

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	EDU/11/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 4 June 2025

Report Title: Statutory Consultation: Merger of the School Nurseries at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools.

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Following conclusion of the statutory consultation process, this report seeks Members' agreement to a recommendation to merge the school nurseries at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Agree to recommend to the Highland Council that the school nurseries at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School are merged to create a new pre-school provision serving both schools.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource – The resource implications were set out at **Appendix B** to the original Proposal Paper, also attached to this report.

3.2 Legal - The proposed closure has been taken forward under the provisions of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

3.3 Risk - The main risks associated with the recommendation relate to the potential for call-in by Scottish Ministers. Officials have sought to mitigate the risk through review and evaluation to ensure that procedurally the requirements of the Act and statutory consultation process have been met.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – None.

3.5 Gaelic – None

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken prior to the consultation being approved by the Education Committee in September 2024. The review of the consultation has not identified any issues requiring an update to the previous screening exercise.

4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there are no significant impacts from this proposal, which concerns a proposed merger of two school Early Learning Classes (ELCs) that are already co-located. One is presently "mothballed" - temporarily closed. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area Conclusion of Screening/Full Assessment

Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and Young People – <i>Positive / Negative / No impact</i>• Children affected by disability – <i>Positive / Negative / No impact</i>• Older adults – <i>Positive / Negative / No impact</i>
Socio-economic	<i>No impact</i>
Human Rights	<i>No impact</i>
Children's Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive impact</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>No impact</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

5. Overview

5.1 **Appendix 2** is the proposal for decision. The original proposal for consultation, and relevant documents for consideration by the Committee, are all also circulated as appendices to this paper. They provide details of all consultation comments received, the note of the public meeting, the report from Education Scotland, and the Council's response to comments arising from the consultation.

5.2 There were 3 written responses to the consultation, two of which expressed support for the proposal. The other raised issues of concern around the detailed operation of the joint nursery. The issues raised are discussed in the "Responses" section of

Appendix 2, and further work on these issues will be undertaken in the event the nurseries do merge.

- 5.3 The meeting was attended by a number of the school staff but by only one parent. No participants expressed direct opposition to the proposal, though several points of detail were raised.
- 5.4 In their report, HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits detailed in the proposal. HM Inspectors consulted senior leaders, staff, parents, and children in both schools who showed strong support for the proposed single nursery provision for both schools. Should the proposal go ahead, current arrangements where children attend the same nursery would be maintained. This would provide clarity and longer-term certainty for parents with the end of the mothballing arrangement for St Columba's RC Nursery. HM Inspectors noted that the larger number of children in the one nursery would provide increased opportunities for social interaction and the forming of age-appropriate relationships. The proposal would provide a shared facility within an already shared campus. A shared nursery could support equal promotion of each primary school rather than children progressing automatically from Caol Nursery to Caol Primary School. This has the potential to increase the roll of St Columba's RC Primary School.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The legislation requires that any proposal for decision must be published at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting at which any decision may be made, to allow time for further representations. The proposal was published on 6 May 2025. Any further representations that are received will be tabled at the meeting for the attention of Members.
- 6.2 Following consideration by the Committee, if the recommendation is agreed, the following timeline will be followed as required by the legislation.
- The recommendation of the Committee will be considered by the full Highland Council.
 - If ratified by full Council, the Council must, within 6 working days of the Committee decision, advise Scottish Ministers of the decision it has reached, provide them with the proposal paper and consultation report, and publish a notice stating that Ministers have been advised and the process through which representations may be made to Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 2 May 2025

Author: Ian Jackson

Appendix 1-Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2-Review of Consultation Report
Appendix 3-Note of Public Meeting
Appendix 4-List of Respondents to Consultation
Appendix 4i-4iii - Copies of individual responses*

Appendix 5-Education Scotland Report
Appendix A-Original Proposal Paper
Appendix B-Financial Analysis

* Appendix 4i is restricted to Elected Members and Council Officers, at respondent's request

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

This Impact Assessment is marked as confidential or sensitive. If you intend to share this document please check with the Responsible Manager who this can be shared with.

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Redesign or change to existing service

Proposal name: Request to proceed to statutory consultation on a merger of the school ELC settings at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School

High level summary of the proposal: A proposed merger of two school ELC settings, which are currently co-located. One is presently "mothballed" - temporarily closed.

Who may be affected by the proposal? Parents of pre-school children who attend the ELC class(es), staff of the two schools.

Start date of proposal:

End date of proposal: 19/08/2025

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? Yes

Which Council services will be impacted by this proposal? People

Does this relate to an existing proposal? No

Author details

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Service: People

Responsible officer details

Name: Anne MacPherson

Job title: Interim Head of Service Resources, Education & Learning Service

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Sign off date: 2024-08-09

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: No impact

Age: No impact

Disability: No impact

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: No impact

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: No impact

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: The proposal will formalise existing temporary arrangements. Pre-school children are the ones mainly affected, and age is not a protected characteristic in the context of school provision.

