

**Budget Consultation**  
Co-chomhairle Buidseit **2012**



The Highland Council  
**Consultation Analysis**  
**Education**

# Budget Consultation 2012

## Education

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## **School Estate**

***Which of the following is most important when considering when schools should be combined?***

*and*

***Would you support the approach (to mothballing schools) being adopted more frequently across Highland?***

*and*

***Would you be supportive of an all-through (3-18) school approach?***

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## **Combining Schools**

***Which of the following is most important when considering when schools should be combined?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The first question was introduced as follows: “We currently operate 215 schools across Highland. These schools vary considerably in size from some with a role of over 1,000 to others with less than 5 pupils. During the last consultation you told us that you would prefer us to reduce the number of schools where appropriate, rather than to reduce the overall budget of every school.”

Respondents were asked the question: “Which of the following is most important when considering when schools should be combined?” From 6 options they were invited to “identify your top three (please tick three boxes only).” The results are found in the table below.

## **Education**

### **Views of Respondents as to the most important factors when considering combining schools**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Respondents with School Age Children %</b>
<b>Number of teachers within each school location to ensure appropriate peer interaction and support</b>	57	61
<b>Length of the journey to school (30 minutes primary, 45 minutes secondary)</b>	53	54
<b>Facilities available within a school</b>	53	51
<b>Low school rolls which can result in concerns about educational and social opportunities</b>	51	56
<b>Condition of the buildings</b>	44	37
<b>Capacity of the nearest alternative school</b>	30	29
<b>No response</b>	2	0

*N=1,041*

The factors in the table are ranked according to the percentage of respondents who considered them as being within the 3 most important of the 6 factors on offer.

The results show that when considering whether to combine schools four factors attracted the support of between 51% and 57% of all respondents and between 51% and 61% of respondents with school age children. These four factors are:

- **“the number of teachers within each school location to ensure appropriate peer interaction and support”** (rated as one of the 3 most important factors by 57% of all respondents and 61% of those with school age children);
- **“length of the journey to school”** (rated as one of the 3 most important by 53% of all respondents and 54% of those with school age children);
- **“facilities available within a school”** (rated as one of the 3 most important by 53% of all respondents and 51% of those with school age children);
- **“low school rolls which can result in concerns about educational and social opportunities”** (rated as one of the 3 most important factors by 51% of all respondents and 56% of those with school age children).

Some 44% of all respondents and 37% of those with school age children rated “**condition of the buildings**” as one of the 3 most important factors, while the “**capacity of the nearest alternative school**” was rated one of the 3 most important factors by 30% of all respondents and 29% of those with school age children.

### Qualitative Analysis

320 responses were received for the question “*Which of the following is most important when considering when schools should be combined? (Rank in order of priority 1-6 where 1 is the most important and 6 the least)*”. Responses were mainly received through the online form, with additional responses collected from discussions at ward forums and from posted and emailed forms. Organisations that expressed their views included Parent Councils and Community Councils.

The views of respondents were split over the most important factor to be considered when combining schools. When considering average rankings, the *length of the journey to school* was considered most important, this factor also received the most top rankings of 1. This was followed by *facilities in the nearest school, low school rolls* and *the number of teachers*. The rankings of these factors however were all close. The *capacity of the nearest school* and *the condition of the buildings* were ranked of least importance and received the most lowest rankings of 6.

### **Average rankings for consideration when combining schools**

<b>Low school rolls which can result in concerns about educational and social opportunities</b>	3.61
<b>Length of the journey to school – 30 minutes primary, 45 minutes secondary</b>	2.82
<b>Facilities available within a school</b>	3.50
<b>Capacity of the nearest alternative school</b>	4.17
<b>Condition of the buildings</b>	4.11
<b>Number of teachers within each school location to ensure appropriate peer interaction and support</b>	3.82

N=320

The table above indicates that respondents considered the *length of the journey to school* the most important criterion when considering combination of schools and *capacity of the nearest alternative school* and *condition of the buildings* the least important. The table demonstrates that respondents had varying views over what was most important when combining schools.

When considering the frequency of rankings, *Low school rolls* had high frequencies of both 1 (freq.<sub>1</sub>=83) and 6 (freq.<sub>6</sub>=95) rankings, indicating that opinion was polarised over this factor. *Length of journey time to school* received mostly 1s (freq.<sub>1</sub>=114), while most respondents scored 6 for *Capacity of the nearest alternative school*

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(freq.<sub>6</sub>=90), *Condition of the buildings* (freq.<sub>6</sub>=95) and *number of teachers* (freq.<sub>6</sub>=117). Most respondents felt that *facilities available within a school* was of medium importance, with the most frequent score for the factor being 3 (freq.<sub>3</sub>=86).

Some respondents only used 6s and/or 1s in their rankings, suggesting that they considered several factors to be of equal importance. Respondents who used only 6s and/or 1s in their rankings tended to rank *length of the journey to school* as most important. Among these respondents, opinion was divided over the importance of *number of teachers*, with some respondents ranking this 6 and some 1.

Although the online form did not provide space to comment on respondents' answers, some comments were received from respondents at ward forums and from a Parent Council, as well as from some individuals.

Some respondents disagreed with the premise of the question, believing that schools should not be combined at all. It was noted that the roles of rural schools are very important, and respondents expressed concern for the long-term sustainability of a village if its only school is closed. It was suggested that the combination of schools would be more reasonable in an urban community, but that considering schools as part of sustainable communities should be the Council's top priority. One or two respondents suggested that, rather than amalgamating schools, they should be increasingly used to house facilities such as Service Points, libraries, community activities and Post Offices.

A number of respondents stated that all factors were of equal importance, or that their ranking depended on local circumstances. It was suggested that each school should be consulted individually before schools were combined.

A group of respondents highlighted the importance of children's educational achievement, mentioning the Fort William Primary School review. It was suggested that educational outcomes should be considered when combining schools, and respondents noted that the quality of teaching was an important factor.

Respondents who ranked teacher numbers of high importance noted that teachers were important for other reasons, rather than just teaching. It was suggested that the ratio of teachers to pupils should be considered.

Those who ranked low school rolls of low importance stated that small pupils numbers can be an advantage, or felt that this was a given for combining schools anyway.

### **Case study – Amalgamation of Bonar Bridge and Gledfield Primary Schools**

Bonar Bridge Parent Council provided opinions on their amalgamation with Gledfield Primary School. Some respondents raised concerns about the amalgamation, but others felt that this was a viable option.

#### *Concerns*

Respondents highlighted the importance of schools to a community, noting that community events were held in the school hall and reporting that identity would be lost with closure of the school. There were concerns that children would be further away from their peers out of school, making socialising more difficult. One respondent reported that the school was the reason that families moved into and stayed in the area.

Respondents felt that the closure of the school would mean that there was another disused building in Bonar Bridge, which would not be desirable for the community. Concerns were raised about the location and facilities at Gledfield Primary School, with respondents proposing that the combined school should be located in Bonar Bridge Primary.

Transport issues were raised, with respondents mentioning increased congestion, increased cost, too few parking spaces and difficulties for children walking to school. It was felt that fewer school trips would be made due to transport difficulties. Respondents noted that child minders may not be able to pick up and drop off children at a different location, making working arrangements difficult for parents.

Respondents reported that local job losses were likely, noting that the current Head Teacher and staff at Bonar Bridge Primary were hand-working and talented. There were also concerns that secondary school catchment areas would be changed, which parents would not agree with.

#### *Advantages*

The amalgamation was considered advantageous for social reasons, with communities and pupils able to mingle to a greater extent and all schools able to take part in community events. Members also mentioned academic advantages, with a grouping of skills at one location and the opportunity for classes to be split into year groups.

#### *Conditions*

Some respondents supported the amalgamation as long as communities were consulted and pupil-teacher ratios were appropriate.

### Mothballing Schools

***Would you support the approach (to mothballing schools) being adopted more frequently across Highland?***

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The Citizens' Panel was asked about mothballing schools. The question was introduced as follows: "In some circumstances, if a school roll has fallen below a certain level, we have chosen to mothball schools and transfer pupils to the nearest available school. This would happen when there may be concerns about the educational or social opportunities available for pupils. The schools are not permanently closed and could reopen should there be an increase in the school roll."

Respondents were then asked: "Would you support the approach of mothballing schools being adopted more frequently across Highland?" Their answers are in the table below.

#### **Views of Respondents on Adopting the More Frequent Mothballing of Schools across Highland**

<b>"Would you support the approach of mothballing schools being adopted more frequently across Highland?"</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Parents with School Age Children %</b>
<b>Yes</b>	71	71
<b>No</b>	29	29
<b>Total</b>	100	100

*N=1,022*

The table reveals that 71% of all respondents and an identical percentage of those with school age children say that they would support the approach of mothballing schools being adopted more frequently across Highland while 29% of both groups say that they would not support this proposal.

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

313 separate responses were received for the question "*Would you support the approach of mothballing schools being adopted more frequently across Highland?*", mainly from discussions at ward forums and through the online form. Responses were also received through post and email. Organisational responses included



Parent Councils, Community Councils, Nairn Youth Forum and views collected from the focus group held with Highland Youth Voice.

Most respondents, including some Parent Councils, supported the approach, although several stated that this was conditional on certain factors. A number of respondents opposed the mothballing of schools, reporting that this would have a large impact on communities and that it would not be cost effective.

### **In favour**

Respondents who were in favour of mothballing schools more frequently across Highland mentioned the high costs involved in running schools with a small number of pupils, stating that this was unsustainable. It was noted that mothballing would allow savings to be made on staffing, overheads and heating, with one respondent reporting that money would be saved without a large number of people being affected.

Some respondents felt that mothballing schools would give children access to better resources and more educational opportunities. It was noted that composite classes would be avoided and that children would be properly challenged in a larger school. One respondent stated that they would prefer fewer schools with better facilities rather than several small schools using resources that could be used by larger establishments.

It was noted that there are many small schools in Highland with close neighbours, so mothballing would be a sensible option. Respondents from one Community Council believed that there were too many small village schools, which stop communities coming together and do not allow children to socialise.

A small number of respondents stated that they would prefer mothballing to either closing schools or reducing school time, while others stated that they would support mothballing reluctantly as a last resort.

### **Conditions**

A number of respondents stated that they would only be in favour of mothballing schools if certain conditions were met.

#### *Distance to be travelled*

Several respondents noted that they would only support mothballing if children did not have to travel too far to school; for example, for no longer than half an hour. Other respondents stated that the relevant schools should only be a small distance apart, such as 15 miles. It was noted that the age of young children should be taken

into account, and that travelling distance should be balanced against social and economic opportunities. One or two respondents stated that they would only support mothballing if the condition of roads in winter were improved, to assist with travelling to school.

