

Agenda Item	7.
Report No	EDU/14/26

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Education

**Date:** 3 June 2026

**Report Title:** Temporary School Closures – Statutory Guidance, Governance and Adoption of Policy

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - People

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members on Scottish Government statutory guidance relating to temporary school closures commonly referred to as “mothballing”. The report sets out proposed governance arrangements for planned and unplanned temporary school closures and presents a draft Temporary School Closures Policy for member approval.
- 1.2 The updated statutory guidance replaces the previously used term “mothballing”, and sets clearer expectations on governance, duration and review. The key changes are:
- Reinforces the distinction between temporary and permanent school closures, confirming that temporary closure must be time-limited, with a clear intention to reopen, and must not be used to avoid the statutory requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
  - Strengthens expectations around regular review and transparency, requiring education authorities to keep temporary closures under active consideration and demonstrate ongoing educational and community justification.
  - Provides clearer guidance on when consultation may be required, particularly where a temporary closure becomes prolonged or where there is no realistic prospect of reopening, at which point statutory consultation on permanent closure should be progressed.
  - Emphasises the need for robust governance and decision-making, including appropriate Member oversight, clear recording of decisions, and evidence-based rationale.
  - Highlights the importance of community engagement and communication, even where formal statutory consultation is not triggered, to ensure local communities are kept informed and involved.
  - The statutory guidance and proposed policy have also been considered in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This includes the requirement to ensure that children and young people are afforded appropriate opportunities to be informed, engaged and have their views taken into account in decisions which affect them, in line with their age and maturity. The proposed policy reflects this through a strengthened approach to engagement and communication in relation to planned temporary closures.

This report and the accompanying policy at **Appendix 2** reflect these changes, ensuring Highland Council's approach is compliant, transparent, and reduces the risk of challenge.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1 Members are asked to:**

- i. Note the updated statutory guidance relating to temporary school closures and the distinction between temporary and permanent school closures.
- ii. Approve the Highland Council Temporary School Closures Policy, as set out in **Appendix 2**.
- iii. Agree that planned temporary school closures are brought to the Education Committee for approval prior to implementation.
- iv. Agree that unplanned or immediate temporary school closures are reported to the Education Committee as soon as practicable after a decision is taken.

## **3. Implications**

3.1 Resource - The adoption of the Temporary School Closures Policy will require additional staff time for the engagement and reporting requirements set out in the guidance. Operational, staffing, transport or property-related costs associated with individual temporary closures will be managed on a case-by-case basis within existing resources.

3.2 Legal - The policy aligns with Scottish Government statutory guidance on temporary school closures and the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. It clarifies governance arrangements while ensuring that temporary closures are not used to circumvent statutory consultation requirements for permanent school closures.

3.3 Risk - Clear governance arrangements reduce legal and reputational risk by ensuring that temporary school closures are lawful, proportionate, time-limited and subject to Member oversight. Failure to align local arrangements with statutory guidance could present challenge risk.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - Temporary closures may be required to manage immediate risks to pupil and staff safety, including building condition issues, utilities failure or emergency events. The policy supports timely operational decision-making while maintaining appropriate reporting and oversight.

3.5 Gaelic - There are no specific Gaelic implications arising from this report.

## **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 has been undertaken and The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are potential indirect impacts which are proportionately mitigated through governance arrangements and case-by-case consideration of individual closure proposals.

Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3 <b>Impact Assessment Area</b>	<b>Conclusion of Screening</b>
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and Young People – Positive through strengthened governance and oversight;</li><li>• Children affected by disability – No direct impact identified at policy level.</li><li>• Older adults – No direct impact identified at policy level.</li></ul>
Socio-economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive Impact – the policy articulates the need to consider socio economic factors as part of the decision making process.</li></ul>
Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engages the right to education and family life; overall neutral where decisions remain lawful, proportionate and time-limited with alternative education provided.</li></ul>
Children’s Rights and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive through enhanced engagement and clearer governance and oversight;</li></ul>
Island and Mainland Rural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No direct impact identified as the policy applies equally to all parts of Highland. A possible indirect positive impact as the purpose of the statutory guidance is to give protection to rural and island schools from closure.</li></ul>
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No impact identified as the policy does not introduce activities affecting emissions, transport or the environment.</li></ul>
Data Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No impact as no changes to existing data processing or governance arrangements are introduced.</li></ul>