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: No impact

Places: No impact

Financial: No impact

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: The two ELC settings are already co-located, and the new merged ELC setting will provide the same access to education as already exists.

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?No human rights will be affected

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?No impact

Human rights impact details: As previously mentioned, the proposal will formalise existing arrangements, and will not affect any of the rights listed above.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? No impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? In the future children will attend a joint campus ELC setting rather than two separate ones under the same roof.

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3)

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected: The proposed merger will benefit the children by promoting opportunities for socialisation, and the development of friendship groups.

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? Yes

Is any of this data already processed by the Highland Council? Yes

What is the purpose of the personal data being processed? Parents, children and others will be invited to submit views on the Council's proposal. Responses received will be published on the HC website, though with personal email addresses, personal phone numbers and signatures removed. Respondents will be offered the opportunity to advise that they do not wish their response to be published.

Is there an up-to-date privacy notice available on the Highland Council website? No

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No significant change to current processing

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities?No difference

Is a Full Impact Assessment required?No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂e)? No

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? No

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? No

Provide information regarding your selection above: The proposal involves merging two ELC settings that are already co-located.

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? No

Is a Full Impact Assessment required?No



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE NURSERY CLASSES AT CAOL PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ST. COLUMBA'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, REPLACING THEM WITH A SINGLE PRE-SCHOOL FACILITY SERVING BOTH SCHOOLS

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

to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period:
- Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held at the Caol Joint Campus on 6 November 2024:
- The report from Education Scotland.

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

For the avoidance of doubt, there are no changes proposed in respect of P1-7 provision at either school.

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- Appendix 2** - Minute of public meeting held at Caol Joint Campus on 6 November 2024
- Appendix 3** - List of Responses to Consultation
- Appendix 3i – 3iii** Copies of Responses to Consultation
- Appendix 4** - Report from Education Scotland
- Appendix A** - The Proposal Paper
- Appendix B** - Financial Analysis

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 12 September 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendix B** is an appendix to the original proposal.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 30 September 2024 to Friday 29 November 2024. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Caol Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) Parents/carers of pupils attending St. Columba's RC Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (iii) The Parent Councils of Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School.
- (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (v) Staff of Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School.
- (vi) Caol Community Council
- (vii) The Roman Catholic Church, Parish of St. Mary's, Fort William
- (viii) Trade Union representatives.

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

2.4 A public meeting was held at the Caol Joint Campus on 6 November 2024. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, Facebook page, "X" account, and in the *Lochaber Times*.

2.5 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meetings, officials reviewed the proposals.

2.6 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

3.0 Responses received

3.1 The note of the public meeting is at **Appendix 2**. The meeting was attended by a number of the school staff but by only one parent. No participants expressed direct opposition to the proposal, though several points of detail were raised.

3.2 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**, whilst copies of the actual responses are at **Appendix 3i – 3iii**.

3.3 Three written responses were received. Two expressed support for the proposal. The other raised issues regarding the detailed operation of the joint nursery, should be proposal be implemented.

4.0 Issues raised during the consultation period

4.1 The issues raised during consultation concerned the future operation of the merged nursery. These are detailed at Issues 1-6 below, with the responses from the Council following each.

Issue 1

Who would be responsible for the management of the new setting? Who would support the staff, organise PDR meetings and staff meetings, and act as the point of contact for child protection concerns?

Response 1

We would envisage that the existing management of Caol Primary School, would take the lead role in managing the nursery. That would allow existing practice to continue, and the majority of children at the nursery will be going on to Caol Primary School. The precise delineation of the role of the Head Teacher at St. Columba's will be determined in discussion with staff, should the merger be approved.

Issue 2

Would there be a new uniform introduced?

Response 2

Nursery children are of course not required to wear school uniform, though we appreciate some parents like their children to do so. Children who are already at the nursery will not be asked to dispense with their existing uniforms.

It would be appropriate, in due course to create a new uniform for the nursery children, possibly a version without a school badge. The detail of this can be worked out if the merger is approved.

Issue 3

Would there be any changes to current staff contracts?

Response 3

No changes will be required to current staff contracts as a result of the proposed merger.

Issue 4

Would there be an expectation that staff participate in whole school events for both schools?

Response 4

The nursery is non-denominational, so there would be no expectation that the nursery children would participate in religious events at St. Columba's. Otherwise, we would expect the schools to be treated equally in terms of enrolments, open days etc. The two Head Teachers can come to an agreement following discussion, and we anticipate this could happen without intervention from the Council centrally.

Issue 5

Has there been a proposal for a new name for the setting if we merge?

Response 5

A new name would be required if the new joint nursery is created, in order to reflect the change. Usually this is decided after input from the staff and children. This was what happened for example, when Lundavra Primary School was created.