### *Careful consideration, consultation and monitoring required*

A number of respondents, including those from Nairn Youth Forum, felt that schools should only be mothballed after careful individual consideration and consultation with the community. Respondents stated that other alternatives, such as permanent closing or alternative use, should be investigated fully, and that the Council should take into account the number of children due to enter school in future years, the possible growth in numbers of children, and what effect a small number of families moving into an area would have. One respondent stated that all of the points listed in the question above about closing schools should be considered.

The need to consider each school on its own merit was stressed by several respondents. It was noted that large schools may provide better social opportunities for children, but that some small schools offer more personal teacher attention and produce very good results. One respondent reported that it was important for parents to have a choice of schools for their children, as not all schools were of the same standard. Respondents felt that some areas would suffer more than others if schools were mothballed, and it was noted that the economic impact of this, especially in rural areas, should be considered.

Some respondents, including those from a Parent Council, highlighted the importance of consulting with a community before schools are mothballed. It was proposed that Community Councils and communities should be fully involved, and that mothballing should only go ahead with their agreement. One respondent reported that losing a school can be a very large event for a community, and that time should be given to prepare for changes and to celebrate the work and history of the school being mothballed.

A group of respondents noted that mothballed schools should be subject to frequent, evidence-based review, with clear criteria set out for reopening or closing them. One or two respondents felt that schools should only be mothballed for a certain length of time, such as five years, and that alternative use should be made of the building after this time. However, some respondents reported that they would only support mothballing schools if they were not permanently closed.

### *Numbers in school*

Several respondents believed that schools should only be mothballed if their rolls are very small. Respondents mentioned pupil numbers from two to fifteen as a threshold for mothballing schools. One or two respondents felt that schools should only be mothballed if there are no children in the area.

### *Use of mothballed schools*

It was noted by a number of respondents that schools should only be mothballed if the school building is put to alternative use in the meantime. Some respondents, including those from Nairn Youth Forum, suggested that mothballed schools could be used to make a profit. For example, schools could be used as youth hostels during the summer. Other respondents suggested that mothballed schools could be used as community resources, as in Dalwhinnie, or that they could be used to house other Council services. It was noted that this would help to support fragile communities and maintain a Council presence in this area.

One respondent suggested that schools could be used on rotation, with each mothballed school in an area used for a proportion of the year. It was noted that, although this would be expensive, each child would have a turn of going to school in their local area and buildings would not become dilapidated.

### *Resources and educational quality in receiving schools*

Some respondents reported that they would only support the mothballing of schools if larger schools had sufficient space and resources to deal with an increase in pupil numbers. A respondent suggested that additional facilities should be given to schools that take on extra pupils to ensure that the policy is regarded as a benefit and opportunity for these schools, rather than a drain on resources. One respondent stated that they would only support mothballing if this was done to improve facilities in a school or because of building conditions.

Respondents also raised concerns about children's education, stating that schools should only be mothballed if this would mean that educational provision was improved and that teaching staff were high quality, not overworked and had sufficient contact with each pupil.

### *Cost of mothballing*

A group of respondents noted that they would only support mothballing schools if buildings were maintained well and if the cost of doing this was not too high. It was suggested that the Council ring-fence funds to ensure that facilities are well maintained and could be reopened at a minimal cost if required.

A small group of respondents stated that mothballed schools should not have Head Teachers, as is the case with some mothballed schools, because this would not save money.

### *Mothballing parts of schools*

Respondents from a Parent Council suggested that parts of school buildings, rather than whole schools, should be mothballed if pupil numbers fall. They noted that this would save energy, cleaning and maintenance costs.

### **Not in favour**

#### *Effect on communities and importance of local schools*

Respondents who were not in favour of mothballing schools felt that this would have a detrimental effect on the school's local community. It was noted that schools often provide a centre for activities for children within a village and that they can keep communities going. One respondent stated that remote rural areas are typically low wage economies and that losing their school would be particularly detrimental.

Some respondents believed that mothballed schools would not attract new residents or would mean that families moved out of an area, further reducing demand for a school and damaging communities.

Some respondents highlighted that local school provision was important, particularly for nursery and primary children, and that local schools should be supported. One respondent felt that resources should be concentrated on re-energising local schools, rather than mothballing them.

#### *Concerns over cost and the closing of schools*

Respondents reported that it would not be cost-effective to maintain buildings, particularly if they were unlikely to be used again. They noted that schools with small numbers of pupils should instead be closed permanently and either let or sold for other purposes.

However, other respondents felt that schools should not be closed permanently and raised concerns that mothballed schools would not be kept in good enough condition to be reopened. It was noted by one or two respondents that schools that had been mothballed in their area had not been opened again.

#### *Transport concerns*

Some respondents raised concerns about children travelling long distances to schools because of poor weather or road conditions, particularly in winter. The high cost of transport to alternative schools was also mentioned.

#### *Disruption caused*

A group of respondents, including those from two Parent Councils, believed that mothballing schools would lead to disruption and uncertainty for children. It was noted that it would be unsettling for children to move between schools, especially if schools were closed and then reopened. A respondent reported that children with learning difficulties would find this change in routine particularly difficult.

Respondents noted that the need for schools could change quickly, with the arrival or one or two families to an area, so schools could be mothballed and reopened several times throughout a child's time at primary school.

### *Alternative suggestions*

A small number of respondents suggested reconsidering catchment areas, looking for savings in other ways or attempting to generate income rather than mothballing schools.

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**All-Through (3-18) School Approach**

*Would you be supportive of an all-through (3-18) school approach?*

**Quantitative Analysis**

The question on all-through school approach was introduced as follows: “We are building a new High School in Wick and have chosen to adopt an all-through (3-18 years) school approach which involves primary, secondary and nursery provision being located on the same campus. We believe that there are educational benefits in this model and possibilities for reducing management and administrative costs. This is not a model that will work everywhere and each location would be assessed on an individual basis.”

The Citizens’ Panel were then asked: “Would you be supportive of an all-through (3-18 years) school approach being looked at elsewhere?” The results are found in the table below.

**Views of Respondents on an All-Through (3-18) School Approach**

<b>“Would you be supportive of an all-through (3-18 years) school approach being looked at elsewhere?”</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Parents with School Age Children %</b>
<b>Yes</b>	82	75
<b>No</b>	18	25
<b>Total</b>	100	100

*N=1,027*

The table reveals that 82% of all respondents and 75% of those with school-aged children are supportive of all-through school approach being looked at in places other than where it is being established - i.e. in Wick. This leaves 18% of all respondents and 25% of those with school age children as not supportive of this approach being considered elsewhere.

**Qualitative Analysis**

315 separate responses were received for the question, “*Would you be supportive of an all-through (3-18) school approach?*” Most responses were received from the online form and from discussions at ward forums. Responses were also received from posted and emailed forms. Organisations that expressed their views included Parent Councils and Community Councils. Opinions were collected from the focus

group held with Highland Youth Voice. A specific consultation was carried out with primary and secondary pupils through Nairn Youth Forum. These results are presented in a case study below.

Opinion was divided over an all-through school approach. Those who supported the proposal reported that money could be saved through sharing resources and that having a mix of age groups on the same campus would benefit all children. Respondents who were against the proposal felt that the different needs of primary and secondary pupils would not be met and that older children would intimidate and influence younger students. Some respondents noted that they would only support the proposal if certain conditions were met, such as different age groups remaining separate.

### **In favour**

#### *Shared resources and staff*

Several respondents, including those from Parent Councils, noted that money could be saved by sharing resources and staff on an all-through campus. It was reported that infrastructure, maintenance and overheads could be shared, increasing efficiency and reducing costs. One or two respondents gave examples of all-through schools with very good facilities, which were also used by the community. These facilities could either generate income or schools could house public services such as libraries and Service Points.

Respondents from one Parent Council noted that the Curriculum for Excellence offered more opportunities for secondary staff to assist primary teachers. They believed that flexible use of primary and secondary staff could remove the problems associated with teachers' 22½ hour class contact time. A respondent noted that all-through schools would allow more flexibility at a time when the population was declining.

#### *Easier transition between schools*

Respondents who were in favour of an all-through school approach reported that this would allow children to become familiar with the campus and to be less intimidated by transitions between nursery, primary and secondary schools. One or two respondents believed that 3-18 campuses would allow a fair start for all pupils in secondary school, as they would all have the same background. However, another respondent stated that primary pupils at an all-through school would have an unfair advantage over pupils from other feed-in primaries when starting secondary school.

#### *Could benefit both younger and older pupils*

Some respondents felt that having small children and young adults on the same site could be a benefit to both groups. It was noted that teenagers may behave better if younger children were around, and some respondents, including those from Nairn

Youth Forum, suggested that older children could be given additional responsibilities and opportunities to mentor other pupils. One or two respondents reported that all-through schools would help pupils of different ages to get to know each other, while another stated that all-through schools would help to encourage a cross-section of ages in a community.

### *Other successful all-through schools*

Examples were given of schools where an all-through approach has been successful. Some respondents stated that they had been taught in an all-through school and benefitted from this, while others mentioned effective all-through schools in Bettyhill and in Cape Breton in Canada. However, one respondent felt that the all-through school in Bettyhill had not been successful.

### *Educational advantages*

Some respondents noted that all-through schools would improve educational opportunities for children, meaning that advanced children could work at an appropriate level, and that continuity would be maintained between stages in the curriculum.

### *School transport*

A small group of respondents reported that an all-through school would allow fewer long, costly journeys to be made than if schools for separate age groups were centralised over a larger catchment area.

## **Not in favour**

### *Primary and secondary children have different needs*

Several respondents felt that primary and secondary children have different needs, which would not be met in an all-through school. The difference in emotional and physical behaviour between age groups was highlighted. It was noted that primary schools and nurseries are nurturing, supportive environments, which prepare children for a more exam-based secondary education. Respondents believed that teenagers would not be given the independence and separate identity that they require when in secondary school. One or two respondents noted that sharing facilities, such as a canteen, would be difficult.

### *Younger children would be intimidated or influenced*

A number of respondents, including some Parent Councils and a group of young people, raised concerns about older children intimidating or bullying younger pupils. It was felt that primary children would pick up bad habits from their older peers and that they may grow up too quickly.



### *Important for children to change schools*

Several respondents believed that it was important for children to change schools between primary and secondary, and that this challenge gave them a chance to develop and take on more responsibility. This view was supported by a group of primary school children and by members of some Parent Councils. Respondents raised concerns that, if a child was unhappy at primary school, they would not have the chance to make a fresh start by moving for secondary school.

It was reported that the challenge of moving schools helped to prepare children for moving to university and possibly for moving away from home to find work, since employment can be scarce in rural communities. One respondent commented that pupils who stay in the same school for S4 and S5/S6 find it hard to cope with the lack of change. Another respondent reported that they were uneasy with the idea of one organisation being responsible for a child for sixteen years.

