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**From:**  
**Sent:** 22 August 2016 11:28  
**To:** ECS-CRM Sutherland  
**Subject:** Fwd: Kinbrace Primary School

Dear Mr Alexander  
I enclose a submission in relation to the above matter.  
Yours sincerely

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** -  
**Date:** 20 August 2016 12:38:36 BST  
**To:** Highland Council -  
**Subject:** Kinbrace Primary School

**From:**  
**Date:** 20 August 2016 11:39:14 BST

**Subject: Kinbrace Primary School**

Sir,

I write in response to the Highland Council's "Proposal to discontinue education provision at Kinbrace Primary School" ("the Proposal").

My interest consists as a farmer and employer in the area surrounding the school. I direct and control the Achentoul Estate Company and Achentoul Farms Ltd. These two companies employ approximately 13 individuals full and part time, 11 of whom live in the Kinbrace catchment area as defined in Appendix A of the attachments to the Proposal.

I have an objection in principle to the Proposal because in line with the gradual withdrawal of services to this remote part of the United Kingdom, the document contains its own self fulfilling prophesy. The more the Council reduces services in this area, the less tolerable and attractive life becomes for those who live here or who might require to do so. The more difficult life becomes, the fewer people will live here. The fewer people live here, the fewer services the Council will seek to provide.

What do I say to a prospective shepherd and his family who respond to an advertisement for a job in this locality when I am asked where their small children will go to school? What reaction can I expect when I tell them that their 5 year old must leave home at 8.15 am and return at 3.45 pm winter and summer, and will have to suffer a long car journey to school each day? In the light of the gradual decrease in services, medical, social, and economic in this area, it is not surprising (as para 4:3 of the Proposal reminds us) that between 2001 and 2011 the population of the catchment area declined by 25%.

I do not seek to argue that Kinbrace PS should re-open now: it has been closed for the last 3 years. During that time it has been "mothballed" and I suggest that that process should continue.

The Proposal contains four short paragraphs discussing such a process. The rationale for discontinuing it and shutting the school permanently is contained in para 6:1.

"Mothballing", the author asserts, "would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school." Axiomatically the process of "mothballing" contains an element of uncertainty and therefore a certain "lack of clarity." Apart, therefore, from stating the obvious, this sentence, and the Proposal generally, contains no argument for discontinuing the process of mothballing which has existed with no detriment to the community and no identified cost to the public purse for the last 3 years.

Notwithstanding the regular and persistent withdrawal of services in this area, employment opportunities do occur from time to time as jobs are created or as individuals retire. By way of example, a job opportunity arose locally 3 years ago and was filled by a family who live in the catchment area but whose 6 year old child is compelled to travel to Helmsdale rather than be educated at Kinbrace PS. A year ago a vacancy for a shepherd occurred in the area and one family who had applied for the job lost interest when they learned that the Kinbrace PS was shut. Last week a vacancy arose at the garage in Kinbrace which, hopefully, will attract applications from a mechanic and his family. During the course of the next two or three years there is likely to be at least one job vacancy created by retirement, and possibly others, which will hopefully be filled by at least one applicant with family. It is also a fact that houses in the catchment area regularly come up for rent.

None of these considerations have found a place in the Council's Proposal, notwithstanding that many of them were canvassed at the Meeting which took place at the Kinbrace PS with two Council local government officers present on 4 March 2016.

The Kinbrace PS was designed and constructed as a school. It has a commodious classroom and nursery accommodation, as well as a spacious playground. Para 8:3 of the Proposal makes clear that the school is currently rated "B" for educational suitability and "C" for building condition, the same ratings enjoyed by Helmsdale PS.

Moreover there is a perfectly good village hall which the local community repaired and restored three years ago with grant aided funds. There is, therefore, no possibility that "the current school building could be turned over to community use" as envisaged in para 17:2. The closure of the school would necessarily and inevitably create a permanently redundant building which would become an increasing eyesore in the village to all travellers up and down the A897.

Much is made in the Proposal about the advantages of the greater number of pupils at Helmsdale and Melvich PSs. But no consideration at all is given to the long distances which children, some as young as 4 years of age, would be required to travel for example, from Achentoul or Badenloch. These places are, located, respectively, at least 36 and 38 minutes by car direct from Helmsdale PS. With stops to collect other children en route, a very young child living, say, at Achentoul and compelled to drive to Badenloch to collect other pupils, with other stops en route and finally to Helmsdale PS, could expect to spend at least an hour

and a half per day travelling to and from school. Such an imposition on a young child is not consistent with the Highland Council's self imposed "indicator" (para 13.1.5) that "Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school." The fact that the Council recognise that this is not always possible, only serves to underline how undesirable it would be to condemn a child to spend 90 minutes in travel time on a daily basis to and from school from the age of 4 years until 12 years.

The Council's Proposal is on equally shaky ground on the question of costs. These are discussed in paras 15:1 - 4. The Council's figures assert that the current cost of transporting the Kinbrace catchment area pupils to Helmsdale PS is £14,769.

Yet the Proposal goes on to claim that in the event that Kinbrace PS was to reopen at some time in the future, the cost of transporting pupils from various parts of the Kinbrace catchment area would be of the order of £25,000. This calculation depends on the assumption that no "local contractor" would be available to transport pupils within the Kinbrace catchment area to Kinbrace PS. Why should such an assumption be made, unless it be to try to justify the permanent closure of the Kinbrace PS? Are the Council officers who wrote this Proposal so ignorant of this locality and the way in which the Kinbrace PS has been run in the past that they are unaware of the fact that between the early 1930s and 2012, a period of at least 80 years, local children were chauffeured to Kinbrace PS by several generations of the same "contractor" family who lived in Kinbrace?

The Council purport to consider an assessment of the Financial Consequences of the proposed merger of schools in Appendix M (see para 18:1). Yet an examination of that Appendix reveals that although it is headed "Financial Template - Kinbrace PS Closure" it is clear from the body of the document that it relates not to Kinbrace but to Achfary Primary School!

This extraordinary error is symptomatic of a document which deals with the issues concerned in a thoroughly tendentious and disingenuous way.

I urge its rejection.

Sent from my iPhone

