

## **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

### **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.**

### **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 education provision at Roy Bridge Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Spean Bridge Primary School. A map of the proposed merged catchment is at **Appendix B**.
- The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

## **SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

### **PUBLICATION INFORMATION**

#### **Proposal Paper Published**

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

- Fort William Public Library, 2 High Street, Fort William PH33 6EU
- Spean Bridge Primary School, Spean Bridge, PH34 4EU

and published on the Highland Council website:

[www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations](http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations)

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

Area Care and Learning Office,  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE  
Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto: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 Area Care and Learning Office, Camaghael Hostel, Fort William, PH33 7NE.

Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto: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 Spean Bridge Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Council of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- (v) Trade Union representative.

#### **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 24 November 2021 and will end on 21 January 2022. 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 12 January 2022 at Roy Bridge Village Hall. 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 taken into account. 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:

Area Care and Learning Office,  
Camaghael Hostel  
Fort William  
PH33 7NE

Email: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

Or via an online form, to be found at:

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

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, 21 January 2022 at 5.00pm.

## **Involvement of Education Scotland**

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 31 January 2022, 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 18 February 2022. 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 May 2022, prior to submission to the Education Committee in June 2022. 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.

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 Roy Bridge Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the school is classed as "accessible rural") and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the school roll projections for Roy Bridge PS, taking into account the current pattern of enrolments (see Section 7 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5-8 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 12 below) and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Roy Bridge catchment (Section 10 below).

### **Reason for the Proposal**

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
  - Roy Bridge PS has been mothballed since Easter 2017, after the school roll fell to two. Consequently, no children have attended the school since that date.
  - The roll at Roy Bridge fell to very low numbers because the majority of parents decided to enrol their children at Spean Bridge Primary School. The drive time between the two schools is about 5-6 minutes.
  - Evidence gathered by the Council during informal consultation suggests that very few parents from Roy Bridge are interested in re-opening the school. Re-opening the school in such circumstances would have a negative educational impact on those pupils attending Roy Bridge PS, as well as possibly the pupils who remain at Spean Bridge PS. Further details on this are provided in Section 9 below.
  - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.
- 2.2 During 2019 and early 2020 three informal meetings were held with parents and members of the local community, to discuss the future of Roy Bridge PS. The first was a meeting of the Spean Bridge Primary School Parent Council on 7 May 2019. Only around 8 or 9 parents attended, but they were mostly from the Roy Bridge and expressed opposition to the closure of Roy Bridge PS. Council officials subsequently attended a Community Council meeting in Roy Bridge village hall on 3 September 2019. This was well attended although many of those in attendance were not parents of primary school age children. There was no support expressed at the meeting for closing Roy Bridge PS,

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and the Council was asked what it would take to re-open the school. The Council advised we would consider re-opening Roy Bridge PS if a sufficient number of parents committed in writing to moving their children from Spean Bridge to a re-opened Roy Bridge PS. In the event, only two parents wrote to so confirm, which would indicate that a re-opened Roy Bridge Primary School would have a roll of two children, were it to re-open.

- 2.3 A further meeting with the Parent Council took place on 12 March 2020. Six parents attended, three of whom were from Roy Bridge. The view of that meeting was that the closure of Roy Bridge PS was inevitable.
- 2.4 Further action was then put on hold because of the pandemic, but an additional meeting with the Parent Council was held on 1 September 2021. Only three parents attended, and all were in support of the proposal.
- 2.5 Notes of the above meetings can be found at **Appendices C-Cvi**. The Appendices include notes of the meetings taken by Council officers, as well as minutes from the Community Council or the Parent Council (as appropriate). We do not however, have the Parent Council minutes of the meeting of 1 September 2021.