### *Travelling distance*

Some respondents raised issues with travelling distance, believing that this would be too great for children if schools were combined into all-through campuses.

### *Schools would be too large*

Concerns were raised about the size of the school, with respondents worrying that education would suffer because of high pupil-teacher ratios, stretched resources and teachers finding it difficult to control students. It was reported that a large school could be overwhelming for pupils, with the danger of getting 'lost in the system'. This was contrasted with smaller schools where staff know children well. Respondents felt that a sense of school identity was important, and that this would be lost with all-through schools.

### *Costs*

Some respondents believed that setting up all-through schools would be very expensive, as current school buildings would not be appropriate. This would mean that more land and new buildings would need to be purchased. Respondents also raised concerns about transport costs, believing that these would be too high for all-through schools.

### *Communities would lose schools*

A small group of respondents, including those from a Parent Council, reported that the closing of schools would be damaging to communities, as many community events supporting cohesion and inclusion are run by schools. It was noted that closing schools would mean a decrease in local employment, and possibly in the population of small villages, as families may choose to live nearer the new school.

### *Other views against all-through schools*

Respondents stated some other reasons for not supporting all-through schools:

- The current system has worked well for many years
- The Highland population is too small
- Much disruption would be caused
- Universities may not understand the concept of an all-through school

### **Conditions**

Some respondents reported that they would only support all-through schools if certain conditions were met.

### *Geographical considerations*

Several respondents felt that all-through schools should not be introduced in rural areas, and that some parts of Highland are too remote for this to be appropriate. However, one or two respondents reported that 3-18 campuses should only be introduced in smaller communities. A small group of respondents stated that they would not like all-through schools to be introduced in certain areas, such as Lairg or Invergordon and Ainess.

### *Separation between age groups*

A number of respondents, including a group from Highland Youth Voice, felt that an appropriate atmosphere should be maintained by ensuring separation between age groups. Respondents proposed that nursery, primary and secondary children could share the same campus but have different buildings. It was believed that children at different stages should have separate playgrounds and that teachers should not be required to teach too large an age range of pupils, as this would encompass too many ability levels.

### *Management structure and budgets*

Respondents noted that all-through schools would need to be managed properly to ensure that each stage was given equal weight. It was suggested that one member of staff should be in charge for each age group, rather than having one overall Head Teacher, as it was important for Heads to understand the needs of pupils. There were concerns that primary and nursery provision may be neglected, with resources concentrated on the secondary stage. A respondent proposed that each stage should have its own ring-fenced budget to prevent this.

### *Choice of schools*

It was reported by some respondents that a choice of schools should be maintained, as an all-through approach would not suit everyone. One respondent noted that, if pupils from outwith a catchment area wanted to join a school at the nursery stage,

they should be accepted for the whole of their school career and not have to reapply at each stage.

### *Educational needs*

Some respondents stated that they would only support all-through schools if these improved educational opportunities for children. The importance of accommodating the needs of all pupils was also highlighted, with one respondent calling for clear funding provision for learning support teachers, so that children with learning disabilities or other difficulties were not detrimentally affected by large schools.

### *Other conditions*

Other conditions that respondents mentioned were:

- The need for early consultation with communities, investigation of financial implications and reviews of previous case studies;
- The need for a purpose built school as existing schools would be unsuitable;
- The importance of funding for organisations like school clubs to promote inclusion.

### **Alternative suggestions**

A group of respondents offered alternative suggestions for the organisation of schools:

- Attaching nursery schools to primary schools but keeping secondary schools separate;
- Splitting schools at aged 14 into academic and vocational schools;
- Introducing a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year college at one secondary school, to provide a greater choice and make better use of teachers;
- Seeking input from organisations like businesses, skills bodies and further education establishments to create more joined-up approaches to academic and vocational education;
- Merging higher education for adults and teenagers;
- Merging smaller secondary schools to make larger ones;
- Making more use of distance learning for children in remote areas.

### **Case Study - Views from Nairn Youth Forum Budget Consultation**

Around 250 pupils from primaries in Nairn and around 500 secondary pupils from Nairn Academy were asked for their views on 3-18 school campuses.

As can be seen from the table above, most primary and secondary school pupils were not in favour of introducing 3-18 campuses.

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Primary pupils</b>	10%	90%
<b>Secondary pupils</b>	15%	85%

*N primary = 258; N secondary = 514*

Both primary and secondary pupils raised concerns that all-through schools would be overcrowded, which could mean that younger pupils were accidentally hurt by older ones. There were worries both that older pupils would intimidate or negatively influence younger students, and that older students would find it hard to concentrate and learn with younger pupils around. Pupils felt that it would be difficult to find their way around a large school, and a secondary student reported that illnesses could spread more easily with high pupil numbers.

Pupils from both age groups believed that moving schools at the end of primary was something to look forward to, explaining that this provided a change of scene and a chance to meet new people. It was reported that moving schools gives young people a sense of achievement and greater independence, as well as preparing them for university and the workplace.

Some pupils felt that it was inappropriate for pupils at different stages to be taught together as they require different facilities and types of teaching. A secondary pupil raised concerns that there would not be enough focus on the secondary stage in all-through schools.

Concerns were raised about the infrastructure of all-through schools, with pupils believing that it would be difficult to find an appropriate location and that schools would be costly to build. Secondary pupils reported that traffic congestion could be caused, and that more school transport would need to be provided. Secondary respondents raised concerns about job losses, while a primary pupil felt that teachers could become overworked.

Pupils in favour of an all-through school approach felt that this would promote bonding and allow pupils to make friends of all ages. Primary pupils noted that friends would not be lost when pupils move to secondary school, and that they would be able to socialise with older friends and siblings. It was reported that older children could be positive role models for younger ones and that they could look out for

younger siblings.

Some pupils supported the approach as it would save money. A secondary pupil noted that land would be saved, while a primary student reported that less building and repairs would need to be done than if schools were separate. One or two respondents from secondary school were in favour of the proposal as they would get a nice new school.

A group of pupils believed that an all-through school would allow them to learn better, with improved teaching provision.

Primary pupils stated that parents would only have to make one journey to drop off children at different stages, and that it would be easier for pupils to find their way around when moving to secondary school if they were familiar with the building.

Primary pupils made the additional suggestions that pupils at different stages should have different playgrounds, or that schools should instead be split into two sections: one for 3-10 year olds and one for 10-18 year olds.

## **Educational Arrangements**

***Should we consider developing this approach by introducing a group school arrangement where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools?***

*and*

***Would you be supportive of reducing the school day by 30 minutes each day in Highland?***

*and*

***What would you see as being the problems with this approach?***

*and*

***If this was to be the approach, what is your view on where the 30 minutes each day could be found?***

- ***School day starting later***
- ***School day ending earlier***
- ***Lengthening the morning and lunch breaks***

*and*

***Significant savings could be made if this approach was adopted, what alternative savings could you suggest instead?***

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***Should we consider developing this approach by introducing a group school arrangement where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools?***

### **Quantitative Analysis**

The question on group school arrangements was introduced as follows: "In rural areas where there can be several small schools close together, we have adopted a model of one head teacher overseeing 2-3 schools". Respondents were then asked: "Should we consider developing the approach of introducing a group school arrangement where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools?" The results are found in the table below.

### Views of Respondents on Introducing a Group School Arrangement

“Should we consider developing the approach of introducing a group school arrangement where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools?”	All Respondents %	Parents with School Age Children %
<b>Yes</b>	34	24
<b>No</b>	66	76
<b>Total</b>	100	100

*N=1,026*

These results reveal that 66% of all respondents and 76% of all those with school-aged children are not supportive of a group school arrangement being introduced where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools. That leaves the level of support for the proposal at 34% of all respondents and 24% of those with school age children.

### Qualitative Analysis

273 separate responses were received for the question, “*Should we consider developing the approach of introducing a group school arrangement where a head teacher might manage 4-6 schools?*” Responses were mainly received through online and posted forms and from discussions at ward forums. Opinions were also collected from emailed forms. Special interest groups who expressed their views were Highland Youth Voice and the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers. Other organisational responses included primary and secondary Parent Councils and Community Councils. A specific consultation was carried out with primary and secondary pupils through Nairn Youth Forum. These results are presented in a case study below.

In keeping with the Citizens’ Panel responses, most respondents were not in favour of a group school arrangement. They believed that Head Teachers have an important pastoral role in schools and that it would be difficult to manage multiple schools at once. Some respondents stated that they would be in favour of the approach if certain conditions were met, such as adequate staff support in schools and appropriate school sizes and locations. A small group of respondents were in favour of the proposal, reporting that it would be a good use of resources and help to reduce administration.

### ***Not in favour***

#### *Importance of knowing individuals and communities well*

Many respondents, including members of some Parent Councils, believed that Head Teachers were an integral part of a school, and that their roles extended beyond that of managers. It was felt important for Heads to know parents, pupils and staff well, so that they can provide appropriate mentoring and support and ensure that all children's needs are met. Respondents believed that this would not be achieved if Head Teachers split their time between multiple schools.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of a school's individual identity, noting that Head Teachers helped to support this. It was felt inappropriate for a Head Teacher to work in a community which they did not have knowledge of or ties to. Pupils from Balloch Primary School reported that they would not like to share their Head Teacher, and respondents mentioned the need for schools to feel valued, rather than just one of many. One respondent mentioned that Head Teachers should do even more in schools and with the local community, such as helping to run clubs.

#### *Heads would not be available to deal with issues*

A number of respondents reported that Head Teachers should be available to deal with issues as they arise in schools, which would not be possible with a group Head arrangement. It was believed that Heads would spend too much time travelling between schools, and would not have sufficient time to devote to each one. Concerns were raised that Head Teachers would not be present to deal with behavioural issues, which would be particularly difficult in a school where many children displayed challenging behaviour. It was felt that discipline and educational standards would suffer, and that there may be a rise in exclusions.

Respondents believed that staff and parents should be able to raise issues with Head Teachers immediately, rather than waiting until an allocated day of the week. It was reported that certain issues, such as child protection concerns, should be dealt with by a Head Teacher rather than another member of staff. Some respondents felt that telephone and email contact was an unacceptable substitute for face-to-face communication, and that Head Teachers should always have a personal presence in schools.

One or two respondents reported that Head Teachers sometimes covered staff absences by taking classes themselves, and that this would not be possible with a group school arrangement.

#### *Juggling needs of different schools*

Several respondents reported that Heads would find it difficult to manage multiple schools with different needs. It was noted that they would have to keep on top of developments at each school, and to monitor progress on different Improvement Plans. Respondents queried whether Head Teachers would have to be accountable



to several different Area Managers and Quality Improvement Officers. One respondent felt that a group schools arrangement would give too much power to one person.

Concerns were raised that certain schools would be neglected at the expense of others, with Heads focusing too much on larger schools or those with immediate needs.

