

**Note of an Exploratory Meeting with Parents in Torrington held at Torrington Community Centre at 5pm on 12 June 2019, to discuss the Future of Torrington Primary School**

Norma Young, Area Care and Learning Manager (West)

Ian Jackson (Education Officer – Resources)

Felix and Sarah von Racknitz

Clare Thorburn

Joanne Mitchell

Sally Cook

Local parents had been invited to the meeting by individual letter, and Ms Cook had been invited as HC staff had been advised she was the parent of a pre-school child, who was likely to move to the area.

The invite letter specified that the meeting was with local parents. A separate meeting had been arranged with the Community Council. However, 3 community representatives, Terry Doe, Anne Macrae and Andrew Peacock, sought entry to the parents' meeting. NY advised them that only parents had been invited to the 5pm meeting, but undertook to discuss their request with the parents.

NY explained to the parents that several community representatives wanted to join the meeting. She advised that she had no objection to this but that, as the meeting had originally been arranged for parents, she wished to know whether this was acceptable to them. The parents advised they would rather have an initial discussion between themselves and THC, with the community representatives joining in 30 minutes' time. NY advised the community representatives of this decision. Both NY and IJ checked outside several times between 5.30pm and 5.45pm to invite the community representatives in, but there was no-one in sight.

NY introduced the meeting by explaining the purpose, and the difference between mothballing and formal closure. There was an extensive process around the latter, which IJ could outline.

IJ commented that there were only 4 children of P1-7 age in the Torrington catchment at present, and one of those would be moving to S1 in August 2019. THC did not consider that a roll of 3 was enough to justify re-opening Torrington PS. Another factor for the Council to consider was the very small roll at Kinlochewe Primary. Currently it had only 4 pupils in P1-7, of whom two were from Torrington. A closure proposal for Torrington was one option and he could explain the process, but first of all he sought the views of parents.

One parent commented that Torridon was centrally located between Kinlochewe and Shieldaig, and on that basis there might be less reason to close Torridon. NY acknowledged the geography although noted that the Kinlochewe catchment included Achnasheen, which was a long journey from Torridon.

All the parents confirmed they had no intention of taking the current P1-7 pupils out of their current schools. There would be no pupils to enrol in Torridon in Aug 2019. The intention was to look at a longer-term solution. In the meantime the parents thought that the school should continue to be mothballed.

IJ asked about pre-school children in the community. There were two 3 year-olds plus a younger child, with a possibility of two more children currently aged 2-3 years, should planned moves to the area take place. There was thus a possibility of 4 children entering P1 for August 2021 or 2022, though only two of these were currently in the community.

One parent suggested that a community with an attractive school would be a draw to people from elsewhere. Without disagreeing, others commented that the availability of employment and housing were also significant issues.

Some parents were interested in an educational facility in the village that would concentrate on Gaelic, music, and cultural education. NY advised that THC does not deviate from the Curriculum for Excellence, but that parents could develop a private facility, if that were financially sustainable.

It was agreed that parents would work on their proposals over the course of the next year, and that NY and IJ would return for a meeting in the summer term of 2020.

As yet there were no firm proposals about what sort of facility might be offered, but all options could be considered.

It might be the case that THC would undertake a statutory consultation to close the school, on the basis of its replacement by a community facility. Parents asked about the nature of the lease for the school site and whether “reversionary rights” would apply if the building were no longer used for educational purposes. IJ undertook to enquire about this with HC legal staff.

Concerns were expressed about the condition of the Torridon PS building, and parents asked for assurances that the building would be maintained.

One parent asked whether the school building could be used for a Parent and Toddler Group, or as a pre-school nursery. Highland Council did not offer transport for nursery, so it was difficult for parents to access pre-school provision. NY commented that THC was not opening any new nurseries. In terms of a Parent and Toddler Group, the village already had a community centre that could be used for this purpose.

Parents commented that the Community Centre was not a good location for the group, as the Centre would not allow the parents to place displays of artwork, or to store equipment.

IJ undertook to send his contact details to those parents who didn't have them.