The Highland Council

Agenda Item	19
Report No	HC/58/23

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 14 December 2023

Report Title: Highland Response to Education Reform Bill Consultation

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 As detailed in the Education Bill provisions: consultation, the education system must enable everyone to achieve their full potential regardless of background or where they live. This is even more complex to achieve in the geography of Highland and education and skills reform in such a diverse and rural landscape will require creative, sustainable, and unique solutions. These solutions will need to be placed-based to respond to the changing needs of children and young people, teachers and practitioners, and adult learners. The solutions will need to include all partners and be delivered in both English and Gaelic.
- 1.2 The Highland Council area includes a significant proportion of remote, rural, coastal and island communities. The impact of our geography and demography, combined with the cost of delivering services as inclusively, equitably and sustainably as possible, should not be underestimated. There is significant additional cost to delivering educational excellence, inclusion, and equity in Highland and this provides essential context to the response to the Education Reform Consultation. It is essential for any reforms to be properly funded and resourced in schools and also in the wider community. The National Gaelic Language Plan and Highland Gaelic Language Plan outline the national and Highland strategic approaches to developing Gaelic in all areas of Scottish and Highland life, including education. The need to deliver service reform in both English and Gaelic in a unique and diverse context should be considered alongside the Highland response.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to **Note**:

- i. the proposed Highland Council Education and Learning response to the recent Education Bill consultation which will feed into the National response and future recommendations: and
- ii. the questions that form the consultation broadly focus on the new qualifications body and maximising the impact of inspection assurance and supporting improvement.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

The final recommendations of the Education Bill may impact on the future delivery model of Education across the Highlands included funded protected time for staff to plan, learn and access ongoing support from mentors/coaches.

3.2 Legal

The voices of Children and Young People in Scottish educational reform will be important and therefore the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child Article 12 will play an important role within the system.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)

- 3.3.1 The community context of Highland will be a key factor in education reform. As can be seen in **Appendix 1**, Highland's education service is located in four areas, each with a unique range of schools.
- 3.3.2 Accessible professional learning will need to be offered both remotely and in-person to enable full professional dialogue, growth, and collaboration.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever

There are no Climate Change or Carbon Clever impacts.

3.5 **Risk**

There is a risk that the proposed mechanism for accreditation and regulation could be somewhat complex, and greater clarity is required on how these functions will work from within the new qualifications body.

3.6 **Health and Safety** (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

There are no Health and Safety Risks

3.7 Gaelic

There is potential risk to the quality and accessibility of Gaelic Education if the impact and implications of education reform on Gaelic Education are not considered from the outset.

4. Education Reform

4.1 **Background**

- 4.1.1 The Scottish Government intends to reform education and skills. A consultation has been launched, seeking views on the provisions of the Education Bill. The consultation is set to run for 6 weeks and closes on the 18 December. Further information about the consultation and supporting documents can be found here.
- 4.1.2 In March 2022, it was announced that the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) would be replaced with a new qualifications body and that a new independent inspectorate would be established. These announcements were informed by:
 - the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) **report** in June 2021 on Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence;
 - Prof Ken Muir's report in March 2022 on national education bodies;
 - James Withers' report in August 2022 on skills delivery;

- Prof Louise Hayward's a report in October 2022 on Qualifications and Assessments; and
- the report on the National Discussion on Education, that took place in June 2023.
- 4.1.3 In terms of the qualifications body, the paper proposed a similar remit to the Scottish Qualifications Authority, however it sets out new mechanism to ensure better engagement with the teaching profession, children and young people and the broader education system. The bill also sets out plans for a separate committee within the new body which would have responsibility for the accreditation and regulation of qualifications.
- 4.1.4 In terms of inspection, the consultation states:
 - The core purpose of inspection are proposed as:
 - To provide public accountability and assurance on the quality of education to learners, their parents/carers and the Scottish Parliament.
 - To support education providers, including schools, teachers and other practitioners to improve, through capacity building and sharing effective practice.
 - To share evidence about education and training to support services to improve and inform the development of education policy.
 - A range of suggested establishments and services that should be inspected, including Education functions of local authorities.
- 4.1.5 The paper also raises questions on the role of the inspectorate in terms of colleges and ELC services.
- 4.1.6 Two structural options for the future inspectorate:
 - to remove the inspection function from the rest of the current executive agency (Education Scotland), to create a distinct and separate executive agency, remaining directly accountable to Scottish Ministers; and
 - establish the role of 'HM Chief Inspector of Education for Scotland' in law as an independent officeholder, with primary responsibility for schedule, frequency and focus for inspections, as opposed to Ministers.

4.2 Highland Proposed Response and Implications

- 4.2.1 Many schools in Highland are small, have composite classes, teaching takes place in English and Gaelic and provision covers early years to senior phase. The additional cost of delivering education in Highland should not be underestimated or overlooked. Smaller schools and smaller classes cost more. It will cost more to deliver equity in Highland curriculum offer, extracurricular opportunities, work experience, sports, activities, and skills.
- 4.2.2 We believe it is necessary to further incentivise staff to work in island, remote and rural communities and to offer an attractive career path for staff working in both English Medium and Gaelic Medium settings, at all stages of their career. We support the proposed investment in career pathways and professional development for support staff roles.
- 4.2.3 We support the aspiration for all teachers to develop expertise in a broad range of teaching strategies to meet individual learners' needs. This requires funded, protected time for staff to learn, practice and access support from mentors, coaches, and expert practitioners.

- 4.2.4 We agree that schools should make meaningful connections with colleges, universities, voluntary, charity and community organisations. Meaningful engagement takes professional investment and time needs to be given to support and facilitate this.
- 4.2.5 We support the introduction of personalised and flexible learning pathways. This will require a local and context-specific approach and there will be additional delivery costs in Highland.
- 4.2.6 National additional support needs challenges post-pandemic are well documented but cannot be met by schools alone. We support the multi-agency, partnership model of delivery. A national focus on how to deliver equity in remote, rural and island communities is essential, and we believe this must include a specific strand on supporting learners in Gaelic Education.
- 4.2.7 We welcome the commitment to provide adequate support and resources, including funding, staffing, and accessible buildings for learners with additional support needs. We strongly support the aim for all learners to have access to well-resourced schools and high-quality learning experiences rooted in the local context and culture.
- 4.2.8 We believe the reforms should consider local career opportunities, development of entrepreneurship skills, support for self-employment and economic benefits of Gaelic language, history, and cultural heritage. We welcome the inclusion of Gaelic culture under cultural activities.
- 4.2.9 We strongly agree that there should be no costs related to the curriculum or wider school life. Removing cost barriers is particularly important in remote, rural and island communities, where the cost of the school day is a particular challenge and poverty is often hidden.
- 4.2.10 We support increasing opportunities for play, physical education, and activities. This will require investment, including in transport.
- 4.2.11 We agree that nutritious school meals for all are essential and note the increased costs in remote, rural and island communities.
- 4.2.12 The Highland landscape presents outstanding opportunities for outdoor learning and exploring the benefits of nature and the outdoors to the curriculum and health and wellbeing, connections to sustainability, climate change, net zero and green jobs are limitless, and Highland can lead on this nationally.
- 4.2.13 We recognise the advantages that the Scottish Diploma of Achievement (SDA) will bring and welcome its introduction. We support a broader curriculum in the senior phase and flexible learning pathways with academic, practical, and vocational options. We believe that a robust and anonymised external assessment system should remain part of the system.
- 4.2.14 We welcome the inclusion of awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Prince's Trust, John Muir Award, SSERC, and Caritas Award in both English and Gaelic. Providing real life contexts (Project Learning) presents an opportunity and a challenge and we welcome the flexibility offered to adapt to local context and personal interests.

- 4.2.15 Student-centred approaches to learning and teaching need careful consideration in the context of Gaelic Medium and immersion. Expert professionals must be at the centre of these discussions.
- 4.2.16 We welcome the recommendations on careers advice and guidance. It is important for the local context to be referenced and in both languages.
- 4.2.17 We welcome the proposal for specific actions to provide appropriate professional learning and resources to Gaelic medium teachers and the introduction of a national moderation system that will particularly benefit small and Gaelic medium schools.
- 4.2.18 There should be more access to a diverse and future-proof learning platform, in subject areas such as computational thinking and the possible learning pathways emerging from this area. Children, young people, adults, and the practitioners who deliver the learning experiences all need to have knowledge and skills in new and developing areas to enable remote and rural contexts to flourish. These emerging fields should also be linked across partnerships with qualifications aligned across sectors, such as secondary schools to further education. As also noted by the OECD the Scottish curriculum was disjointed between BGE and the senior phase. There is now an opportunity to ensure that qualifications and the associated assessment methods reflect the curriculum rather than the curriculum being driven by qualifications.

5. Partnerships

Health and well-being approaches for children and young people should be 5.1 supported in robust multi-agency ways through the GIRFEC refresh. The voices of our children and young people in Scottish reform will be key and the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) will require sufficient leadership at all levels. This will be significant to Article 12 of the UNCRC which says children and young people have the right to be heard and express their views. This should also involve the creation and implementation of a young person's panel which would ensure that the voices of senior phase pupils and college students are acted upon. It is important that the views of all children are captured, and there needs to be a way to ensure that a range of communication methods are utilised to enable all children and young people with a range of needs to communicate. These diverse views also need to ensure that the range and type of qualifications are fit for purpose in a dynamic and changing environment with complex barriers which need to be overcome to ensure authentic inclusion and equity.

6. Pathways

There are opportunities in Highland for creative innovation and collaboration in qualifications and curriculum delivery, such as the work with the Green Freeport. Through dynamic collaborative partnerships between the public and private sector there is an opportunity to develop personalised and flexible pathways. We agree that schools should make meaningful connections with colleges, universities, voluntary, charity and community sectors. The partnership work should focus on future jobs, skills, creativity skills and critical inquiry, which also provide an opportunity for application of learning. This provides opportunities to incorporate a holistic vision, which encapsulates The Promise; Article 29 from the UNCRC; Sustainable Development Goals; the Logan review on a digital eco-system in Scotland; and our Carbon Neutral aspiration.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning

Date: 1 December 2023

Colette Macklin, Head of Education, Lifelong Learning and Author:

Gaelic Studies

Tina Stones, Senior Lead Manager Beth Brown, Senior Lead Manager

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Proposed Education and Learning response to Education Reform Consultation



APPENDIX 1

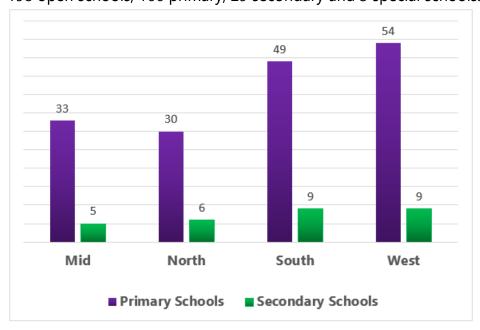
Education and Learning response to Education Reform Consultation

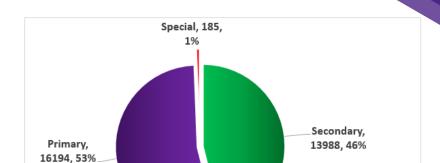
As detailed in the Education Bill provisions: consultation, the education system must enable everyone to achieve their full potential regardless of background or where they live. This is even more complex to achieve in the geography of Highlands and education and skills reform in such a diverse and rural landscape will require creative, sustainable, and unique solutions. These solutions will need to be placed-based to respond to the changing needs of children and young people, teachers and practitioners, and adult learners. The solutions will need to include all partners and be delivered in both English and Gaelic.