Respondents from a Parent Council noted that Head Teachers would not be able to attend all meetings and events associated with schools, such as Parent Councils, Associated Schools Groups meetings and fundraising events.

### *Opinions on smaller school clusters*

Some respondents supported the clustering of two or three schools, but felt that a greater number would be difficult to manage.

However, others believed that Head Teachers struggled to manage even two or three schools at once, citing examples of schools losing their identity and standards dropping. These respondents felt that it was important for a Head Teacher to only manage one school.

### *Overburdening of Head Teachers*

Respondents raised concerns that Head Teachers would become overstretched and unhappy if asked to manage four to six schools. It was noted that Head Teachers already have a large workload when managing one school, particularly involving administrative tasks. Respondents felt that Head Teachers are already overstretched, with one respondent noting that Head Teachers can work 50 to 60 hours a week managing one school.

Respondents felt that Head Teachers would become dissatisfied with their work as they would always have to deal with problems and would not have the opportunity to teach classes. Concerns were raised that teachers would be reluctant to take on a group Head Teacher role because of this.

### *Low staff morale*

Some respondents, including those from a Parent Council, felt that, without a dedicated Head Teacher, teaching staff would have to take on extra responsibility without extra payment. There were concerns that staff morale would be low if they were not supported by a Head Teacher, and that there would be fewer promotion prospects with a group school arrangement.

### *Money not saved*

A small group of respondents felt that money would not be saved with a group school arrangement. They reported that staff would be needed at Deputy Head level

in each school. Since the salaries of Deputy Head Teachers are not much lower than those of Head Teachers, respondents believed that little money would be saved. A respondent noted that principle teachers would need to spend more time dealing with issues out of classes, and so cover for their usual teaching time would need to be paid for. Another raised concerns that petrol expenses would be large, while a further respondent believed that the Council were likely to keep existing Head Teachers on conserved salaries, meaning that no money would be saved.

### ***Conditions***

#### *Appropriate staffing arrangements*

Several respondents noted that they would only support a group school arrangement if an appropriate school staffing structure was in place to deal with day-to-day difficulties. It was reported that a built-in management structure would need to be considered, possibly with a dedicated paid position to deal with emergencies such as accidents or behaviour issues. Respondents highlighted that management jobs should not simply be passed on to teachers who do not have time for them, but that staff should be promoted and Deputy Heads empowered to tackle issues. However, respondents from a Parent Council felt that another layer of management should not be added to schools, believing that this would be a negative consequence of a group school arrangement.

#### *Location, size and type of schools*

A number of respondents felt that a group school arrangement would only be appropriate if schools were close together, so that the Head Teacher did not have to spend too long travelling between each one. It was reported that this arrangement should not be introduced for rural schools as the distances between them would be too great. However, one respondent suggested that the approach would work best for remoter schools, where a combined campus would not be possible. A respondent commented that the arrangement may work for some areas where there are natural community links.

Some respondents reported that having one Head Teacher for multiple schools would be appropriate for small schools but not for larger ones. It was noted that, if the Council was planning to combine smaller schools, the larger schools created would be too big to manage as a group. One respondent felt that, when deciding whether or not cluster Heads should take on teaching duties, the overall number of pupils and staff that they manage should be taken into account, as well as the number of schools in their cluster.

One respondent believed that the approach should only be introduced for secondary schools, while another felt that it would be more appropriate for primaries.

### *Competence of Head Teacher*

Respondents noted that group Head Teachers would have to be highly competent and be empathetic and understanding of Highland issues. It was noted that a good Head Teacher was important for a good school and, conversely, that if a Head Teacher was poor, all schools in a cluster would suffer. It was reported that time and money should be invested in the development of Head Teachers, to ensure that they are prepared to take on the role. One or two respondents felt that a very high level of pay would be necessary to attract the best Head Teachers to the posts.

### ***In favour***

Respondents who were in favour of a group school approach reported that this would be cost-effective and a good use of resources. Some respondents supported the introduction of a non-teaching manager, believing that teaching Heads should not continue. It was felt that someone in a school management role could make more effective community use of schools than could a Head Teacher of a single school. However, one respondent felt that teaching Heads were very effective when they had less administration to do, and that the continuation of teaching Heads should be encouraged.

One respondent stated that a group school approach would offer Deputy Head Teachers the chance to take on more responsibility, which should lead to greater rewards. Another believed that administration and bureaucracy would be reduced, for example around health and safety procedures. A further respondent was in favour of the approach as they thought that managers should do more for their money.

It was suggested that, in introducing the arrangement, the Council take note of best practice from organisations that have undergone similar changes, such as the police.

### ***Additional suggestions***

A group of respondents suggested that each school should have a dedicated teacher in charge, but that administration could be handled by an Area Business Manager and part-time clerical staff. It was felt that this would give Head Teachers more time to teach and to perform management duties, improving their job satisfaction and possibly making vacancies in certain areas easier to fill. Respondents from a Community Council noted that such a Business Manager would need to report to a group of Head Teachers, rather than the other way around.

It was reported by one respondent that, if a group school arrangement was to be introduced, the person in charge of a group would not necessarily have to be from a teaching background, but could be experienced in managing businesses.

One or two respondents believed that smaller schools should be amalgamated or closed, while another suggested getting rid of Deputy Head Teachers.

### Views from Nairn Youth Forum Budget Consultation

Around 250 pupils from primaries in Nairn and around 500 secondary pupils from Nairn Academy were asked for their views on one Head Teacher overseeing 2 or 3 primary schools.

	Yes	No
Primary pupils	5%	95%
Secondary pupils	10%	90%

N primary = 259; N secondary = 514

As can be seen from the table above, most of the pupils were not in favour of the proposal.

Pupils who were against a group school arrangement felt that it would be too much for one Head Teacher to take on, and that they would be overloaded with paperwork, meetings and assemblies. Pupils reported that Head Teachers would get tired and stressed and that no one would want to take on the role.

Concerns were raised that Head Teachers would not give enough attention to individual pupils or schools. Pupils highlighted the importance of each school having its own identity and felt that all schools needed their own Head Teacher to deal with issues as they arose. It was noted that Heads should take time to build up relationships with pupils, and that a group Head Teacher would have little authority, leading to more misbehaviour. Respondents were concerned that resources and time would be focused on larger schools at the expense of others, and noted the financial and environmental implications of a Head Teacher travelling between schools.

Secondary pupils noted the effect of the arrangement on other school staff, commenting that staff needed a leader present every day, and that the organisation of a school would suffer without a dedicated Head Teacher. It was felt that the Deputy Head Teacher would be put under too much pressure when taking on additional responsibility. Pupils noted that Head Teachers would not be able to continue teaching, and that they could not cover classes if a supply teacher was absent. Secondary pupils expressed concern over job losses and felt that schools would be run more like a business than a school.

Some primary pupils noted that the arrangement would be too expensive, although this may be due to a belief that the Head Teacher would have to personally provide funding to schools.

One or two primary pupils noted that parents would not be happy with the

arrangement, and that the Parent Council would suffer.

Comments in favour of the proposal were mostly provided by secondary pupils. They noted that a group school arrangement would help to build relationships between schools, making them easier to compare and leading to greater cross-school consistency in areas such as dress code. A primary pupil felt that a group school arrangement would help pupils to mingle.

Some respondents reported that, since Head Teachers were only overseeing schools, rather than teaching, a group school arrangement would be appropriate. It was noted that Deputy Head Teachers could deal with problems such as discipline, leaving Head Teachers to tackle bigger issues.

Some pupils supported the proposal because it would save money, and one or two noted that the arrangement would not make a big difference to their school life.

It was suggested that the arrangement should only be applied to small schools, and one respondent felt that, although they did not fully support the idea, it would be acceptable if budget cuts had to be made.

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## Shortening the School Day

**Would you be supportive of reducing the school day by 30 minutes each day in Highland?**

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Respondents to the Citizens Panel Questionnaire were asked: “Would you be supportive of reducing the school day in primary schools by 30 minutes each day in Highland?” The results are in the table below.

### **Views of Respondents on Reducing the School Day in Primary Schools by 30 Minutes Each Day**

“Would you be supportive of reducing the school day in primary schools by 30 minutes each day in Highland?”	All Respondents %	Parents with School Age Children %
<b>Yes</b>	47	41
<b>No</b>	53	59
<b>Total</b>	100	100

*N=1,016*

Some 53% of all respondents and 59% of those with school age children are not supportive of a 30 minute reduction in the school day. This leaves 47% of all respondents and 41% of those with school age children who are supportive of this proposal.

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**Would you be supportive of reducing the school day by 30 minutes each day in Highland?**

*and*

**What would you see as being the problems with this approach?**

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Respondents to the Citizens’ Panel along with respondents to the overall consultation provided comments on Shortening the School day. The analysis of both of these are provided below.

### **Citizens' Panel Comments**

After being asked if they supported shortening the school day, and for their opinion on where the 30 minute reduction could be found, Citizens' Panel respondents were asked, "*What do you see as being the problems with this approach?*" 801 responses were received for this question. Some of the comments related specifically to where the 30 minutes should be found. These are presented under the question on this topic below.

Compared to the responses to the overall consultation, a higher proportion of respondents answered from a non-personal perspective, describing why parents might not support the proposal, rather than detailing problems which would affect them personally. However, themes were very similar to those found in the overall consultation responses, with respondents noting that the proposal was unlikely to be financially, socially or educationally beneficial in the long run. Respondents highlighted issues such as childcare, reduced learning time, loss of specialist teachers, transport arrangements and teacher employment levels. However, respondents also commented in favour of some arrangements for shortening the school day or said that they could see no problems with the proposal. Some respondents offered alternative suggestions for saving money or for shortening the school week in other ways.

### **Issues identified**

#### *Childcare*

A key theme identified were issues with childcare for working parents. Respondents reported that childcare was a problem for parents currently, and that single parents or those with no extended family support would be particularly disadvantaged. It was noted that parents would have to work fewer hours, which would result in lower incomes and difficulties finding a job with flexible hours. Respondents raised concerns that this could affect the economy, with more parents unemployed and more childcare benefits being claimed. It was reported that childcare was expensive, so any cost saved by the Council would be transferred to parents.

Respondents raised concerns about children being left unattended, which could put the children at risk or lead to an increase in anti-social behaviour. It was noted that spending more time at home would be detrimental to children whose home situation was poor.

A respondent reported that sufficient childcare may not be available in all areas.

### *Educational disadvantage*

Many respondents raised concerns about the educational disadvantages of shortening the school day. It was noted that Primaries 4 to 7 was a key time in children's education, and that education should be a priority for the Council. Respondents were concerned that educational attainment would decrease, with one respondent reporting that educational research had shown a direct link between learning time and progress made. Some respondents believed that educational attainment was already too low and should not fall further.

