



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT DUROR PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Duror Primary School.

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 person) at the public meeting held at Duror Primary school on 16 April 2024.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 21 February 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Duror Primary School. The original proposal also suggested that, should Duror Primary be closed, the school's catchment area should be re-assigned to that of Ballachulish Primary School. Following the consultation, the Council proposes to amend this latter aspect.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - D** are the appendices to the original proposal.

- 1.3 Duror Primary School has a current roll of two pupils. Highland Council is of the view that a total roll of this size creates barriers to education.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Duror Primary, it is the Council's view that there is an insufficient number of children of suitable age in the Duror catchment, who wish to attend Duror Primary School, and that consequently the school is no longer viable. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6, 7 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Duror 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 7-11 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 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 15 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 8 and 10 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. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 4 March 2024 to Friday 3 May 2024. 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:
- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Duror Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
 - (ii) Parents/carers of pupils attending Ballachulish Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
 - (iii) The Parent Council of St. Bride's Primary School
 - (iv) The Parent Council of Glencoe Primary School
 - (v) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area

affected by the proposal.

- (vi) Staff of Duror School.
- (vii) Staff of Ballachulish Primary School
- (viii) Duror and Kentallen Community Council
- (ix) Ballachulish Community Council
- (x) Trade Union representatives.

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

2.4 A public meeting was held at Duror Primary School on 16 April 2024. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, X Account and Facebook page, and in the *Lochaber Times*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

3.0 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

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 22 written responses (not including the pupil responses). Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendices 3i-3xxiii. Twenty of the responses opposed the proposed closure, two were in favour. Most of the responses came from the wider community rather than from parents.

4.2 The views of the four children attending Duror PS during session 2023-24 were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3ii summarises their views, which are also discussed at Section 5 below. Two of the four pupils were in P7 in 2023-24 and are now in High School. Two children remain at Duror Primary School.

4.3 During the consultation, one representation against closure was received from the parents of a pre-school child, who moved into the community in December 2023/January 2024. The child is now 3 years old. Since the completion of the consultation exercise, the Council has received further representations from the parents of two other pre-school children, one aged two and the other around 10

months. Neither of these representations were received during the formal consultation period, but they have helped in estimating possible future numbers.

- 4.4 A further representation was received, again after the close of consultation, from an armed forces family with three children who are currently away from the area but who maintain a house in the community. They argued that if the school closed, the catchment should be re-zoned to that of St. Bride's Primary.

5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period

- 5.1 The closure proposal was strongly opposed by almost all the parents and other residents who responded. The detailed comments from pupils can be viewed at Appendix 3ii.
- 5.2 Education Scotland Inspectors who visited the school noted that all stakeholders felt strongly that the school should remain open.
- 5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-6 below, together with arguments put forward in support of closure.
- 5.4 There were 22 written responses received from other stakeholders. Two of these supported the proposed closure, which the other 20 respondents opposed.
- 5.5 The public meeting was reasonably well-attended, given the small size of the local community. The views expressed at the meeting were unanimously against the closure of the school.
- 5.6 The main arguments put forward 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.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children are set out at Issues 1-6 below, and addressed at Responses 1-6.

Issue 1

I feel it would be good to make one big school (for South Lochaber).

Response 1

The Council agrees that in principle this would be a good idea. However at the moment the Council has identified other priorities with the money it has available. A single school for the area could though be considered in future as part of a planned 20-year investment programme being taken forward by Highland Council.

Issue 2

The school building is underused; there is scope to have the building available for the community such as clubs, afterschool events.

Response 2

There would be a cost to Highland Council in doing this. Electricity and heating costs money, and a member of staff would have to be paid to secure the building afterwards. Due to the small population of the area, it is very unlikely that enough people would want to use the school in the evenings, to justify the costs of opening.

Issue 3

It wasn't very good (to close the school) as parents do not drive. The school is local and important to me.

The school is in a fantastic location for pupils to travel by foot and cycling.

Response 3

If the school does close then transport will be provided to take children to their new school. We agree though that there will be less opportunity for children to walk or cycle to school.

Issue 4

The school is in a fantastic area of natural beauty and the children can access great resources inside and outside.

Our school has an advantage compared to other schools because we can easily access the outdoors (Cuil Bay, forest, river and trails).

Response 4

It's true that Duror Primary has a fantastic natural location, but that is also true of the other local schools.

Issue 5

The school can support an Early Years service (such as a playgroup/toddler group).

Response 5

The school has recently been supporting an informal playgroup for one day a week, which has attracted families from outwith the Duror Primary School catchment. However the Council remains unconvinced about the viability of a full Early Years facility at the school. This is discussed further at Response 14 below.

Issue 6

(Other schools) It's a lot noisier, we get lots of learning done because it is quiet and I learn off the older children.

We are able to be best at our learning because it is quiet and we all have access to a teacher. Our learning is very individualised.

Small school(s) allow us to be flexible (to the needs and development needs) of the children.

We have a very supportive Parent Council that enable opportunities to experience a wide curriculum, and we get these opportunities because we are a small school.

We get to experience being around the other children as we visit and experience other children (in the cluster) and we have friends beyond the school. We don't feel isolated.

There are lots of things to do in and around the playground.

The community is very connected to the school (open days, school events).

Feels like Duror is a family rather than a school.