Highland Council includes a significant proportion of remote, rural, coastal and island communities. The impact of our geography and demography, combined with the cost of delivering services as inclusively, equitably, and sustainably as possible, should not be underestimated. There is significant additional cost to delivering educational excellence, inclusion, and equity in Highland and this provides essential context in the response to the Education Reform Consultation. It is essential for any reforms to be properly funded and resourced in schools and in the wider community. The National Gaelic Language Plan and Highland Gaelic Language Plan outline the national and Highland strategic approaches to developing Gaelic in all areas of Scottish and Highland life. The need to deliver service reform in both English and Gaelic in a unique and diverse context should be considered alongside the response detailed in this paper.

Highland Schools and Pupil Rolls

198 open schools; 166 primary, 29 secondary and 3 special schools.







Highland Geography and Population

The Highland Council serves a third of the land area of Scotland, including the most remote and sparsely populated parts of the United Kingdom. The Highlands has the 7th highest population of the 32 authorities in Scotland (c.238,000) while having the lowest population density at 8 persons per square kilometre.

The total land area including all islands at low water is 26,484 square kilometres. This is 33 per cent the land area of Scotland and 11.4 per cent of Great Britain. It is 10 times larger than Luxembourg, 20 per cent larger than Wales, and nearly the size of Belgium.

In the published figures from the Scottish Household Survey Report 2019, 33% of Highland households were in fuel poverty, compared with a Scottish average of 24%, and 22% of Highland households were in extreme fuel poverty compared with a Scottish average of 12%. However, this survey predates the current energy price crisis, so the current scale in Highland is likely to be much greater.

Educational Reform

It is imperative that our teachers, lecturers and other education and skills professionals have the knowledge and expertise to deliver high-quality teaching, learning experiences and qualifications in Scotland. Access to on-going career long professional learning in accessible contexts will be key to ensuring that this is implemented and sustained in Highlands. This will enable our teachers and other practitioners to continue to develop their knowledge and input into the new qualifications body. As detailed in the *Putting Learners at the Centre* report the new education agency should create and sustain a forum for ongoing and proactive discussion about curriculum and learning and teaching.

As can be seen in Appendix 1, Highland's education service is located in four areas, each with a unique range of schools.

Accessible professional learning will need to be offered both remotely and in-person to enable full professional dialogue, growth, and collaboration. This will also be



crucial for our broad range of support staff roles and expertise in our schools. We strongly support investment in career pathways and professional development for this sector of our workforce and would welcome introducing a standardised system of paraprofessionals and allied professionals in our schools.

There should be more access to a diverse and future-proof learning platform, in subject areas such as computational thinking and the possible learning pathways emerging from this area. Children, young people, adults, and the practitioners who deliver the learning experiences all need to have knowledge and skills in new and developing areas to enable remote and rural contexts to flourish. These emerging fields should also be linked across partnerships with qualifications aligned across sectors, such as secondary schools to FE. As also noted by the OECD the Scottish curriculum was disjointed between BGE and the senior phase. There is now an opportunity to ensure that qualifications and the associated assessment methods reflect the curriculum rather than the curriculum being driven by qualifications.

ASN challenges post-pandemic are well documented but cannot be met by schools alone. We recognise the benefits of personalised education and that children and young people with ASN require specific support from their teachers and support staff to achieve and thrive in school. We support a multi-agency model of delivery to support C&YP and their families. Recruitment and retention challenges, inexperienced staff managing complex workloads and the scale of the need present significant hurdles to delivering equity for ASN children and young people. These problems are magnified in Highland, where a dispersed population, particularly in the North and West makes it very difficult to provide the services and support required to all those who need it in the place it is required. A focus on how to deliver on the aspiration of genuine equity for all in remote, rural, coastal and island communities is essential. This must include a specific strand on how to do so for our Gaelic speaking communities.

Health & Wellbeing approaches for children and young people should be supported in robust multi-agency ways through the GIRFEC refresh. The voices of our children and young people in Scottish reform will be key and the implementation of the UNCRC will require sufficient leadership at all levels. This will be significant to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child which says children and young people have the right to be heard and express their views. This should also involve the creation and implementation of a young person's panel which would ensure that the voices of senior phase pupils and college students are acted upon. It is important that the views of all children are captured, and there needs to be a way to ensure that a range of communication methods are utilised to enable all children and young people with a range of needs to communicate. These diverse views also need to ensure that the range and type of qualifications are fit for purpose in a



dynamic and changing environment with complex barriers which need to be overcome to ensure authentic inclusion and equity.

Highland children and young people experience the same barriers to learning and achievement as other parts of Scotland but have additional challenges stemming from living in remote, rural, coastal and island communities. For example, a young carer may miss the school bus due to home circumstances and with no other transport available, they may miss a considerable number of learning hours. The need to get home from school immediately as school finishes impacts on wider opportunities, which may be fewer, in remote and rural communities. This illustrates the need for dynamic qualifications, and we support the aspiration for all schools to deliver good achievement and social, emotional, vocational, and life skills to prepare learners to be successful in their post-school destinations. In order to ensure that teachers are represented at a national level in qualifications, for Highland, a regional representative may be most suitable. The challenge and cost of delivering on this in remote, rural, coastal and island communities cannot and must not be underestimated and must be planned for from the start.

There are opportunities in Highland for creative innovation and collaboration in qualifications and curriculum delivery, such as the work with the Green Freeport. Through dynamic collaborative partnerships between the public and private sector there is an opportunity to develop personalised and flexible pathways. We agree that schools should make meaningful connections with colleges, universities, voluntary, charity and community sectors. The partnership work should focus on future jobs, skills, AI, creativity skills and critical inquiry, which also provide an opportunity for application of learning. This provides opportunities to incorporate a holistic vision, which encapsulates The Promise; Article 29 from the UNCRC; Sustainable Development Goals; the Logan review on a digital eco-system in Scotland; and our Carbon Neutral aspiration.

Meaningful engagement takes professional investment and teachers, support staff and school leaders need to be given time to do this. Offering equitable wider opportunities to all our communities will require a local and context-specific approach, as can be seen in Appendix 1. In Highland, we have unique identities linked to strong community connections. Education reforms should include consideration of local career opportunities, development of entrepreneurship skills, support for self-employment and appreciation of Gaelic language and history, place, and cultural heritage. We must support the future workforce to take advantage of the economic opportunities available in Highland and welcome the inclusion of Gaelic culture under cultural activities.



Inspection

There is support for the aspirations detailed in the Education Reform Consultation on inspection and the core purposes. The governance for inspections should reflect its independence to ensure integrity in the system. It is viewed that during the process of inspections, wider local authority services which have a direct impact on education delivery should also be scrutinised and accountable for outcomes. It would be helpful if there was parity and consistency in the quality of feedback from national bodies, so that it matched the level of Education Scotland, or the new equivalent.

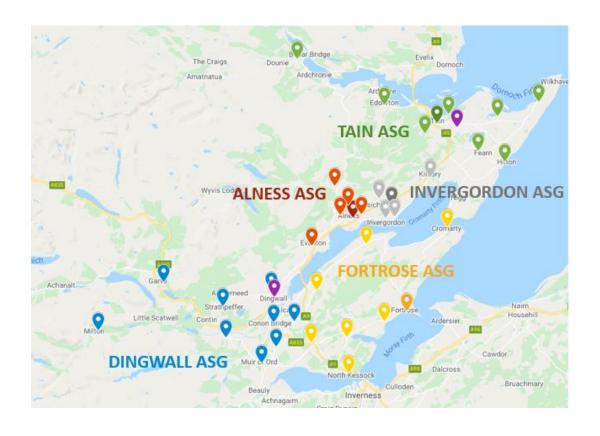
There is a need to ensure that all inspections have minimal impact on the smooth-running of the school or setting, so that teachers and school leaders can focus their attention on the importance of the learning of children and young people. It would be helpful to local authorities if the learning captured from inspections could be summarised and shared on a national level more robustly to ensure maximum impact for Scottish Educational improvement.

Highland Associated School Groups & 3-18 Campuses Nov 2023



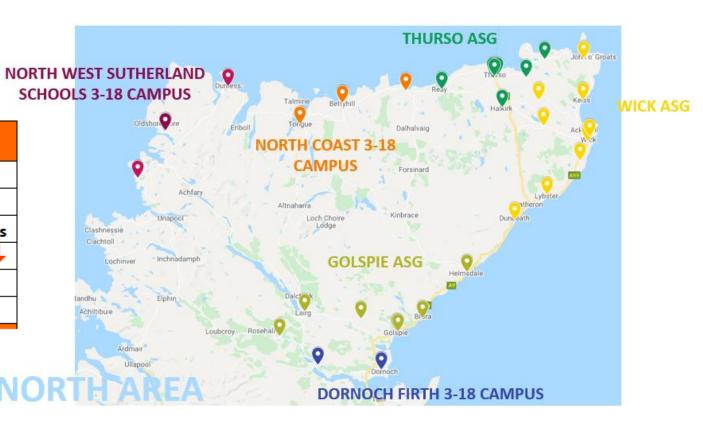
MID AREA

MID AREA	
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	40 🚔 🖈
TOTAL AREA ROLL (2023-24)	6,756 🖊
LARGEST ASG	Dingwall c.2,291 pupils
SMALLEST ASG	Invergordon c.707 pupils
TOTAL PRIMARY ROLL	c.3,601 pupils
TOTAL SECONDARY ROLL	c.3,075 pupils
TOTAL SPECIAL SCHOOL ROLL	c.80 pupils



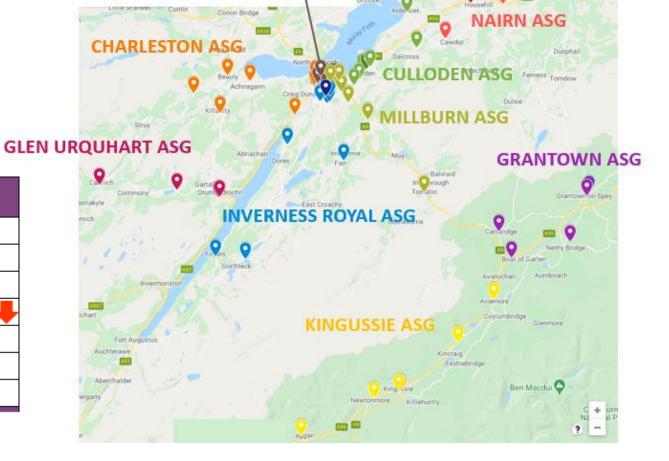
NORTH AREA

NORTH AREA	
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	36
TOTAL AREA ROLL (2023-24)	4,436 🖶
LARGEST ASG	Wick & Thurso c.1,594 pupils
SMALLEST ASG	Kinlochbervie c.71 pupils
TOTAL PRIMARY ROLL	c.2,370 pupils 🖊
TOTAL SECONDARY ROLL	c.2,066 pupils 👚