It was felt that it would be difficult to cover the whole curriculum if the school day was shortened. Respondents noted that teachers already found this difficult and there were concerns that a shorter day would put more pressure on already stressed teachers. It was believed that, if it was possible to cover the curriculum in less time, children should currently be doing more during the school day. Although one respondent suggested that time could be caught up through extra homework, others were not in favour of this. It was felt that time after school should be used for extracurricular activities and it was noted that some children may not have a stable home environment in which to do homework.

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of specialist teachers of subjects such as music, physical education, art and drama. It was noted that these activities added a great deal to children's education, enhancing their creativity, group work and social learning skills. A respondent reported that these activities were particularly important in many rural areas, where school is the only place where children gather for sport and musical activities. Respondents were concerned that these subjects, including certain vocational subjects, would be cut from the curriculum, since not all teachers would be capable of teaching specialist subjects.

There were also concerns that pupils would be disadvantaged in their later life, through being unprepared for secondary school, being unable to gain a place on a higher education course or being unable to get a job. It was noted that this could be particularly detrimental to some families, where children may not otherwise get the chance of a basic education. Respondents felt that, with a shorter school day, pupils would be disadvantaged compared to those in other areas of Scotland.

Some respondents noted that less able pupils would be disadvantaged by a shorter school day, if teachers had to condense or rush through lessons. One respondent stated that growing class sizes made one-to-one teaching very difficult. It was noted that less able pupils may require more monitoring and extra attention, which could cost more time eventually.

### *School transport*

A number of respondents highlighted possible transport issues if the school day was shortened. It was noted that bus timetables would need to be changed, particularly to



fit in with secondary school times, and that changing timetables would affect the wider public rather than just school pupils. One respondent raised a similar concern about taxi transport for disabled pupils, noting that transport providers may not be able to accommodate a change in times.

Respondents raised concerns that a later start or earlier finish would pose difficulties for parents dropping off or collecting children from school. One respondent noted that this could be difficult for parents with children in different age groups, but another felt that changing school times could help bring times for different classes in line.

One respondent noted that a change in start or finish times could lead to an increase in rush hour traffic, particularly in the morning, but others felt that this could actually ease traffic congestion.

### *Disadvantages for teaching staff*

Respondents reported that the proposal would lead to job losses and fewer job opportunities for supply staff, part-time teaching staff, classroom assistants, specialist teachers and younger teachers. One respondent noted that supply teachers' wages had been reduced already, while another stated that the proposal would lead to a reduction in the supply teacher pool, meaning that fewer teachers would be available when they were needed. Some respondents raised concerns that there would be fewer opportunities for teacher development and training. It was also noted that there may be opposition from staff unions, and that the proposal may lead to low morale among teachers, which would be fed back to pupils.

### *Additional issues identified*

Respondents identified some additional issues that could arise as a result of shortening the school day:

- Disruption of children's routines – Some respondents raised concerns about the disruption of children's routines, which would be particularly difficult for children with autism. One respondent noted that a shorter school day for some children could be disruptive for siblings in different class ranges.
- Less opportunity to socialise – It was noted that a reduction in school hours would reduce pupils' contact time with peers and staff, something that was thought particularly important for children in rural areas.
- Difficulties with longer days in the future – Respondents raised concerns that a shorter primary school day would not prepare children for a longer day at secondary school, and one respondent noted that longer days helped children to develop a good work ethic for the future.

### ***Respondents who identified no problems***

A small number of respondents stated that they could see no problems with the proposal. Although most of these respondents did not have school age children in their household, some parents also expressed this view. It was stated that no problems would arise if there was proper planning and clear explanation given to parents. One respondent noted that a shorter day would give more opportunity for children to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities, while one or two others noted that school should not be used as childcare.

### ***Alternative suggestions***

Some respondents made suggestions for alternative arrangements regarding the school day.

A view expressed by several respondents was that teachers should have contact with pupils for 25 hours per week, at their current rate of pay. It was noted that teachers have long holidays and that they work fewer hours than other professions such as nurses. A small number of respondents noted that the school day should be longer than it currently is to facilitate learning. One or two respondents believed that, if teachers are not willing to have class contact time for 25 hours per week, they should be replaced by teachers who are. One respondent reported that, in future, working arrangements should be made for a fixed period, such as five years, since circumstances of employers and employees often change.

A number of respondents suggested using breakfast clubs or after school clubs to assist with childcare. It was noted that funding should be provided for these, and that they could be staffed by volunteers. Respondents also suggested that parents or volunteers could supervise during extended break times, with extra sporting and other activities provided during these times. One respondent suggested that children could engage in activities to benefit the community after school times.

Some suggestions were made for alternative timings of the school week. A few respondents suggested closing the school for half a day per week, or having four longer school days instead of five.

Respondents felt that savings should be made on staffing, rather than school hours reduced. One or two respondents stated that administration staff should do most of the paperwork for teachers to reduce their workload, although another suggested reducing the number of administration staff and spending the money saved on teachers.

Two respondents made suggestions for raising the school or nursery starting ages. It was reported that children should start primary school aged 6 or 7, or that they should start nursery aged 4 ½.

One or two respondents were in favour of making more use of physical education teachers in schools, while another suggested alternative pupil groupings for some of the week to save on supervisory staff. For example, schools could introduce assemblies or keep fit and story reading sessions involving one teacher and a number of pupils.

One respondent stated that a consultation with relevant professional organisations was required, while another stated that it was better to save money by mothballing or closing small schools rather than shortening the school day.

### **Overall Consultation Responses**

357 separate responses were received on the question *Would you be supportive of reducing the school day by 30 minutes each day in Highland?* 274 separate responses were also received on the question *What would you see as being the problems with this approach?* Since potential problems were highlighted in responses to both questions, the responses have been analysed and presented together. Responses to both questions were mainly from the budget blog and from individuals via the online form, posted forms and email comments. Responses were also received from ward forums, Parent Councils, Community Councils and other special interest groups such as Highland Youth Voice. A specific consultation was carried out with primary and secondary pupils through Nairn Youth Forum. These results are presented in a case study below.

In the main respondents were not in favour of the proposal, with Parent Councils voicing particularly strong opposition. However, young people tended to be divided in their opinion of whether to shorten the school day.

### **Respondents not in favour**

Respondents who were not in favour of shortening the school day reported that, while this might make a short term saving, the long-term social and financial costs would be high. Respondents noted issues with educational disadvantage, disadvantages for teaching staff, arrangements for working parents, concerns over time spent by children when not in school and issues with school transport. Some felt that no savings were likely to be made at all by shortening the school day.

#### Educational disadvantage

##### *The importance of (Early) education*

Respondents felt that any shortening of the school day would be purely for financial reasons, with no educational benefit. It was believed that reducing the length of the school day was not in keeping with the Council's policies of early intervention and

preventative spend. Several respondents, including young people from Highland Youth Voice and Nairn Youth Forum, noted that Primaries 4 to 7 was a critical period for the brain development of children, and that early education was very important for developing skills for later life.

Respondents felt that education was vitally important for society, and noted that the Council has a core duty to provide it. They believed that reducing education would risk damaging the future of individual children as well as society as a whole. It was commented that children should not suffer because of an economic situation caused by a previous generation.

### *Time to cover curriculum*

Respondents also expressed concern that children would lose a large amount of their education, adding up to four weeks in a year, and that there would not be enough time to deliver a balanced curriculum, meaning that breadth or depth of education would suffer. Young people from Highland Youth Voice reported that lessons would be rushed if class time was reduced and it was noted by other respondents that children would be expected to learn the same as other pupils in Scotland in a shorter time.

Several respondents felt that the school day was too short currently and that it was already difficult to cover a full curriculum. It was noted that pupils in Scotland already have less education time than those in other counties and one respondent felt that children currently have too many holidays and in-service days.

### *Loss of specialist teachers*

Many respondents raised concerns over the loss of specialist teachers of subjects such as physical education, art and music. It was noted that these teachers bring variety and diversity to education and help to build children's confidence and their creative, physical and social skills. Specialist teachers were believed to be particularly important in rural areas, where children might have fewer opportunities to access cultural facilities or interact with a wide range of adults. It was noted that specialist teachers already have relevant skills and relationships with children, which should not be broken.

Encouraging physical activity was thought to be particularly important in the year of the Olympics, especially as there are concerns regarding obesity and the activity levels of children. There was concern that there would be less time to organise school plays and concerts, which would be a loss to the children and would impact on the fundraising ability of schools. It was noted that, while some classroom teachers would be comfortable leading activities such as art and music, others may not have the skills or confidence to do this.

### *Impact on attainment*

Some respondents believed that educational attainment was already too low, with some children having poor reading, writing and counting skills. It was noted that the UK was going down in educational rankings and that reducing education time would affect this further. There was concern that a reduction in the school day would disadvantage young people when looking for jobs or applying for further education.

### *Catering for all children*

There was concern that a reduction in school time would mean less time available for children with additional needs. Respondents with children in composite classes noted that the extra 30 minutes that teachers spend with older pupils are very valuable for the children.

### Arrangements for working parents

#### *Providing extra childcare*

A key theme was concern over the cost of additional childcare needed to cover reduced school hours. It was noted that childcare was very expensive currently, and that paying for additional childcare could mean that parents on a low income are effectively working for nothing, or at a financial loss. There was also concern over the availability of childcare, particularly in rural areas. It was noted that childcare could be particularly difficult for people from ethnic minorities, who may not have the same family support network as local people. Some young people raised concerns about childcare provision, although this was not a major issue for them.

#### *Issues with working arrangements*

Respondents noted that employers may not be flexible with working arrangements to allow parents to care for their children if school hours were reduced. This was mentioned particularly in relation to single parents. There was concern that reducing the school day would impact on the employment prospects of parents receiving Working Tax Credit. It was noted that some parents may not be able to work at all, and so have to rely on benefits. This would lead to deprivation, be detrimental to the local economy and mean that more money had to be paid by the Government. It was felt that, if parents chose to continue working, they may leave their children unsupervised, which could put them at risk and lead to more anti-social behaviour in the community.

### Disadvantages for teaching staff/impact on teaching quality

There was concern that reducing the school day would deskill teachers, with comments that supply teachers would lose valuable experience. Respondents believed that the budget for supply teachers would be reduced, leading to less opportunity for teachers to spend time on training and development. It was reported that supply teachers current rely on extra hours in school and that teachers may be lost just before they are required. There was concern that good teachers would not

be attracted to or retained by communities, particularly in rural areas. This would lead to more families leaving the area, which would be detrimental to communities.

Respondents were concerned about what would happen to existing Class Contact Reduction (CCR) staff, probationer teachers and additional support teachers. It was felt that there were not enough Classroom Assistants and Learning Support Teachers currently and that these teachers provided more than half an hour of support at the end of the day.