## **5. Overview and Statutory Context**

- 5.1 Scottish Government statutory guidance has replaced the previously used term “mothballing” with the term “Temporary Closure”. Temporary closure is intended to be time-limited, non-statutory, and distinct from permanent school closure.
- 5.2 A temporary school closure does not constitute a permanent closure under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, provided that reopening remains the intention and that closures are properly reviewed and not continued indefinitely.
- 5.3 The attached draft policy at Appendix 2 reflects this guidance and provides a consistent Highland-wide framework for decision-making, review and reporting.

## **6. Governance and Decision Making**

### **6.1 Planned Temporary Closures**

Planned temporary closures are those identified in advance, for example due to sustained low pupil numbers, building condition issues or planned works. It is proposed that all planned temporary closures require Education Committee approval prior to implementation.

### **6.2 Unplanned or Immediate Temporary Closures**

Unplanned or immediate closures may arise due to urgent health and safety concerns, severe weather or other emergency circumstances. In such cases, decisions may be taken operationally and will be reported to the Education Committee as soon as practicable.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 21 May 2026

Author: Derek Martin, Strategic Lead- Operations

Background Papers: n/a

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 – Temporary School and ELC Closures Policy Draft

Appendix 3 - Scottish Government Guidance – Extract relating to Temporary Closures Guidance

# Appendix 1- Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

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## Summary

### Proposal overview

The proposal sets out the governance framework, decision making responsibilities, and reporting arrangements for temporary closures of schools, in line with Scottish Government statutory guidance.

The policy does not approve or implement any individual school closures.

All decisions on temporary closures will continue to be taken on a case by case basis, based on operational, safety and service considerations.

### Who is affected

The policy may affect children and young people, parents and carers, school staff, and the wider school community across Highland.

Any impacts will arise from individual temporary closure decisions rather than the policy itself.

### Equalities impact

Overall impact is positive.

The policy strengthens governance, consistency and oversight in decision making.

No direct impacts on protected characteristics are identified at policy level.

Any impacts will be considered and mitigated through individual closure decisions.

### Poverty and socio-economic impact

Overall impact is positive.

The policy requires consideration of socio-economic factors, including access to education and potential impacts on families, as part of decision making.

No direct impacts on household costs, access to services or opportunities arise from the policy itself.

### **Human rights**

No direct impact identified.

The policy engages the right to education and respect for family life.

Overall impact is neutral at policy level, supporting lawful, proportionate and time-limited decision making, with continuity of education maintained.

### **Children's rights and wellbeing**

A positive impact is expected.

The policy supports decision making in the best interests of the child and reinforces the right to education.

It strengthens governance and promotes consistent engagement with children, young people and families.

### **Data protection**

There is no change to existing data processing arrangements.

Personal data will continue to be processed under current policies and purposes, with no new risks identified.

### **Rural communities**

No direct impact identified.

The policy applies consistently across Highland, including island and rural communities.

A potential positive impact is noted, as statutory guidance provides additional consideration and protection for rural and island schools within decision making.

### **Climate change**

No direct impact identified.

The policy does not introduce activities affecting emissions, transport, or environmental factors.

Any impacts would arise from individual closure decisions and will be considered on a case by case basis.

## **Conclusion**

The screening identifies a positive overall impact, primarily through strengthened governance, consistency and oversight.

A full Integrated Impact Assessment is not required at this stage, as the proposal relates to a policy framework rather than implementation of specific closures.

Further detailed assessment will be undertaken where individual temporary closures are proposed.

