

17th January 2022

To whom it may concern:

Re Roy Bridge Primary School Consultation

Further to the recent Consultation document proposing to 'discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School and to reallocate the school's catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School' I would like to make the following comments:

I would suggest that it is factually inaccurate that the proposal does not properly consider Gaelic medium education and pupil numbers from the Roy Bridge catchment attending Gaelic medium education in Fort William. Without these figures the document is incomplete and does not properly illustrate the current situation regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge area. In order to present correct information regarding education provision for children from the Roy Bridge catchment accurate numbers for pre-school and Primary Gaelic medium education need to be included and factually presented. Parents of children living within the Roy Bridge catchment but attending GME need to be included in the Consultation. Note Appendix A, Note on Corrections.

GM Nursery

3.5 "... The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge". I would suggest that this statement is unfounded and would ask for evidence. From 2000 to 2012 I was involved in the development of Gaelic medium pre-school provision in Roy Bridge. There was significant demand and we established a Gaelic medium nursery under contract to Highland Council. This is acknowledged in the Consultation document. Parents from Fort Augustus and Fort William as well Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and surrounding areas attended the provision. It was evident that, with the right support, there was the opportunity for this pre-school provision to grow into Primary provision in due course. With the advent of Bun Sgoil Ghaidhlig Loch Abar it is correct that there is now alternative provision however the travel time from Roy Bridge is prohibitive and the size of the nursery is very much urban rather than rural. I understand that there may also be pressure of numbers at BSGLA. If Highland Council were to open a Gaelic medium nursery in Roy Bridge it is likely that it would be well attended. Like BSGLA and all other Gaelic schools, over time, numbers would grow. Children would come from both Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge and surrounding areas and pressure on facilities in Spean Bridge and in the Gaelic nursery in BSGLA would be eased. When GM nursery education ceased in Roy Bridge in 2012 it was due to the need for additional support from Highland Council, particularly with staffing. With the advent of BSGLA parents are much more aware now of the benefits and opportunities that GM education presents. I would suggest that there is opportunity now to reintroduce GM nursery provision which would very quickly grow into Primary provision. The travel requirement is excessive for these younger age groups and there would be numerous benefits if there were local provision.

Catchment

If there were GME provision in Roy Bridge a wider catchment would be expected. It is notable that there are currently several HC Consultation papers ongoing regarding the creation of GME catchment

areas for schools eg Acharacle, Glenurquhart. A hypothetical catchment for Roy Bridge Primary as a GME Primary might enable those within the hypothetical catchment to be consulted and included in the formal Consultation. The narrative at Option 3, points 8.1 and 8.2 of the Consultation paper should be amended to reflect this.

The carbon footprint and financial costs associated with transportation of children to GME provision need to be explored and clearly documented.

We are living in times of change. Carbon footprint and impact on climate change has become a key consideration. We are also emerging from a pandemic. Have guidelines on educational provision been amended to reflect these changing times? A classroom that was once deemed suitable for 25 children might in future be deemed suitable for less children in order to enable social distancing and adequate health and hygiene considerations for staff and pupils. Journey times that were once acceptable may no longer be acceptable in future. Where bigger was seen to be better in recent years, might it be the case that, with new challenges, smaller rural schools become more desirable regardless of whether or not there might be slightly higher per capita running costs?

I would urge Highland Council to give full consideration to the above points prior to reaching a conclusion on the future educational provision in Roy Bridge and surrounding area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Catherine M MacKinnon