### School transport

Respondents noted possible issues with school transport, as school buses are often shared between primary and secondary schools. A later start or earlier finish to the school day would mean either that children are left unsupervised or that staff would have to be employed for supervision.

It was noted that transport contractors may have other commitments around the current timing of the school day, especially if they have additional jobs.

There was also concern raised over traffic congestion around schools. This could be a health and safety issue and lead to parking problems, as well as being intimidating for younger pupils. There was a suggestion that congestion could be eased with a walk to school campaign.

### Time spent while not in school

Respondents, including those from Nairn Youth Forum, reported that children were likely to get more homework to make up time reduced in class. This would mean that children who get little or no support at home would be at a disadvantage. There was concern over welfare if children were not adequately looked after at home, and it was noted that, for some children, school was the best thing in their lives. It was noted that children may just play computer games at home and not spend their time productively.

### Belief that no money would be saved

Some respondents believed that shortening the school day would not save the Council money. It was noted that high redundancy payments would be given to experienced teachers, which would mean that no money would be saved, at least in the short term.

### More research needed

Some respondents commented that a reduction in the school day should not be undertaken hastily and that further research on the impact of the proposal should be carried out. Research was suggested on the number of parents affected by the change, the effect on the local economy, the link between parents' working hours and school hours and the effect on educational attainment. It was suggested that the

Scottish Government and Highland Council's early years strategies should be considered, and that the decision should not be made before considering the results of the McCormack review. It was noted that school pupils, staff and parents should all be consulted before any changes are made.

### ***Alternative suggestions***

There were additional suggestions made regarding school day arrangements; these included alternatives to shortening the day and requirements if this were to proceed:

#### ***Childcare arrangements***

Several respondents noted that childcare provision would need to be in place if the school day was to be shortened. It was suggested that sport, art and music activities were provided at the end of the day, organised with the help of volunteers and/or provision of grants if necessary. Young people from Highland Youth Voice supported this idea. Respondents suggested that after school sporting activities could be arranged by Sport Development Officers and helpers, which would be cheaper than employing teachers, and that sports could be organised jointly with several schools.

There was a suggestion that subsidies for Care and Learning Alliance or similar schemes could be used to offset the extra childcare costs that would be incurred for parents.

#### ***Increasing teacher-class contact time***

Several respondents suggested that teachers should have contact with pupils for the full 25 hours it was suggested that teachers' contracts should be changed, in co-operation with the unions. Opinion was divided over whether teachers should be paid extra for extra hours worked or receive the same salary as before.

One respondent felt that teachers had too many holidays and that some of this time should be sacrificed to make up 25 hours of teaching time.

It was suggested that preparation could be done in 12.5 hours, rather than 15 hours, with the help of advances in technology. There was also a suggestion that school pupils volunteer to help with administration tasks, to give them work experience.

#### ***Time allocation is decided locally***

It was suggested that schools should be able to decide on their own start and finish times and timetables, in response to local circumstances and resources. It was noted that schools already have different start and finish times. One respondent suggested considering lesson types individually and reducing lessons that are not core.



### ***In favour of proposal***

There was some, although limited, support for reducing the school day, as long as money was saved. It was reported that CCR was a problem to manage, and one respondent felt that CCR teachers were not truly compatible with the Curriculum for Excellence.

In response to concerns about childcare provision, some respondents commented that schools should be used for learning, not childcare. It was noted that childcare was needed for most of the afternoon anyway, so an extra half an hour should not make a large amount of difference.

One respondent felt that half an hour was not a significant amount of time for children in Primaries 4 to 7, and another noted that this could have a smaller impact on learning than, for example, changes of school or personnel. Some of the young people from the Nairn Youth Forum consultation noted that the day was already long and that the loss of half an hour would not be significant. It was also queried how effective the use of time for learning was at the end of the day.

Several respondents noted that children finishing school at the same time would be beneficial for parents collecting children of different ages. It was noted that this would lead to easier school transport arrangements, especially in winter. One parent commented that children leaving school early would mean that they could spend more time with their parents and have more time to do homework.

One or two respondents noted that there are now many opportunities to learn at home, and that a shorter school day would prepare children for the style of learning used at university. It was also noted that many other countries have a shorter school day than in the UK, and that educational attainment is not damaged by this.

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If [shortening the school day] was to be the approach, what is your view on where the 30 minutes each day could be found?

- School day starting later
- School day ending earlier
- Lengthening the morning and lunch breaks

### Quantitative Analysis

Respondents were asked a supplementary question (question 6): “If this was to be implemented, what is your view on where the 30 minutes each day could be found?” Three options were presented and those answering were invited to “please tick as many boxes as appropriate”. The results are found in the table below.

#### Respondents’ Views on where the 30 minutes each day could be found

“If [shortening of the primary school day] was to be implemented, what is your view on where the 30 minutes each day could be found?”	All Respondents %	Parents with School Age Children %
Lengthening the morning and lunch breaks	42	42
Primary School day ending earlier	32	35
Primary School day starting later	17	12
No Response	19	19

*N=1,041*

It is noticeable that not one of the options presented commanded the support of a majority of respondents. The highest level of support was for the option of “**lengthening the morning and lunch breaks**” – some 42% of all respondents and 42% of those with school age children selected this option. Some 32% of all respondents and 35% of those with school age children selected “**primary school day ending earlier**”. The least favoured option was “**primary school day starting later**” – it was selected by 17% of all respondents and 12% of those with school-aged children. Note also that 19% of all respondents and 19% of those with school-aged children provided **no response** to this question.

### Citizens’ Panel Comments

#### *Opinions on where the school day should be shortened*

Several respondents provided opinions both for and against the different options for shortening the school day.

### *Lengthening the morning and lunch breaks*

A number of respondents noted that supervision would still be needed for longer morning and lunch breaks, so money would not be saved. It was noted that supervision would be particularly important if 3-18 campuses were adopted, but also that it would be difficult for small schools with few teachers to arrange supervision. It was felt that teachers would often have to deal with disputes, meaning that they would get little time for a break or for preparation time.

Respondents reported that longer breaks could lead to more bullying, troublemaking and boredom among children, especially in poor weather.

Some respondents felt that break times were long enough already, and that children would find it hard to concentrate when they returned to class. It was noted that longer breaks and lunchtimes would not give teachers a continuous block of time in which to mark work or prepare lessons.

Several respondents also pointed out advantages of lengthening break and lunch times, noting that this would cause less disruption for working parents and school transport than changing school start or end times. It was reported that children would enjoy longer breaks, which would allow them to get more exercise and have more time to eat lunch, play and develop social skills. One respondent noted that longer breaks would give teachers a 'proper' break, with more time to relax and prepare.

### *Primary school day starting later or ending earlier*

Respondents argued that changing start or finish times of the school day would cause problems with childcare and school transport, as described above. One respondent also noted that children are brighter earlier in the day, so a later start would not be beneficial.

However, some respondents highlighted advantages of these options, stating that they would be helpful for travelling in winter with poor weather and shorter lighter hours. A small number of respondents suggested only starting the school day later during winter. It was noted that, with a later start, children would be more likely to make it to school and be brighter and less tired.

## **Overall consultation responses**

357 separate responses were received on the question "*If this was to be the approach, what is your view on where the 30 minutes each day could be found?*" Responses to both questions were mainly from the budget blog and from individuals via the online form, paper forms and email comments. Responses were also

received from Parent Councils, Community Councils, ward forums and other special interest groups such as Highland Youth Voice.

Opinion was divided over where the 30 minutes could be found. Respondents provided opinions for and against each arrangement. Several respondents did not express a preference for when the school day should be reduced, and reiterated that they were against the proposal.

### ***School day starting later***

Respondents in favour of this approach noted that it would be preferable for winter travelling arrangements. It would allow more time for snow clearing and gritting to be done before travelling to school and would mean that there was more daylight on the way to school.

Those not in favour of the school day starting later reported possible problems with childcare and with transport arrangements, since many parents drop their children at school on the way to work. It was suggested by both young people and others that this approach would encourage poor time keeping when children leave school and that staff would be likely to use the later start as an opportunity for a long lie. Respondents, including those from Highland Youth Voice, noted that more breakfast clubs would be needed for the supervision of children if this approach was adopted.

### ***School day ending earlier***

Respondents in favour of the school day ending earlier noted that it would be beneficial for parents collecting children of different ages if all children left school at the same time. It was noted that an earlier end to the day would allow teachers to travel between schools for meetings. Respondents, including young people, reported that this would be a preferred approach in the winter, as there would be more daylight for children walking home. It was also noted that pupils work better in the mornings and are tired by the end of the day.

A key theme for those against this approach was problems with childcare provision, as detailed above. However, some respondents noted that this could be tackled with affordable and easily accessible wraparound care provision.

### ***Lengthening the morning and lunch breaks***

Respondents in favour of this approach noted that it would be the one least disruptive to parents. It was noted that there would be less rush at mealtimes and that children would have longer to play and develop social skills.

Respondents who did not agree with lengthening morning and lunch breaks noted that children would still require supervision during these times, so money would not be saved. Respondents believed that children would get bored easily with longer breaks and that there would be more bullying and fighting in the playground, which staff would have to deal with. It was noted that longer breaks would be a particular problem in bad weather, when children would get cold and wet or inside provision would have to be made. These views were echoed by some young people, who noted that there was little to do at break and lunchtimes.

There were concerns that pupils with additional support needs would find longer unstructured periods challenging and that teachers would find it harder to get all children refocused after longer breaks. Some respondents noted that break times were too long currently and that schools had been trying to keep them as short as possible. Respondents felt that longer lunch breaks used to be important when children went home for lunch, but that this does not often happen now.

It was suggested that playgrounds should be made more attractive for play, especially team building, and that structured activities, such as music or sport, could take place at break times. A respondent proposed discounts for school children at local leisure centres. Respondents also suggested using parent volunteers to supervise children at break times.

### ***Reducing school hours in different ways***

Several respondents suggested starting the school day 15 minutes later and ending it 15 minutes earlier. It was also recommended that the school day stayed the same length in the summer but was reduced by an hour in the winter, when there was poorer weather and darker days.

Several respondents, including young people, suggested finishing the day at lunchtime on a Friday or a Wednesday, instead of reducing the length of each school day. This has been introduced in other Local Authorities, such as the City of Edinburgh, and in some Highland secondary schools, such as Grantown Grammar. It was noted that it would be easier for teachers to work without pupils on school grounds, and that it would be easier for parents to arrange childcare for one afternoon rather than at the start or end of the day. However, one respondent commented that they would prefer the school day to be reduced by 30 minutes than to have a half day on a Friday.

One or two respondents suggested lengthening the school days from Monday to Thursday and closing the school on Fridays. They reported that this would save on heating and lighting in the school.