Response 6

Whilst there are many good things about the school in Duror, the Council thinks that two or three children just isn't enough for a school.

- 6.2 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 7-18 below and addressed at Responses 7-18. Where different respondents have raised similar issues, these have been grouped together in the comments below.

Issue 7

My wife and I moved to Duror just before Christmas last year and we have a two-year-old son.

We fell in love with Duror since moving here and our property shares a boundary with the school. Our son has got to know the other kids at the

school, been to their open days and is already part of the school community. The pupils, staff and community around the school is amazing and something special is lost if the council chooses to close it.

As you saw and heard at the meeting on 16 April, the community strongly believes that it is best served by having its own school, as it's had since pre-1841.

We are really wanting our son to go to Duror Primary School. He has already enrolled for nursery at St Brides which would be our second choice if Duror closes.

Response 7

We welcome new families moving to the Highlands. However the Council has proposed the closure of Duror Primary School on the basis that the school is no longer viable. Unfortunately, the very small number of children who appear to be available for enrolment locally in future years, will not alter that position.

Issue 8

I feel I must write this letter in the only way I know how, by being honest. In my opinion Duror Primary is not able to provide the level of education that children in Scotland should receive.

Here in the community the parents who put their children in the school are in the minority. There are five families who do not use Duror Primary the reason being that they are not able to offer acceptable levels of teaching. I feel that Duror Primary should not remain open. The village itself is mainly made up of Airbnb and second homes having a school in the village is not essential as I am myself and the other families travel out with to take our children to school, where in many cases the school is the heart of the community here in Duror this is not the case our community centre is the hub of the community where we all gather and come together. The school is not and is no longer fit for purpose. The cost of keeping that school open versus a bus for myself and all the children in the community to go to a school with the village is going to be far more cost-effective than keeping Duror Primary open after the summer holidays the numbers will drop to 2 in the school and I cannot believe that this is a good use of taxpayers money.

Response 8

The Council notes this response.

Issue 9

If the school closes, there will be even less chance of families with children moving to this village. Kentallen School closed in the mid-1960s, and since then very few children have been brought up in Kentallen

Response 9

Many of our most rural schools in Highland have seen sharply declining rolls over the last decade, suggesting that the presence of a school does not necessarily have any significant effect on attracting families with young children.

The Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014, considered the impact of school closures on communities. They concluded that *"...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."* The Commission added that *"In some of the communities the Commission visited, it found evidence that while a school closure had been resisted and closure still took place, the impact had been less than was feared, with communities adjusting to different school provision and community focus continuing in individual villages. Rural communities and their economic base vary widely, as does their remoteness, and this will affect their resilience to school change."*

Issue 10

When the Travellers' site on the outskirts of Kentallen was a more appealing place for travellers to stay, the majority of traveller parents opted to bring their children to Duror PS. They were in the Ballachulish PS catchment area, but parents told me that their children coped better in a small school and, more importantly, were accepted by everyone in the school community. It is unusual for gypsy traveller parents to attend school meetings let alone speak out. One of the parents who spoke at the meeting on 16 April is from the traveller community and she strongly believes her daughter will be best served by remaining in a small school.

A small rural school can never provide the facilities of a larger school, but parents accept this as they feel the benefits of a small school outweigh the shortcomings.

Response 10

The Council accepts the above description is accurate. However both Ballachulish Primary and St. Bride's Primary are small schools. Ballachulish in particular has a much smaller roll than it did 15-20 years ago. On balance, the Council remains of the view that Duror Primary is no longer viable and that the educational interests of the children are best served elsewhere.

Issue 11

The Condition and Suitability Surveys were completed in 2016. It may well be that during the last eight years, some of the identified shortcomings may have been dealt with, or has Highland Council done nothing to resolve problem areas?

Response 11

As the Suitability Assessment has been circulated, respondents will be aware that the “C” rating was based on issues such the school lacking a dining hall, staffroom, PE hall, and other limiting factors. The school site itself is a small one, so some of these issues could not easily be resolved. In assessing priorities for investment, Highland Council has to take account of the fact it has nearly 200 schools, and limited resources. Around 35% of Highland schools have a “C” rating, and investment must be carefully targeted to ensure Best Value for the Council taxpayer.

The most important point though, is that the closure proposal has been advanced on the educational issues linked to the current roll of two. Upgrading the Duror Primary School building to a “B” rating for Suitability would not alter the educational disadvantages of the very small school roll.

Issue 12

I have been employed by Highland Council as the Cleaning Operative for the school for nearly two years. Notwithstanding the fact that this position is a menial one, below the level of my qualifications and experience, the post has served me well as the only employment I could find in my local village. Myself and one other member of the Duror community are employed by the school. Currently, no other establishment exists which provides local employment within the village.

As a Council serving a largely rural area, I feel it is incumbent upon HC to support the needs of small, isolated, rural communities. In the interests of social welfare (some people cannot travel great distances for work due to economic imperatives or mental health), as well as the obvious environmental/sustainability factors involved, it is hugely important to provide employment opportunities at a very local level for those living in small communities.

Although the employment provided by the school may be deemed insignificant to those in the Council at the decision-making level regarding its closure, these roles are enormously important to those whose livelihoods depend on them. Thus, I urge the Highland Council to please consider these factors when deciding to close a very popular village school and put two members of that community out of work.

