

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE**

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT KINBRACE PRIMARY SCHOOL, DIVIDING ITS CATCHMENT AREA BETWEEN THOSE OF HELMSDALE AND MELVICH PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

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| This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:   * To discontinue education provision at Kinbrace Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Helmsdale and Melvich Primary Schools   Having had regard (in particular) to:   * Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period. * Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held at Kinbrace Primary School on 22 June 2016. * The report from Education Scotland.   This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the  requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended. |

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**1.0 Background**

* 1. Highland Council’s Education, Children and Adult Services Committee (ECAS), at its meeting on 18 May 2016, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Kinbrace Primary School, dividing its catchment between those of Helmsdale and Melvich Primary Schools.
  2. **Appendix 1** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices A - O** are the appendices to the original proposal.
  3. Kinbrace Primary School has been “mothballed” since the end of session 2012-13. Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of 5 by 2019-20, but information gathered during the consultation exercise suggests that in practice it is unlikely there would be more than 3 pupils on the roll. A roll of this size impedes the successful delivery of the curriculum and hampers social interaction opportunities for children.
  4. Since July 2013 pupils from the Kinbrace Primary catchment have attended Helmsdale Primary, 17 miles from Kinbrace Primary itself. Highland Council considers that these arrangements have been of benefit to the pupils at both schools.
  5. The school has a planning capacity of 25. The notional school roll of 5 by 2019-20 would therefore represent 20% use of capacity, whilst the probable roll of 3 would represent 12% use of capacity.

1.6 Kinbrace Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:

* any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 3-6 of the Proposal Paper **(Appendix 1)** and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5 and 9 below.
* the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school’s premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 17 of the Proposal Paper **(Appendix 1)** and is further considered at Sections 7 and 9 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
* the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
* the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school’s pupils and staff and any other users of the school’s facilities, (ii) any environmental impact; effects on school transport were considered at Section 15 of the Proposal Paper, **(Appendix 1)** and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5 and 9 below.

1. **Consultation process**

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 30 May 2016 to Wednesday 24 August 2016. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

1. Parents of pupils in the catchment area of Kinbrace Primary School, and parents of pupils attending Helmsdale Primary School, Melvich Primary School, Altnaharra Primary School, Farr High School and Golspie High School, including parents of pre-school pupils;

(ii) Pupils attending Helmsdale Primary School, including the pupils from the Kinbrace PS catchment area;

(iv) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;

(v) The Parent Councils of Helmsdale Primary School, Melvich Primary School, Altnaharra Primary School, Farr High School and Golspie High School.

(vi) Staff of Helmsdale, Melvich and Altnaharra Primary Schools and of Farr and Golspie High Schools.

(vii) Trade Union representatives;

(viii) The community councils for the areas covered by the schools;

(ix) Education Scotland;

(x) Local Youth Convenor.

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Kinbrace on the 22 June 2016. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page, and in the *Northern Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2.**

1. **Review of proposals following the consultation period**

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

**4.0 Responses received**

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at Appendix 3. There were 10 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires) plus the one written response received out of time. Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendix 3.

4.2 The views of pupils at Helmsdale Primary School (which included pupils living within the Kinbrace catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire completed by the pupils. Copies of the questionnaires returned are at **Appendix 3.**

**5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period**

5.1 There were a total of 56 pupil responses. Pupils were given 3 options; i.  Close Kinbrace ii. Re-open Kinbrace, or iii. Keep Kinbrace mothballed.

5.2 Of the total pupil responses, 17 pupils were in favour of closure, with another 17 opting to keep the status quo for longer. A further 22 pupils indicated a preference to reopen Kinbrace School.

5.3 Arguments put forward by pupils supporting the closure were:

* Because then we could get a new school here.
* They might be lonely.
* They can play with us
* Then people will get more friends.
* I don’t want to go to Kinbrace School.
* We have lots of people in our school and that school might have none.
* I like this school because the school is really pretty, it’s better than my old school.
* We can make more friends.
* It would be weird to open a school for just three pupils.
* We like having people coming down from the Strath because we can play together and make new friends.
* They’ll have fun and we’ll have fun playing together, like football and stuff and it’s really nice that they’re coming here.
* So that the children can look for new friends.
* If it closes we can get more boys and girls in our school.
* It is costing loads of money to keep it open when there are only 1-2 pupils and that money could pay another teacher in another school.
* They should shut it down because the school doesn’t have a lot of pupils. Hardly anyone will go to it.
* Close Kinbrace Primary because what’s the point in opening the school again to only teach about 10 children.
* They should shut it down because there are only 4 people in the school.
* People like it here and if they opened it most people would probably just stay in Helmsdale.
* If they open it then people going to Helmsdale or Melvich won’t have as many friends plus it would be a waste of money as there are only a few people.
* They could get more people to learn in school.
* It would be pointless if only 3 or 4 kids go to Kinbrace School.
* It would be hard for the Strath children to change schools and make new friends

5.4 The arguments put forward by pupils who supported keeping the school mothballed are summarised below together with the responses from the Council. Individual issues raised that are similar to one another have been “grouped.”