Issue 6

Are alternative proposals being considered?

Response 6

Alternatives were considered as part of the original Proposal, as follows:

- The status quo is always considered, St. Columba's RC Primary has suffered a declining roll, with particularly small numbers in the nursery. The nursery was mothballed during the 2023-24 school session, due to low numbers, and mothballing has continued into the current session, pending the outcome of the current consultation. The nursery class at Caol Primary, whilst still healthy, has also suffered a decline, and is projected to fall further.
- It would have been possible for the Council to consult on simply closing St. Columba's nursery, but it is our view that a new joint nursery would be the best option in terms of securing the future of St. Columba's Primary.
- It would not be appropriate to have continued the current mothballing arrangement indefinitely, and this would have been contrary to statutory guidance.

5.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 5.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 5.2 In their report, HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits detailed in the proposal. HM Inspectors consulted senior leaders, staff, parents and children in both schools who showed strong support for the proposed single nursery provision for both schools. Should the proposal go ahead, current arrangements where children attend the same nursery would be maintained. This would provide clarity and longer-term certainty for parents with the end of the mothballing arrangement for St Columba's RC Nursery.
- 5.3 HM Inspectors noted that the larger number of children in the one nursery would provide increased opportunities for social interaction and the forming of age-

appropriate relationships. The proposal would provide a shared facility within an already shared campus. A shared nursery could support equal promotion of each primary school rather than children progressing automatically from Caol Nursery to Caol Primary School. This has the potential to increase the roll of St Columba's RC Primary School. Should the proposal proceed, The Highland Council should work with all stakeholders to address uncertainties about important issues raised by stakeholders as a matter of priority. These include who has management responsibility of the new nursery, children's uniform, the name of the nursery and potential uses for spaces previously used for St Columba's nursery class.

- 5.4 The issues raised by Education Scotland are, for the most part, the same issues that were raised during public consultation, and addressed at Section 4 above. The use of the nursery area at St. Columba's is something for the school's Head Teacher to address

6.0 Effects on School Transport

- 6.1 Highland Council does not provide transport for pre-school children, but in any case, there are no effects on transport, as the two nurseries are located on a shared site.

7.0 Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 7.1 An assessment of the effects on school transport can be found at S.7 of the Proposal Paper, and the assessment has not changed since.

8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 The Proposal Paper described how the joint campus contains extensive community facilities. The merger of the two nursery classes will not have any impact on the wider community or on users of the community facilities.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 9.1 Two alleged inaccuracies were raised. One respondent commented that 39 children were enrolled for Caol Nursery for the 2024-25 session, not 32 as stated, and that the nursery has 5 EYP's on a 23-hour contract rather than the 6 stated in the proposal.
- 9.2 The number of children in a nursery setting constantly fluctuates, not least because there are at least 3 different entry dates during a school session, as well as children on split placements. At the time the Proposal Paper was drafted, 32 children had been reported, by the school, as being enrolled at the nursery.
- 9.3 The Authority listed 6 members of staff on 23-hour weekly contracts. However, it appears that one of the six actually has a contract for 25 hours per week.

9.4 Highland Council has carefully considered the above issues, but concludes that neither issue materially affects the educational benefits that will arise from the Proposal. Therefore, the Council proposes to take no further action in response.

10.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

10.1 The consultation exercise has not identified any significant opposition to the Proposal. Aside from the pupil responses, only three written representations were received, two of which supported the Proposal.

11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 26 June 2025 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on **16 July 2025**. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 20 August 2025 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.

11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to merge the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School is asked to email schoolclosure@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 16 July 2025**.

11.3 Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

12.0 Legal issues

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

12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland. The above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

13.0 Conclusion

13.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 4 and 6 above.

- 13.2 Education Scotland staff visited Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document, the written responses, and the note of the public meeting.
- 13.3 The Assistant Chief Executive (People) on reviewing all of the submissions, the notes of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; concludes that the Proposal to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools, will result in educational benefits and should be implemented.

14.0 Recommendation

- 14.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council proceeds with the course of action set out at Paragraph 13.3 above.

Kate Lackie
Assistant Chief Executive (People)
6 May 2025

**CONSULTATION MEETING – PROPOSAL TO MERGE THE NURSERY CLASSES
AT CAOL PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ST. COLUMBA’S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**HELD AT ST. COLUMBA’S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL – 6 NOVEMBER 2024 –
6.30pm**

MINUTES OF MEETING

Panel

Cllr. Kate Willis - Chairperson
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Mhairi MacDonald, Area Education Manager

In Attendance

Colette MacLean – Acting Head Teacher, St. Columba’s RC PS
Leah Burns, Head Teacher, St. Columba’s RC PS (on maternity leave at the time of
the meeting)
Anne-Marie Dillon, Clerical Assistant, St. Columba’s RC PS
Sharon MacDonald, Head Teacher, Caol Primary School
Kerry Lamont, Depute Head Teacher. Caol Primary School

Barbara Daly, Education Scotland
1 member of the public

Apologies: Hayley Brown, Senior Manager, Early Years
Tracy McIlvar, ELC Commissioner, West Area

The Chairperson – Cllr. Kate Willis introduced herself as an elected councillor and
Chair of the Lochaber Area Committee, and welcomed everyone to the consultation
meeting.

