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Review of Education Provision
at
BALALLAN SCHOOL
Isle of Lewis

CONSULTATION REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2010

Roinn an Fhoghlaim is Seirbheisean Chloinne

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Index

Section:

1	Background
2	The Consultation Process
3	Consultation Meetings
4	Omissions and Inaccuracies
5	Representations
6	Summary of Representations and Comhairle Responses
7	HMle Report
8	Summary of Consultation with Pupils
9	Summary of Consultation with Staff
10	Conclusion
11	Recommendation

Appendices:

- A. [Proposal Document for Balallan School](#)
- B. [Note of Public Meeting](#)
- C. [Initial Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment](#)
- D. [HMle Report](#)

Review of Education Provision at Balallan School, Isle of Lewis Consultation Report

Report by Director of Education and Children's Services

CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL THAT:

- **Education provision at Balallan Primary School be discontinued with effect from 29 June 2012.**
- **That the pupils of Balallan Primary School continue their education at Sgoil nan Loch, from 16 August 2012.**
- **That the catchment area of Sgoil nan Loch be extended to include the current catchment area of Balallan Primary School.**

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Comhairle, at its Meeting on 29 April 2010, authorised the Director of Education and Children's Services to proceed to undertake the necessary statutory consultation with parents, staff, pupils and other interested parties affected by the proposal regarding the proposed closure of Balallan School as required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 1.2 This decision relates to the implementation of the Strategy for the Future Provision of Education in the Western Isles. The Comhairle is required to provide its statutory services as effectively and efficiently as possible. It is therefore necessary to be strategic in the delivery of education to ensure Best Value. School rolls in the Authority as a whole have been falling year on year for the last thirty years and this, based on population projections, is a continuing trend. This trend has resulted in there being more buildings in the school estate than are considered necessary for the delivery of high quality education.
- 1.3 In order to ensure appropriate investment in education at a time of financial challenges it is necessary that the Comhairle make the most efficient use of its finances and resources. The current level of over-capacity in schools combined with the high maintenance costs and poor condition of many of the school buildings throughout the Western Isles is a significant drain on resources and presents a major obstacle to investment in education and school buildings.
- 1.4 Balallan School is designated as a very remote rural school. In terms of Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, the Comhairle has given special regard to -
 - any viable alternative to the closure proposal,
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to
 - (a) the sustainability of the community,
 - (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to
 - (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular),
 - (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities,
 - (ii) any environmental impact,
 - (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 The current requirements for consulting on proposed school closures are set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

- A proposal document was issued as a result of a decision approved by the Comhairle as detailed in Appendix A. A copy of this document was issued free of charge to the consultees as listed in the Proposal Document and was also published on the Comhairle website.
- An advert was placed in local newspapers on 13 May 2010 and the consultation ran thereafter for a period of 34 school days until 30 June 2010.
- A public meeting was held on Friday, 2 June 2010.
- Pupils and staff were also consulted separately.
- HMle involvement included being sent a copy of the proposal document, their attendance at the public meeting and their visiting the affected schools and meeting with parents, pupils and staff. They also received a copy of all written representations. They then prepared a report on the educational aspects of the proposal (Appendix D)
- This Consultation Report is the Comhairle's response to issues raised during the consultation period including a response to identified inaccuracies in the consultation information.
- This Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks before a final decision is taken by the Comhairle on the proposal.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

2.2 An Initial Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (Appendix C), in line with statutory legislation, was undertaken in relation to the proposal for the School. There were no discriminatory or detrimental consequences identified to the proposal being implemented. Therefore a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

CONSULTATION MEETINGS

3.1 Consultation meetings were held as follows:

- Public meeting at Balallan Primary School on 2 June 2010
- Meetings with staff at both Balallan and Sgoil nan Loch were held separately.
- A meeting with pupils at Sgoil nan Loch was held.

OMISSIONS AND INACCURACIES

4.1 Within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 there is guidance on how errors or omissions should be addressed. During the public meeting on 2 June 2010 attention was drawn to the error in paragraph 9.1 of the Proposal Document where Balallan School was described as an accessible rural school when in fact it is a very remote rural school. An advertisement to that effect was placed in local newspapers. This error was not deemed to be material and therefore no further action was taken in relation to this matter.

REPRESENTATIONS

5.1 The written representations received during the consultation period are detailed below.

Representations from:	Number
• Community Petition with 16 signatures	1
• Individual written representations (1 with petition attached with 10 signatures)	14
• Parent Council	1
• Parent and Toddler Group	1
• Community Council	1
• Staff Professional Associations	2
• Bòrd na Gàidhlig	1
• NHS Western Isles	1
• Fire Service	1
TOTAL:	23

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS AND COMHAIRLE RESPONSES

6.1 This section details the relevant points raised at public meetings and in the written submissions. A full transcript of the public meeting is included as Appendix B. A copy of all written representations will be published as part of the Report to Comhairle Members.