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| **Issue 1**  We need to take more time to make a better decision. Things might change. |

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| **Response 1**  In drawing up its original proposals, the Council calculated estimates of the  future roll, taking into account the number of pupils currently within the  catchment, the local birth rate, and potential housebuilding. As set out in  Section 4 of the Proposal Paper, projections indicate that if Kinbrace  Primary were re-opened, it would be as a single teacher school with a very  small roll. |

5.5 The arguments put forward by pupils who supported re-opening the school are summarised below. Individual issues raised that are similar to one another have been “grouped.”

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| **Issue 2**  Because I don’t have to go on a bus to get there, I can ride on my bike because it’s easier.  If we re-open Kinbrace we won’t need a school bus.  Some people who aren’t close to our school can go to Kinbrace School.  Kinbrace Primary should re-open because it will be a shorter distance for people who live up in Kildonan instead of driving to Helmsdale Primary.  It is unfair for the Kinbrace children to have to travel so far to school.  It would be better for the Kinbrace children not to have to travel so far. |

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| **Response 2**  The original Proposal Paper acknowledged that the main adverse effect for  children is the length of journey from Kinbrace to Helmsdale, details of which  were provided. This adverse effect must be set against the educational  benefits that the proposal could deliver. |

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| **Issue 3**  We can go to that school to play games. |

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| **Response 3**  Helmsdale Primary is part of an Associated School Group (ASG) and already  has links with other schools in the ASG, particularly for sports activities. |

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| **Issue 4**  The children from Kinbrace might not know what Helmsdale School is about. |

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| **Response 4**  As Kinbrace Primary has been mothballed since 2013, the children have  adjusted to attending Helmsdale Primary. |

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| **Issue 5**  It would be nice to open it so children can go there if they live in Kinbrace.  If it re-opened then there would be another school. |

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| **Response 5**  The low population density of Highland means that schools cannot be located  in every community. The proposal is being advanced on the basis of  educational benefit for children in Kinbrace. |

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| **Issue 6**  So our school doesn’t get busy and not that noisy. |

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| **Response 6**  Helmsdale Primary is currently operating at 50% of its capacity. The addition  of the very small number of children from the Kinbrace catchment will not  make Helmsdale Primary too busy or too noisy. |

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| **Issue 7**  The school should re-open because soon we will not have enough transport. |

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| **Response 7**  The Highland Council is legally obliged to arrange and fund transport for any pupil who is travelling beyond the statutory walking distance to the designated school for their address. Appropriate transport arrangements would be put in place in the event the number of children requiring transport increased beyond the capacity of the current vehicle. |

5.6 There were a total of 10 written responses received from parents and other stakeholders during the consultation period. Seven of the letters actively opposed any re-opening of Kinbrace School and did not express opposition to the closure proposal. Two letters expressed opposition to the proposed closure whilst acknowledging that there were insufficient numbers to justify re- opening the school at present. Both these responses argued in favour of continuing to mothball the school. One further letter expressed opposition to closure and suggested either re-opening the school or continuing to mothball.

5.7 One further response was received outwith the statutory consultation period, from Helmsdale Community Council. The Community Council did not oppose the closure proposal but expressed concern on two particular points, which are included in the issues identified below.

5.7 As can be seen from **Appendix 2,** only three questions were raised at the public meeting, and all were points of clarification.