# Temporary Closure of Schools and ELC Settings

**DRAFT Policy**

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## **Purpose**

This policy sets out how the Highland Council will consider, decide on and manage the temporary closure of a school or an early learning and childcare (ELC) setting.

It applies to both planned temporary closures and exceptional immediate temporary closures, ensuring that decisions are taken on a consistent and transparent basis and are subject to Education Committee oversight, either in advance or, where that is not possible, at the earliest opportunity following a decision.

Temporary closure will normally be considered only where it provides an alternative to progressing a permanent closure proposal through statutory consultation, and where reopening remains a realistic prospect.

## **Statutory and Policy Context**

Temporary closure is defined in Scottish Government statutory guidance on Temporary Closures issued under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

This guidance replaced earlier reference to 'mothballing' and confirms that temporary closure is a time-limited, non-statutory decision to pause the operation of a school or ELC setting where the roll is very low or zero, and where reopening remains a realistic possibility.

Any proposal which would amount to a permanent closure is a relevant proposal under the 2010 Act and must follow the statutory consultation process.

Temporary closure is not a replacement for statutory consultation where permanent closure is proposed.

Temporary closure may also arise in exceptional circumstances unrelated to school roll, such as where a school or ELC setting cannot safely operate due to building failure, serious health and safety concerns, or other unforeseeable operational events.

This policy reflects:

- Scottish Government Statutory Guidance on Temporary Closures (December 2025)
- Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010
- UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC)

## Definition of Temporary Closure

A temporary closure is a formal, time-limited decision to temporarily cease operating a school or ELC class because the roll is very low or zero, or due to exceptional operational or safety-related circumstances, and where the Council reasonably considers that reopening remains a realistic option within a defined period.

**Short-term closures of one or two days arising solely from severe weather or temporary building failure will continue to be managed in line with existing operational guidance and business continuity arrangements.**

Such short-term operational closures are not the primary focus of this policy, which is intended to provide governance and oversight for temporary closures extending beyond routine operational disruption.

Temporary closure does not require statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

## Principles

Temporary closure decisions will:

- Prioritise educational benefit and continuity of learning.
- Comply with Scottish Government Statutory Guidance on Temporary Closures.
- Be taken only where temporary closure is considered preferable to progressing a permanent closure proposal through statutory consultation, where appropriate.
- Normally involve engagement with affected parents, staff and the wider community prior to any planned decision, unless exceptional circumstances make this impracticable.
- Be evidence-based, proportionate and properly documented.
- Recognise the presumption against permanent rural school closure and the need to consider rural sustainability.
- Remain time-limited, subject to review, and must not be used to circumvent statutory consultation requirements, regardless of the reason for closure.
- Comply with UNCRC requirements, ensuring children and young people's views are sought and taken into account.

## Criteria for Considering Temporary Closure

Temporary closure may be considered only where one or more of the following apply:

- A school or ELC setting has a very low or zero roll.
- There are educational or operational barriers to continued operation related to viability or sustainability.
- Exceptional circumstances make continued operation unsafe or impossible at that time, including building failure, serious health and safety concerns, or loss of access to the premises.
- The authority considers that, in the absence of temporary closure, it would otherwise need to consider progressing a permanent closure proposal through statutory consultation, where appropriate.

In assessing viability and impact, the Council will consider a range of factors including:

- Current and projected roll over a minimum 3–5 year period
- Capacity and suitability of alternative provision within the cluster or catchment
- Travel time and accessibility for children and families
- Educational experience and outcomes, including peer group considerations
- Financial sustainability and efficient use of the estate
- Condition and suitability of the building
- Community impact, including rural sustainability and wider service use

## Evidence Base

All planned temporary closures must be supported by a proportionate but robust evidence report. This will include:

- Pupil roll data and projections
- Assessment of cluster capacity and receiving schools
- Analysis of educational impact and learner experience
- Travel and transport implications
- Building condition and suitability
- Financial considerations, including cost of continued operation
- Options appraisal, including alternatives to closure
- Assessment of community impact

Where closure arises from exceptional operational or safety-related circumstances, the evidence base may focus on the nature of the incident, immediate risks, and remediation options rather than enrolment viability.