Response 12

Paragraph 14.2 of the Proposal Paper advised that the staff affected would be eligible for redeployment in line with Council policy. Staff would be eligible for transfer into any vacant posts within reasonable travel distance. This was also discussed at the public meeting. It is nevertheless acknowledged that the loss of employment in a rural community is an adverse effect from a school closure.

Ultimately, schools need a viable number of children to continue in operation.

Issue 13

The school is very special in nature, being a small rural school within the cluster of four, the other three being larger schools in larger villages. The school provides an excellent level of education for the pupils and is, I believe, vital to the continued development of our community.

The school has been unfortunate in recent months in that a couple of families with multiple children attending have had to move from the area. But there has been a big increase in pre-school age children in the village in the same period, with a total of 8 now in the area, and I believe that the school roll should be given a chance to rise again as it has done in the past.

Should it remain open, I believe that there is an opportunity for the school, in its unique rural setting, to also play a role in the education of children from all of the cluster schools.

I am confident that our village school has some unique attributes that would merit keeping the school open. As part of a schools cluster it appears that, where engagement with larger groups of pupils is beneficial, for example with sports, this is already happening. I would suggest that using this cluster principal to bring pupils from the other 3 primary schools to Duror would be an extremely valuable experience, particularly in order to “study” outdoor activity in its many and varied forms. The environmental surroundings and outdoor space that Duror Primary has access to are second to none.

This school is one of few amenities in the village and an attraction for young families moving to the area. Over decades the school roll has fluctuated, as is usual for a rural school. Children cycle or walk to the school and discontinuation would make this unfeasible. The school is located in a beautiful environment which forms part of the children’s education.

Duror & Kentallen Community Council wishes to object strongly to the proposed closure of Duror Primary School.

Whilst we recognise that the anticipated roll of 2 pupils for the 2024/25 year is low, the parents of those pupils (and indeed the pupils themselves)

are more than happy with the situation and are adamant that their children are receiving an excellent education. In addition, there are currently 8 pre-school age children in the area, and the Community Council believe that there is a good chance that the school roll will increase in future, as it has done in the past. In recent weeks a toddler group has been set up which meets for the first time in early May and it is hoped that this could lead to some form of pre-school class in future.

Whilst I acknowledge that the school roll is likely to be very low at the start of the next school year (probably as low as 2 pupils) I can see no evidence of this being problematic for these pupils; their education seems to be progressing very well and their personal integration with our community is exemplary. I do not believe that a small school roll is damaging to pupils. Since Covid, the opportunity for remote working has become more popular and feasible in the area and we have noticed an increase in the number of young families choosing to live here, resulting in a very cosmopolitan and eclectic community. Our community has always had a strong bond with the school and, as one of few amenities in the village, it has been pivotal in attracting families to come and live in the area in recent years. Should the school close, a huge part of the attractiveness of the area to families would be taken away. The rural environment surrounding the school is unique and, we believe, is capable of adding substantial educational benefits to pupils of Duror Primary School and potentially the other schools in the cluster. We do not feel that sufficient weight has been given to this opportunity in the closure proposal.

The completion of the Caledonia Way through the community in recent years allows children to walk or cycle to school. Closing the school would require them to be driven to the schools further afield, which would be contrary to the Highland Council policy to encourage more walking and cycling and less reliability on vehicle transport.

In addition, with the current Scottish Government focus on how to halt rural depopulation, it is strongly felt that by removing the school it is not only the children who will be affected but the whole community. Closure would have a negative impact on the growth and sustainability of this vibrant community.

The community would be very happy to work with Highland Council in any way we can in order to facilitate keeping the school open.

Closing our primary school would stifle the current increase in families with young children (currently there 8 children of pre-school age in this community). Our villages have limited amenities at present, closing the school would drastically worsen this position.

Today Duror Primary School hosted the first (of what I hope will be many) Stay and Play sessions. In total eight pre-school aged children attended all from the local area and therefore potential future pupils. It would be such a shame to close the Primary School now when there will clearly be a real need for it in a few years time. Since moving to Duror a just over a year

ago, I have come to know the lovely staff and pupils which are an absolute credit to that school. The school pupils helped out with session, making cups of tea for the parents and playing with the children. Parents who had not previously met despite living in the village were able to get to know each other. It's a lovely thing to be part of. If you take away the School you will be taking away a crucial asset to Duror, where parents and children can come together without having to travel for miles and miles. It would be so sad if I was unable to send my little boy there when the time comes in a few years. Please don't close Duror Primary School

As a local resident of Kentallen, I wish to express my concerns of the proposed closure of Duror Primary School. I live within the catchment area and while I have no children of primary school age, I do value this as an important local resource and feel it would be extremely detrimental to the area if the closure proceeds.

A recent meeting to discuss the proposed closure heard from parents of pupil past and present, all of whom spoke very highly of the standards of education their children received and dismissed the suggestion that there was a need for increased socialisation, listening and talking, opportunities for peer work that would come from being part of a larger class group.

These positive statements were supported by testimonials from local secondary school teaching staff who reported the social skills of children from the school were not impaired in anyway by the low school role but quite the opposite. The teachers reported Duror Primary children to have strong social skills, keen sense of identity and, more often than not, were better prepared to deal with the transition from primary to secondary than their counterparts from larger populated schools.