5.8 The main arguments advanced in support of the Council’s proposal were as follows:

* Moving children from Helmsdale into a small school like Kinbrace would be detrimental to them, not only socially but educationally as well.
* With a projected roll of 5 pupils by 2019, the children would not benefit socially or on the sporting front.
* The children would not have a school canteen.
* There would only be one child in nursery. There would be no social interaction and children would not enjoy the same range of activities that are available in Helmsdale.
* The financial document in the consultation suggests that re-opening Kinbrace School would cost almost £32000 per child per year.  This money could be better invested elsewhere in education.
* Both schools would lose out as they do not have a Head Teacher on site every day and it would be difficult for the Head Teacher to balance time between both schools.
* Children could end up being together 24/7, in the same classroom, playground and home environment.
* Children in Kinbrace would only ever have one teacher for the remainder of their primary education. Potentially they would not benefit from visiting specialist teachers or be offered music tuition, which is available at Helmsdale PS.
* The cost per head to educate a child seems ludicrous in the current financial climate.
* Are funds ring fenced for Kinbrace to reopen or would the council have to make further savings?
* PSA and cleaning time hours across Highland have been cut, could this lead to further cuts?
* How would the Head Teacher split her time?  Previously the HT spent 2 days in Kinbrace per week, if this was still the case it would be out of sync if it was considered on how many children attended each school.
* The clerical time for Kinbrace is noted as 16 hours, Helmsdale only has 18 – how is this calculated?
* Would you manage to recruit someone for Kinbrace?  What would happen if not, would the HT be forced to teach until someone was appointed?
* Would Helmsdale lose out on time with specialist teachers?  I.e.  ASN, PE, Art (the latter 2 are for CCR and we understand this is not applicable in Kinbrace until there is a child in P4 and above).Would children who attended Kinbrace have the offer of music tuition as they do in Helmsdale?
* Do the children who attend Helmsdale PS and are already settled, who are in the Kinbrace catchment have the choice of continuing their education in Helmsdale? Surely it is more beneficial socially for the children to attend Helmsdale PS.
* Academically the children will always have to work within the same groups for group work / pair work, this allows for no variation and the possibility of one child overpowering the other, stunting their educational growth.  In Helmsdale partners could vary and children may feel more in their comfort zone.
* How can the children learn competitive sport etc if there are so few of them?
* Would all children from Helmsdale and Kinbrace not benefit from having one school i.e. better resources?
* The children could possibly lose out on after school activities. Have the children who attended Kinbrace prior to mothballing been asked how they felt it impacted their life / education (these children are now in High School)? Whilst there is sympathy that children who would be in the Kinbrace catchment have a longer school day due to the travelling, there is no reason to believe it has impacted negatively on them.
* Will the roads continue to be gritted in winter?
* Re-opening Kinbrace could hinder education and opportunities for the rest of the children at Helmsdale P.S. Lowering the general numbers of the school may affect the provision offered to the pupils, such as a playground supervisor (which only got appointed after the number of pupils reached 50), as well as the additional member of canteen staff. This would result in unsupervised play, less adult impact and encouragement in games, and a longer lunch queue - negatively affecting the pupil's enjoyment of their lunch time break.
* Lowering the numbers of pupils at Helmsdale could result in losing a teacher, classes becoming oversized and limiting the opportunities for activities within the classroom. Because of class sizes it could result in splitting and separating children of the same age and year group within different classes, meaning children of the same age may have more limited opportunities.
* Having a school as small as Kinbrace may make it hard to reach aspects of the curriculum due to small numbers. Children will have fewer opportunities to socialise and when they reach High School age they will need to travel regardless - only without the prior relationships with other pupils.
* The money used to reopen Kinbrace could be better spent benefiting all the pupils by providing more resources to the Helmsdale Primary School - such as more computers as currently they have a limited amount. Helmsdale as a Primary School should be of a high standard before opening another school, and opening another school to benefit a small number of pupils should not affect the majority already settled within their school environment
* The costs that would be incurred to re-open are not sustainable in the present economic climate.
* We are losing PSA, cleaners’ and janitors’ hours all over the Highlands - how can it be possible to justify re-opening a school at such great cost, especially when the prospective pupils concerned are already attending and fully integrated in Helmsdale Primary.
* How many hours would Helmsdale Primary lose our already hard pressed head teacher for?
* Would Mrs Gill be willing to continue as a cluster head, managing two schools with all the extra work involved?  If not then we would have more disruption at Helmsdale.
* Would the resources at Helmsdale be diminished?  Would we lose visiting teacher hours - PE etc?
* Where will the extra money to open Kinbrace come from? Would it even be possible to attract a suitable candidate to teach there?
* Apart from the travelling time for the children involved, it is hard to see what other benefits are to be had from going to a smaller school. So much learning is done nowadays through group activities and socialising that it would actually be to the detriment of the children involved.
* To re-open Kinbrace would be a drain on resources we cannot afford.
* The social and emotional well-being of the Kinbrace pupils is not best served by being educated in such a small group.
* The subsequent reduction in roll at Helmsdale Primary school if pupils were to be educated in Kinbrace instead would reduce class sizes in Helmsdale, reducing the choice of friends for the children there and possibly impacting on the number and distribution of teaching and support staff within Helmsdale, which would be detrimental to the academic and social education of all of the pupils involved.
* It would be difficult to recruit a long term member of staff to teach in Kinbrace, resulting in a succession of supply teachers for the Kinbrace pupils, which would not best serve the educational needs of those children.
* There are not enough educational or social benefits to the re-opening of Kinbrace school to make it worthwhile spending the considerable sums of money necessary to re-open and maintain the school, in the current economic climate I believe that this money would be much better spent if it were allocated to more LSA hours, or improved resources (or even better a couple of additional teachers) within the currently open schools in Sutherland.
* Kinbrace School should not be re-opened. There are not enough children to justify this and the money could be better spent elsewhere on education. It is also important for children in rural areas to interact with other children as much as possible to prepare them for high school etc
* To have a school costing upwards of £130,000 to open for 4 children would be a gross waste of public money, especially considering the financial pressures the Education Department is under.  It would be cheaper to send the children to boarding school.
* There are benefits to having a diverse group of peers, where children learn to socialise, emotionally and intellectually, by co-operating and sharing activities, resources and ideas.  There are 4 children affected here, one of whom is still in the nursery, so that child would be in a solitary situation, while the remaining three would be in the unhappy position of "two being company and three being a crowd" - there would invariably be (given human nature) one child left out, regardless of the best efforts of the teacher.  Also with this number brainstorming ideas are limited to the life experiences of three children in similarly isolated areas, so they cannot benefit from the culture capital of a variety of peers from different socio-economic backgrounds.
* It is suggested that the children, if travelling to Helmsdale, may miss out on education in the winter months due to the road being closed in bad weather - in fact, unless the teacher was living in Kinbrace the school would still be shut, since if children could not get to Helmsdale then a teacher driving to work would, in all likelihood be unable to reach Kinbrace.