SOUTH AREA

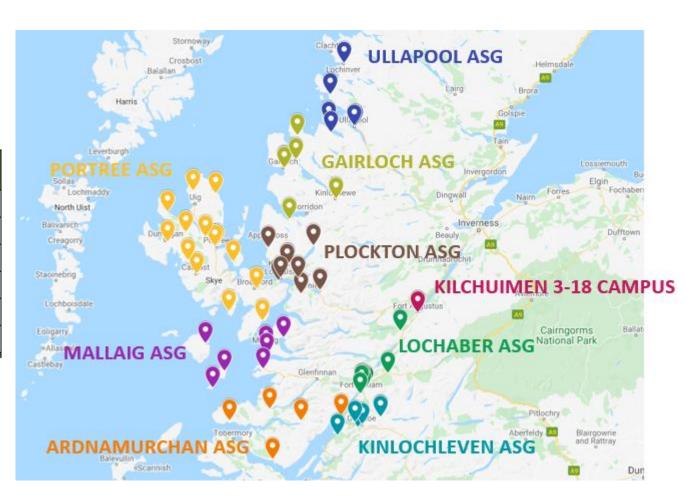
SOUTH AREA	
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	60 🕮 🖈
TOTAL AREA ROLL (2023-24)	14,481 🖊
LARGEST ASG	IRA c.3,012 pupils
SMALLEST ASG	Glen Urquhart c.399 pupils
TOTAL PRIMARY ROLL	c.7,738 pupils 🖊
TOTAL SECONDARY ROLL	c.6,638 pupils
TOTAL SPECIAL SCHOOL ROLL	c.105 pupils 👚

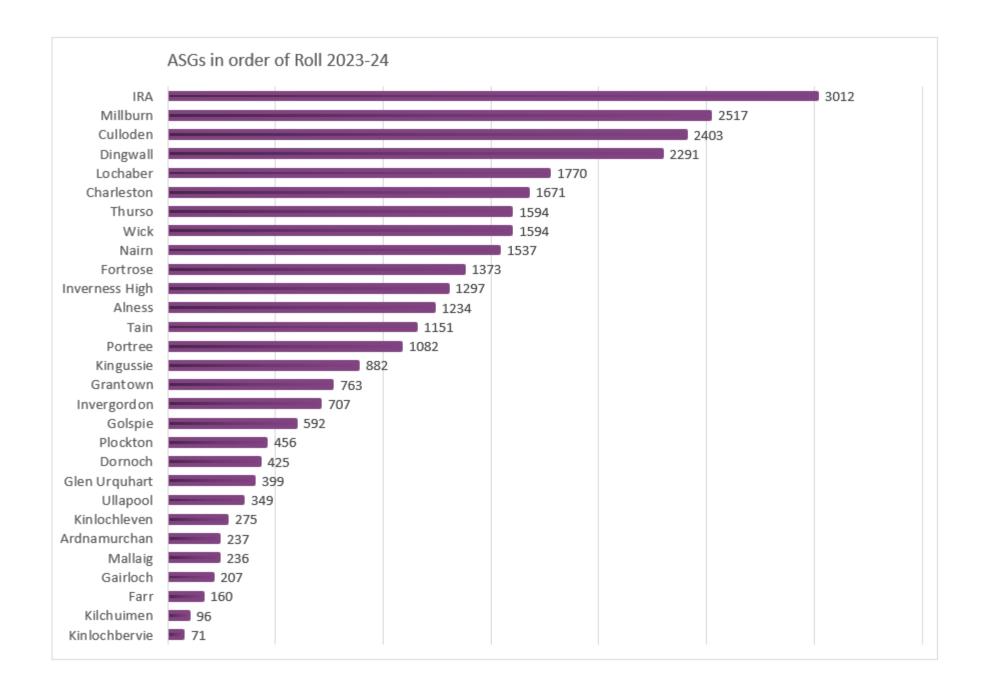


INVERNESS HIGH ASG

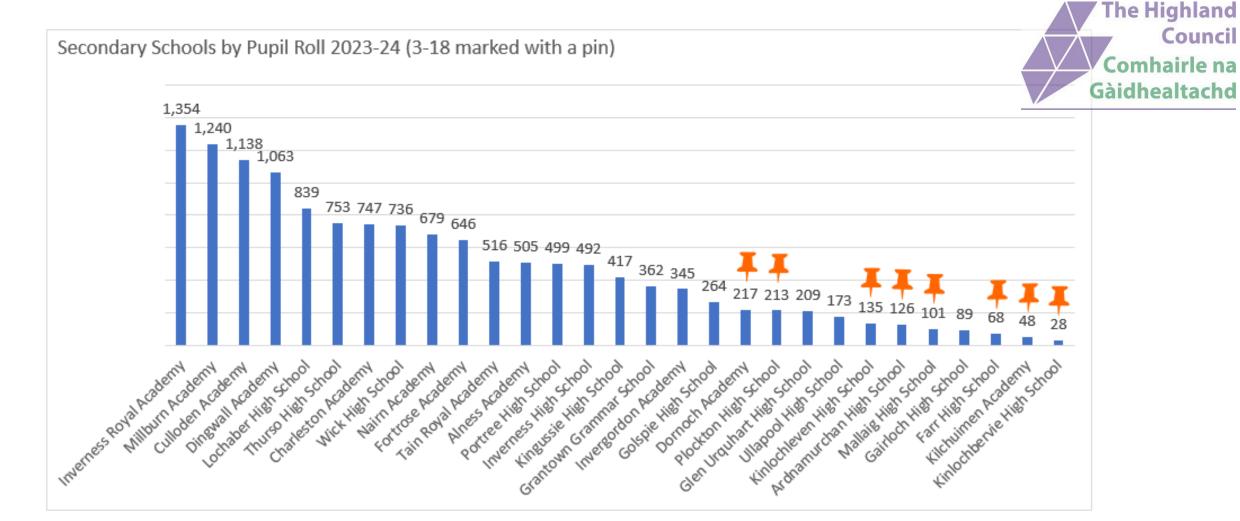
WEST AREA

WEST AREA		
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	63 📫 📦	
TOTAL AREA ROLL (2023-24)	4,708 🖊	
LARGEST ASG	Lochaber c.1,770 pupils	
SMALLEST ASG	Kilchuimen c.96 pupils	
TOTAL PRIMARY ROLL	c.2,485 pupils 棏	
TOTAL SECONDARY ROLL	c.2,223 pupils 棏	