The school itself is in s a state of good repair, despite the claims made in the outdated report and its location on the National Cycle Network offers the children the opportunity for regular exercise, as well as carbon-free travel to and from school. With access to forest, glen and coast, the school is well placed to provide the children who attend with an environment rich in educational opportunity that will both sustain and improve the educational opportunities. These opportunities are not so easily accessible at other schools in the area.

The children of Duror and Kentallen are continually active in the community, taking part in local events, both fun and socially minded – such as the local litter picks and beach clean-up events. These kids care about the environment and community in which they live and grow.

Duror and Kentallen communications have recently been improved with the installation of fibre optic cabling to provide reliable Wi-Fi and with this development comes ever-expanding work possibilities for families who are seeking a more rural lifestyle. Covid has led to more businesses offering their employees remote working opportunities which bring social, economic, and cultural benefits the area. Families faced with ever increasing costs of living

and rising house prices are looking to areas that were previously out of reach, and the rise in remote working opportunities has increased the popularity of the area.

In summary, the parents of the children who will be schooled at Duror and Kentallen primary are happy with the education and socialisation on offer. They are also happy with the school premises and the wider environment opportunities of the surrounding area. And given the most significant elements of the financial burden will not be eliminated by closing the school, this is a much less relevant factor than previous suggested.

Closing Duror and Kentallen primary school would be a major loss to current residents and their children and make the community a much less attractive proposition for new families at a time remote working and remote living is becoming more popular, possible, and practical option for so many families.

Duror and Kentallen is a socially diverse and eclectic area. The threat of the school closure is deeply upsetting to many people in the community. It will reduce the attractiveness of the area to families with young children.

While there are many practical elements to be considered I believe Highland Council and Education Scotland must also gave serious weight to the depth of feeling and the emotional impact the closure of this school would bring. I do hope full consideration will be given to the wider impact on the local area and population both in the short and longer term. Since, as stated at the consultation meeting, there are no financial reasons for closure the proposal is presumably based largely on the Suitability Assessment. This appears to have been carried out nearly 8 years ago. It also seems to use standards designed for a larger town school which are not necessarily applicable to a small village school. It is an overly harsh assessment, that does not consider the full social and community environment. I have made more comments at the end of this email. When we first arrived in Duror, in the 1970s, there were proposals to close the school. Fortunately this did not happen, the school roll rose and the school became so well-regarded that some pupils came from Ballachulish. Now that we are facing another proposed closure the arguments against closure remain the same:

1. Although the expected roll for 24/25 is only 2, there are babies and young couples in the village and the roll will increase.
2. Village schools are part of the community. Closing the school will take the heart out of the community and young couples will be discouraged from moving here.
3. Bussing 5-year olds to Ballachulish every day is not acceptable.

Overall, there seems to be no good argument for closure and I hope that Highland Council will keep the school open and allow it to prosper once more. Duror primary has always been a nurturing inclusive school and the pupils are well rounded individuals with a great education base. I would have put my own older children to Duror but did not have my own transport at the time.

Now that I have another baby Duror was where we were hoping he would start his education.

I would like to stress two main points. Firstly the school has and is functioning perfectly well in its present form, providing a rounded, balanced education for all of its pupils – past and present. This, despite not having shiny new facilities, a big car park or a discrete entrance away from the pupils....

Secondly, the damage to the village of the removal of the school would be serious and would discourage young couples from settling here. At the moment there are only a few prospective pupils in the population but demographic change is cyclical and in a few years the demand will almost certainly grow again. Closure now would be the worst type of short-termism. Finally I'd like to express my personal commitment to the school where my three children had an idyllic and fondly remembered education. They still talk about the "extended family" atmosphere, the trips to Cuil Bay which they enjoyed together and the solid foundation for a secondary education that they received there.

I hope that you will ensure that the school stays open, for the benefit of present and future pupils and the inhabitants of the village.

Both my children attended Duror Primary School - the eldest was the only child in her year, and her younger sister was one of 8 in hers. They were extremely privileged to receive the best education - both academically, and - importantly - as active members of the wider Duror community and within the surrounding environment.

If we have no school, we can't attract families - if we have no families we have no school...and Duror will become a retirement village with no transport network or nearby shops. We need more affordable housing and we need a school that is attractive to families who want to come to live in a rural environment - with, for instance, a feeder nursery like eg Stramash.

I appreciate this is not in any way an easy fix - certainly not one that is achievable in the short term - and that finances are tight; also that the housing issue is a UK wide one - although possibly magnified in rural areas because of its direct effect on all other aspects of village life. However, we do have several babies and toddlers in the village and it would be fantastic if a local nursery could be made attractive enough for them to continue their education here - with plenty of interaction with other schools that feed into Kinlochleven, as has always been the case. The new "Stay and Play" initiative (photo uploaded) is a really lovely idea and simple things like this would surely create good foundations for carrying on into a local Primary School.

If the school closes now, I fear it will never reopen and that would sound the death knell for our village.

I remain hopeful that the decision made will not be based on short term, possibly short-sighted thinking - rather, a future vision for a thriving, multi-generational rural community.