She continued as follows:

The purpose of the meeting - is to discuss the proposal to discontinue the nursery
classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba’s Roman Catholic Primary School,
and to replace them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools. We can
consider other options or alternatives which those present would like to raise.

Beside me are Mhairi MacDonald, Area Education Manager for the Council “West”
area and Ian Jackson, Education Officer – Resources. Mr Jackson and Mrs
MacDonald will shortly make a couple of quick presentations, and following these, I

will open to the meeting for questions and observations. To begin with, Mr Jackson will now describe the consultation process.

(Ian Jackson) As the Chair has outlined, the Council is proposing to merge the two nursery classes at Caol and St. Columba's. This type of proposal is subject to a statutory consultation process, of which this meeting is part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 29 November, and I would urge anyone who wants to submit views in writing to do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

My colleague Mhairi MacDonald will shortly set out the educational basis for the Council's proposal, but before that I will briefly describe the rest of the consultation process.

The formal process has a number of stages. Once the public consultation ends on 29 November, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form their own view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact the school, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. That part of the process will take place between 13 and 31 January 2025. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

After all that, there would still be a further opportunity for representations to be made to Scottish Ministers. All school or nursery class closures in Scotland have to be ratified by Ministers, and they have 8 weeks from the date of the Council's decision to themselves decide whether to ratify the proposal or to refer it to what's called a school closure review panel. During the first 3 weeks of that 8-week period, Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person on whether the decision should be called in, or not called in, for review by a panel. Advice about how to make those representations will be provided at the relevant time.

In summary, I would say that the consultation process provides multiple opportunities for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made.

The Chair then asked Mhairi MacDonald to discuss the educational benefits.

(Mhairi MacDonald) – The main educational benefits relate to the larger number of children that would attend the joint nursery. The effect on Caol Primary would be minimal, but there would be a significant benefit to the children at St. Columba’s Nursery.

The new nursery would be a single setting feeding into the 2 schools, and will operate to a principle of equality between them. Although St. Columba’s is a denominational school, the early years facility is non-denominational. Co-operation between the management of the two schools will be vital to the success of the new nursery. I have every confidence in the current management and in their ability to work together to deliver the best outcomes for children. I would hope that this new model will increase the number of children entering into P1 at St. Columba’s.

There will need to be discussions on the name of the new EY facility, and we will involve stakeholders in that in due course.

Lastly, I will just make it clear that there will no effect on the current staffing arrangements of the Early Years class.

The Chairperson opened the meeting to the floor.

Q1 – Have there been any written responses so far?

A1 (Ian) – Not yet, though there is a pattern with these consultations, where responses tend to arrive in the last few days.

Q2 – I’m a bit concerned that the use of the term “closure” is a red herring. It’s more of a merger than a closure. I wondered whether we can avoid using the term “closure” as people find it alarming.

A2 (Ian) – The point is well-made. We will have to continue using the word “closure” to a certain extent, just because of the way the legislation is written. I think though we will look to minimise its use.

Q3 – What will you do about school jumpers? At the moment the nursery children wear Caol Primary jumpers. Also, what would the merged nursery be called?

A3 (Ian) – We will need to discuss those issues. It sounds like we will need to get together with the HTs and the Senior EY Manager in the Council, to thrash out detailed issues like those.

(Mhairi) - We would also need to speak to parents and the wider community.

Q4 – I can see the benefits of the merger. My two girls are past the nursery stage, but attend St. Columba's. Obviously the numbers at St. Columba's are small, and my children tell me how much they enjoy being out in the joint playground where they can join with the Caol Primary children, so I accept what you say about the benefits of children mixing together. When would the merger take effect?

A4 – (Ian) – The current consultation ends on 29 November, and Education Scotland's consultation will take place from 13-31 January. We delayed it until after the Christmas/New Year period, because that's a time when parents have other things on their minds! Once completed, we have to go back to our Education Committee. There is a meeting in February 2025 but we won't be in time for that as the papers have to be published in advance of the meeting. There's another meeting on 4 June, so that's probably when the decision will be taken. After that it has to go to Scottish Ministers for 8 weeks, so we would aim to have the new nursery in place for the start of the 2025-26 school session in August 2025.

Q5 – How would that work with enrolment?

A5 – (Ian) – We would continue to mothball St. Columba's until the outcome of the current consultation.