6.2 The responses to the issues raised are detailed below.

Finance
<p>ISSUE: The consultation raised a number of concerns regarding finance including levels of savings, GME costs at Sgoil nan Loch, maintaining an empty building, cost per pupil figures, cost comparisons with Bernera, DDA compliance, travel costs of centrally deployed staff and cost of meals.</p> <p>RESPONSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal document outlined proposed savings in cost per pupil terms, based on the actual budgets for each school. The school estate review, by reducing the number of schools and decreasing the staff to pupil ratio, estimates a net saving of approximately £2m. • The budgeted cost per pupil comprises the school's budget plus a calculated share of centrally held budgets for schools, e.g. transport, catering, cleaning and Gaelic Medium. These costs are reported to the Scottish Government on an annual basis. • The annual budgeted school running cost per pupil, as reported to Scottish Government, is obtained by dividing the total budgeted school running cost by the school roll. The total cost comprises of the following. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff (teaching and non teaching) • Premises (e.g. lighting, heating, maintenance, cleaning etc) • Supplies (including books, materials and educational equipment) • School transport • Catering • Other School Costs (e.g. Parental Councils, Administration, Examination costs where applicable etc).

- The Balallan School pupil costs for **2009/10** are shown in the following table along with the relevant comparators.

Detail	Amount
Scottish Average	£3,948
Western Isles Primary School Average	£7,014
Sgoil nan Loch Primary Department	£7,578
Balallan Primary School	£11,300

- The cost difference in Gaelic between Bernera and Balallan is due to costs of Gaelic staffing provision in Bernera School being included in overall school costs, whereas costs for Balallan are shown separately as they are being funded through Specific Grant for Gaelic monies.

School 2009/10	Balallan School	Bernera School
DESCRIPTION	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BUDGET
Employee Expenses	106,743	105,911
Premises Related Expenditure	21,708	13,585
Transport Related Expenditure	261	200
Supplies and Services	3,155	3,213
Net Expenditure	131,867	122,909
Gaelic Teaching Cost	45,086	42,928
Parent Council Funding	372	437
Central Printing and Copying	176	184
Itinerant Teacher Costs	13,431	13,686
Itinerant Teacher Costs (Travel)	1,074	1,094
Catering Costs	9,789	17,260
School Transport	32,187	22,287
Central Licences	3,312	3,312
TOTAL	237,294	224,097
Number of Pupils	21	21
COST PER PUPIL	11,300	10,671

- The current cost per pupil (2010/11) for Balallan School is as detailed below.

Balallan School 2010	
DESCRIPTION	TOTAL BUDGET
Employee Expenses	157,434
Premises Related Expenditure	13,351
Utilities Related Expenditure	1,785
Resources Related Expenditure	12,785
Transport Related Expenditure	9,994
Catering Related Expenditure	19,829
Net Expenditure	215,178
Parent Council Funding	439
TOTAL	215,617
Number of Pupils	17
COST PER PUPIL	12,683

- Pupil costs at Sgoil nan Loch will increase with the provision of a Gaelic Medium Education Unit.
- The Disposal of Surplus Buildings Policy provides an opportunity for communities to make proposals on how buildings could be used. Based on issues raised in the consultation process, the Education and Children's Services Department has developed a European Social Fund application which is currently at stage 2. This proposes community-based economic regeneration projects, together with the appointment of community development workers who would be based in communities affected by school closures.
- Any vacant building will be maintained at the level of it being wind and water tight with minimum heating, representing a reduced cost until time of disposal, at which point a capital asset may be received. Balallan School has CCTV cameras which will remain active until the disposal of the building. This provides a measure of security against vandalism.
- The Education and Children's Services Department's centre-based staff spends £195,000 on mainland and island travel and subsistence. £140,000 of this sum is directly spent in relation to teachers and other school-based staff, providing support to rural schools and or accessing training. Of this sum, £13,000 is spent on mainland travel and subsistence. Centrally deployed staff account for £44,000 of the travel budget, of which £9,000 is used for mainland travel. A further £11,000 is spent by ICT staff maintaining IT support to schools.
- The school is not fully DDA compliant. However, all Health and Safety requirements based on the needs of individual pupils, have been met. Outstanding works based on the 2006 audit would cost approximately £45,843.
- The difference in the cost of meals between Sgoil nan Loch and Balallan School is attributable to the cost of transportation of meals from Sgoil nan Loch to Balallan. Tender information for Comhairle services is commercially sensitive and can not therefore be disclosed. However, all tenders are compliant with national guidance and subject to external audit, monitoring and scrutiny.