Where temporary closure arises from exceptional operational or safety circumstances, the evidence base will focus on:

- The nature and severity of the risk
- Immediate actions taken
- Options for remediation
- Expected timescales

Exceptional immediate closures may rely on operational evidence where urgency requires immediate action, with fuller documentation completed as soon as practicable.

## **Engagement and Communication**

Planned temporary closures will normally involve early and proportionate engagement with affected children and young people, parents, staff and community representatives before a decision is taken.

Engagement with children and young people will be undertaken in line with UNCRC principles, ensuring their views are sought, given due weight, and reflected appropriately in the decision-making process, taking account of their age and maturity.

Exceptional immediate temporary closures may be implemented without advance engagement where required, but communication will be issued as soon as practicable explaining the reason for the action, the expected duration, and how and when the decision will be reviewed.

Temporary closure must not be used in a way that denies communities transparency, clarity or participation in decision-making.

## **Decision-Making**

Planned temporary closures will be submitted to the Education Committee for approval.

Exceptional immediate closures may be authorised operationally and will be reported to the Education Committee at the earliest opportunity.

All decisions will be formally recorded, including the reasons for determining that temporary closure is appropriate.

### **Review of Temporary Closures**

Temporary closures will be reviewed at least annually, or sooner if circumstances change. Each review will result in a clearly recorded decision to reopen, continue temporary closure for a defined period, or initiate statutory consultation for permanent closure where reopening is no longer considered realistic.

Each review will consider:

- Updated roll projections
- Evidence of renewed demand
- Changes in local provision
- Continued educational and financial viability

Each review will result in a recorded decision to either/or:

- Reopen the school or setting
- Continue the temporary closure for a defined period
- Progress to statutory consultation for permanent closure

### **Governance and Monitoring**

The Education Service will maintain a register of all temporary closures. Proposals to temporarily close schools will ordinarily be presented to Committee in the second quarter of the year. Annual reviews of temporarily closed schools will be presented to Committee in the third quarter of the year. Emergency temporary closures will be reported to Committee as soon as possible.

### **Management During Closure**

During periods of temporary closure, the Council will ensure that:

- All affected children have access to appropriate alternative provision
- Transport is provided in line with policy where required
- The closed building is maintained in a safe, secure and wind and watertight condition
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for staff

Arrangements must be kept under review to support continuity of learning and minimise disruption.

## **Equality and Rural Impact**

A screening assessment will be completed for all temporary closures to identify potential equality, socio-economic, children's rights, rural, island, sustainability and environmental impacts. Where required, full assessments will be undertaken and mitigation steps clearly set out.

## **Relationship to Permanent Closure**

Temporary closure must not be used in a way that results in a de facto permanent closure. Where reopening is no longer considered realistic, the Council will progress the statutory consultation process without undue delay.

## 2.5 Temporary closures (formerly known as “Mothballing”)

### General points

63. It may be necessary from time to time for local authorities to close schools (including stages of education) or nurseries [14] on a temporary basis. Such decisions can have a significant impact on those affected by such closures and on the future viability of the schools, nurseries and wider communities involved. Therefore, decisions about temporary closures should be carefully considered by local authorities, using clear and accountable decision-making processes. The maximum length of the temporary closure’s duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed three years in areas that are not very remote.

64. It is also vital that the flexibility to close a school or nursery for a temporary period is not used to undermine the purpose of the 2010 Act to enable the community to consider and scrutinise proposals by local authorities to permanently close local schools and nurseries. Therefore, if the majority of parents are against the temporary closure, it would be appropriate to move to a statutory closure consultation as soon as possible to ensure those affected are fully consulted with. In such circumstances, where an authority is preparing for, and conducting, any statutory consultation on a proposed permanent closure, and where feasible, the setting should remain operational for any remaining pupils during this period.

