

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

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

September 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 The Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Uig Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Kilmuir 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' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final 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 final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals 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 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:

- 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 Uig Primary School and Kilmuir Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal 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 Uig 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 consultation period ran from 4 June until 30 August 2019. The proposal paper was available online and the public informed through the local press and via the council's website. A public meeting was held on 19 June 2019 with 17 stakeholders present. Seven residents provided

written responses to the council. There was little support for the council's proposal expressed at the public meeting or from those who responded in writing.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council has outlined a number of educational benefits which it believes will result from the implementation of the proposal to permanently close Uig Primary School. They note that if some children currently attending Kilmuir Primary School were to transfer to Uig Primary School they would be moving to a school with a learning environment which has been assessed as poor. The larger numbers of children in both the English medium and Gaelic medium classes at Kilmuir Primary School provide better opportunities for group work and collaborative learning with children of a similar age and stage. The larger school roll provides greater opportunities for team sports, games, musical and other activities. Larger numbers of children allow for a wider range of after school activities which are more sustainable. If Uig Primary School were to re-open providing both Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and English Medium Education (EME) there would be greater challenges in delivering total immersion for children in P1-P3 GME due to likely class structures. The council proposes no nursery or sgoil-àraich in Uig should Uig Primary School re-open. The current arrangements allow smooth transition for children moving into P1. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits if the council's proposal goes ahead. These potential benefits should be balanced against the lost opportunity for children from Uig to walk or cycle to their local school and the longer travel and length of the school day for children being bused to Kilmuir Primary School.

3.2 Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors were mixed in their views. All were sensitive to the importance of schools within their communities. Half of the parents would like to see Uig Primary School re-open. They believe that the ability to attend a school close to home brings advantages in terms of being able to walk or cycle to school with their children. Half took an alternative view and thought the current arrangement should continue with children attending Kilmuir Primary School and Uig Primary School continuing to be mothballed. They felt that their children benefit from the larger pupil numbers in terms of educational opportunities and socialising.

3.3 Children who met with HM Inspectors all wanted the current arrangements to stand. They valued learning and socialising in larger peer groups. They considered the current arrangements better in terms of the opportunities and experiences they gain in Kilmuir Primary School. They would not want friendships to be split if Uig Primary School was open again. They think re-opening the school would not be a good use of the council's money. They would prefer money to be spent improving the facilities for play in Kilmuir Primary School.

3.4 As a statutory consultee, Bòrd na Gàidhlig welcomes the proposal that The Highland Council recommends that Uig Primary School, currently mothballed, is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Kilmuir Primary School. In the Bòrd's view the proposed discontinuation of education at Uig Primary School will not adversely affect GME provision. It believes a larger roll at Kilmuir Primary School supports the continuation of two GME classes at Kilmuir Primary School. This adheres to the recommendations in the Statutory Guidance regarding total immersion from P1-P3 and has the potential to attract more parents and therefore could increase the learning of Gaelic.

3.5 During the consultation period the council was notified of an inaccuracy in the proposal in section 12.7. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate this inaccuracy. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address this inaccuracy notified to it.

3.6 As the proposal 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 clearly identified its reasons for formulating the proposal and considered a number of alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on the proposal. The alternatives considered included: continuing with mothballing Uig Primary School; re-opening Uig Primary School as an English Medium school; re-opening Uig Primary School offering EME and GME; expanding the catchment of Uig Primary School as an English Medium school or with EME and GME being offered. It has concluded that none of the alternatives will bring greater benefits.

3.7 The local community has a village hall which is used by local residents. It has been without Uig Primary School for over eight years. The school building is used on Sundays by a local church and occasionally for other events. There is potential for greater use of the building by the local community. For children living in and near Uig there is a greater travel distance in attending a school in Kilmuir. The council provides fully funded transport for the children in P1-P7 affected.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors' believe that The Highland Council's proposal has the potential to deliver overall educational benefit. Children in both EME and GME are able to learn in groups with other children of similar ages and stages in a more suitable learning environment. They welcome the opportunities for team and group activities during and after school. The provision for both GME and EME is well-established at Kilmuir Primary School since Uig Primary School was mothballed in 2010. Current transition arrangements from early years to primary are working well. Parents' views were mixed. Half made the case for Uig Primary School to re-open arguing that travel distance would be reduced and that the community would benefit from a more local school. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should work with the community to explore how to make best use of the former Uig Primary School building. It should explore with stakeholders how to maintain and improve play facilities in Kilmuir Primary School. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address the inaccuracy notified to it.

HM Inspectors
September 2019