Some respondents suggested that the school day should be reduced by less than half an hour, with 10 minutes suggested as a maximum time reduction. A compromise was proposed: reducing pupil time by 10 minutes, reducing class teacher time by 10 minutes, and having 10 minutes covered by additional teachers.

### **Nairn Youth Forum – Case Study**

Around 250 pupils from primaries in Nairn and around 500 secondary pupils from Nairn Academy were asked for their views on shortening the school day.

Pupils were asked for their views on each of the following options for shortening the school day:

- Longer break
- Start later
- Finish earlier
- Longer lunch

Pupils were asked to choose “Good” or “Bad” for each option. The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1: Primary pupils’ opinions on shortening the school day**

	<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>
<b>Longer break</b>	48%	52%
<b>Start late</b>	49%	51%
<b>Finish earlier</b>	44%	56%
<b>Longer lunch</b>	49%	51%

N = 253 - 255

**Table 2: Secondary pupils’ opinions on shortening the school day**

	<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>
<b>Longer break</b>	41%	59%
<b>Start late</b>	47%	53%
<b>Finish earlier</b>	49%	51%
<b>Longer lunch</b>	43%	57%

N = 480-484

Similar to the results of the Citizens’ Panel, none of the options provided were conclusive.

Pupils were also asked to provide comments on their answers, the results of which suggest both that opinion was divided on the proposal as a whole, and that respondents disagreed about where the extra 30 minutes should be found.

Many of the young people, in both primary and secondary, were not in favour of shortening the school day. In the main, the reasons provided were similar to the consultation overall, with pupils noting concerns regarding the impact on educational attainment and childcare arrangements.

Secondary pupils noted that reduced class time would result in more homework and that some pupils may struggle with this without teacher support. There were also concerns expressed about the impact on pupils moving up to secondary, as the difference in length of day would be even greater.

Pupils who were in favour of shortening the school day noted that it was currently too long and too tiring. This was a view expressed particularly by primary pupils. Some secondary pupils supported reducing the school day as this would save money, while several primary school pupils were in favour of the proposal because they would have less work to do and have more free time.

As an alternative to reducing the school day, secondary pupils suggested that school hours could be reduced by introducing a half day on Friday or by cutting out certain classes, such as Personal and Social Education.

In terms of where the school day could be shortened, a common view among primary children, which was supported by several secondary pupils, was that longer breaks and lunches would benefit pupils by giving them more time to play and socialise, more time to eat lunch and more fresh air and exercise. However concerns were raised by some on this proposal believing that breaks and lunches were already long enough and that there was little to do during them.

Both primary and secondary school pupils reported that starting later would give pupils and staff more time to rest, leading to increased concentration. An example was given of a school in England that had introduced a later start, resulting in higher pupil achievement. However, some secondary pupils felt that this would result in bad habits if children didn't have to get up in the morning.

Both primary and secondary pupils reported that ending school earlier would leave more time for extracurricular activities and socialising, as well as for completing homework. It was noted by both groups that children get restless by the end of the day, so finishing school earlier may not make much difference to learning.

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### ***Significant savings could be made if this approach was adopted, what alternative savings could you suggest instead?***

259 responses were received for the question “*Significant savings could be made if this approach was adopted, what alternative savings could you suggest instead?*” Responses were mainly received through the online form and from discussions at ward forums. Other responses were collected through posted and emailed forms. Organisations and special interest groups that expressed their views included Parent Councils, Community Councils, Nairn Youth Forum and a group of young people at a ward forum. Responses were also received from the focus group with Highland Youth Voice.

Respondents suggested a variety of cost-saving measures from different departments. Only those related to education have been presented here; the other comments are detailed in the relevant sections elsewhere in the report. The main areas in which respondents suggested savings were staffing, school estate and teacher and pupil time distribution.

#### **Staffing**

##### *Staff numbers*

Several respondents felt that savings could be made by reducing numbers of staff. Respondents suggested that the number of higher paid staff could be reduced, with fewer managers above Head Teachers or the reduction of middle management in the Education Department. Some respondents believed that the number of promoted teachers should be assessed, perhaps with a reduction in Head Teachers. One respondent felt that there were too many tiers of supervision for school meals and cleaning services.

Some respondents suggested that the number of Quality Improvement Officers should be reduced, or their role revised, with an investigation into whether they are making an impact on schools. Other respondents felt that jobs should be cut in area offices, with, for example, one person in charge of all school transport.

A small number of respondents proposed an assessment of the number of teachers on retained wages, and noted that teachers should not be paid when they are not teaching children, as in the case of retained Head Teachers with no pupils. A respondent reported that teachers on a ‘winding down’ scheme who want to leave should be able to do this, allowing younger teachers to be employed instead.

Other roles where respondents believed reductions or cuts should be made were:

- Youth Co-ordinator and Active Schools Co-ordinator roles;
- Early Years Principle Teachers – it was felt that salaries were too high for this role, and that nursery assistants were forced to take on extra duties;



- Support staff and classroom assistants;
- Specialist chair cleaners in schools;
- Cleaning inspectors for schools – it was suggested that these could be carried out by another member of staff, such as the Head Teacher;
- A dog warden visiting schools to educate pupils about the hazards of dog dirt– it was reported that this should be done by teachers as part of the normal curriculum.

### *Use of volunteers*

A number of respondents proposed that volunteers or parents were used to run sessions in schools. It was suggested that someone in the community with particular skills should share these with the children, for example a local gardener.

### *Supply teachers*

Several respondents believed that fewer supply teachers should be used, reporting that they were costly. It was proposed that, once supply teachers are retired, they should not be re-employed, and that more young and probationer teachers should be taken on.

### *Teacher pay and other staffing costs*

A small number of respondents suggested that teachers should receive a pay cut, or that they should not receive holiday pay. A respondent suggested that staff relocation packages should not be given when the relocation was the teacher's choice, while another reported that less money should be spent on consultancy fees. However, one or two respondents believed that money would not be saved on teachers, as they would be unlikely to take pay cuts and teacher redundancies would cost the Council money.

### *Training and support*

One respondent felt that the Continuing Professional Development Programme should be cut, while another suggested that more of this should be delivered online. A respondent reported that school cleaners were given excessive training, and suggested that this should instead be matched to the recruit.

One or two respondents highlighted the importance of a support and advisory network for teachers, particularly in small schools or for single teacher departments.

### *Teacher roles*

Respondents from Highland Youth Voice suggested that teachers could be trained to deliver Personal and Social Education, rather than specialist teachers being employed for the subject. Another respondent suggested that CCR teachers who were formally visiting specialists should be moved back to their previous roles. It was felt that the teachers could then be spread further to cover more schools. A



respondent proposed that teachers in training should be used in classrooms to give them work experience.

### ***School estate***

Many respondents made money-saving suggestions about school estate, most of which had been proposed elsewhere in the consultation.

A number of respondents suggested that money could be saved by merging small schools in the same locality, either through mothballing or closure. Suggestions were made to merge Alness Academy and Invergordon Academy or Golspie High School and Dornoch Academy. One respondent felt that mergers should go ahead as soon as possible, without expensive meetings or consultations, and it was noted that plans to amalgamate schools in Fort William should be followed through more thoroughly.

Other respondents were in favour of introducing 3-18 campuses, merging smaller primary and secondary schools.

A respondent believed that capital and refurbishment works should be planned and executed in a more cost-aware, education focussed manner, and a review carried out to determine whether these should be carried out privately or by the Council.

### ***Teacher time distribution and alternative school timings***

Respondents felt that teachers' and pupils' time should be distributed differently, as described under *Alternative Suggestions* in the *Shortening the School Day* section. In addition to the suggestions above, a respondent believed that meetings within school time should take place outwith the school day, to avoid the need for cover. One respondent suggested reducing the number of practical classes in secondary school, while another felt that nursery planning time should be reduced.

In addition to the alternative school day timings mentioned above, a group of respondents proposed changing school holiday arrangements. Some respondents suggested reducing the October holiday by one week and increasing the Christmas, February, Easter or summer holidays by a week. It was noted that this would save on fuel at the coldest time of the year. One respondent suggested reducing teachers' holidays, while another proposed that holidays should be lengthened.

One respondent suggested starting 10 minutes later, ending 10 minutes earlier and taking 5 minutes off break and lunch times. Another proposed that the school day should be staggered, with older children starting and finishing later than younger children.

### ***Technology***

Several respondents reported that money could be saved through more efficient use of technology.

There was support for re-negotiating the Fujitsu IT contract, with views that this was inconvenient and expensive. It was felt that schools should be in charge of their own photocopying and computer systems, rather than being tied into expensive contracts. A respondent suggested that spare ink cartridges should be kept in schools, so that someone did not have to travel to replace these.

Respondents suggested delivering more lessons via the Internet, which may mean that fewer teaching staff are needed. However, respondents from Highland Youth Voice felt that less use should be made of Glow, an online schools community. While one respondent suggested increased use of whiteboards to cut down on paper use, another believed that money would be saved by using more traditional “chalk and talk” methods.

Some respondents proposed that parents should be communicated with more frequently via email rather than by letter, and that publications and leaflets should be made accessible online rather than printed. It was felt that this would reduce paper use and could improve communication.

One respondent suggested that school IT facilities should be rented out for purposes such as video conferencing, while another noted that more efficient use of technology could help to reduce the amount of travelling undertaken.

### ***School resources and procurement***

Several respondents suggested that schools could save money by cutting down on waste. It was proposed that schools use less printing paper by printing double sided, and that classes try to use resources such as books and jotters for longer.

Respondents believed that less food waste should be produced in school kitchens, less bottled water should be used and that small, inexpensive bin bags should be used for small amounts of waste. One respondent reported that teaching resources are sometimes brought in and not used. They suggested that, if these are outdated, they should be put to use in the wider community.

Some respondents proposed a means-tested parental contribution towards the cost of school transport, school equipment, jotters and pencils. Respondents noted the value of the school clothing grant and free school meals, but believed that these could be reduced slightly.

It was suggested that schools should be given more autonomy in terms of procurement and budget allocation. Respondents felt that allowing employees to buy locally would avoid unnecessary personnel and cut down on Council administration. However, one respondent noted the buying power of the Council in terms of suppliers for school dinners, cleaning products, stationery supplies and electricity.

A small number of respondents proposed getting rid of school librarians, suggesting that anyone could sign books in and out, and that pupils can use computers instead. It was proposed that a local public librarian should cover school libraries, and these libraries declared a public asset. It was noted that libraries and schools would benefit by sharing the cost of procurement and strengthening home-school ties.

A respondent reported that resources should be distributed more carefully, noting that new schools are currently given an inappropriate amount of equipment without consultation. Another respondent suggested buying fewer toys for schools, and having playground monitors to look after existing facilities.