### **Current Details – Roy Bridge Primary School**

- 3.1 Roy Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the western edge of its large catchment, which extends eastwards along the A86 almost as far as Loch Laggan, northwards to encompass the whole of Glen Roy, and southwards to Corroul Station.
- 3.2 The school has been mothballed since Easter 2017 when the school roll fell to 2, and the pupils transferred to Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 3.3 Prior to the school being mothballed all the children were accommodated in a modular building which contained the P1-7 classroom, school office, staffroom, and toilets. A Horsa hut in the playground was used as the school canteen/general purpose area. There was in addition, the original school building which at one time was used as a classroom. The school has an outside seating area for the pupils, which was used in the summer months as an outdoor classroom. A Multi Use Games Area is sited in the playground, and was used by the pupils at break times and also for PE when the weather permitted. The school also has an outdoor grassy area and play equipment.
- 3.4 There was no nursery class at Roy Bridge PS prior to mothballing. A Gaelic Medium nursery was located for a period within the former schoolhouse, managed by a private provider under contract to the Highland Council. This had however ceased operating prior to the school being mothballed. When the school was last in operation, nursery education for English Medium pupils from Roy Bridge was provided at Spean Bridge PS, as it still is.
- 3.5 In 2015 the Highland Council opened a new Gaelic Medium primary school and nursery in Fort William, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, located about 20

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minutes' drive from Roy Bridge. The existence of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar makes it unlikely that there will be demand for another Gaelic Medium nursery in Roy Bridge.

- 3.6 The school has a registered permanent capacity of 50, based on the availability of two classrooms.
- 3.7 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). Prior to mothballing, Roy Bridge Primary School was rated as "B" for the educational suitability of the building and "B" for building condition.
- 3.8. As the school has not operated since session 2016-17, placing requests have not arisen.
- 3.10 No current HMle Report is available.
- 3.11 Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 1.378 tonnes. This low figure reflects the fact the buildings are not in use, and would be much higher otherwise. During the year 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017, the last year in which the school was in operation, the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from the Roy Bridge School building are estimated at 17.399 tonnes.

### **Current Details – Spean Bridge Primary School**

- 4.1 Spean Bridge Primary School is located just off the A86 Trunk Road, at the eastern end of the village. The school is located close to the eastern edge of its large catchment, which extends westwards to incorporate Achnacarry and Glen Arkaig, southwards to Achindaul, and northwards to Letterfinlay.
- 4.2 The school has excellent facilities. The main teaching area consists of four classrooms, a learning support room, storeroom and a large general purpose area which houses the school library and ICT suite. Two further classrooms are located in a new building beside the school. A large entrance hall leads to the administrative area, medical room, disabled toilet, boys' and girls' cloakrooms, toilets and showers, gym hall and main teaching area. The nursery classroom has a self-contained outside play area and a separate entrance. The gym hall has been built to satisfy the standards set by Sport Scotland and has staging facilities for assemblies and drama. The kitchen and dining area are connected to the gym hall by a sliding wall. There is a large playground with marked playground games and boxes of play equipment for each class. Lastly, the school has a large sports field with its own mountain bike track, a climbing wall and other outdoor play equipment, and a garden area.
- 4.3 The 2021-21 roll is 102 pupils within P1-7. There are a further 17 children in the nursery class.

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- 4.4 The school (excluding the nursery) has a registered capacity of 125. The 2021-22 roll of 102 therefore represents 82% use of capacity.
- 4.5 The registered capacity is based on 5 classrooms with a maximum of 25 pupils per class. As mentioned in paragraph 4.2 above, the school actually has 6 classrooms, with one not counted in the registration figure as it is used as GP room. This could however be used as a classroom if necessary, thereby permitting a capacity of 150. The Highland Council's formula for staffing primary schools requires six teachers once the roll reaches 121.
- 4.6 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Spean Bridge PS is attached at **Appendix D**, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**.
- 4.7 It can be seen from Appendix C that the roll at Spean Bridge Primary School is forecast to rise to 121 in session 2027/28 and to 126 in session 2030/31. The Council will carefully monitor the roll at Spean Bridge PS with a view to managing the accommodation issue if and when capacity issues arise.
- 4.8 The Spean Bridge Primary School building is rated as "A" for educational suitability and "A" for Condition.
- 4.9 There is no current HMle Report for the school.
- 4.10 Annual CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from Spean Bridge Primary School building from April 2020 to March 2021 were just under 68 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.

### Examination of Alternatives

- 5.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must give due consideration of alternative courses of action that could be considered. The following reasonable alternatives to closure have been considered:
- i. To continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
  - ii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with its current catchment area.
  - iii. To re-open Roy Bridge PS with an expanded catchment area.
- 5.2 As part of the consideration of alternatives, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections.
- 5.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the reasonable alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices.

### Option 1 – Continued Mothballing

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. "Mothballing" would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the

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school and would prevent the community from developing options for the future use of the accommodation. The Council would also be burdened with the costs of maintaining a “mothballed” building.