5.9 The main arguments put forward by those opposed to closure are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

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| **Issue 8**  The Council’s Proposal contains its own self-fulfilling prophecy. 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. 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%. |

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| **Response 8**  It was noted in the Proposal Paper that the population decline mentioned  above took place during a period when the school was open. This information  suggests that re-opening the school is unlikely to arrest the area’s population  decline.  Past analyses of rural locations in Highland that have experienced school  closures has established no clear relationship between school closures and  population patterns. Additionally, the Report of the Scottish Government’s  Commission on Rural Education, published in 2013, found a number of  examples of communities which continued to depopulate despite the  presence of a school. The Commission’s review of the scientific and other  literature on school closures found there was a lack of robust evidence on  how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of  closure) links to the sustainability of communities. |

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| **Issue 9**  The Council’s Proposal Paper asserts that continuing to mothball the school  “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 uncertainly 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.  'Mothballing' of the school, as we have seen for the last few years, seems the  best way forward.  At the present time there are 3 houses in Kinbrace for  sale.  There must be a good chance therefore that at least one new arrival will  have family.  The presence of a potential school will encourage a family to  come here.  The absence of one will mean that the likelihood of any new  arrival being of working age is less, and it is worth considering that retired  people, constituting the alternative type of new resident, need services more  than they provide them.  The cost-benefit aspect of this should be part of the  over-arching policy in deciding about the future of this school building. |

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| **Response 9**  The School has already been mothballed for 3 years and there is no  evidence to suggest there is a realistic prospect of a significant rise in the  school roll. It is unrealistic to expect that a school remain mothballed  indefinitely, and nothing to suggest that the local situation will have changed  markedly a few years from now. There comes a point where a decision must  be made. |

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| **Issue 10**  What does an employer say to a prospective shepherd and his family who  responds to an advertisement for a job in this locality when are asked where  their small children will go to school? What reaction can be expected when  they are told their 5 year old must leave home at 8.15am and return at  3.45pm winter and summer, and will have to suffer a long car journey to  school each day?  The closureof the school would be premature as at the moment there are employment vacancies in the area due to employees retiring. There are also three houses and the two local hotels in the catchment area that are for sale. If the school remained mothballed or reopened it would encourage more families to the local area.  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.  To attract potential employees here is harder if there is no local school.  For any potential family person schooling is the first question.  It is government policy to encourage population in the glens.  Shutting a school goes against that. |

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| **Response 10**  Responses 8 and 9 address some of the points made above. In addition,  some parents regard the presence of other children in the local area as an  important part of their children’s social and educational development. In that  sense the larger pupil numbers available at Helmsdale could be seen as a  positive feature by families considering a move to the area.  Many factors play a part in a family’s decision to move to a particular area,  including the cost and availability of land and housing, employment  opportunities, and the cost of transport to shops and social facilities. |