Council

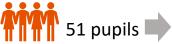
SPECIAL SCHOOLS

St Duthus School, Tain



29 pupils 👚

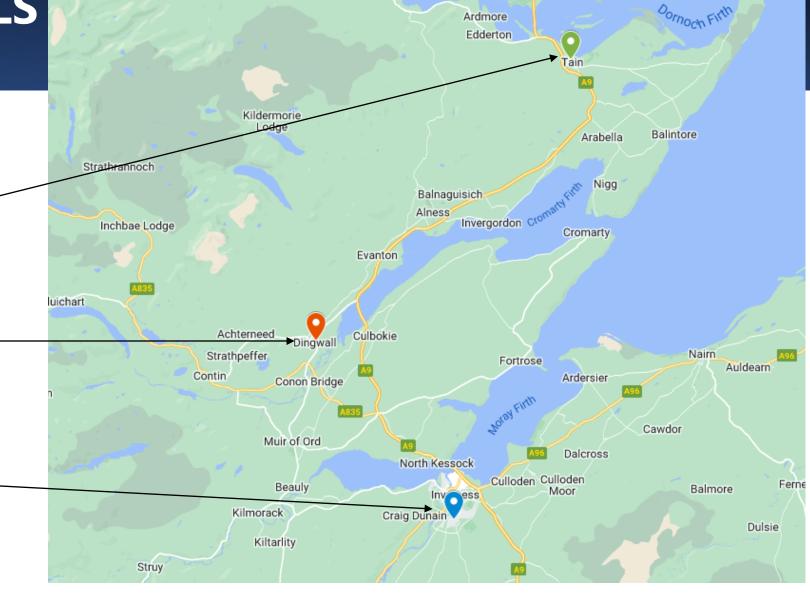
St Clement's School, Dingwall



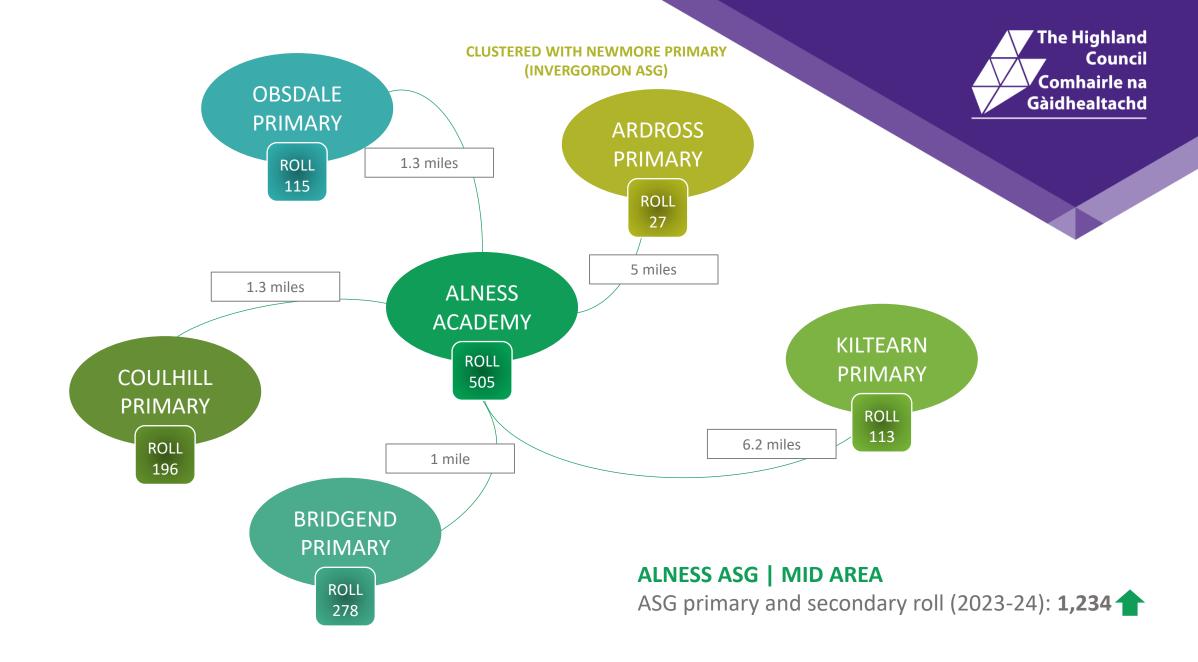


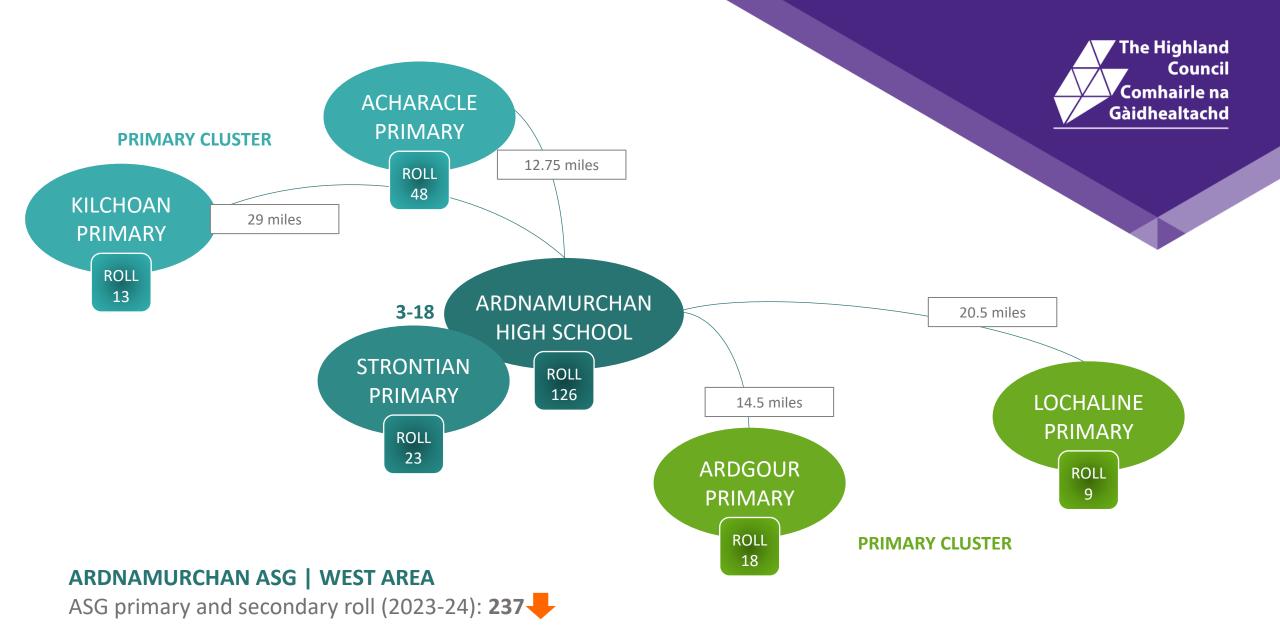


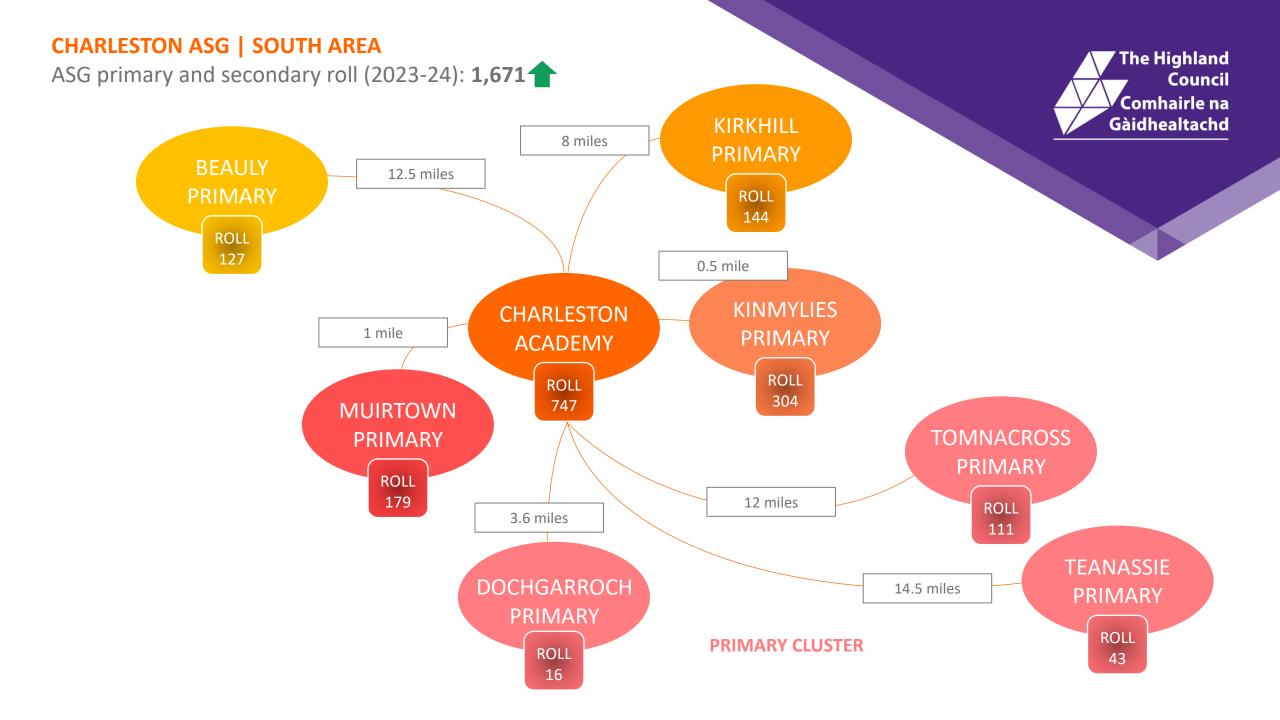
105 pupils 👚

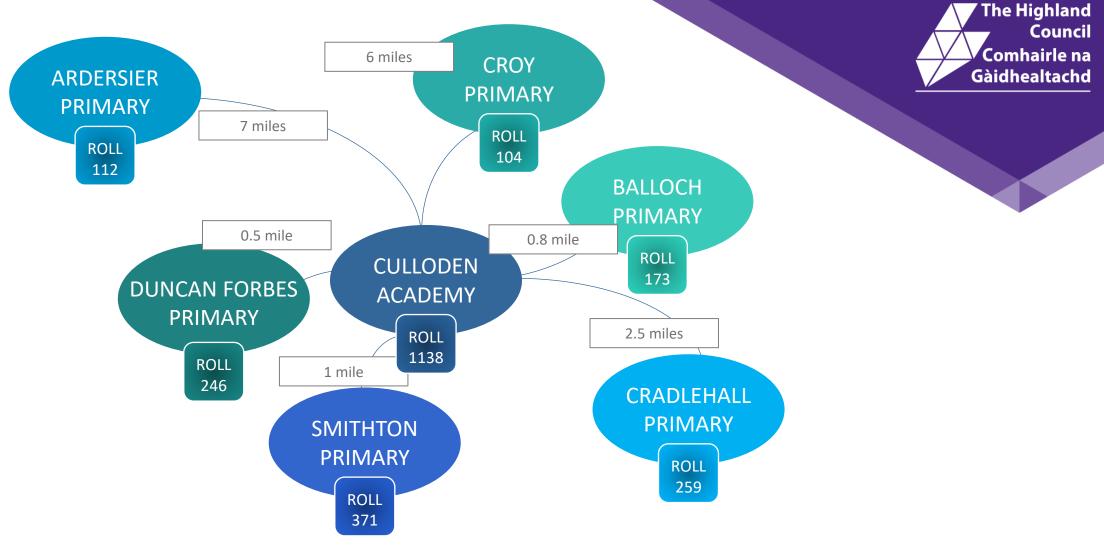


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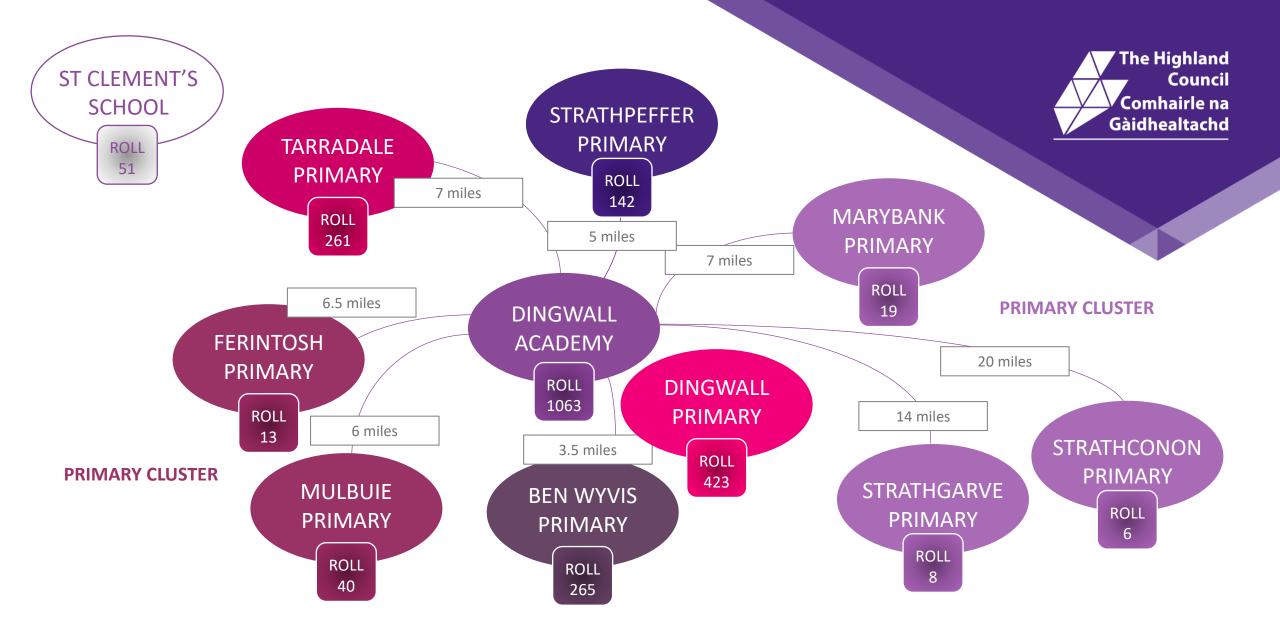




CULLODEN ASG | SOUTH AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 2,403