Leah Burns commented that she would keen to advertise St. Columba's to prospective nursery parents, with a view to eventual enrolment in P1. It was agreed that would be added to the list for future discussion on detailed arrangements. **Mhairi** suggested there might be a case for a joint meeting with prospective parents.

Q6 – What would happen if the merger was refused, either by the elected councillors or by Ministers?

A6 (Ian) – We could not then close St. Columba's nursery class on a permanent basis. Technically we could probably continue to mothball it, but if the permanent closure was rejected, there would be moral pressure on us to re-open the separate nursery at St. Columba's. Not doing so would go against the spirit of the decision to reject the closure.

Q7 – If there is to be a joint nursery, you will need to decide who the manager will be.

A7 – This would be another for the list of detailed issues, for further discussion.

There being no further questions, the Chairperson thanked everyone for coming, and reminded everyone that representations should be sent to Ian Jackson, email Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk (address circulated in the letter), or via the online form, to arrive **no later than Friday 29 November 2024**. She also advised that the record of the meeting will be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee where it is intended that the report of the meeting, plus

any submissions/representations and the view of Education Scotland on the proposal, will be considered.

List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation Exercise – Proposal to Merge the Nursery Classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba’s RC Primary School

1. Confidential - restricted to Elected Members and Council Officers, at respondent's request
2. St. Columba’s RC Primary School Parent Council
3. Fr. David Connor

Dear Sirs

We refer to your letter of 30th September 2024 and the consultative paper regarding the proposal to replace the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School with a single nursery class serving both schools.

St Columba's R.C. Primary School Parent Council are happy to confirm that they firmly support this proposal. In particular, we broadly agree with the educational benefits of a merged nursery facility for the two schools, as detailed in Appendix A of the consultative paper.

We have direct experience of the positive impact that the shared campus of both schools has had for the pupils in our school. Pupils have had increased social interactions and made friends with pupils at both schools at breaktimes and lunchtimes. There have also been campus wide activities and events, such as a Halloween Disco and a Christmas Party, which pupils from both schools have enjoyed.

There have been many benefits to the joint campus and we believe it has helped the children at both schools build relationships with other pupils. We believe that there would be a key benefit of beginning this journey in the nursery setting. This would allow these friendships and relationships to start at an early stage, and this would then continue as pupils progress through their primary school years.

Kind regards

St. Columba's R.C. Primary School Parent Council

Dear Sirs

My name is Father David Connor, and I am the Parish Priest for St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Fort William. Part of my role involves contributing to and supporting St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School.

I am aware of the current consultation in regard to the proposal to replace the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School with a single nursery class serving both schools.

I write to confirm that I support this proposal. St Columba's nursery is currently mothballed, and I believe that this proposal will help to improve the sustainability of St Columba's R.C. Primary School. This proposal gives the children and parents of the nursery the opportunity to get to know the staff and children of St Columba's R.C. Primary School and it will help them get a greater understanding of what the school can offer and introduce them to the great work that the school does.

Kind regards

Father David Connor



Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility, serving both schools.

January 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of a proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

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

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 6 November 2024 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the site of Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The formal consultation process to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St Columba's RC Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools, ran from 30 September to 29 November 2024. The proposal paper was made available to a wide range of stakeholders including parents and carers within the school

catchment areas and on council website. Interested parties were invited to respond to the statutory consultation by letter or electronically. There were three written responses. Two responses were in favour of the proposal and one sought clarification on operational matters for the new nursery, should the proposal go ahead. The council held a public meeting, which one member of the public attended. Overall respondents were in favour of the proposal and would welcome more information about the new nursery, for example who would assume responsibility for its management.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits detailed in the proposal. HM Inspectors consulted senior leaders, staff, parents and children in both schools who showed strong support for the proposed single nursery provision for both schools. Should the proposal go ahead, current arrangements where children attend the same nursery would be maintained. This would provide clarity and longer-term certainty for parents with the end of the mothballing arrangement for St Columba's RC Nursery.

3.2 Since the nursery class at St Columba's RC Primary School was mothballed, all nursery aged children from the shared campus currently attend the nursery at Caol Primary School. Senior leaders and staff at both schools welcome the proposal as it would bring certainty to the current arrangements. They recognise the importance of quality early learning experiences and the value of children being together in a larger group. Senior leaders and staff at St Columba's RC Primary School feel that a new, shared nursery facility would provide clarity for parents and allow them to make more informed choices about where their child will start P1. This has the potential to increase the number of children attending St Columba's RC Primary School through equal promotion of both schools. They would also like to be involved in decisions about how spaces previously used for the nursery within St Columba's RC Primary School will be utilised to their full potential to increase educational benefits for children. Staff in both schools would welcome clarity about who will manage the new nursery should the proposal go ahead. This is creating considerable uncertainty for individuals.