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| **Issue 11**  The community also has concerns about the effect of the closure on the role of the Head Teacher at Helmsdale School. Kinbrace was part of the "cluster" and we would have serious concerns about any negative effect the closure would have on our excellent Head Mistress and the future of Helmsdale Primary. |

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| **Response 11**  Highland Council currently is currently in discussion with staff and parents  about a new management model for schools in Highland. The model is based  around the principle of a smaller number of Head Teachers who should not be  routinely class committed. If implemented the new model would be likely to  create larger “clusters” of schools within a local community, managed by a  single, non-teaching Head Teacher. This exercise is completely unrelated to  the proposal to close Kinbrace Primary, and it potentially affects a large  number of schools across Highland.  The new management model is being progressed to provide Head Teachers with greater opportunities to meet the requirement on them to lead school improvement; to respond to new demands on school management; and to respond to challenges faced by Highland Council in filling Head Teacher and other school management posts. |

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| **Issue 12**  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. |

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| **Response 12**  The Council agrees with the comments above about the accommodation at  Kinbrace Primary, and about the Suitability and Condition ratings at the two  schools. As the respondent acknowledges, the information was included in  the Proposal Paper.  The Report from Education Scotland (Appendix 4) noted that the nursery at Helmsdale has recently been refurbished to make it a very attractive learning environment. Greater numbers of children in Helmsdale provide improved opportunities for children in the nursery to learn through play. The parent and toddler room provides an opportunity for parents to meet and support each other and to develop strong family engagement with the school. |

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| **Issue 13**  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.  There is an adequate building for community use already in the area and specifically designed for it.  The school has no purpose as a second community building. |

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| **Response 13**  The impact of the proposal on the community is considered further at Section  7 below. |

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| **Issue 14**  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.  Currently three boys of a young age have to travel thirty two miles and for  more a day over five days a week, instead of walking to the top of the hill,  being transported a short distance. Our son leaves the house at 8.15 and  doesn't return until 3.50. This is an eight and a half hour day for a boy of five.  In the mornings they all arrive thirty minutes before school starts why? We  have around one hour's worth of homework every day and six hours of  school. Do you think this is fair for any child at that age?  What about Loch Choire? Are they not allowed families? There is no mention that you leave the tarred road at Badanloch and then travel twelve miles up a dirt track road. It takes around forty-five minutes in a 4x4, when the road is good, to get there. How far do you expect a child to travel? There is also no road to Ben Armine Lodge from Kinbrace.  Alternative schooling involves a very long journey for young children.  I have lived 3 miles from Kinbrace for 36 years and can attest that the weather in winter will often make this journey awkward in the extreme. Conversely, there were very few occasions when my children were at the school when classes were not open and everyone managed to get there.  Whilst the community is aware transport has to be provided we are not clear what form this will take. There would be real concerns about children [potentially as young as 5 years old] going unaccompanied on the train and who would collect them at Helmsdale station? If they are being brought in by car/bus will this be from their own home or will there be a collection point in Kinbrace? The journey however supplied will make it a very long day for these young children. |

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| **Response 14**  The Proposal Paper acknowledged that the length of the home to school  journey was the main adverse effect arising from the Proposal. Whilst this  was a particular concern to one current parent, the Education Scotland  Report (Appendix 4) noted that the majority of Kinbrace parents did not  consider travel time to be the most significant factor in determining where  their children should be educated. The Council also notes that the parent  from Badanloch, whose child has the longest journey to school, took the view  that the educational interests of her children outweighed the travel time  consideration.  The time period mentioned, 8.15am to 3.50pm, represents 7.5 hours rather  than 8.5 hours. It is nevertheless acknowledged that the journey times are  long. Since the consultation exercise was carried out, (during the 2015-16  school session), the afternoon departure time for the infant children from  Kinbrace has been changed to 2.45pm (previously 3.15pm). This means  infant children from Kinbrace itself should now be returning home at 3.15-  3.20pm.  The morning start time at Helmsdale Primary is 9.15am, and the school  advise that the Kinbrace children arrive at school at approximately 8.55am.  Highland Council is currently in the process of re-tendering this contract  (along with others) and the new contract will specify that the Kinbrace pupils  should not be delivered to Helmsdale Primary any earlier than 5 minutes  before the bell.  There are no children currently at Loch Choire, and any family with young  children who might move there in future would need to take the potential  school journey time into account. Ben Armine Lodge is within the Rogart  Primary School catchment so is not affected by this proposal.  The Proposal Paper included the information that during the current school  session the school transport from the Strath to Helmsdale has operated  without interruption.  Highland Council has absolutely no plans to use the train as a method of  transporting children from Kinbrace to Helmsdale. We would agree with the  concerns raised about supervision and collection of children using the train,  and in any case the timetable is not suitable. |