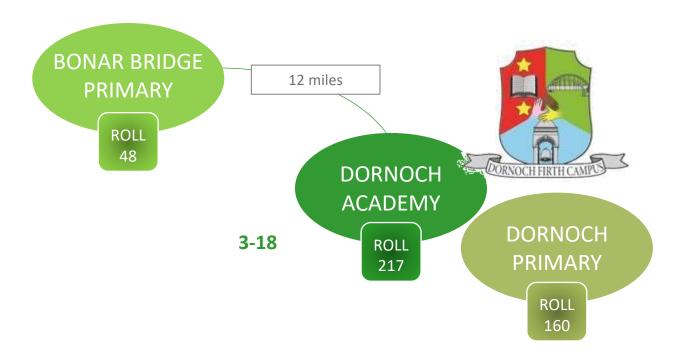




DINGWALL ASG | MID AREA

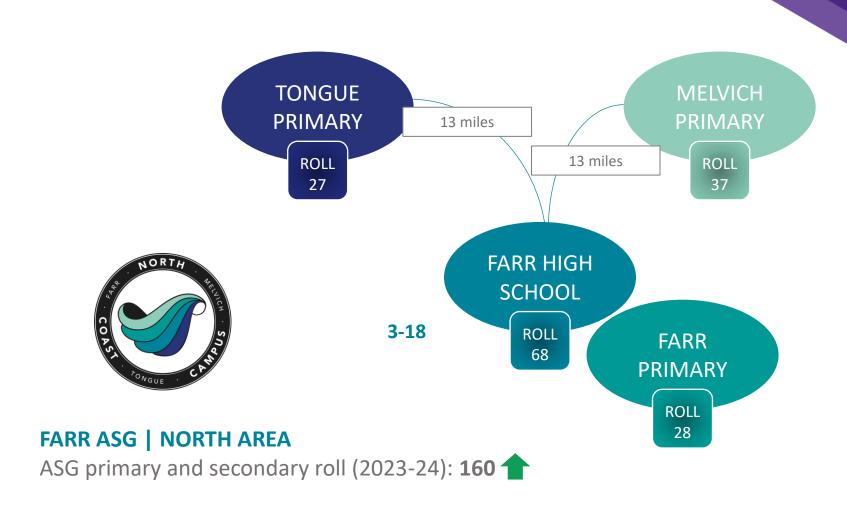
ASG primary, secondary and special school roll (2023-24): **2,291**



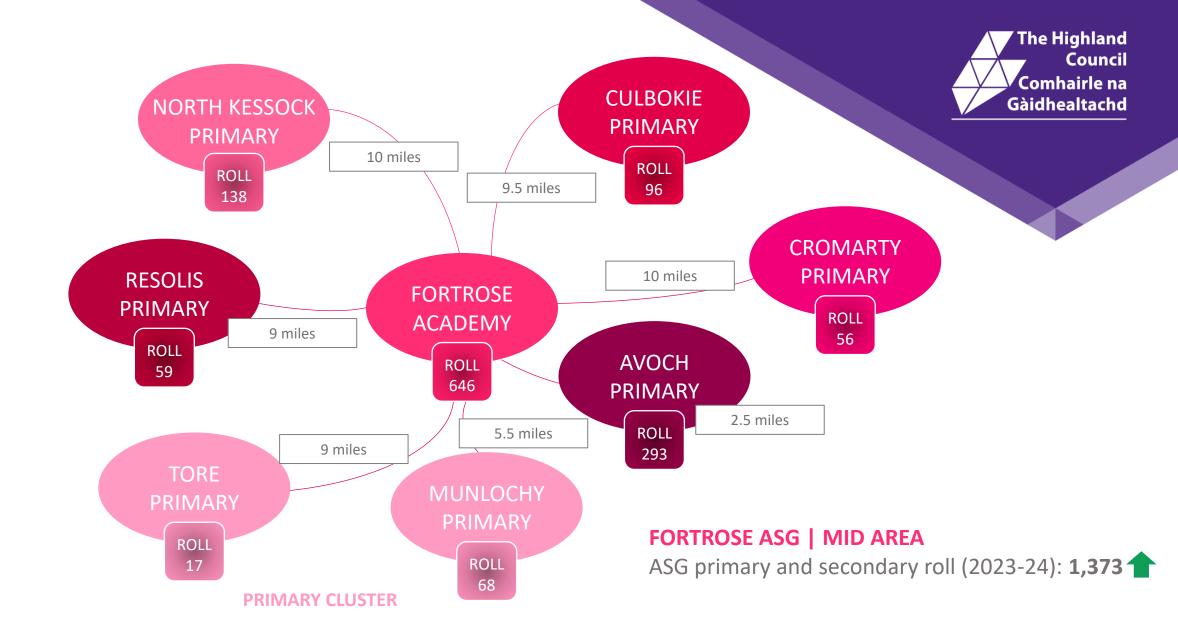


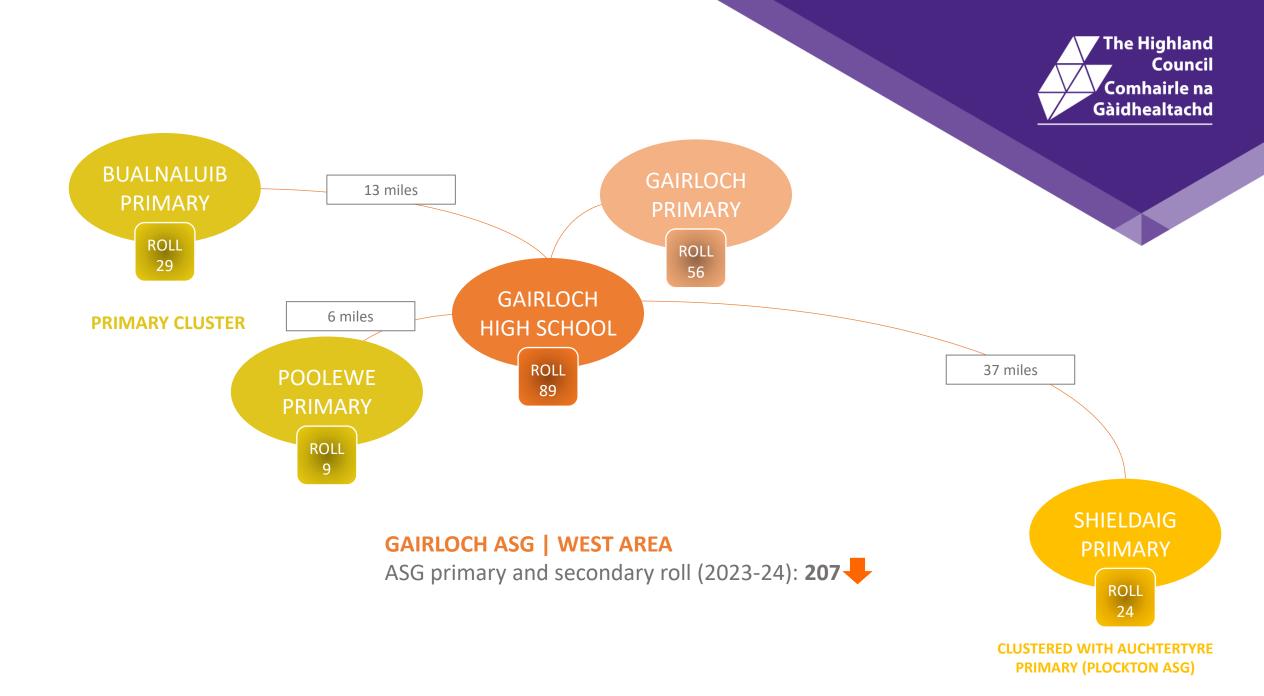
DORNOCH ASG | NORTH AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 425