I fully understand the Budgetary constraints on the Highland Council and the Education Department but I think the potential Closure of a Village School with such a strong aluminae is a devastating Social blow to a Highland Community;

I have lived in Appin for over 50 years and was a GP with a strong presence in the Duror/Kentallen Community watching generations of Children grow up and thrive in the School catchment area.

Attending a Community School gives young people a strong sense of belonging and confidence which they take forward in life enriching their Community; This is supported by the Stability that having dedicated Teachers in the Community bring as well as the Parents and Grandparents supporting the core of the Community. Duror has lost the Village Shop and Post Office in recent years and to lose the School would devastate the Area; I remember the School being threatened in the 70s and then an extension had to be built to accommodate the rising numbers of Pupils; This is the nature of Rural Communities; Denying that probability will mortally affect this proud, historic Community.

I am so fortunate to have been employed at Duror Village Primary School as general auxiliary/cleric for over 30 years. Over that time I have witnessed the first class education that is the provision of a local village school. It is a well known fact that pupils attending a local village school are provided with opportunities for social interaction with peers who live in the same area. This can help children build social skills and friendships that extend beyond the classroom. I fear this huge benefit would be lost if Duror Village School were to close and pupils were to attend a larger school outside their village of residence.

Families come and go within a community and although at this present time numbers of pupils attending the village school is at an all-time low I feel certain that families with children of primary school age will once again take up residence in the community in the near future.

A local building developer has informed the Duror & Kentallen Community Council of his intention to build 30 homes on a large area of land he has purchased in the centre of Duror village. I would envisage that of these 30 new homes many would be occupied by families with children of primary school age.

The facility of a village school is high on the list of priorities of prospective buyers of property or those seeking employment within the locality. Closure of the village school would be detrimental in that it would discourage new families with school age children moving into the area.

Youth is the very lifeblood of any community, the village school is very much an integral part of the structure of all communities. The retention of our village school is of the utmost importance as the provision of a primary education is undeniable.

Highland Council are far too premature with their suggestion to possibly close Duror Village School.

Duror Primary School is one of many schools across the Highlands that is committed to the Eco-School Programme. The pupils and staff regularly walk to and from school on a daily basis whenever possible. Highland Council have indicated that they would provide a bus to transport pupils to/from Duror village to another school out with the village. A backward step in regard to the Eco- School Programme.

I formally request that The Highland Council take my objections into consideration when deciding on the proposal.

Response 13

Although the other 3 schools in the cluster are larger than Duror PS, they themselves are very small rural schools. Ballachulish PS has a current P1-7 roll of 35, Glencoe PS has 25, and St. Bride's has 31. They would be considered very small schools in almost any other part of Scotland. All three schools have easy access to outdoor landscapes.

Following the completion of the consultation, a number of references were made to the presence of 8 pre-school children in the area. Further enquiries suggested that a number of these live outside the Duror Primary catchment. The Council has been notified of three pre-school children in the catchment who would be interested in attending the school in future years. Given the ages of these three children, and that the two current children are in the upper stages of their primary school education, the projections do not suggest that the roll at Duror Primary School will rise above three in the foreseeable future.

As noted above, the Council accepts that closure of the school will result in reduced opportunities for the remaining children to walk or cycle to school, though it should also be noted that a only very small number of children would be affected.

The Council stands by the educational benefits outlined in Section 11 of the Proposal Paper.

It is understood that the previous discussions on the closure of the school Took place in the 1970s, when Duror was part of the former Argyll County Council. Those discussions occurred at a time when the school roll was well in excess of what it is at present. It is accepted of course, that rural school rolls can fluctuate to a degree, but Highland Council has seen, and is seeing, a continuing decline in the number of children attending our schools.

The school transport distance from Duror to Ballachulish Primary is well within normal travelling distance for many primary school children in Highland.

The question of rural depopulation is considered at Response 9 above.

Issue 14

We have some concerns regarding the paperwork that has been Issued regarding the proposed closure of the school. Discrepancies include:

Appendix A page 5, 3:4

“There has never been a pre-school class.”

There was, for a brief time, a pre-school/nursery provided within the school in 1998. This was replaced by a private nursery that ran in the village hall for many years.

Appendix A page 6, 3:5

“Registered Capacity 25”

We believe that from 1991-2001 the school roll exceeded 25 apart from one year (1999) when there was a drop.

Appendix A page 6, 3:5

“Building stated as poor condition. Category C”

In the summary of the Condition Survey which we have been sent, it clearly states that all 3 blocks in the school are Category B: "Satisfactory – Performing adequately but showing minor deterioration." So why has the building condition now been declared as Category C?

Furthermore – this survey was carried out in 2013 and 2018 and may be well out of date and therefore should not be considered in any decision making. “Educational Suitability stated as Category C”

This Assessment was carried out in 2016. This is clearly outdated and should not be considered in any decision making.

Appendix A page 11,14:2

States that “staff (teaching, clerical and cleaning) will be eligible for redeployment” but in Appendix D, row 6, it states that “there will be a saving in support staff costs.” These statements contradict each other.

The history of Duror Primary School shows clearly the swings in pupils attending over many years, from nearly thirty to its present level. There are already a few youngsters in the village who may well want to attend the Duror school. The villages of Duror and Kentallen are attracting young families constantly and they would wish to have their own primary school. The provision of a pre-school nursery would enhance its attraction and this is being discussed within the village at present. The previous nursery was excellent and should not have been closed.