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| **Issue 15**  The Council's Proposal is on 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? |

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| **Response 15**  The Highland Council awards school transport contracts on the basis of  competitive tender, and this makes it extremely difficult to estimate future  costs for routes that do not exist at present. Historical records suggest that in 2011 there was a contract for Kinbrace Primary School at a daily rate of £45.14 (£8576.60/year). That transport would of course have been over a different mileage from any required today, were Kinbrace Primary to re-open. No contractor in the Kinbrace area has expressed any interest in providing the current transport from Badanloch and Kinbrace to Helmsdale, so the Council has no grounds for saying that a similar price would be obtainable today. However, it is possible that a tender from a local contractor might be received. For illustrative purposes, the financial analysis has been amended to show an anticipated annual transport cost of £10,000 were Kinbrace Primary to re-open. If this assumption is made, the cost per pupil of re-opening Kinbrace falls to approximately £28,000.  This point is also covered below in Section 8. |

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| **Issue 16**  If the school were to reopen it would offer two or three local jobs, not including teachers.  The need for transport also creates employment and sustains the area, a good objective. |

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| **Response 16**  It was acknowledged in the Proposal paper that if Kinbrace School were re-  opened the Council would need to consider employing part-time staff such as  a cleaner, school clerical, and early years practitioner. In recent years  Highland Council has significantly reduced its staffing complement in  response to a reduced overall budget. In that context, it would be very difficult  for the Council to justify the recruitment of 3 or 4 new posts, to staff a school  with the same number of pupils. |

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| **Issue 17**  The only reason there have been no children at Kinbrace School since 2013  is because the school has been mothballed. Parents were told their children  had to attend Helmsdale and were given no choice in the matter. |

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| **Response 17**  This is of course correct. However during the period of mothballing the  majority of parents and children have adjusted to attending Helmsdale  Primary and would prefer to continue to do so. |

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| **Issue 18**  As time has gone on the catchment of Kinbrace PS has diminished, as the school roles in Helmsdale and Melvich decreased, their catchment areas have widened, taking children from Kinbrace PS. lf the Council was to extend  Kinbrace PS catchment back an extra three miles max, it would increase the role from five to eight children for 2019-20, as the roll stands at the moment |

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| **Response 18**  This claim is not correct. The catchment area for Kinbrace Primary has not  been altered.  Expanding the catchment area of Kinbrace Primary was considered as one of  the alternatives to closure prior to the publication of the proposal paper, and  details of the Council’s consideration were set out at Section 5 of the Proposal  Paper. It is clear that expanding the Kinbrace catchment at the expense of  neighbouring rural schools would risk undermining the sustainability of those  schools, as well as increasing travel distances for pupils without increasing  the roll at Kinbrace to a viable number. |

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| **Issue 19**  Please tell us where in the curriculum for excellence does it stipulate education can't be delivered if there are only five or less pupils?  I have had 4 children schooled at Kinbrace.  During the year when my daughter graduated from University two former pupils managed to get first class degrees.  Its educational satisfactoriness as historic record is not in doubt. |

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| **Response 19**  Highland Council has never claimed that education could not be delivered in a  re-opened Kinbrace Primary School. We do however argue that the greater  pupil numbers available at Helmsdale Primary offer educational and social  benefits not available to schools with a roll of 3-5 pupils, as would be the roll  at a re-opened Kinbrace Primary. S.13 of the Proposal Paper set out the  Council’s views in detail. |

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| **Issue 20**  This is about the money, not the children. |

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| **Response 20**  Highland Council is clear that the closure of Kinbrace Primary is in the best  interests of the children in both Kinbrace and Helmsdale. This view was set  out in detail in the Proposal Paper and is supported by Education Scotland  (Appendix 4). |

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| **Issue 21**  Kinbrace PS had a visiting music teacher, P.E teacher and art teacher that all came from Farr High School to visit for six weeks rotation. They had swimming lessons in Bettyhill. The kids loved it. They did tele-conferencing with children all over the world. The world of lT has not gone backwards, it's moved forward, and we believe Kinbrace PS could have moved forward too if it had been allowed to do so. |

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| **Response 21**  There are nevertheless limits to what can be achieved using Information  Technology, for example in participating in peer review exercises, in the  sharing of tasks, in sports, music and art activities, and of course in terms of  social interaction. |

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| **Issue 22**  Kinbrace PS was the hub of the community, where the kids learnt community spirit, and warmly invited everyone to join in for any occasion, whether they were old or young. |

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| **Response 22**  The new merged school will maintain strong links with all the communities within the new catchment. Any community events historically held within the Kinbrace catchment could be replicated within Helmsdale Primary. |

**6.0** **Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland**

6.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council’s proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4.**

6.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognise that the proposal offers the prospect of clear educational benefits to the children affected. If the proposal is implemented, children who live in the catchment area which served Kinbrace would learn as part of a larger teaching group. This larger number and wider range of peers is likely to allow increased opportunities for socialising and making friends. The larger peer group would allow children to engage more appropriately in peer and self-assessment activities. This could also provide greater opportunities to be involved in team sports and group activities which have the potential to contribute positively to children’s social and emotional development.