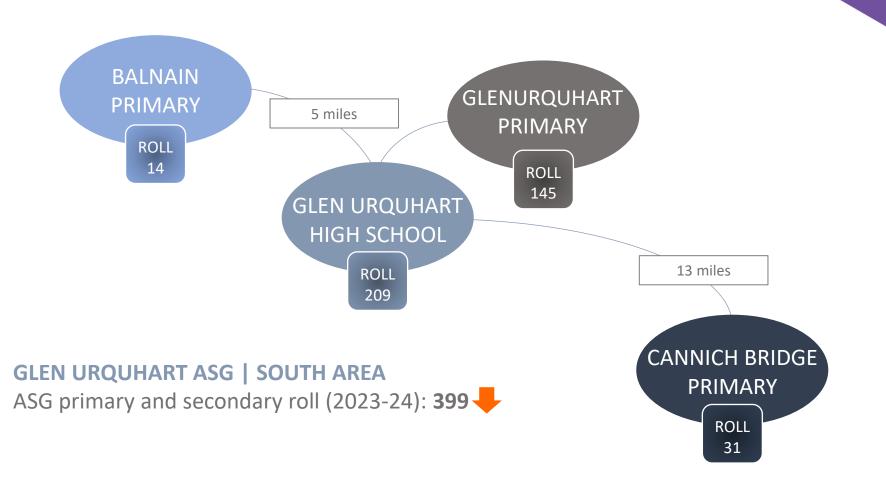


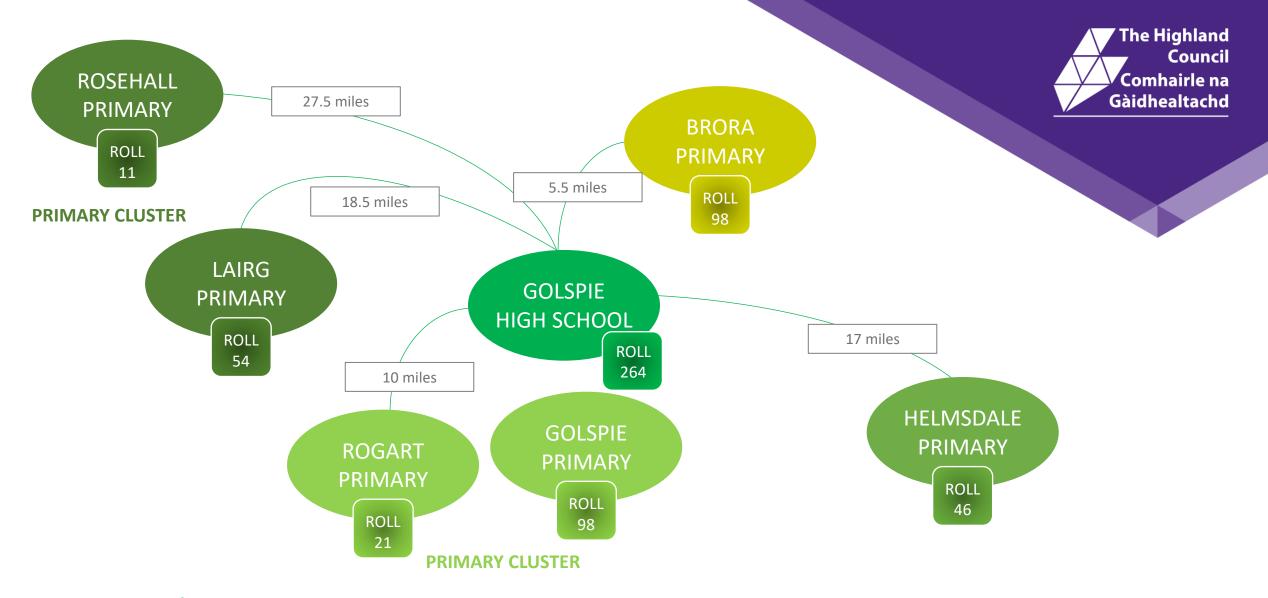






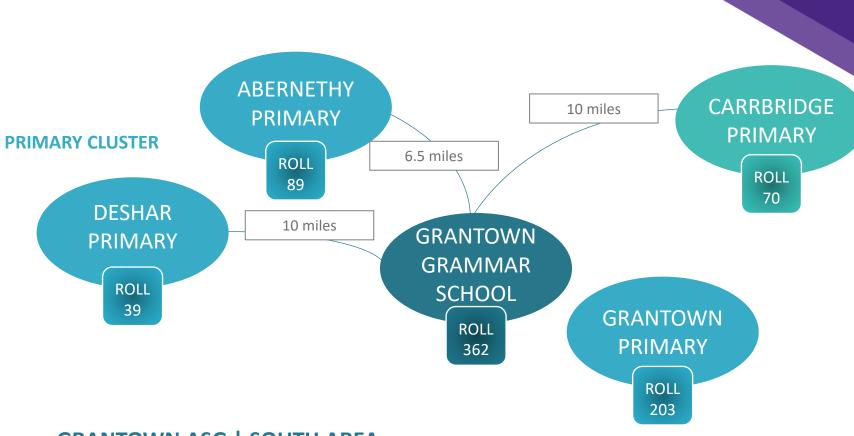






GOLSPIE ASG | NORTH AREA

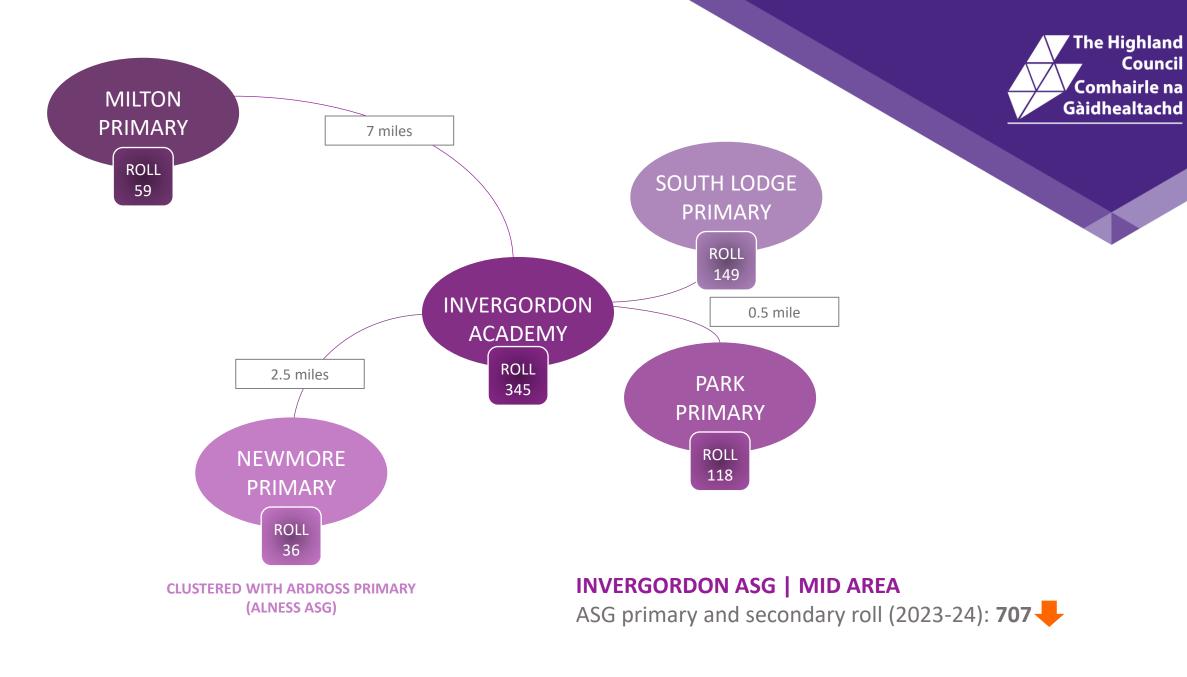
ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): **592**



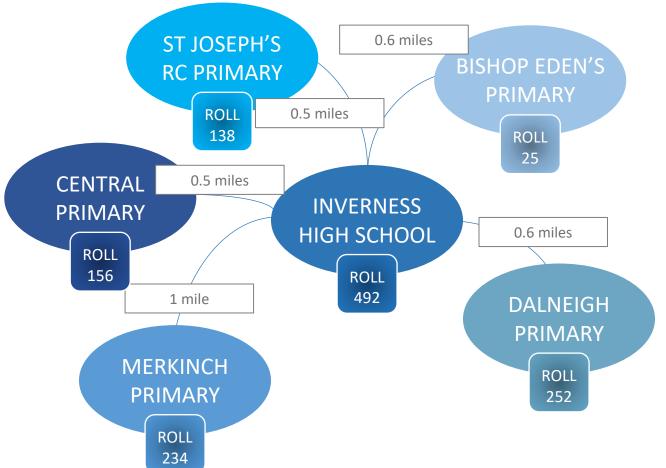


GRANTOWN ASG | SOUTH AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): **763**



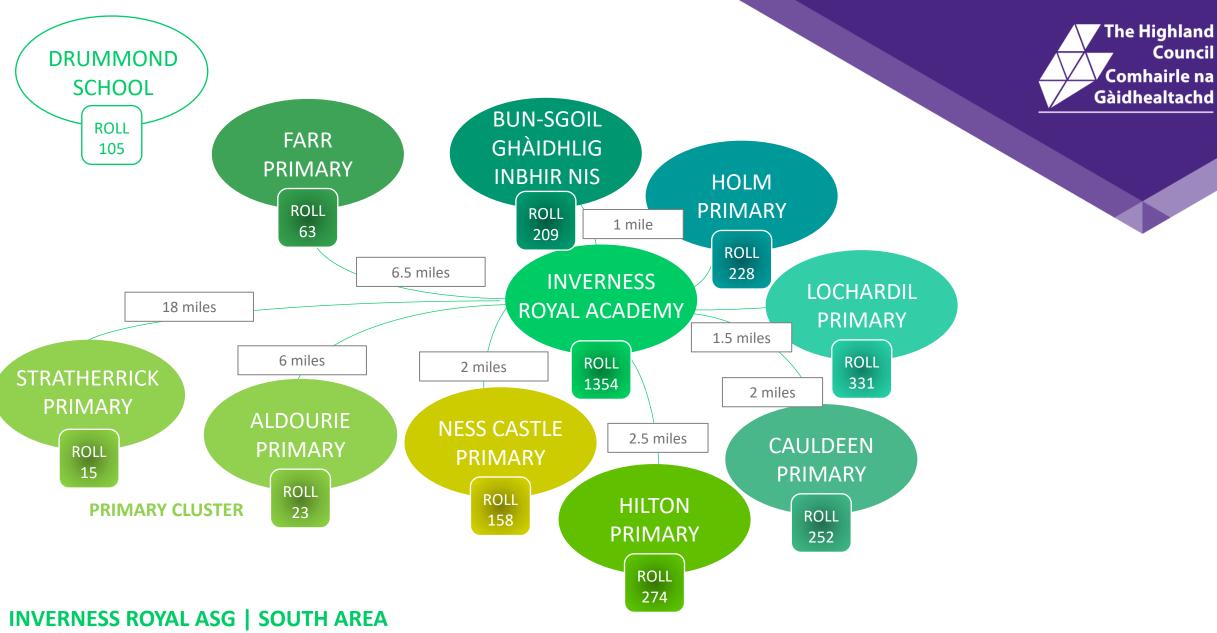




INVERNESS HIGH ASG | SOUTH AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 1,297



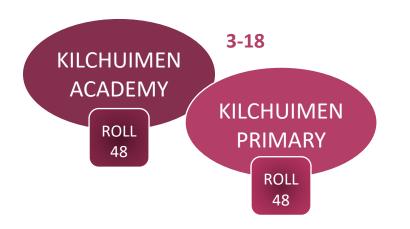


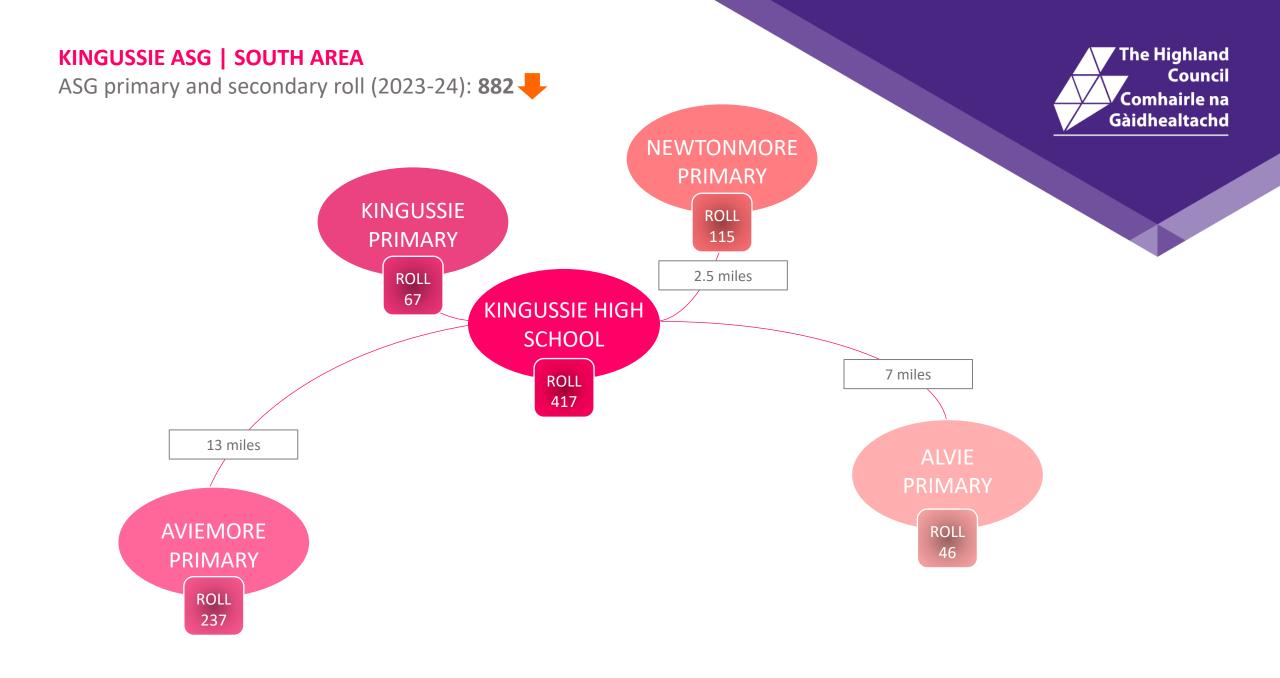
ASG primary, secondary and special school roll (2023-24): 3,012