- 6.2 Roy Bridge Primary School has now been mothballed since 2017, and it is appropriate to decide on the future of the school.
- 6.3 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.

### **Option 2 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with its Current Catchment Area**

- 7.1 For the 2021-22 school session, there are 33 pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school.
- 7.2 Roy Bridge Primary School would have remained a viable school had children from the catchment continued to attend. As detailed above in section 2, a large majority of parents within the Roy Bridge catchment have chosen to enrol their children at Spean Bridge PS instead. Information gathered during informal consultation would suggest that a very small number of local parents would be willing to enrol their children in Roy Bridge School, were it to be re-opened. In these circumstances, Roy Bridge PS would re-open as a single teacher school with a total roll of less than 10 pupils. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching. Further detail is provided at Section 9 below.
- 7.3 When the school was mothballed, it was managed as part of a “cluster” with Spean Bridge PS. The latter school is now managed as a cluster with Invergarry Primary School. For this reason, it is assumed that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would be managed with a “standalone” Head Teacher
- 7.4 Were the school to re-open with as it was prior to mothballing, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council’s Devolved School Management policy are as follows:  
  
Head Teacher – 1.00FTE  
Management Time Teacher – 0.2 FTE  
Class Contact Time Teacher 0.1 FTE  
Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week  
Cook 2 – 9.5 hours per week  
Cleaning Operative – 5 hours per week
- 7.5 Additional Support Needs teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

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- 7.6 As set out above, Roy Bridge Primary School did not have a school nursery prior to mothballing. As with the P1-7 stages, there is currently no information to suggest that a new pre-school nursery in Roy Bridge would be viable.
- 7.7 If the school were to re-open, pupils within Roy Bridge village would no longer require school transport. Pupils from the further reaches of the Roy Bridge catchment would continue to qualify for school transport and would have marginally shorter journey times to school than they do at present. However, Highland Council does not consider that the travel distance from Roy Bridge PS to Spean Bridge PS is excessive, as the two schools are located only a few miles apart along the A86 trunk road. Full details of the transport arrangements are set out at Section 10 below.
- 7.8 The re-opening of Roy Bridge PS would be unlikely to have a significant short-term effect on Spean Bridge PS, unless a larger number of pupils than expected moved to Roy Bridge PS.

### **Option 3 - Re-Opening of Roy Bridge Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area**

- 8.1 This is not a realistic option, partly the two schools are located so close to one another. The Roy Bridge catchment could not be extended towards Spean Bridge without actually entering the village of Spean Bridge itself.
- 8.2 In the other direction the next school to Roy Bridge is Gergask Primary, located in the village of Laggan which is 28 miles from Roy Bridge. The current catchment boundary runs along the former boundary between Lochaber District Council and Badenoch and Strathspey District Council, and represents the historic boundary between two areas with a different geographical identity. Moreover, Gergask Primary is itself a very small rural school with a total roll in single figures. For both reasons, it would not be appropriate to alter this catchment boundary in favour of Roy Bridge.

### **Educational Benefits**

- 9.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland. Some of the activities listed in the paragraphs below have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the educational benefits of the closure are considered in the longer term.
- 9.2 Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its' school estate:
- Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
  - Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
  - Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.

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- Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
- Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural council area such as Highland.
- School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
- School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
- Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
- Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
- The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
- Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

- 9.3 As mentioned above, evidence gathered by Highland Council to date suggests that a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would have a very small roll, and consequently there would be educational detriment to pupils from attending such a school. Pupils at Spean Bridge PS regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes. The very small roll of a re-opened Roy Bridge PS would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A small roll would also limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 9.4 A larger school roll makes it easier for the school to attract visiting speakers, tutors and other external partners to work with the children. In many cases external partners look for a certain threshold in the number of children they will be working with.
- 9.5 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 9.6 The existence of the pre-school class at Spean Bridge PS enables a strong transition process for children moving into P1.
- 9.7 The language programme at Spean Bridge PS aims to develop listening, talking, reading and writing skills. Listening is developed by games, stories, radio & television programmes, music, and use of ICT. The school aims to develop fluency and clarity of expression and to extend vocabulary. Talking is

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developed by role playing, mime, reporting, interviewing etc. They are also used for the teaching of French and Gaelic, which are introduced to pupils as part of the 1+2 language initiative. Once again, the emphasis is on oral work and role play. In all cases, working with others plays an important role.

