



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON 7 JUNE 2023**

**SUBJECT: LEARNING ESTATE PROGRAMME – CROSSROADS PRIMARY
SCHOOL STATUS UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS**

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee on the current status of Crossroads Primary School and to seek a decision by Committee on the next steps.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Council in terms of Section III (D) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all the functions of the Council as Education Authority.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- i) scrutinise and notes the information included in the report;**
- ii) reviews the proposed options for next steps on the future of Crossroads Primary School and decide to progress with either:**
 - a. Option 1 - Do nothing and review the decision within next 12 months; or,**
 - b. Option 3 – Consider future options for the school earlier.**
- iii) agrees to receive a further report following issue of the next annual School Roll Forecast report and completion of 24/25 schools admission process.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Crossroads Primary School is a remote rural school which is part of the Keith Associated Schools Group (ASG). It is paired with Rothiemay Primary School, sharing the same Headteacher. Moray Council agreed on 28 September 2022 (para 27 of the minute refers) to mothball the school from

9 January 2023 as a consequence of the roll falling to a low level. Due to the adjacency of the Crossroads Primary School catchment to the Buckie ASG catchment area it was advised that the mothballing decision could influence voters in the upcoming Buckie Ward 3 by-election on 3 November 2023. Consequently, the public, including Crossroads Primary School parents, were not informed of the decision to mothball the school until after the by-election.

- 3.2 The term 'mothballing' is used, according to Scottish Government guidance, to refer to a temporary decision to close a school where the roll has fallen to a very low number of pupils. Mothballing is the temporary closure of a school, which does not in itself lead to statutory consultation, and this provides the opportunity for a school to reopen should circumstances change. There is no legal process for mothballing.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government has issued statutory Guidance under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 which can be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/schools-consultation-scotland-act-2010-statutory-guidance/pages/2/> - Paragraphs 63 to 65 of the Guidance (page 16) deals with the issue of mothballing as follows:

Mothballing

63. In considering alternatives to closure, authorities may choose to consider "mothballing" a school (or a stage of education or a nursery class at a school). This is a temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act. It is only appropriate in very restricted circumstances. When a school roll falls very low, the authority and/or community may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.

64. It is vital that this flexibility to close a school for a temporary period is not used to undermine the requirements under the 2010 Act to consult on all school closure proposals. Mothballing is only appropriate for a temporary period and should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school (or stage of education). The maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote. The condition of the school building and cost of maintaining the mothballed provision will also be relevant.

65. A school can be mothballed where the school roll has fallen to zero and continues to be zero. It may also be appropriate where the roll or potential roll is very low and the authority considers the only other option to be closure. However, in circumstances where a school is mothballed rather than closed and some children and young people remain in the catchment area, this decision should be taken in consultation with the parents involved, and the possibility should be raised as early as possible, in order to ensure that families can understand the options open to them.

Mothballing should not be a way of denying parents' access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act and if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible.

- 3.4 In taking the decision to mothball Crossroads Primary School it was noted that it is only appropriate for a temporary period and should be subject to regular review, at least annually, against the same requirements which led to the original decision to mothball the school. The maximum length of mothballing depends on: the location of the school; the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open the school; the condition of the school building; and, the cost of maintaining the mothballed provision.
- 3.5 The Council process for mothballing a school states that should a school roll fall naturally to a 'very low number' (defined as less than 15) this will trigger an operational assessment of the decision, which should consider the impact on the community, other local schools, current users of the building and the school roll forecast.
- 3.6 At the time of the decision in September 2022 to mothball Crossroads Primary School the school roll had fallen to 5 pupils. As a result of the mothballing and consultation with parents, 4 of the children were placed at Rothiemay Primary School and one at Keith Primary School. The school has from 9 January 2023 been placed into a 'care and maintenance' regime.

4. NEXT STEP OPTIONS

- 4.1 The December 2022 school roll forecast supporting information reported that the total number of primary school children living within the Crossroad Primary School catchment for the 2022/23 academic session totalled 22. This included the 5 children at Crossroad Primary School at the time of mothballing. The additional 17 pupils are placed at other schools within the Keith ASG at parental request.
- 4.2 With the loss of 2 x P7 pupils, balanced by the gain of a P1 and P3 pupil at the start of 2023/24 academic session, the Crossroads school roll is expected to increase to 6, with the overall primary school catchment total unchanged at 22 children.
- 4.3 Given the current status of the school and the data provided in the most recent school roll forecasts there are considered 3 options for the start of the next academic year in August 2023.

Option 1 – Do Nothing – Review the decision within next 12 months

- 4.4 This 'Do Nothing' options takes account of the expected school roll for August 2023. Based on the outcome of the schools admission process and the potential additional placing requests there is an anticipated increase in the school roll for the 2023/24 session from 5 to 6 children. This remains well below the ideal minimum of 15 children recommended by Education and does not change the context from that informing the recommendation of September 2022 that Crossroads Primary School should be mothballed.

4.5 This option is considered the logical and the least disruptive for parents, children and staff. It does however extend the uncertainty across the Crossroads community over the long term future status of Crossroads Primary School. The intent would be to review the decision following the completion of the 2024/25 admissions process in February 2024.

Option 2 - Reopen the school for 23/24 academic session

4.6 This option to reopen the school in August 2023 takes account of the information within the latest school roll forecast (December 2022) which is set out in Table 1 below. The information indicates the pupil numbers will gradually increase to 15 for the 2028/2029 academic session, which is a considered a lowest viable roll for a school to deliver an effective educational experience.