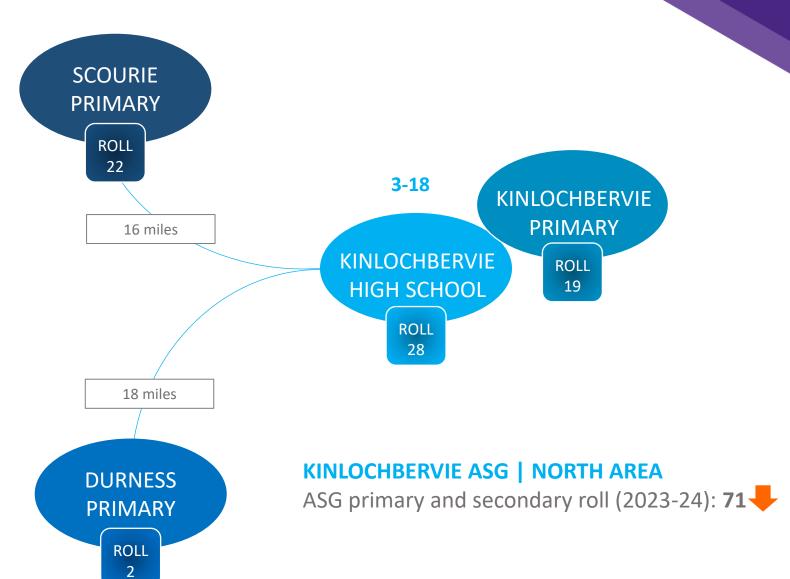
KILCHUIMEN ASG | WEST AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 96 -







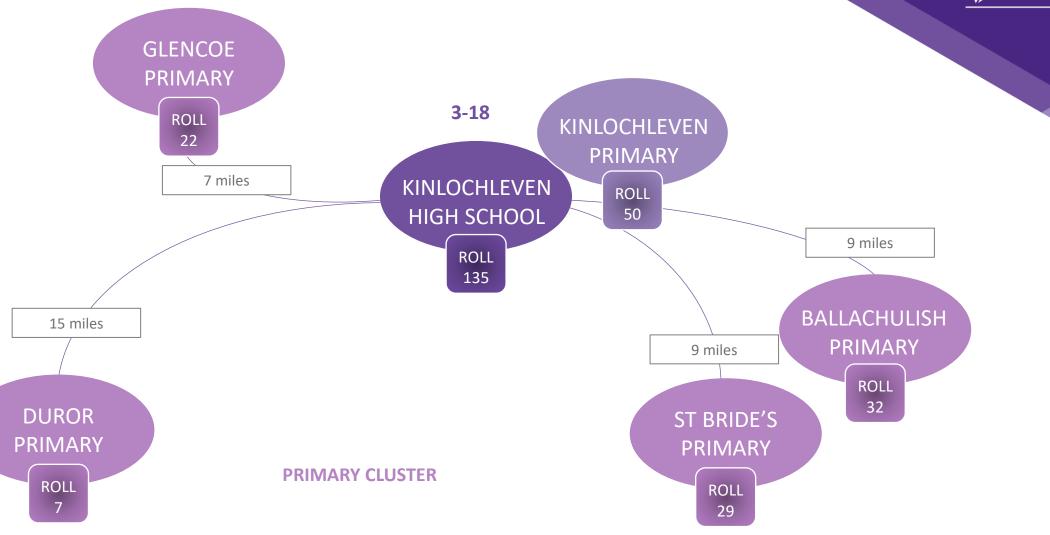


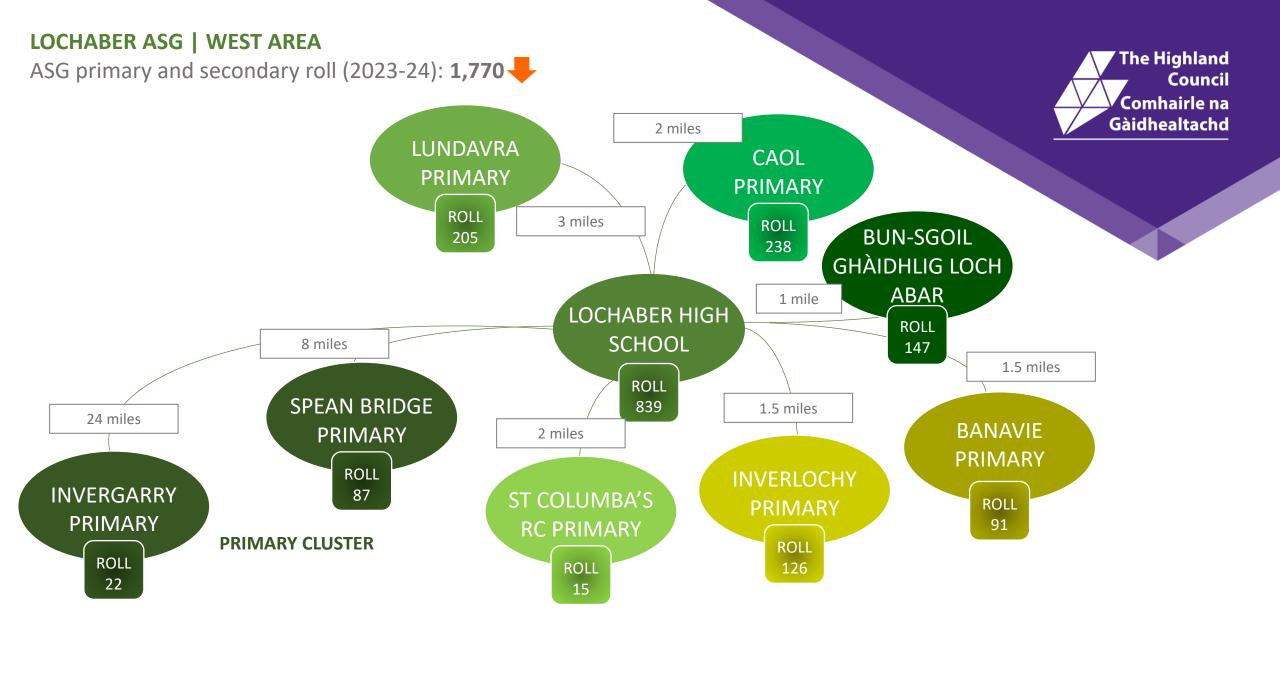


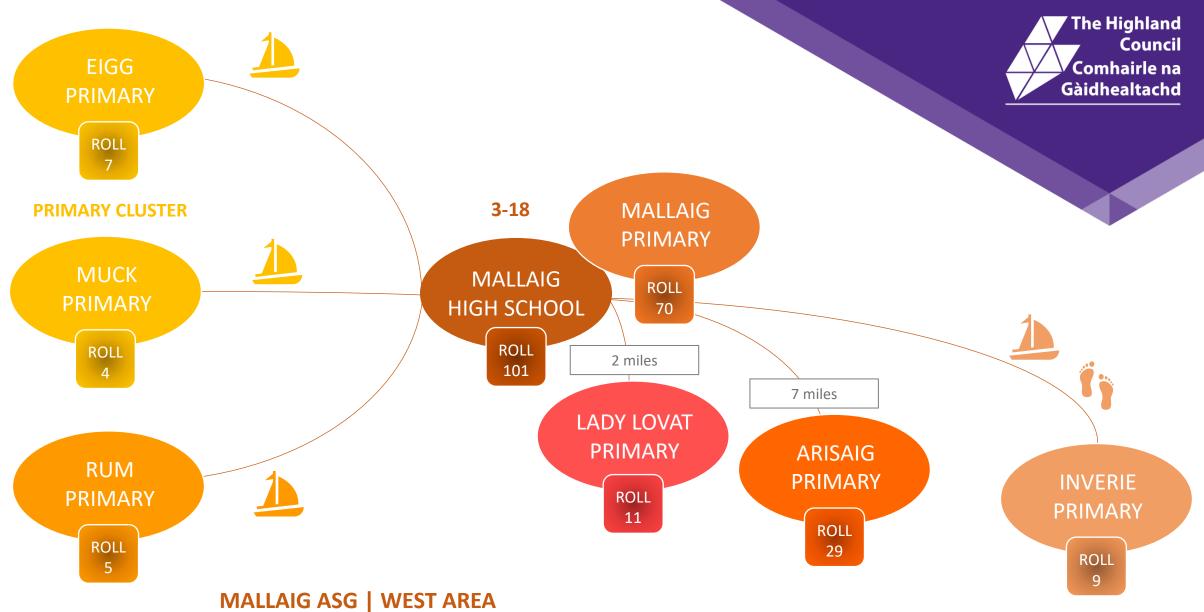
KINLOCHLEVEN ASG | WEST AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 275