### Circumstances where it may be appropriate to temporarily close a school, stage of education or nursery

65. Temporary closures are only appropriate in very restricted circumstances.

- Temporary closure may be appropriate where the numbers of children attending are zero and there is a realistic prospect of families returning for example, in very remote or islands communities where the school is the only local provision. In such cases temporary closure helps preserve the possibility of reopening if families return
- It may also be appropriate where the number of children attending the school or nursery is very low. Although pupil numbers alone may not provide a full picture of viability; other factors (see paragraph 71) should be considered with the educational benefit to children remaining at the heart of decision making
- In the case of a nursery attached to a school, where it is proposed that the school is to be temporarily closed, it may be appropriate to temporarily close both together.

- Temporary closure should only be pursued where the setting has been assessed as having the potential to reopen in the future (e.g. through an analysis of future rolls or demand for funded early learning and childcare places);
- Where the parent forum request the consideration for the school being temporarily closed

### Legislative considerations

66. It is important that local authorities consider carefully before embarking on proposals to temporarily close a school or nursery, that they do not have the effect of permanent closure or are likely to. Local authorities should satisfy themselves that the actions they are taking are not likely to have the effect of a permanent closure. This may include consideration of the actions outlined in paragraph 75.

67. The 2010 Act, provides in Schedule 1, “Relevant Proposals”, paragraph 1 (Closure) [15] that a proposal to make the following sort of arrangements (however described) is to be regarded as a proposal to discontinue (a) to (d) below and is therefore a closure proposal:

“(5) The arrangements are such arrangements in respect of the school or a stage of education in the school as would (if they were implemented) result, or be likely to result, in the permanent discontinuation of (as the case may be)—

- (a) the school,
- (b) all the nursery classes in the school,
- (c) a stage of education [16] in the school (apart from a nursery class), or
- (d) the provision of Gaelic or English medium education in all the nursery classes or a stage of education (apart from a nursery class) in the school.”

68. The purpose of this is to make clear that any arrangements that would, or would likely, have the effect of a permanent closure of a school or nursery are to be considered a relevant proposal under the 2010 Act and therefore subject to the provisions within the 2010 Act that apply to permanent closures.

69. It is also the case that section 12A(2) requires that when formulating a closure proposal as regards a rural school, the authority must consider whether there are reasonable alternatives as a response to the reasons for formulating the proposal. These may include temporary closure.

70. Local authorities should also note the provisions in s13 (2)(b) [17] of the 2010 Act require that, (in relation to the permanent closure of rural schools only) local authorities describe the steps they took (if any) to address the reasons for the proposed closure in the Proposal Paper they publish. Actions taken by authorities during a period of temporary closure may be relevant.

## Factors to consider when deciding if a temporary closure is necessary

71. When considering whether to temporarily close a school or nursery, educational benefit should be at the heart of decision-making. It is recommended local authorities may also wish to take into account following factors:

- Enrolment trends (school rolls and nursery attendance)
- Financial sustainability of affected schools/nurseries
- Condition of the facility/site prior to temporary closure is such that temporary closure would be detrimental to the future prospects of the school/nursery reopening due to the potential for deterioration of the building or site during the temporary closure period.)
- Capacity and proximity of nearby schools and nurseries
- Impact on community use of the school and associated facilities.
- Aligned to the 2024 Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, encompass within any decision-making process active consideration of broader rural development and demographic outcomes, recognising the key role of schools and nurseries in creating attractive places for households to locate themselves. E.g. the potential impact of temporarily closing a school or nursery should be assessed in terms of the subsequent medium-to-long term attractiveness of a location and risk to community sustainability
- New developments or new industry or employment opportunities within the community of an appropriate size and scale that will bring more children to an area
- Authorities should consider the distances pupils would need to travel or the need for hostel accommodation during the school week, and the associated impact on attendance;
- Authorities will need to consider any potential disruption to the continuity of education for all learners. For pupils undertaking qualifications, they may also wish to consider curriculum viability and educational breadth.