While it is understood keeping the school open comes at a cost, with staff being the costliest factor, Highland Council's policy of seeking to redeploy staff to other educational settings will relocate the cost but does not remove it from future budgetary obligations. There are no immediate financial savings to be had from closing the school.

Response 14

The staff who drafted the Proposal Paper were unaware that there was a school nursery for a brief period in 1998. This may have been so but it is noted that this was more than a quarter-century ago. The Council is grateful to have this information but the existence of a school nursery class for a brief period in 1998 is not material to the discussion about the future of the school taking place in 2024-25.

The school's capacity is officially registered at 25, which is the maximum number of children allowed in a composite class (or indeed for any class that has P1 pupils). The relevant legislation has changed since the 1990s.

Even with a capacity of 25, it is clear that the school will have more than sufficient capacity for the foreseeable future. The roll of 2 for the 2024-25 school session represents 8% of the available capacity.

The comment that the school had more than 25 children in the 1990s illustrates just how much the roll has declined over the last 30 years. Sadly this pattern has been repeated across many rural schools.

The issue of the Suitability rating is addressed at Response 11 above, and at Section 9 below.

The Council does not accept there is a contradiction between the savings identified and its commitment to redeploy staff, since the closure would lead to a reduction in the number of staff the Council requires. Staff who are deployed will usually go into vacant posts elsewhere, thereby avoiding the need to recruit staff for the vacant post.

The Council has repeatedly made it clear that the proposal to close Duror Primary School is being advanced on educational and not financial grounds.

It is the Council's understanding that the partner centre nursery that previously operated from the village hall closed after all the parents withdrew their children.

In respect of early years, Highland Council does not believe that very small settings with 1 or 2 children offer a good learning, play and socialisation environment for young children. It would be very unlikely that, in most years, there will only be 1 or 2 children in each year group in the area, and as such that does not make a viable traditional ELC service (school nursery).

There are alternative solutions, such as a commissioned childminder, which may afford a wider range of childcare availability and include babies and after school care, we could consider looking to recruit to that if the community would be interested in that provision.

There is no suitable accommodation to create an ELC at Duror, even if there was funding available and it was believed to be a viable option.

Children have access to local ELC provisions at Ballachulish and St Brides which offer greater opportunities to socialise play and learn within easy travelling distance.

Evidence across Highland is that there are mixed decisions for parents in keeping their child at the school they attended ELC and moving the child back to the catchment school. Glencoe is an example of this, as a school without a nursery class but where the primary school roll has help up well, with the school even attracting pupils from neighbouring catchments, on placing requests. Many parents are committed to their local catchment school and do move the children back to that, even when they have attended ELC elsewhere. There is also evidence however that some parents choose not to move their child back because they do not want their child to be the only child in their year group.

Issue 15

I propose you put on hold the procedure to close the school for at least three years and await the very likely increase in applications which will follow.

This school has been an integral part of our community for generations, though I do understand that it is not viable with just 2 pupils, it seems short-sighted to shut it down altogether when it is already established that there are enough pre-school age children in the community currently to make it viable again in the near future. Perhaps the council would consider alternatives, such as using it as specialized classrooms (e.g. for horticulture and outdoor education), or as a nursery, with adult evening classes, to help make it pay its way until it is fully populated again? A recent community consultation event I attended suggested that there is a desire in our community to encourage more young families to move into the area. Local

groups and businesses, and developing facilities such as the community centre will help attract these families, but the loss of a school the children can walk or cycle to each day along our fabulous cycle path may be a deterrent.

Therefore, I would be very grateful if, instead of closing the school permanently, you would consider possible alternatives.

Response 15

The suggestion that the school should be “mothballed” was originally made by the Council in November 2023. However there were concerns from the community that “mothballing” would be a back door closure of the school and that an issue as important as the future of the school should be subject to full consultation.

Mothballing has advantages and disadvantages, one of the latter being the tendency of empty buildings to deteriorate.

The question of how many pre-school children are available for enrolment in the next few years is considered above, and indications are that the school roll is unlikely to rise above three pupils.

The possibility of an alternative use for the school is addressed in Section 10 below.

Issue 16

In the event of the closure of Duror Primary school, please relocate the catchment to St Brides Primary School and not to Ballachulish Primary. St Brides is the closer school and the majority of the children in Duror already attend or will be attending St. Brides Primary anyway. This would be helpful with regards to transport provision, which would need to be provided anyway for Ballachulish primary school as it more than 2 miles away. This would greatly improve the lives of the working parents in this area who have commutes to towns such as Oban (the opposite direction of both St Brides and Ballachulish primary schools).

Response 16

The main disadvantage with this proposal is that Duror does not share a catchment boundary with St. Bride’s Primary. Amalgamating the two catchment areas in the way suggested would therefore leave St. Bride’s Primary with an exclave to its core catchment.

Nevertheless, the Council has taken account of the arguments advanced around travel routes, and especially the close links that already exist between the two schools.

However, having considered the representations made, and in particular the links and pupil friendships already formed between Duror Primary and St. Bride's Primary, the Council agrees the suggestion that, in the event the school is closed, the catchment should be re-zoned to St. Bride's rather than to Ballachulish.