3.3 Children from both schools recognise benefits of the proposal. They recognise young children would have increased opportunities to make friends within a larger peer group. Children from both schools identify that there are two distinct schools as part of the Caol campus and are proud of their individual school. They recognise the sense in sharing a nursery in a similar way that the dining hall and school gym are shared within the campus. Most children recognise the importance of having a separate uniform for nursery children to help them identify with the nursery and not a particular school. A few children would like to be consulted about how spaces previously used for the nursery at St Columba's RC Primary School are utilised should the proposal go ahead. Parents in both schools also recognise the benefits of a shared nursery facility. They suggest that this may help the nursery have its own identity. They also feel that a new, shared nursery facility may enhance opportunities for the schools to work together. Should the proposal go ahead, parents would welcome clarity about transparency in decision making about who would manage the new facility, and involvement in deciding a new name.

3.4 Although all nursery provision is non-denominational the parish priest who supports St Columba's RC Primary School is supportive of the proposal. The view is that should the proposal be accepted, nursery children and parents will have an increased understanding of St Columba's, and this may support the sustainability of the school roll.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined in this proposal. The larger number of children in the one nursery would provide increased opportunities for social interaction and the forming of age-appropriate relationships. The proposal would provide a shared facility within an already shared campus. A shared nursery could support equal promotion of each primary school rather than children progressing automatically from Caol Nursery to Caol Primary School. This has the potential to increase the roll of St Columba's RC Primary School. Should the proposal proceed, The Highland Council should work with all stakeholders to address uncertainties about important issues raised by stakeholders as a matter of priority. These include who has management responsibility of the new nursery, children's uniform, the name of the nursery and potential uses for spaces previously used for St Columba's nursery class.

HM Inspectors
January 2025

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, and to replace them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools.
- The proposed change, if approved, will take place for the beginning of the 2025-26 school session.
- For the avoidance of doubt, there are no changes proposed in respect of P1-7 provision at either school.

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

Caol Primary School, Caol Joint Campus, Glenkingie Street, Caol, PH33 7DP
St. Columba's RC Primary School, Caol Joint Campus, Glenkingie Street, Caol, PH33 7DP

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Education Business Support Team,
Highland Council
Charles Kennedy Building
Fort William
PH33 6RQ
Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please contact the Education Business Support Team, Highland Council, Charles Kennedy Building, Fort William, PH33 6RQ

Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Caol Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) Parents/carers of pupils attending St. Columba's RC Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (iii) The Parent Councils of Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School.
- (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (v) Staff of Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School.
- (vi) Caol Community Council
- (vii) The Roman Catholic Church, Parish of St. Mary's, Fort William
- (viii) Trade Union representatives.

Advertisement in Local Media

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the local press and on the Highland Council's Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 30 September 2024 and will end on 29 November 2024. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held at 6.30pm on 6 November 2024 at the Caol/St. Columba's campus. Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Education Service.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be considered. A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council website. The meeting will also be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

Meetings with Pupils and Staff

School staff will arrange to discuss the proposal with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. Questions, responses, and views will be taken down and the results published in the Consultation Report.

Responses to the Proposals

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions on the Proposals to:

Education Business Support Team,
Highland Council
Charles Kennedy Building
Fort William
PH33 6RQ

Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, to be found at:

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>

Appendix A

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil,” “parent,” “carer,” “relative,” “former pupil,” “teacher in school,” “member of the community” etc. However, it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Highland Council.” Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available. All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, 29 November 2024 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will be sent to Education Scotland the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 13 January 2025, a copy of any written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period. Education Scotland will also receive the summary note of the public meeting that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 31 January 2025. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website and at the affected school and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council’s considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Education Committee of Highland Council, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report, the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time the Council intends to publish its Report in March 2025, prior to submission to the Education Committee in May 2025. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Appendix A

Any proposal approved at the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

As the proposal involves the closure of a school, Highland Council would be required to notify Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers would have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person.

Note on Corrections

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal Paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction or the reissuing of the Proposal or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised.

DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Neither of the affected schools are rural schools within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. St. Columba's RC Primary School is a denominational school where education is conducted in the interest of the Roman Catholic Church. However, the pre-school nursery class is not operated under principles of denominational education.

Reasons for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - Caol Primary School and St. Columba's RC Primary School share a single campus, but the latter school has suffered a declining roll, with particularly small numbers in the nursery. The nursery was mothballed during the 2023-24 school session, due to low numbers, and mothballing has continued into the current session, pending the outcome of the current consultation.
 - Consequently, no children have attended the nursery class at St. Columba's since the end of the 2022-23 school session.
 - The nursery class at Caol Primary has healthy numbers, with 32 enrolled for the 2024-25 session. This does however represent a fall in the nursery roll compared to 2023-24, when there were 53 children attending.
 - It is therefore the Council's view that a single nursery facility would be appropriate for the two schools and would offer educational benefits. The single facility could provide a high-quality educational facility for children attending, irrespective of which school parents chose for their children at the P1 stage.
 - Children attending the joint campus would have the opportunity to attend either school when they transfer to P1. This is the case anyway, but it will be made clear to all parents that the merged nursery is associated with both schools on the campus. Transition arrangements will be in place for children attending the nursery class, to each P1 class in the associated schools.
 - Although in legal terms the proposal represents a closure of both nurseries and the opening of a new merged one, in practical terms the service will continue from its current location, with the current staff.