Additionally, for nursery schools:

- The local authorities' statutory duties under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Section 47 in relation to ensuring the mandatory amount of early learning and childcare is available to eligible pre-school children
- in cases where a school and nursery school are attached or integrated, where it is proposed that one be temporarily closed, local authorities should consider

the impact on both, and factor this into any decision-making process to temporarily close either or both

- The recommendations made within the Early Learning and Childcare statutory guidance
- Consultations made under The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Section 50), which requires local authorities to consult with families in their area about how they should make ELC available;
- The local authority's published ELC delivery plan.

### Engagement

72. It will be important to engage with those likely to be affected by a temporary closure of a school or nursery, in a meaningful way. Early engagement should begin when enrolment trends indicate a sustained or significant decline that could affect the viability of the school or nursery within the next academic year. This approach ensures that affected parents and children and the staff are given sufficient notice of the possibility of temporary closure and have an opportunity to contribute to discussions. Key activities to undertake are:

- Early engagement with parents/carers and children and young people [\[18\]](#), likely to be affected by plans to temporarily close schools or nurseries to gather their views on the potential impact of a temporary closure.
- Early engagement with relevant staff
- Produce a clear rationale and timelines for temporary closures of schools or nurseries.

73. Engagement should be aligned to key stages in the authorities' decision-making process. It is recommended that local authorities may wish to evidence within published materials how feedback from engagement activities has been reflected within the local authority's decision making. Prior to decisions being made to proceed with a temporary closure of a school or nursery, it is recommended that local authorities may also wish to consider engaging with relevant elected representatives, (e.g. Councillors, MSPs, MPs).

### Decision Making

74. Decision making models will reflect local authority governance structures. To ensure the transparency and accountability of such decisions it is recommended they are made by elected members, except where circumstances dictate that an immediate decision is necessary. Publishing details of the decision making process used in the local authority, will help provide transparency about how decisions are made and ensure public confidence in these processes.

### Actions to take following a decision to temporarily close a school or nursery

75. It is recommended that local authorities undertake the following actions once a decision has been made to proceed with a temporary closure and during a temporary closure. Key among these activities is LA engagement with affected families and wider community:

- Temporary closures should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to temporarily close the school, stage of education or nursery
- Regular updates to families and wider community during the temporary closure period
- Ongoing assessment of demand of interest in reopening the school or nursery.
- Clear information on the Council website stating which schools or nurseries that are temporarily closed
- Inclusion of temporarily closed schools or nurseries on relevant enrolment forms and monitoring of expressions of interest in places.
- Disclosure of the number of applications made to enrol children during the temporary closure period
- Ongoing maintenance of the school/nursery building, and any associated grounds (e.g. playgrounds) to a sufficient standard that reopening is still possible. Where deterioration risks permanent closure, authorities should document mitigation steps (e.g. maintenance during temporary closure).
- Publish clear reopening criteria specifying under what conditions temporarily closed schools or nurseries could reopen.
- Support children and their families with transition to alternative provision.

### Transparency

76. Local authorities should consider publishing a policy for temporary closures so that it is clear to the local community how such decisions are made (e.g. if the decision is made by councillors or delegated to officers; the criteria that is used to determine when temporary closure is to be considered (e.g. any threshold for the number of children attending a school or nursery, or occupancy rate); criteria for reopening temporarily closed schools or nurseries).

77. Within such policies authorities may choose to include indicative thresholds (such as pupil numbers or occupancy rates). It is important to emphasise that fixed thresholds may not be appropriate, particularly in very rural or remote areas. For

example, a school with a small roll may still be viable depending on the distribution of pupils across stages, availability of nearby provision, or the school's role in the wider community. It is generally recognised that there is no single minimum roll that determines educational viability. Decisions should consider the overall educational benefit and local context rather than pupil numbers alone.

78. The intention is not to advise on adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather to support consistency where appropriate. A published policy can help demonstrate that decisions are made in a fair, evidence-based, and locally responsive manner.