Issue 17

I am wishing to inform you that I plan to build a substantial housing development in Duror within the next five years, the housing will be aimed at families. I have two potential sites in Duror that I plan to develop. In all there would be an additional 40 houses and some light industrial space created if planning was granted (of which I am confident and motivated to appeal to the point where it would be approved, I feel there is a need in line with the aspersions of government so approval would be obtained).

I wish to point out that the closing of the School may create a situation where there is insufficient resources to provide for schooling needs. This will create a burden on the council to supply a new school at substantial cost. The only other option would be transport to Ballachulish or North Ballachulish again at substantial cost.

I would suggest making Duror School a Gaelic medium school would increase the pupil numbers and save it from closure if the council are so minded to save such an important part of the community. I myself will be moving to Duror however my 3 children that will be moving with me are learning in Gaelic. I know of others in similar situations.

Response 17

In principle, small scale, proportionate infill development is acceptable at the locality, in terms of the local development plan. There is no mapped boundary for Duror or any specifically allocated development sites. There are certain issues and Placemaking Priorities for the area, and any future planning applications would be considered against these issues and policy criteria. They include the flood risk associated with the River Duror; the presence of relatively good ground conditions, the relatively good aspect but lack of seaward outlook, the very limited capacity of the A828 trunk road junctions through the settlement and the cost of improving or rationalising them; limited water and sewage capacity; and a range of heritage designations that surround or overlap the settlement including areas of ancient/native woodland, the Glen Etive and Glen Fyne Special Protection Area, and the Ardsheal Hill and Peninsula Geological Conservation Review as well as many other listed buildings and monuments.

As stated elsewhere, the school currently has a roll of 2 against a registered capacity of 25. In calculating future rolls, planned new housing developments are expected to yield an average number of Primary and Secondary pupils into the local schools. These Pupil Product Ratio (PPR)

values are one of the key forecasting data inputs. The current PPR for Lochaber is 0.22, so an addition of 40 houses, if completed, would be expected to add around 9 additional pupils to the roll of Duror PS. On this basis, we see no prospect of there being any future capacity problems at Duror Primary School. St. Bride's Primary is currently at 72% capacity (31 pupils with a capacity of 43) and Ballachulish Primary is currently operating at only 47% of capacity (35 pupils with a capacity of 75). The local school estate therefore has ample ability to absorb around 9 additional pupils.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig have issued Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, under which Parents of children under school age, and who have not yet started to attend a primary school, have a right to request an assessment of the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) from the education authority in whose area their child lives. The request must be made in relation to only one child who must be specified in the request. The request must also set out, or be accompanied by, evidence of demand for GMPE from parents of other children resident in that same education authority area and who are in the same year group as the specified child.

When an education authority receives a parental request for GMPE, the education authority must assess the need for GMPE. Following an initial assessment, the education authority must decide whether there is a potential need for GMPE in the GMPE assessment area or not. This is defined as demand for GMPE in relation to five or more children in the same pre-school year group.

The Council would therefore consider any request for the provision of GME at Duror Primary School, made in line with the above.

Issue 18

The school is needed to sustain a community and encourage future families to live in the village.

Ballachulish primary has at times been at capacity and the level of education definitely suffers in those situations. I believe St Brides is also quite full.

Response 18

Ballachulish PS has a registered capacity of 75, and a current roll of 35. St. Bride's PS has a registered capacity of 43, with 31 on the roll. Neither school is forecast to have a rising roll. As there are only 2 children currently attending Duror Primary School, the Council does not anticipate that the closure of that school will result in capacity problems at either Ballachulish or St. Bride's.

Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 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**.
- 7.2 HM Inspectors agree with some, but not all, of the educational benefits outlined in the proposal. In the current context, the potential limitations of the small school roll could be mitigated by the cluster approach. Children, parents and staff state that joint working arrangements across the cluster are working well. They are providing valuable learning and teaching experiences for children to engage regularly with their peers from the other cluster schools. The council should engage more thoroughly with parents and members of the community, particularly around alternative options to the proposal. This should include consideration of the number of pre-school children living in the current catchment area, and an assessment of any planned housing developments. In preparing its consultation paper, it would be helpful if the council could outline the projected school roll of Duror Primary School. Should the council proceed with the proposal, it will be important to have further discussions with parents about the most appropriate change to the catchment area. A few consultees and stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors believe there are inaccuracies or omissions in the proposal document. In its consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies or omissions notified to it.
- 7.3 The Council has addressed the recommendations set out above. Further enquiries have identified three preschool children within the Duror Primary catchment area, whose parents would like them to attend the school. The children's ages range from 10 months to three years. The two current children at the school are in P6 and P4, so the older of these will leave for High School in August 2026, the younger in August 2028. Based on this data, the roll at Duror Primary will not rise above three pupils at any time before August 2028.
- 7.4 An assessment of the effects of Housebuilding is set out at Response 17 above. Comments on the catchment issue are at Response 16. Omissions and inaccuracies are addressed at Section 9 below.