6.3 HM Inspectors further noted that the majority of parents saw benefits in their children having good access to visiting art, music and sports specialists, and that this access may be reduced if Kinbrace were to reopen. Almost all parents and staff saw benefits in making the transition from Helmsdale primary to secondary education as part of a larger group. The majority of parents in the Kinbrace catchment were, on balance, in favour of the proposal. Whilst they acknowledged the potential reduction in occasional local events with Kinbrace residents, they recognised the benefits afforded by the children attending a larger school with a greater number of children. Although the majority of Kinbrace parents would prefer less travelling time for their children, they do not consider it the most significant factor in determining where they wish their children to be educated.

6.4 HM Inspectors commented that the Council has given good consideration to any reasonable alternatives. Through mothballing, the Council had provided time for full consideration and sought to allow time for any increase in the local population. A few local employers feel that continuing to mothball the school will help to attract potential residents and employees. There is a lack of evidence to support this view, however, as there has been no upward trend.

6.5 Two issues were identified for further consideration by the Council. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies notified to it. If the council decides to proceed with its plans to close Kinbrace Primary School, it should work with the local community in exploring possible future uses for the school building.

6.6 The future use of the building is addressed in Section 7 below, whilst inaccuracies and omissions are addressed in Section 8.

**7.0 Effects on the Community**

7.1 Paragraphs 17.1 to 17.3 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council’s assessment of the effects of closure on the local community. This assessment was challenged by the comments summarised at Issue 13 above.

7.2 In the event of the school being closed, the Highland Council would still be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building could be turned over to community use. Nevertheless, the Council accepts that the presence of the village hall makes any community use of the school building unlikely. There is a limit to the amount of public space that can be supported by a community the size of Kinbrace.

7.3 There would however be no intention to leave Kinbrace Primary School as *“a permanently redundant building which would become an increasing eyesore in the village…”* Should no Council or community use be identified for the building, our intention would be to dispose of it on the open market.

7.4 The report from Education Scotland makes reference to the loss of the occasional local event since the mothballing of Kinbrace School, but notes that the majority of parents see this as being outweighed by the educational benefits derived from children attending Helmsdale School.

**8.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies**

8.1 Education Scotland identified the following inaccuracies in the Proposal Paper.

* Paragraph 8.2 contained the sentence “*Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2019-20 roll of 5 pupils would represent 25% use of capacity.*” The percentage figure should of course have been 20%.
* At paragraph 9.3, the word “roll” was mistyped as “toll.”

8.2 The Council has carefully considered the impact of these inaccuracies on the Proposal but has concluded that neither represents a material consideration relevant to the Authority’s decision as to implementation of the proposal. The correct figure for the percentage use of capacity is actually lower than that given in the Proposal paper.

8.3 One of the responses to consultation highlighted an inaccuracy in respect of Appendix M to the Proposal Paper, (the Financial Analysis). The error arises at Col B Line 4, where the spreadsheet is headed “Achfary Primary School.”

8.4 Having investigated this matter, Highland Council can confirm that the actual figures within the spreadsheet relate to Kinbrace Primary. The template itself was copied over from prior work on Achfary Primary and we failed to amend the reference in respect of the name of the school. Highland Council has responded to the consultee and unreservedly apologised for this error. A revised Financial Analysis document can be found at **Appendix 5.**

8.5 The Council has carefully considered the impact of this inaccuracy on the Proposal but has concluded it does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority’s decision as to implementation of the proposal. The actual figures in the spreadsheet do relate to Kinbrace Primary and it is only the text that mistakenly refers to Achfary Primary. Correcting the text would not therefore alter the figures in the spreadsheet.

8.6 Issue 15, and the associated Response 15, above, address an alleged inaccuracy in the financial analysis, in relation to the possible costs of transport were Kinbrace PS to re-open. Response 15 sets out why it is effectively impossible to provide accurate estimates for the future costs of transport routes that do not exist at present. However, for illustrative purposes we have amended the financial analysis to show a reduced transport cost in the event of Kinbrace Primary re-opening.