### ***Gaelic provision***

A number of respondents felt that less money should be spent on Gaelic provision. Gaelic schools were considered by some respondents to be a political rather than a cultural move, with parents sending their children to Gaelic schools because of the small classes and not due to an interest in Gaelic. It was suggested that Gaelic provision should be privatised, with parents paying to send their children to Gaelic schools.

Respondents believed that Gaelic schools should be scaled back or provision restricted to native speakers. Some respondents felt that Gaelic provision should be stopped completely, with views expressed against a new Gaelic school in Fort William.

A small group of respondents suggested combining Gaelic and English provision, to reduce the number of staff required. It was suggested that Gaelic and English medium funding should be combined, with all pupils beginning with Gaelic immersion and having English introduced later.

One respondent proposed redistributing some of the Gaelic budget to cover some additional teachers, offering all children in Highland the chance to learn the language.

### ***School catering***

One respondent suggested cutting back on hot meals for schools with low numbers, believing that packed lunches would be adequate for children. Another respondent proposed having one larger catering facility to provide lunches for a number of

schools in the area and for elderly people in their own home. It was noted that this would reduce staff numbers and bring in income. A respondent felt that expensive additions should not be made to school kitchens, mentioning the installation of large extractor fans which were felt unsuitable for small-scale kitchens. One respondent expressed their disappointment with cashless catering, which they felt had been expensive and did not work in all schools.

### ***Children with additional support needs***

A small group of respondents felt that support for pupils should be reviewed, noting that this was a high spending area. One respondent believed that children with moderate or severe learning disabilities or very challenging behaviour should attend specialist schools, reporting that it was expensive to provide appropriate facilities and support in mainstream schools.

### ***School maintenance and repairs***

One or two respondents believed that janitors should be employed as general handymen, performing tasks like grass cutting and basic repairs. The importance of continuous building maintenance to make long-term savings was highlighted.

### ***No savings should be made***

A view expressed by several respondents was that no savings should be made in education at all. Respondents felt that the Council should be improving education provision, not reducing it. It was noted that cuts had already been made in education, and that more would not be welcome. Respondents reported that money should be spent, rather than saved, and that education should have a ringfenced budget, with savings made in other areas.

### Pre-School

#### How can we rationalise nursery provision further?

*and*

#### What are the models of nursery provision which might work in Highland?

Responses for both of the pre-school questions were similar and have been combined here. 201 separate responses were received for the question "*How can we rationalise nursery provision further?*" Most responses were received through the online form and from posted and emailed forms, with other responses collected from discussions at ward forums.

191 separate responses were received for the question "*What are the models of nursery provision which might work in Highland?*", mostly from the online form and from discussions at ward forums. Responses were also collected from emailed and posted forms. Organisations that expressed their views on pre-school provision included Community Councils, primary and secondary Parent Councils and Youth Highland.

Respondents made suggestions such as amalgamating or closing nurseries with small attendances, not running separate Gaelic-medium nurseries and combining nursery and primary provision. A group of respondents expressed the view that nursery provision should not be changed or rationalised further.

#### **Suggestions for nursery provision**

##### *Merging or closing small nurseries*

Many respondents, including some Parent Councils, felt that nurseries with rolls below a particular number, for example six, should be mothballed, closed or merged with other nurseries. It was noted that having very small numbers in nursery classes did not give children adequate social contact, which is important. Several respondents reported that, after closing facilities, family numbers and attendance at nurseries should be carefully monitored to ensure that needs of communities are being met. Some respondents commented on travel arrangements, suggesting that transport should be provided to nurseries if some centres are closed. It was noted that travelling distances should be reasonable and that the Council should aim to provide provision within a certain number of miles of residents.

One or two respondents suggested having just one central centre, to which children were transported. Another proposed sharing staff between nurseries in neighbouring areas, with morning sessions in one area and afternoon sessions in another.

However, a small number of respondents felt that small nurseries should not be closed or merged. One respondent reported that the Scottish Government is proposing to increase nursery time for children, and raised concerns that there would be too little provision if nurseries were closed.

### *No separate Gaelic provision*

Several respondents believed that the Council should not run separate Gaelic- and English-medium nurseries, especially in areas that are not traditionally Gaelic-speaking. Some respondents suggested that a Gaelic speaking member of staff could be provided in English-medium nurseries, or that all children should be immersed in Gaelic, at least for their first year of nursery. Other respondents felt that families should pay if they want their children to learn Gaelic, and that Gaelic nursery provision should be privatised.

However, one or two respondents commented that Gaelic nursery provision was important and that more Gaelic-medium nurseries should be provided.

### *Venues for nurseries and links with primary schools*

A number of respondents stated that nurseries should be linked with primary schools, with nursery classes held in primary school buildings to save on rent. It was noted that this would help to get children familiar with their primary school building and would be particularly beneficial in rural areas, where it could improve the viability of primary schools.

Several respondents were in favour of nurseries being included in 3-18 campuses, although it was reported by some that this should only be done in urban areas.

One or two respondents suggested that staffing costs could be saved if nursery children shared classrooms with primary pupils, supervised by a nursery assistant.

Some respondents offered proposals for other buildings where nurseries could be housed, including non-purpose built buildings like community halls. It was reported that nurseries should be moved from buildings not big enough to host them. One respondent suggested that all-purpose venues should be used by nurseries, parent and toddler groups and playgroups to provide care for additional hours for additional payment. Another stated that all nurseries should have an outdoor play area.

### *Privatising nurseries and working with other providers*

A number of respondents felt that nurseries should be privatised. They suggested that this could be done as a franchise, with nursery staff encouraged to run nurseries themselves privately. It was noted that the Council could charge for the use and upkeep of nursery buildings. One respondent proposed work-based childcare provision, funded directly from parents' wages, while another commented that

community groups should be encouraged to buy out and run nurseries. Another felt that private nurseries should be used in urban areas and Council-run facilities provided in rural areas. It was reported that competition between nurseries was desirable to maintain high standards and offer choice for parents.

Some respondents believed that the Council should give grants or subsidies for non-Council run childcare, such as nannies, au pairs or voluntary childcare groups. The idea of voluntary groups run by parents was supported by some respondents, with halls let at subsidised rates and educational materials provided free of charge. Respondents from a Parent Council gave the example of the PlayCentre model from New Zealand, which is run by parents as a co-operative for children from birth to age 5. Parents pay a subsidised fee, and the centres are run by qualified play workers, with all parents obliged to help if their child attends.

A respondent commented that lone parents should be encouraged to consider child-minding as a career, while another suggested that the Council should allow registered and regulated child minders who work from home.

However, one or two respondents noted that the Council should not fund private nurseries, especially if they continue to run nurseries themselves. One respondent reported that school nursery provision has proved to be superior to private provision, so the Council should focus on this instead of privatising nurseries.

### *Nursery times*

Some respondents suggested shortening nursery time to three days a week, either for all children or only in the first year of nursery. It was felt that many parents find five days a week too much for their 3-year-olds and that these children would benefit from more time with their parents rather than at nursery. Respondents suggested that community groups should be encouraged to run groups on the days that nursery is not provided, or that swimming pools should offer swimming for nursery children. However, one respondent noted that nursery provision should not be provided for any less than 2 ½ hours, as this would not be worthwhile.

A group of respondents felt that more flexible nursery care should be provided, with more variation in shifts and more choice of when allocated nursery time is used. One respondent suggested a drop-in crèche facility, allowing parents more time to work or study, thus generating more tax revenue for the Council. Some respondents reported that it was useful to have private wrap around care and proposed that this was provided by the Council for a fee. A small number of respondents suggested having longer nursery provision for fewer days in remote areas to save on travel costs.



### *Increase nursery starting age*

Respondents, including a Parent Council, noted that money could be saved if the nursery starting age was increased to 3 ½ or 4 years. It was stated that this would reduce a significant burden on resources, while still providing children with an important pre-school year. However, one respondent reported that their daughter had started nursery at 3 ½, and that this was too late for her. It was suggested that consultation and research was done on this proposal before adopting it. One respondent felt that nurseries should not accept children younger than 3, as they require much time and attention, which is unfair on older children.

While one respondent felt that 3 and 4-year-olds have different needs and should be separated in nurseries, another believed that provision should be combined for the two year groups.

### *Ask for volunteers*

Some respondents believed that parents or grandparents should volunteer to help at Council-run nurseries, either with childcare or with administration so nursery staff can concentrate on childcare. A representative from Youth Highland suggested that parents should be asked to run playgroups and holiday play schemes.

### *Nursery provision not necessary*

A small number of respondents felt that nursery provision was not necessary, and that children should be with their parents or meeting together in voluntary groups until they reach school age. One respondent suggested that the Council should just provide a safe place where children can play and socialise, while a Parent Council proposed giving parents educational packs to help teach children at home before they go to school. Another respondent noted that maternity leave should be extended and flexible working hours offered to allow parents to look after their own children. It was suggested that the Council should lobby the Scottish Government to change their policy of having a nursery place for each child.

### *Ask parents to contribute financially*

A few respondents suggested that parents could be asked to contribute financially to nursery provision, either through a means tested fee or through providing envelopes for anonymous donations. One respondent proposed that nurseries should be made into charities, with £2 charged for sessions.

One or two respondents noted that a nominal amount could be charged for snacks in nurseries, or that children could bring in their own.

### *Additional suggestions for models of nursery provision*

Respondents provided some additional suggestions for models of nursery provision:

- Scandinavian system – For example, in Norway, children attend kindergarten from birth to age 5 and are educated in similar subjects to those taught at school. Kindergartens are partly funded by the state and the municipality, with



parents paying around 25% of the running costs. Around half of the kindergartens are state run, with the rest run privately. Grants are given by the state for the establishment of both public and private kindergartens.

- Belief that current model is effective
- Local provision – Respondents felt that different models should be used to meet local childcare needs.

### *General additional suggestions*

Some additional suggestions for the general efficiency of nursery provision were made:

- Work more closely with public health professionals and health visitors;
- Make use of remote broadcasts by teaching professionals;
- Focus on additional support for learning;
- Priority for nursery places should be given to working parents;
- Ask advice from education and financial consultants.

### ***Respondents against rationalising nursery provision***

Some respondents expressed the view that nursery provision should not be rationalised further, either because they believed that too many cuts had been made already or because they thought the current provision worked well.

Some respondents commented that nursery provision is currently too basic, having been cut back to an unacceptable level. Concerns were raised about cuts in staffing, with respondents believing that nurseries were understaffed. Some respondents felt that children should have more contact with qualified teachers, although one noted that young children should be given more opportunity for play and less for teaching.

Respondents felt that nursery provision was particularly poor in rural areas, with few centres and no provision over school holidays. It was noted that nurseries were especially important in remote areas, allowing children to mix with others.

Respondents mentioned that nursery education was very important for children, allowing them to socialise and learn. One respondent felt that nurseries were good value for money, and that a cut in spending now could lead to more money being needed in the future.