

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Moray Council to close Inveravon Primary School.

November 2022

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 Moray Council's proposal to close Inveravon 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 and young people who live in the catchment area 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 wider area who attend nearby schools;
- 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 meetings held on 27 September 2022 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; and
- visits to the site of Inveravon Primary School, visits to Speyside High School, Glenlivet Primary School, Aberlour Primary School and Knockando 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 Inveravon Primary School. They also took account of 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 Moray Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 Moray Council mothballed Inveravon Primary School in 2017 after the school roll dropped to zero. The school has remained mothballed since that time. During 2022, Moray Council has engaged with local residents about the potential closure of the school. The statutory consultation for the closure of Inveravon Primary School ran from 29 August to 7 October 2022. Three public meetings were scheduled on the 27 and 28 September 2022. Eleven people attended these meetings including one parent with a child at the affected schools. Twenty five people completed an online survey and five written submissions on the consultation were received. From the surveys 13 support the proposal to close the school and 12 disagree. Of the 16 parents who completed the survey, 11 support the proposal and five do not. Currently 15 children of primary school age reside in the Inveravon school catchment area. Families of nine of these children have formally indicated a preference. This is to continue to send their children to their current school rather than Inveravon Primary School, should it reopen. Community members who attended the meeting, completed the survey and/or wrote submissions raised a range of points. These included concerns about the original decision and process to mothball the school, the lack of information for parents about Inveravon Primary School and the use of the school site if it does close. Children in the three neighbouring primaries and young people in the secondary school were also consulted. A minority of the children and young people expressed interest in the school reopening. Of these almost all expressed their preference would be to remain at their current school if Inveravon Primary School did reopen.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors broadly agree with the council's educational benefits statement and are confident there are sufficient educational benefits to merit the permanent closure of the school. HM Inspectors agree that children are benefitting from the wider educational opportunities across the curriculum that attending schools with more consistent school rolls provides. The children are experiencing opportunities to develop their capacity to work with others and build their social skills. Currently almost all children from the Inveravon catchment area attend either Knockando or Aberlour Primary Schools. In both schools and in Glenlivet Primary School children have opportunities to undertake appropriate and engaging tasks and challenges as part of a group.

3.2 All staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors agree with the proposal to close Inveravon Primary School. A few expressed the view that the original process by which the school was mothballed was poorly handled. However, they consider that education resources are now best used to support the current schools in the area rather than reopening Inveravon Primary School. If the proposal is approved this will reduce staffing levels at Knockando Primary School as it would no longer be in a paired headteacher arrangement with Inveravon Primary School. Despite this, staff and parents still agree with the proposal as they believe this would provide clarity, enabling them to better plan for the future of their school.

3.3 Children from Inveravon catchment area who met with HM Inspectors expressed satisfaction with the school they currently attend. All see benefit in being part of a larger group of children for both their learning and for building friendships with children of the same age. HM Inspectors met with a few young people attending Speyside High School who had attended Inveravon Primary School for part of the primary schooling. They remember appreciating the nurturing atmosphere at Inveravon Primary School but overall they consider that the educational benefits of being part of a larger school were more important for their development.

3.4 The proposal explores how the current catchment area of Inveravon Primary School should be allocated if the school closes. Parents are fairly evenly split between option one, all of the catchment area is allocated to Knockando Primary School and option three where it is split across the three neighbouring primary schools. Almost all parents who expressed preferences have children attending either Knockando or Glenlivet Primary Schools. There is concern from staff and parents that reopening Inveravon Primary School would reduce the roll at Glenlivet and Knockando Primary Schools.

3.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also considered the factors to which the council should give special regard. Knockando, Aberlour and Glenlivet Primary Schools are all currently under capacity with fairly stable predicted school rolls in the next five years. Should Inveravon Primary School reopen it would reduce the numbers in some or all of three of these schools. This could leave Glenlivet and Knockando Primary Schools in particular with an insufficient roll to provide for the range of educational opportunities they currently do. Currently children residing in the catchment area of Inveravon travel to school either on school transport or by private car. As Inveravon Primary School is not located in a village, this would remain the case for almost all children. Although many would have shorter journeys, the environmental benefit from this would be offset by the energy use in reopening the school.

3.6 Community members and organisations are concerned that the mothballing of Inveravon Primary School has removed a valuable community resource from the area. Moray Council have engaged with the local community about any future use of the site should the proposal be approved. It should be noted that Ballindalloch Estate owns most of the site. There is strong support from all stakeholders for the site to be used, ideally with community access. There are no community halls or similar in the catchment area although residents do access facilities in villages and towns in the wider area. Should the proposal be approved it will be important that Moray Council, Ballindalloch Estate and community organisations work together to find an appropriate use for the site and building.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal by Moray Council will result in educational benefits for the children in the Inveravon Primary School catchment area. The proposal provides clarity for both families and for staff in the neighbouring schools that the children have attended since the school was mothballed in 2017. Children now attend schools with larger and more stable pupil rolls. There are clear educational and social benefits to learning alongside peers of similar ages and stages. The predicted school roll in the wider area makes it unlikely that all four primary schools affected by this proposal could be sustained. Most parents and children support the proposal to close the school. However, the mothballing of Inveravon Primary School is a loss to the community. It will be important that Moray Council work with the site owners, Ballindalloch Estate, and the local community to explore options for both the school building and land, should the proposal be approved.

HM Inspectors
November 2022