

**August 2016**

**PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE EDUCATION PROVISION AT THE BLACK ISLE EDUCATION CENTRE (BIEC)**

**Response from Fortrose & Rosemarkie Community Council (FRCC)**

Ahead of this submission, I Jackson and B. Cairns attended a meeting of FRCC in December 2015 to outline the proposal for the BIEC. Sarah Atkin represented FRCC at the public meeting of June 29<sup>th</sup> 2016.

***Request for Clarity***

*When Highland Council representatives B. Cairns and I. Jackson attended a Community Council meeting in December 2015 it was our understanding that the objective was to recommend closure of the Black Isle Education Centre (BIEC) **as a school**. 'Discontinuing the provision of education' is not the same thing. The Community Council would appreciate some clarity on this point.*

Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council agrees with the proposal that the BIEC **should close as a school**.

1. There are currently no children on the school roll. Those pupils currently accessing the centre do so on a part-time, flexible basis.
2. We agree (as was raised at the public meeting of June 29<sup>th</sup> 2016) that having to maintain 'school status' inhibits the development of better and more innovative services more likely to benefit greater numbers of pupils going forward. Those designing services need to be liberated to pursue creative solutions to support children, especially in this era of budgetary restraint.
3. We agree that young people should maintain a locus in their communities if it is in their best interests and doesn't impact disproportionately on the rights of all other children to an education. Remaining attached to a local school (i.e. on the school roll) is often critical to a young person's sense of belonging. This is better, in the main than being 'sent' somewhere else (with the stigma that can bring.)

The 'model' that has evolved at BIEC of part-time, flexible support for SEBD pupils is worth continuing and developing. We therefore support the **provision of education** remaining at the BIEC and its development as an outreach centre for the following reasons:

1. Any benefits of the 'flexible' approach could be eroded without a centre of operations. A sense of 'place' is very important to the pupils who will need to access outreach provision. Building trusting relationships with staff and other pupils and feeling part of a less stressful but still structured learning community is more likely to deliver positive outcomes in the longer term.
2. For those working with challenging children team work is vital. Staff are less likely to develop mutually respectful and supportive working relationships if there is no base from which to operate.
3. A centre of excellence has the potential to build up dedicated expertise and a bank of specialist knowledge that can better help challenging pupils **and** inform best practice across

the Highland region and beyond. Mainstream schools cannot provide specialised services or the specialist input many SEBD young people need. They are not geared up for that.

4. The site was originally gifted by the Salvesen family for the provision of educating under-privileged children. This legacy should continue.
5. Accommodation/Setting. We accept that the 'model' we favour does not address the major accommodation issues of the BIEC site. The physical buildings fall well short of modern expectations. However, the location/setting is ideal (a view endorsed by B. Cairns at our meeting in December 2015.) For example, the site presents huge scope for outdoor learning and outdoor activity (e.g. cycling.) There was investment in upgrading facilities not too long ago as well. The overall environment is relaxing, quiet and not 'clinical'.

If this flexible 'model' is to become the gold standard and support many more pupils than is currently possible then investment in infrastructure is bound to be needed wherever it's located. That's unavoidable.

6. SEBD pupils needing to partially access alternative educational provision will benefit more if this is **off site**. Struggling pupils are more likely to remain within the mainstream and succeed if 'time away' is literally that. For so many 'holding it together' for a full school week proves too much of a challenge. Yes, a mainstream school can provide 'chill out' time but will staff in a busy school be available to make this time constructive, stimulating and educationally rewarding?
7. Transferring all support for pupils from BIEC to schools would prove short sighted and more likely to have a detrimental impact on other pupils' potential to learn. There could be a domino effect. The reality might be that the staff hours required to manage greater numbers of challenging pupils day-to-day in mainstream make this option less cost effective in the medium to long term. Also (and most importantly), there's the issue of the pupils' potential to access an education. Which model is going to best facilitate that?
8. Location: the location of BIEC at a distance from population centres is true of many Highland schools. A large number of schools are kept open with far fewer pupils accessing the education provided than currently access services at the BIEC. In the context of rural Highland, the BIEC site isn't that badly located. The Black Isle is within 40 minutes of a number of Ross-shire and Inverness schools (primary and secondary.) The centre is already accessed by pupils from a wide catchment.
9. Transport costs: high transport costs are again a feature of education provision right across Highland. It is not unusual for pupils to be transported many miles to school.

In conclusion. Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council supports the view that the Black Isle Education Centre should cease to operate as a school (i.e. provide full-time education as legally constituted by statute.) We would, however support its development as an outreach centre for pupils with SEBD.

Sarah Atkin  
Chair (on behalf of)  
Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council