CROSSROADS	ACTUAL					FORECAST								
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	
INPUTS														
Primary 1 Input						3	3	4	4					
Pupils per household	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	
Placing Requests	0	2	-2	-4	-1	-1	-2	-1	-1	-2	-2	-1	-2	
CLASS														
P1	2	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	2	
P2	1	3	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	
P3	1	1	3	3	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	2	2	
P4	5	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	2	
P5	1	5	1	1	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	3	
P6	3	1	4	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	3	
P7	6	3	1	3	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	1	
Total Roll	19	16	13	11	5	6	7	9	9	11	13	15	16	
Physical Capacity	66	66	66	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	
(Tot Roll/Physical Capacity)%	29%	24%	20%	17%	8%	10%	11%	14%	15%	17%	21%	25%	25%	

Table 1: Crossroads Primary School – Roll Forecast (December 2022)

4.7 To achieve this forecast increase a total of 15 new children would need to enter P1 over the next seven years; whereas, the actual data shows that over the past five years only 5 new children have entered P1 and during the same period the overall school roll has fallen from 19 to 5 (in 2017 it was 25).

4.8 It is inferred from the actual and forecast data that the current school roll increase forecast for the next seven years is overly optimistic. It neither accounts for the actual rapid decline in school numbers over the last twelve months (10 to 5 children), nor the impact of the low numbers and current mothball status on the decision of parents with young children due to enter Crossroads Primary School over the next few years to send their children there or to an alternate school.

4.9 Given the uncertainty over the school roll forecast for the next few years, the evidence to reopen the school is not sufficiently robust and there is a risk that in reopening the school it would be recommended for mothballing again within the next few years resulting in further disruption and uncertainty for children, parents and staff. The option is therefore not recommended at this time.

Option 3 – Consider future options for the school earlier

- 4.10 This option is to start to actively consider the long term future of Crossroads Primary School and undertake an Options Appraisal to support this that would be completed within the next academic year.
- 4.11 The Options Appraisal would include engagement on all the possible options for the future of the school with all the Crossroads catchment community including children, parents/carers, staff, individual community members and representative community groups.
- 4.12 One of the options of the appraisal would be to consider closure of the school. If this is considered to be the only viable option for the school then the Council must undertake a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a rural school, there is a presumption against closure and the Council must ensure all other alternatives have been identified and robustly considered prior to recommending statutory consultation on this matter.
- 4.13 Following the Options Appraisal process, a report would be brought back to Committee detailing the outcome of the appraisal and recommendations for the longer term future of the school.
- 4.14 Option 3 is similar to Option 1 but assumes that the forecast for the next seven years is overly optimistic and that future analysis will show that the school roll will not reach the minimum viable number of 15 for the foreseeable future. It effectively calls forward an option that could be recommended early next year following review of the next school roll forecast (December 2023) and completion of initial schools admission process (February 2024).

Consideration of Options

- 4.15 In considering the options it is important to note that the mothballing process should not be extended for a prolonged period, as this results in continued uncertainty for the community, particularly for future prospective parents who may wish to see the school re-open. However, it is also imperative that the Council do not rush into a decision without robust school roll data.
- 4.16 Based on the current school roll and that expected for the 2023/24 academic session, together with the uncertainty over the future school roll projections either Option 1 or Option 3 should be considered.

5. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

This report supports the LOIP outcomes:

Building a better future for children and young people in Moray:

- Healthier Children: children get the healthiest start in life and are supported to achieve the best possible mental health and wellbeing and there is equity for vulnerable groups.

And the aims of the Corporate Plan to:

- Improve health and wellbeing for the people of Moray.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 have been referred to and will continue to be adhered to with respect to any decisions on the future of Crossroads Primary School.

(c) Financial implications

The current contract daily rate for transport for Crossroads Primary School children to alternate schools is £339.00. This is an increase of £143.00 on the previous cost of £196.00 to transport children to Crossroads Primary School although this is managed within the revenue savings as a consequence of mothballing.

The cost of any weather and/or security protection to the Crossroads buildings will be managed within current revenue budgets assigned to Crossroad Primary School.

Travel expenses for redeployed staff is met through existing budgets.

(d) Risk implications

There are no risks associated with the proposal to continue to mothball Crossroads Primary School, although this will be regularly reviewed.

(e) Staffing implications

There are no staffing implications arising from this report that were not previously reported as a consequence of mothballing.

(f) Property

Whilst the school has been mothballed, the building has been maintained as wind and water tight. The building has been drained down and regular janitor inspections established. Any issues, e.g. water ingress will be addressed as required

A detailed condition survey of the school was completed and future maintenance requirements noted.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

An equality impact assessment has not been required to date. There will be a requirement to complete one should a decision be taken to formally engage with parents, children and community and an Options Appraisal be instructed.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

There has been a small increase in travel distances undertaken by buses and taxis from Crossroads catchment to Rothiemay and Keith primary schools although this has been assessed as offset by the reduction in energy use at the school while mothballed.

(i) Consultations

The Head of Education (Chief Education Officer), Head of Education Resources and Communities, Legal Services Manager, the Chief Financial Officer, Public Transport Officer (Education), the Business Support Team Manager, the Human Resources Manager, the Equal Opportunities Officer, Climate Change Strategy Officer and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Committee considers this report in light of the future of Crossroads Primary School and agrees to progress either: Option 1 - to do nothing at this stage, to keep the school mothballed but review the decision within the next 12 months; or, Option 3 - to undertake an options appraisal on the long term future of the school earlier.

Author of Report: Andy Hall (Programme Manager (Learning Estate))

Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-9425411-237