Current Details – St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School

- 3.1 St. Columba's RC Primary School is a denominational school within the Caol Joint Campus, in the village of Caol, near Fort William. The Joint Campus, which opened in 2015, is shared with Caol Primary School. The building

Appendix A

addresses, in terms of design and layout, the specific requirements for the appropriate identity and integration of the two faculties within the campus. The school shares some facilities with Caol Primary School –Reception Area, Kitchen and Dining facilities, Assembly Hall, Gymnasium, and external play areas.

- 3.2 St. Columba's RC Primary was formed from a merger of two previous schools, Lochyside RC Primary and Fort William RC Primary. At the time the new campus was designed, a separate nursery was agreed for the new RC school.
- 3.3 The current P1-7 roll of St. Columba's RC Primary School is 11 pupils.
- 3.4 The nursery accommodation at the school comprises a single room with an outdoor area. When last in operation the facility was registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 30 children aged three years to those not yet attending primary school. The room is currently being utilised by the school to provide Additional Support for Learning.

Current Details – Caol Primary School

- 4.1 Caol Primary School forms the other part of the Caol joint campus. The school's new accommodation, opened in 2015, replaced the previous buildings on the same site, which had been of mainly 1960s construction. The new complex includes extensive additional facilities including a community centre, STEM Room, Room 13 Art Studio and Highlife Highland Library on site.
- 4.2 The P1-7 Roll of the school is 216, whilst the nursery classrooms accommodate 32 children at present. The nursery accommodation at the school comprises two rooms with an outdoor area. The facility is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 60 children aged three years to those not yet attending primary school.
- 4.3 Currently the staffing of the Caol PS nursery comprises:
 - Senior Early Years Practitioner – 35 hours per week
 - 2 Early Years Practitioners at 25 hours per week each
 - 6 Early Years Practitioners at 23 hours per week each

Informal Consultation

- 5.1 On 16 May, Council officials met with three parents who had expressed an interest in enrolling their children in the nursery class at St. Columba's, for session 2024-25. The local parish priest also attended the meeting.
- 5.2 The parents were generally opposed to the nursery class being mothballed or closed. The parents had a commitment to education with a Catholic ethos. They acknowledged that the pre-school stage was non-denominational but were concerned at the potential lack of "follow-through" from the nursery into St. Columba's, as opposed to Caol Primary. Parents also felt the smaller setting would suit their own children better. The parish priest was concerned

about the low roll in the school, and that if the school lose the nursery, the school itself may end up closing. That would be a matter of deep concern to the RC Church.

Educational Benefits

- 6.1 The Council believes that the larger numbers of children available at a merged nursery facility for the two schools, would be of benefit. The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.
- 6.2 The merger would have a minimal effect on the children at the Caol Primary nursery, given that facility tends to have a healthy roll anyway. The effect would be more beneficial to the small number of children who might previously have attended the nursery class at St. Columba's.
- 6.3 The principle of equality of treatment between the two schools will be a vital part of the operation of the new nursery. At present, the mothballing of the nursery class at St. Columba's means that children all attend Caol Nursery class, where there is an expectation that children will transfer to Caol Primary for P1. The proposal, if implemented, will result in a single pre-school setting for the two schools, that takes into account the priorities of both schools and works to achieve a shared vision for the ELC provision. The management of both schools will play an equal role in transition events, and the staff of the nursery itself will highlight to parents that children may be enrolled in either Caol Primary or St. Columba's RC Primary. It is to be hoped that this model will lead to an increase in the school roll at St. Columba's RC PS, compared with the current scenario of the school nursery being mothballed.
- 6.4 The Council is mindful that St Columba's Primary School is denominational and makes provision for Roman Catholic education. There will be no effect on the provision of denominational education in the Primary School. The nursery itself is non-denominational and as such is open to anyone in the community. Concerns expressed by the Roman Catholic Church are addressed at paragraph 12.3 below.
- 6.5 Discussions on the name for the new merged nursery would take place with Stakeholders, should be proposal be approved.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 7.1 As the nursery class at St. Columba's is already "mothballed" there will be no impact on school management arrangements from a formal closure of the facility.
- 7.2 Likewise, there will be no impact on current staffing arrangements. The current early years staff at the Caol Primary nursery class will continue in their current job roles.