- 9.8 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills, including team working, leadership and working with others. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.
- 9.9 It is self-evident that an overall school roll in single figures restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling.
- 9.10 As with sports, the larger roll at Spean Bridge provides a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of group musical and artistic opportunities, events that are more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.
- 9.11 Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for lunchtime clubs and after school activities. Spean Bridge PS has lunchtime clubs for knitting and Lego, though the latter has been restricted by the pandemic. There are plans to introduce a lunchtime clubs for young mechanics. There are after school clubs for dance and for the Lochaber Scouts. Lochaber shinty club work with the youngsters and the school hopes to restart netball.
- 9.12 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.
- 9.13 As described above, Spean Bridge PS has excellent facilities. Although there are also a range of facilities at Roy Bridge PS, they do not fully replicate those at Spean Bridge, where overall the accommodation provides a better environment for learning.
- 9.14 In summary, positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge Primary Schools. Collaborative working within the classroom, language learning, and artistic and sports activities have all benefited from the greater numbers available through the operational merger.

### **Effect of Differing Transport Arrangements**

- 10.1 Currently, pupils from the Roy Bridge PS catchment are transported to Spean Bridge PS at an annual cost of £36,195. This is however via a public bus which would continue to operate along the route even if Roy Bridge PS were

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to re-open, so the actual transport saving from re-opening would be less than the figure set out above.

- 10.2 As Roy Bridge PS is currently mothballed, the pupils from the catchment already travel to Spean Bridge PS and no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event Roy Bridge PS is closed.
- 10.3 As set out above, the travel times involved are well within the normal range for the Highland Council area.
- 10.4 It is recognised that the larger merged school implies an increase in the number of pupils entitled to school transport compared to the number who can currently walk/cycle to school, should they choose to do so.
- 10.5 Since pupils are transported from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge in a single bus, and the return distance is only six miles, the additional CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions arising from the transport are negligible, and would in any case be set against the annual emissions of over 17 tonnes that could be expected from the Roy Bridge Primary School building itself were it operational (see paragraph 3.11 above).
- 10.7 Since the mothballing of Roy Bridge PS, there have not been any occasions on which the school remained open but where the education of the Roy Bridge children was disrupted due to unavailability of school transport between Roy Bridge and Spean Bridge in bad weather. Given the short distance between the two schools this would be unlikely to arise.

### **Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements**

- 11.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Spean Bridge PS from a formal closure of Roy Bridge Primary School.
- 11.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.
- 11.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Roy Bridge Primary School are set out at Paragraphs 7.3 – 7.6 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 13 below, and the associated **Appendix E**.

### **Effect on the Local Community**

- 12.1 There is an existing village hall in Roy Bridge, which provides a public space for the local community.
- 12.2 Other suggestions have been made for the future use of the building in the event of the closure proceeding. Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council’s current asset management policy.

## **Financial Consequences**

- 13.1 The Table at **Appendix E** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. As the school is currently mothballed, the savings identified are already being made and no additional saving would arise to the Council from closure.
- 13.2 The table does not include property costs that would arise if Roy Bridge were to become operational once more. At the present time this figure can only be a very rough estimate.

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 14.1 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
- 14.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to 2 primary schools and as such primarily affects children in the 3-12 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.

## **Rural Impact Assessment**

- 15.1 Both Roy Bridge PS and Spean Bridge PS are classed by the Scottish Government as "accessible rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since the summer of 2017. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.
- 15.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, a distance of 3 miles.
- 15.3 As set out in Section 9 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.

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- 15.4 It is recognised that pupils from Roy Bridge itself have less opportunity to walk or cycle to school than when Roy Bridge School was in operation, and that there is occasional inconvenience for parents who wish to take their child to or from school during the school day.
- 15.5 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment to Spean Bridge is 5 minutes (source: Google Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council, the proposal would not be expected to have any impact on accessibility to education or on fuel poverty.

### **Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

- 16.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the additional travel from Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, details of which are provided above. In practice this is already taking place. Funded school transport is and will continue to be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Roy Bridge catchment who attend Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 16.2 If the school re-opened, it would be on the same basis as it existed prior to mothballing, i.e., without a nursery class. Nursery pupils would continue to travel to Spean Bridge PS, as happened prior to the mothballing.

### **Recommendation**

- 17.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Roy Bridge Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Spean Bridge Primary School.
- 17.2 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**