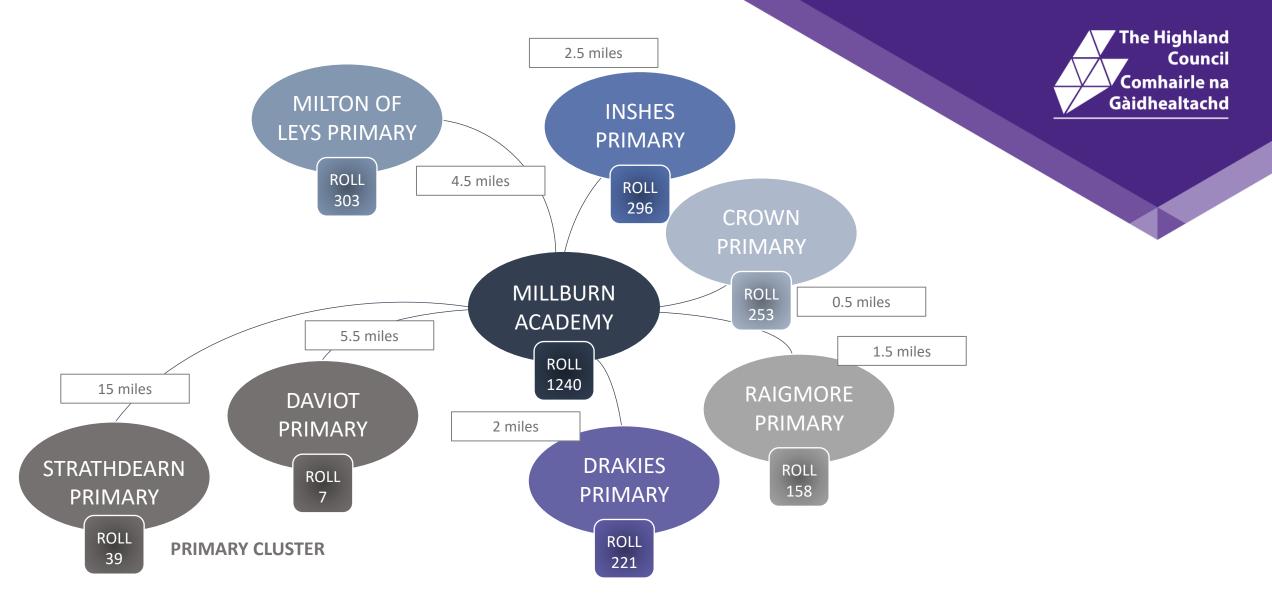








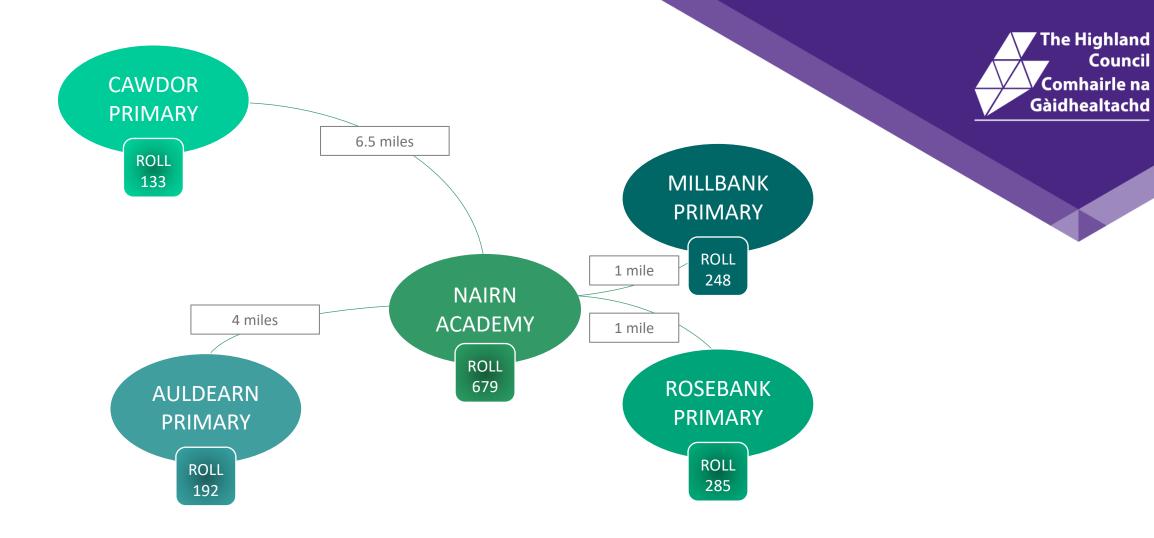
ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 236



MILLBURN ASG | SOUTH AREA

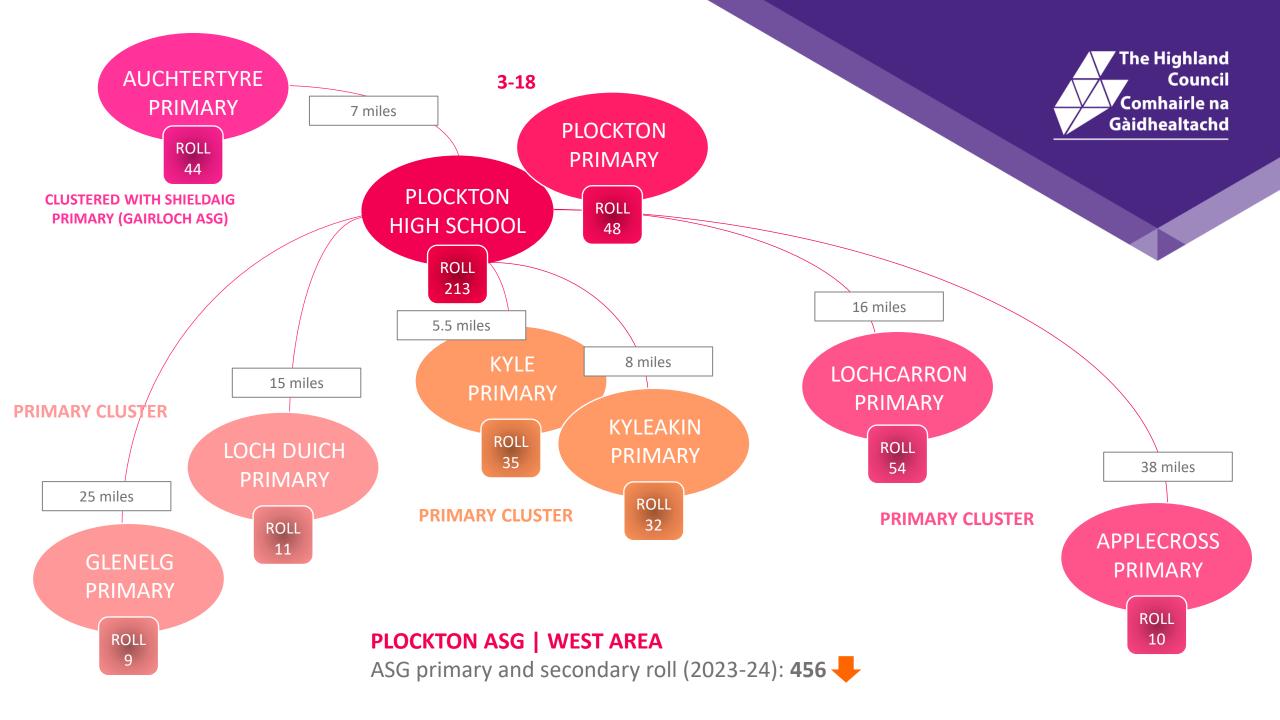
ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 2,517

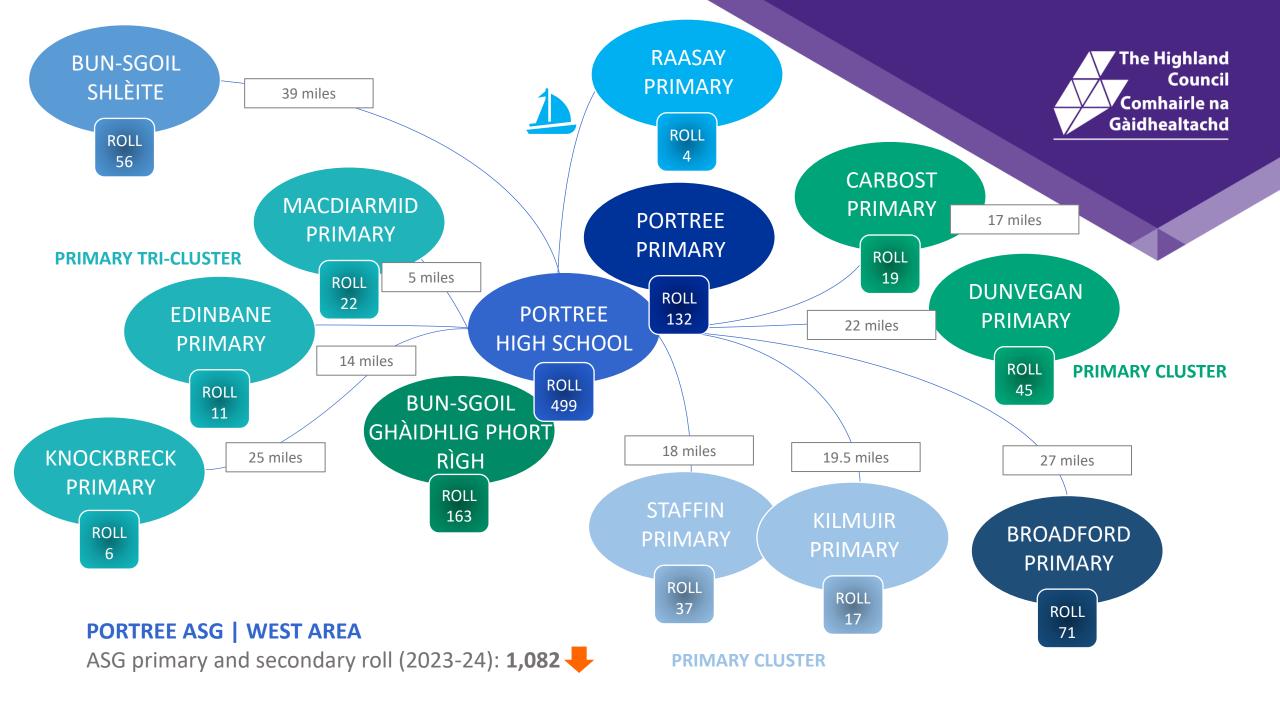


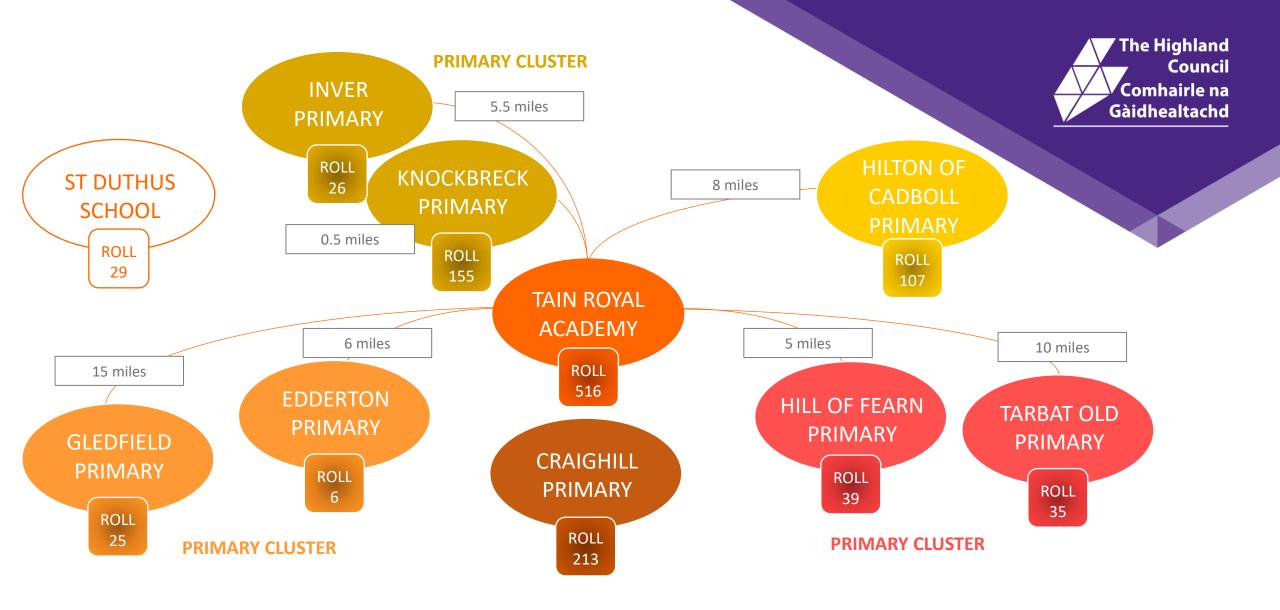


NAIRN ASG | SOUTH AREA

ASG primary and secondary roll (2023-24): 1,537







TAIN ASG | MID AREA

ASG primary, secondary and special school roll (2023-24): 1,151