8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 Section 15 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, and advised that Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building and site could be turned over to community use.
- 8.2 A number of responses have suggested that the closure of the school will have an adverse impact on the future of the community. The Council does not consider there is evidence to support this claim. Further detail is available at Response 9.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 9.1 Duror and Kentallen Community Council alleged the following inaccuracies in the Proposal Paper. At Appendix A page 5, 3:4, the Proposal Paper stated that there had never been a pre-school class at Duror Primary. The CC comment that there was, for a brief time, a pre-school/nursery provided within the school in 1998. This was replaced by a private nursery that ran in the village hall for many years.
- 9.2 The above issue is addressed at Response 14. The Council did not have a record of a school nursery for a brief period in 1998. This may have been so but it is noted that this was 27 years ago. There has not been a school nursery since that time and the existence of a school nursery class for a brief period in 1998 is not material to the discussion about the future of the school taking place in 2024-25.
- 9.3 The Proposal Paper stated at Appendix A page 6, 3:5, that the school's registered Capacity is 25. The CC commented that from 1991-2001 the school roll exceeded 25 apart from one year (1999) when there was a drop.
- 9.4 There is no inaccuracy here. The school's registered capacity is 25. The issue is addressed in more detail at Response 14.
- 9.5 The Proposal Paper stated at Appendix A page 6, 3:5 that the school building was rated as poor condition. Category C. In the summary of the Condition Survey which we have been sent, it clearly states that all 3 blocks in the school are Category B: "Satisfactory – Performing adequately but showing minor deterioration." So why has the building condition now been declared as Category C? Furthermore – this survey was carried out in 2013 and 2018 and may be well out of date and therefore should not be considered in any decision making.
- 9.6 The condition survey information is reviewed and validated to ensure that the overall condition rating that is reported to the Scottish Government each year is appropriate.
- The condition rating was changed from B to C in 2018 following a benchmarking exercise and has been reported as C since then.
- 9.7 The Proposal Paper stated at that the Educational Suitability of the building was Category C. This Assessment was carried out in 2016. This is clearly outdated and should not be considered in any decision making.
- 9.8 Although the survey dates from 2016, there have been no major alterations to the school building in the intervening years, that would be likely to result in a changed rating. The Council does not agree this is an inaccuracy. As noted at Response 11, the Suitability rating is not the primary basis for the closure proposal.

10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

10.1 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;

Sections 7-10 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Duror Primary School with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Duror Primary School with an expanded catchment area.

10.2 Sections 8 and 9 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council’s consideration as to why Options i and ii above would not be viable options for Duror Primary School. No additional suggestions were made during consultation.

10.3 Similarly, in respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, Section 10 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Duror Primary School. Again, no suggestion to this effect was made during consultation.

10.5 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 7-10 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.

10.6 Alternative approaches were suggested during the consultation exercise. It was proposed that the school could be kept open as specialised facility for outdoor education and/or horticultural education; or that it could be used to provide a nurture group setting (which would not be mutually exclusive with the other suggestions). Under these suggestions the Duror building would be used as a centre for the whole ASG, in addition to continuing to operate as a school.

10.7 Having reviewed the suggestions above, the Council has concluded that the Duror school building offers no particular advantages over the other schools in the ASG, for the activities suggested. The other ASG schools are all located in rural, coastal settings, and are under-utilised in terms of capacity.

10.8 As highlighted at paragraph 8.1 above, the Highland Council has a positive attitude towards Community Asset Transfer requests, in the event the school was to close.

10.9 The Council has also reconsidered 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 13 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

- 10.10 The Council has further reconsidered 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 Section 11 of the original proposal paper. The travel times to the alternative schools are not excessive and are within the normal range of school journeys in Highland.

11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 11.1 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 27 March 2025 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 16 April 2025. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 21 May 2025 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Duror Primary School is asked to email schoolclosure@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 16 April 2025.**
- 11.3 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.

12.0 Legal issues

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 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.

13.0 Financial Implications

- 13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix D to the Proposal Paper.

14.0 Impact Assessment

- 14.1 An Integrated Assessment has been prepared, covering Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Socioeconomic Effects, Climate Change, Data Protection, and a Mainland Rural Area Assessment.
- 14.2 The Impact Assessment identified mainly positive effects on children's wellbeing, although it was also acknowledged that children will have further to travel to school. No significant effects were identified in any other areas.

15.0 Effects on School Transport

- 15.1 The effects on school transport were considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper. The additional travel distances are well within the normal range for school travel in the Highland Council area. The schools, and the routes between them, are all located on the coast and only rarely affected by winter weather.

16.0 Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 16.1 Adverse effects were considered at S.17 of the proposal Paper. The main adverse effect will be the additional distance that children must travel. This is mitigated by the fact the Highland Council will provide school transport to the alternative school.

17.0 Conclusion

- 17.1 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 -10 above. For the reasons set out in detail above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

- 17.2 The most significant reason for closure is that all the available evidence suggests that the number of children attending Duror Primary School is and will continue to be too low to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Lastly, the neighbouring schools, St. Bride's Primary, and Ballachulish Primary, are also rural schools with rolls of just over 30 pupils. The closure of Duror School would thus help consolidate the numbers at these neighbouring rural schools.
- 17.3 Education Scotland staff visited Duror 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.
- 17.4 The Assistant Chief Executive (People), 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 Sections 5-10 above.

18.0 Recommendation

- 18.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Duror Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of St. Bride's Primary School.

Kate Lackie
Assistant Chief Executive (People)
29 January 2025