8.7 Once again, the Council has concluded that the impact of this alleged inaccuracy does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority’s decision as to implementation of the proposal. In coming to this conclusion the Authority has considered the following factors:

- the nature of the tendering process for school transport means that neither figure is anything other than an estimate;

- Under the revised analysis the annual operational costs of Kinbrace Primary would be just under £113,000, with the cost per pupil at just over £28000. The latter cost is higher than the equivalent cost in most schools.

**9.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure**

9.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

* any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Alternatives to closure were reviewed at Section 3 of the original proposal paper.The consultation exercise did not identify any new alternatives for consideration.

The majority of written responses to the consultation exercise from those opposed to closure acknowledged that the current number of children in Kinbrace is insufficient to justify re-opening the school at this stage, and sought instead to prolong the “mothballing” of the school that has been in place since 2013. Whilst this would be possible, neither the Highland Council nor Education Scotland have been able to identify any evidence (other than anecdotal evidence) that suggests there is likely to be an upward trend in the local population. Indeed, the evidence of past census figures suggest the opposite.

Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Section 3 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal. This view has been endorsed by HM Inspectors. The detailed reasons for the Council’s view are set out in Section 13 of the Proposal Paper and in the Education Scotland Report at **Appendix 4.**

The Report by Education Scotland highlighted that the majority of parents in the Kinbrace catchment were, on balance, in favour of the proposal.

* the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school’s premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 17 of the Proposal and is further considered at Section 7 above. In responding to the consultation exercise, two local employers expressed concerns that closure of the school would have a negative effect on the perceived attractiveness of the area for families, and would therefore accelerate population decline within the Kinbrace catchment. However, evidence both from across Highland and across Scotland does not suggest any clear relationship between school closures and population rise and fall. There was a clear population decline in Kinbrace between the census years of 2001 and 2011, during a period when the school was open. As is noted by Education Scotland, there is no compelling evidence that re-opening Kinbrace School would have a significant impact on local employment or in boosting the potential school roll.

The responses to consultation indicated that the loss of the school building is unlikely to have a significant community impact, due to the presence of the village hall. If so, proposals for future use of the school building would be subject to the Council’s asset management policy.

* the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school’s pupils and staff and any other users of the school’s facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school’s pupils and staff and any other users of the school’s facilities.

The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Sections 14, 15 and 21 of the original proposal paper and again at Responses 2 and 14 above. Since Kinbrace Primary School has been mothballed since 2013, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. It would however be reasonable in these circumstances to compare the travel arrangements under the Proposal with those that would apply were Kinbrace Primary to re-open.

Of the 3 current families living in the Kinbrace catchment, one lives between Kinbrace and Helmsdale and their children would not have a substantially longer journey with either option. A second family lives west of Kinbrace and has a significantly longer journey to Helmsdale, but this family has made it clear that they regard the educational advantages offered by Helmsdale Primary as outweighing the disadvantages of longer travel. The third family in the area live in Kinbrace itself. Re-opening Kinbrace School would significantly reduce the travel time for the child involved.

For two of the three families affected, the overall travel times for pupils are within the guideline figure adopted by Highland Council for the purposes of reviewing the school estate. As already mentioned, the family with the longest travel time have indicated their opposition to the re-opening of Kinbrace Primary (see Response 1).

If the closure Proposal is implemented, Highland Council will keep the travel arrangements for Kinbrace pupils under annual review to ensure children from the Kinbrace catchment do not have their trips made longer by unreasonable detours to nearer places on their way to school or by unnecessarily early or late arrival/collection times.

**10.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers**

10.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 9 March 2017 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 29 March 2017. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 3 May 2017 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.

10.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in a local authority decision to close a school is asked to email [schoolclosures@gov.scot](mailto:schoolclosures@gov.scot) or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 29 March 2017.**

10.3 Until the outcome of the eight week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

**11.0 Legal issues**

11.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

11.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland’s Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

**12. Financial Implications**

12.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as an Appendix to the Proposal Paper. Uncertainties concerning the cost of school transport are reflected in a revised Financial Analysis which is at **Appendix 5.**

**13.0 Equality Impact Assessment**

13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at **Appendix N** to the Proposal Paper.

**14.0 Conclusion**

14.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council’s response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-9,

14.2 Education Scotland staff visited Helmsdale Primary School to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.

14.3 The Director of Care and Learning, on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Section 5-9 above.

**15 Recommendation**

15.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Kinbrace Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Helmsdale and Melvich Primary Schools.

**Bill Alexander**

**Director of Care and Learning**

**19 December 2016**