

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Kinlochewe Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Gairloch Primary School.

March 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 education provision at Kinlochewe Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Gairloch Primary School. 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. There are special provisions that apply to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people 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 28 January 2025 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal and;
- visits to the site of Gairloch Primary School, Gairloch High School and Shieldaig Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Kinlochewe Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

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 proposal for Kinlochewe Primary School also includes closure of the related early years provision. The school was mothballed in the summer of 2022, after the roll fell to zero. Children currently attend either Gairloch Primary School or Shildaig Primary School. Most parents have opted to send their children to Gairloch Primary School. Transport to Gairloch is already in place and includes children attending Gairloch High School. In December 2023, The Highland Council contacted local parents and the community council to gather their views informally. The council then decided to move to a formal consultation on permanent closure of the school.

2.3 The consultation ran from 13 January to 28 February 2025. The proposal was made available online and distributed to relevant stakeholders. Consultees were invited to submit their views to the council via an online form or by email. A public meeting was held on 28 January 2025, attended by 14 members of the public. The council received four submissions from local people, including the community council. These raised concerns about the loss of pre-school provision in the village and transport arrangements to alternative schools in the area. Consultees asked the council to consider splitting the catchment area to give parents a choice of school, with transport provided, where necessary. Attendees at the public meeting, raised similar issues, including that not having a school may make it a less attractive place for families to settle. They also pointed out that there are a few children in the area and that school rolls can change. Children from Gairloch and Shildaig Primary Schools were also consulted. The majority of children opted for the closure of Kinlochewe Primary School. Children from Kinlochewe would prefer to continue at their current school with their friends. A minority of children, who live in the area, wanted Kinlochewe to reopen as they would prefer not to have to travel.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined by The Highland Council. At the moment, based on the council's projections, there is little chance of a stable school roll within the catchment area. Children from Kinlochewe have the opportunity to work in wider cooperative learning groups across year groups at both Gairloch and Shildaig Primary Schools. This supports them to develop their skills in sharing and working with others. They also have access to a range of social activities at the alternative schools. Children and young people, who met with HM Inspectors are happy and settled at their current schools and do not wish to change. Both schools also have associated early years classes which can support a smooth transition from nursery to primary one.

3.2 Almost all parents and community members who met with HM Inspectors are disappointed by the proposal but understand the difficulty if there are no children currently attending. They point out that numbers of children in the area fluctuate and there may be a need for the school in the future. Staff who met with HM Inspectors, agree with the proposal. However, they are concerned that falling school rolls are an issue across the area and are keen to ensure that rural schools continue to be maintained and staffed appropriately. They agree that there is capacity within Gairloch and Shildaig Primary Schools to accommodate more children in the future, if needed.

3.3 Parents who engaged with HM Inspectors are concerned about the lack of early years provision in the area. While provision is available at Shildaig and Gairloch Primary Schools, they point out that transport is not provided and that the distance involved could make it difficult for parents to take this up. Parents are concerned that these issues may prevent local children from accessing important early learning.

3.4 With regards to the catchment area, stakeholders would like the council to consider allowing parents to have a choice between Shialdaig Primary School and Gairloch Primary School and to provide transport for both options. This also has the potential to protect the future rolls of both schools. If this proposal is agreed, the council should engage further with stakeholders to mitigate any negative effect on access to early years provision and transport arrangements to Gairloch and Shialdaig Primary Schools.

3.5 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The council has considered the alternatives to closing Kinlochewe Primary School permanently. They do not feel that continued mothballing is viable, in part due to the ongoing cost of maintaining the building. Kinlochewe Primary School is rated as 'C' for condition and is beginning to deteriorate further. Alternative schools at Shialdaig and Gairloch are both rated as 'B'. Based on school roll projections and other demographic data, the council do not believe there is a reasonable case for the school to reopen. Consideration of widening the catchment area, does not significantly change the school roll. The Highland Council also gave consideration to reopening Kinlochewe school offering Gaelic Medium Education. Children from Kinlochewe wishing to attend Gaelic Medium Education are already zoned to Gairloch Primary School, with transport provided, and no such request has been received for the Kinlochewe area. Were Kinlochewe Primary School to reopen, children from the catchment area would have shorter journey times. However, children are now used to the time required to go to Gairloch or Shialdaig Primary Schools.

3.6 Local people, including children, who met with HM Inspectors would like to ensure that there continues to be a playground in the village as the one attached to the school is the only one currently. The community council have not yet considered any alternative use for the building. They would support the reopening of the school, if that is what local parents want. The community council would like to know more about the strategic approach that The Highland Council is taking to protect schools across the area. A few stakeholders would like the council to consider a further period of mothballing. However, the majority of stakeholders recognised that the building would continue to deteriorate if not used. If this proposal is agreed, the council should engage further with stakeholders to consider future uses of the school site, including the playground.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined by The Highland Council in their proposal to permanently close Kinlochewe Primary School. Children currently in the catchment area are happy and settled at alternative primary schools, with most opting for Gairloch Primary School, which has transport provided. Both Shialdaig and Gairloch Primary Schools are able to offer appropriate learning environments, with the opportunity for group learning and team activities. Since it was mothballed, the existing Kinlochewe Primary School building has begun to deteriorate and may require investment to bring it into use. Stakeholders were concerned at the loss of pre-school provision in Kinlochewe. They are worried that families may not be able to access the provision at Shialdaig and Gairloch due to the distance and time involved and a lack of transport. Local people, in the village do not want to lose the only playground. Stakeholders would like the council to consider giving parents the choice of both Shialdaig and Gairloch Primary Schools instead of making the catchment area, Gairloch Primary School only. If this proposal is agreed the council should engage further with the local community to address the issues they have raised.

HM Inspectors
March 2025