- 7.3 The current staffing at the Caol Primary nursery class is set out at paragraph 4.3 above. If anything, a formal merger of the two nurseries protects the current levels at Caol, since splitting the children between two facilities would mean less children in each.

Effects from differing Transport Arrangements

- 8.1 Highland Council does not provide transport for pre-school children, but in any case, there are no effects on transport, as the two nurseries are located on a shared site.

Effect on the Local Community and Other Users of the Facilities

- 9.1 Sections 3 and 4 above describes how the joint campus contains extensive community facilities. The merger of the two nursery classes will not have any impact on the wider community or on users of the community facilities.

Financial Consequences

- 10.1 The Table at **Appendix B** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. As the nursery class at St. Columba's is currently mothballed, the savings identified are already being made and no additional saving would arise to the Council from closure.

Impact Assessments

- 11.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no impact on the following Equality areas:
- Disability
 - Gender
 - Gender reassignment
 - Pregnancy or Maternity
 - Marriage/Civil Partnership
 - Race
 - Religion or Belief
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Looked After Children
 - Young Carers
 - Children and Young People Living in Deprivation
- 11.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to the pre-school stages of a primary school and as such primarily affects children in the 3-4 age group, and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in the area concerned. No negative age-related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of school provision.
- 11.3 The proposal has been assessed against the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Guidance and the Rights of Children as set out by the UNCRC. The proposal

Appendix A

does not conflict with the rights of children. Item 12 on the UNCRC list, *“When important decisions are being made that affect you, you have the right to give your opinion and to be taken seriously”* will be met through discussion with the children during the consultation exercise.

- 11.4 The proposal will have no impact on any of the criteria identified as potentially affecting climate change.
- 11.5 Any personal information received during consultation will be handled in accordance with Data Protection rules. All those who respond to consultation are advised that their response will be public, unless they request otherwise.

Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 12.1 As the nursery class at St. Coumba’s is already mothballed, the children who might have attended the facility are already attending the nursery at Caol Primary, or alternative provision in the local area, and will not experience any change from the proposal.
- 12.2 During informal discussions with parents and the Roman Catholic Church, the main concern identified with the proposal was that the merger would lead to children transferring only to Caol Primary School for P1 and not to St. Columba’s, something which was perceived as posing a threat to the future of the latter school.
- 12.3 The Council will address this concern by applying the principle of equal treatment between the two schools, set out at paragraph 6.3 above. It is entirely possible that the future school roll at St. Columba’s may be boosted as a result.

Recommendation

- 13.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba’s Roman Catholic Primary School are closed, to be replaced with a single pre-school facility serving both schools.
- 13.2 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority’s procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER

Financial Template

Table 1

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Row 1	Current revenue costs for Closure of St Columba NS ONLY retain Caol NS on same Campus			
	Name of School St Columba NS (Caol NS on same Campus would remain operational)	Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Costs (during the period of Mothball)	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Row 2	<i>School costs</i>			
Row 3	<i>Employee costs</i>			
Row 4	Early Years Practitioner 2 (Qualified)	£59,264	£0	£59,264
Row 5	support staff	£0	£0	£0
Row 6	teaching staff training (CPD etc)	£0	£0	£0
Row 7	support staff training	£0	£0	£0
Row 8	Supply costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 9				
Row 10	<i>Building costs:</i>			
Row 11	property insurance	£0	£0	£0
Row 12	non domestic rates	£0	£0	£0
Row 13	water & sewerage charges	£0	£0	£0
Row 14	energy costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 15	cleaning (contract or inhouse)	£0	£0	£0
Row 16	building repair & maintenance	£0	£0	£0
Row 17	grounds maintenance	£0	£0	£0
Row 18	facilities management costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 19	revenue costs arising from capital	£0	£0	£0
Row 20	other	£0	£0	£0
Row 21				
Row 22	<i>School operational costs:</i>			
Row 23	learning materials	£507	£0	£507
Row 24	Groceries	£475	£0	£475
Row 25	SQA costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 26	other school operational costs (e.g. licences)	£0	£0	£0
Row 27				
Row 28	<i>Transport costs:</i>			
Row 29	home to school	£0	£0	£0
Row 30	other pupil transport costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 31	staff travel	£0	£0	£0
Row 32	SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	£60,246	£0	£60,246
Row 33				
Row 34	<i>Income:</i>			
Row 35	Sale of meals	£0	£0	£0
Row 36	Lets	£0	£0	£0
Row 37	External care provider	£0	£0	£0
Row 38	Other	£0	£0	£0
Row 39	SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	0	0	£0
Row 40				
Row 41	TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	£60,246	£0	£60,246
Row 42				
Row 43	UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	20,082	-	20,082
Row 44				

Note: Should this provision re-open it would require 2 EYP posts, school roll based on 6 pupils