

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School.

May 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people who live in the catchment area of Struan Primary School; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 20 March 2023 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the site of Struan Primary School and Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School and Nursery Class, including discussion with relevant consultees. Stakeholders from neighbouring schools and the community were invited to attend discussions.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Struan Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements resulting from the proposed closure.

2. Consultation process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 Struan Primary School was mothballed in April 2022 when the total school roll reduced to two pupils. The Highland Council consulted parents in making this decision. There are currently no children of primary school age in Struan Primary School catchment area who require the educational services of the school. A very small number of children attend other schools. This is either as a placing request and/or to access Gaelic Medium Education. Struan Primary School did not provide Gaelic Medium Education. Children who reside in Struan and the surrounding area are in a designated Gaelic Medium catchment area for Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School.

2.3 The council fulfilled duties to regularly review the mothballed arrangements for Struan Primary School. The council considered future predictions of Struan Primary School's roll. These show that from 2023 to 2037 there will be one pupil or no pupils within the school's catchment area. There were no children attending the nursery class at Struan Primary School prior to mothballing. There is no known change of local circumstance to suggest that the school roll would increase significantly. The council met with Struan Community Council in November 2022. Struan Community Council agreed that the council should progress to a statutory consultation on discontinuing education at the primary school.

2.4 The statutory consultation for the closure of Struan Primary School ran from 23 February to 21 April 2023. The Highland Council undertook a full range of consultation activities during this period. A public meeting was held on 20 March 2023. This meeting was attended by 16 people. Attendees viewed the closure of the school as inevitable due to the very small number of primary-aged children residing within Struan Primary School's catchment area. A question was raised about the proposed realignment of neighbouring catchment areas, should Struan Primary School be closed. They requested that children have an option to attend the all-Gaelic immersion school at Portree, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh. This view was also received in a written response to the statutory consultation. Currently, children may attend Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh only as a placing request. The council was receptive to considering the request to access all-Gaelic immersion schooling. They also responded on the importance of sustaining other very rural schools in this area of Skye whose catchment areas would be expanded, should the council close Struan Primary School.

2.5 Four written responses were received to the statutory consultation, one of which has been referenced above. Two responses agreed with discontinuing education but suggested some realignment to the proposed catchment areas to benefit Carbost Primary School. This is a neighbouring school which is classified as very rural. Parents and the Parent Council made this request to safeguard their school roll. They also focused on issues of equity should Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School have increased resources from having a larger school roll than Carbost Primary School. Children's views on the proposed discontinuing education at Struan Primary School were summarised in a written response. Almost all children agreed with the proposal to discontinue education at Struan Primary School and realign the catchment area with that of Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School.

2.6 The community's strong interest in acquiring the school building was clear at the public meeting, should the council proceed with the proposal. Struan Community Council confirmed they are clear on the reasoning and rationale for the proposal. They support the proposal, as do Struan Community Development Group.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council is responding to a decline in demand for education in the catchment area of Struan Primary School. The council have consulted the school and wider community to arrive at a consensus that keeping Struan Primary School open or mothballed is not viable. HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits to progressing with the proposal to discontinue education at Struan Primary School and to realigning the catchment area. HM Inspectors do not agree with all of the educational benefits statements produced by the council. The council should continue using educational research in producing educational benefit statements. HM Inspectors met with staff, children, members of the community and Struan Community Development Group. Consultees were supportive of the proposals. HM Inspectors also met with the headteacher of Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain – Dunvegan Primary School, Carbost Primary School and Struan Primary School. As a cluster headteacher, she was able to share with HM Inspectors an overview of the impact of the proposal across the cluster of schools.

3.2 Almost all the children at Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain – Dunvegan Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposals. They looked forward to having more friends. Children reflected on avoiding long travel times to school. The consultees with whom HM Inspectors met supported assigning the catchment area to Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain - Dunvegan Primary School. They did not feel that assigning some of the catchment area of Struan Primary School to that of Carbost Primary School would bring educational benefits to children currently attending Carbost Primary School, or in the future. The council have already considered this option in how the catchment area may be reallocated. They should explain further to parents their reasoning for retaining the current catchment area of Carbost Primary School.

3.3 Struan Community Council confirmed in writing to HM Inspectors that they are clear on the reasoning and rationale for the proposed decision. They support the proposal, as do Struan Community Development Group.

3.4 At the meetings with HM Inspectors, there was some further interest shown by the consultees in enabling parents in the Struan area to have an option for their children to attend Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh. This is to experience the benefits of total immersion approaches in the language. The council, in making its final decision, should be clear on parents' access to total immersion as well as immersion alongside English Medium Education.

3.5 As the proposal may lead to closing a rural school, HM Inspectors also considered the factors to which the council should give special regard. The council has produced equalities and rural impact assessments to inform their approaches. They should also consider undertaking an island community impact assessment. The council have considered best value through a financial analysis and the implications on the environment from discontinuing education at Struan Primary School. Their proposal is not reported to increase adversely children's travel time to Bun-sgoil Dhùn Bheagain – Dunvegan Primary School. The council presented four alternative options to discontinuing education at the school. These options included designating Struan Primary School for Gaelic Medium Education. The council's options on how Struan Primary School may remain open, are not viable because of pupil numbers declining in the area.

3.6 The council have acknowledged the community's interest in securing the school building for community use, should the proposal go ahead. HM Inspectors heard from consultees of a range of ways that local people may benefit from acquiring the building. Consultees highlighted that Struan does not have a village hall or community centre. The school building is an important public space, and the only practical location for community meetings. Struan Community Council are active users of the school building since the school was mothballed. They have managed the school building since January 2023, with an interim lease setting out detailed arrangements. The

Highland Council have stated that they remain committed to working with the local community over the future use of the building and land. They have advised that any such proposal for continued community use would be progressed within the terms of the council's current asset management arrangements.

4 Summary

HM Inspectors agree that The Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of Struan Primary School catchment area. There is a consensus among those consulted that the closure of the school is inevitable and that the school building could be used to benefit the community. The council in making its final decision should clarify further for parents their interest in accessing an all-Gaelic school without making a placing request. They should also provide further reassurances to parents at Carbost Primary School on the rationale for realignment of catchment areas. It will be important that the council continues to collaborate with the local community of Struan in realising their ambitions for the school building and land, should the proposal be approved. The council should do this in a timely manner to maintain momentum for the community's proposed use of the building, and to avoid the condition of the building deteriorating from not being used.

HM Inspectors
May 2023