TRAVEL

ISSUE: A number of concerns were raised in respect of distances, travel time, environmental impact and access to services.

RESPONSE:

- The Comhairle's Home to School Travel Policy provides transport for children who have to walk more than 1 mile.
- In the majority of rural schools within the Outer Hebrides the catchment area is greater than the one mile distance.
- The distances that pupils have to travel to and from school are clearly important in any assessment of the requirement for appropriate transport provision. In addition, distances of themselves have to be set in the context of road conditions and the time that such travelling takes.
- The Comhairle Policy states that Primary pupils should not, as a rule have to travel more than 30 minutes on a bus, or Secondary pupils more than 60 minutes. On occasions where pupils live in a remote location, which would mean that their journey to school was longer than the policy stated, reasonable steps would be taken to minimise their journey time.
- The route from the furthest point of Eisken is approximately 18 miles. The Transport Department has simulated the journey in real time and were able to do so within 35 minutes. On the basis that this would affect only one or two families, an exception to policy would be made, with possible taxi provision.

- Balallan and Sgoil nan Loch are on the main bus route which currently requires buses to travel north to south/south to north. These buses will take all the pupils required, with the possible exception of Eisken, where a taxi may be required to the road end. This will have little additional environmental impact or significant effect on the carbon footprint. Any increase is likely to be offset by the reduction in heating at Balallan School.
- The existing Home to School Travel Policy excludes pre-school provision. However, pre-school opening and closing times can be adjusted to fit public or dedicated school transport times. Mother and toddler groups would be able to access the school hall and, depending on the future use of the current school hall, other opportunities may be available.

SCHOOL CAPACITY
<p>ISSUE: A number of questions were asked in relation to the capacity of the school.</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School capacity is subject to the application of national guidance and is reported to the Scottish Government on an annual basis. Classroom capacity is calculated using Regulation 8, The Schools (Scotland) Regulations 1975 along with Core Fact 4 "Standard teaching room is m² /1.75 capped at 25 for composite, Gaelic and P1, 2 and 3 and at 30 for single year groups P4-7". • Sgoil nan Loch has the capacity to accommodate Balallan Primary School. Based on current enrolment data, Balallan operates with two class groups, one English and one Gaelic Medium. Sgoil nan Loch would operate with four class groups of eighteen. The Gaelic class group would remain as at present. • The School Estate Review will ensure that all school provision in the Western Isles will have Gaelic Medium Education provision. The Department currently has Gaelic Medium provision in schools where a number of staff do not speak Gaelic, and there is no evidence that this results in impairment in language acquisition. The Department is committed to the Comhairle's Gaelic Plan and is working to ensure that increasing numbers of staff have a basic competence in the Gaelic language. Increasing emphasis is being placed on encouraging staff to take up available CPD opportunities, e.g. Ulpan, evening classes, in-house, etc. • The Comhairle in recent years has seen a steady growth in enrolments in Gaelic Medium Education. The Education and Children's Services Department's revised Gaelic Plan will set a target of at least 50% of P1 enrolments in Gaelic Medium Education. This is considered realistic, on the basis that many parents whose children are enrolled in Croileagan do not enrol their children in Gaelic Medium Education, where their local catchment area school only provides education through the medium of English.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY
<p>ISSUES: A number of concerns were raised in relation to parental choice, economic development, community identity and community involvement in learning.</p> <p>RESPONSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current roll of Balallan School is 17. Parental choice is not being removed, although it may be more limited. Over the last 3 sessions, there have been 18 placing requests applications from Balallan School to Sgoil nan Loch.

- In terms of economic development, research suggests that for every 100 houses built, we might expect approximately 28 primary enrolments and 20 secondary enrolments. An additional 28 pupils to the current roll of 17, would not significantly affect our recommendation for school closure.
- Over a period of 30 years, where there have been significantly more schools than at present, and there has been an ongoing annual decline in the pupil population, and there is no evidence within the Western Isles that having a school in a community, increases inward migration. With the improved road infrastructure in the islands there is evidence that people's choice of where to live, is determined by factors other than the presence of a school.
- The decline in population is not always greater in communities where schools have already closed. In some communities, the population has increased despite of the closure of the local school.
- All of our schools are designated very remote rural schools. Our strategy is focused on sustaining and strengthening schools in very remote rural locations.
- The Outer Hebrides Migration Study 2008, identified key factors of sustainable communities which included sustainable employment, private sector led economic diversity, housing provision, self determination and clean energy. It is development in these areas that sustains local communities.
- In light of issues raised at the consultation regarding migration and community viability, a European Social Fund (ESF) application supporting community regeneration and economic development, targeting youth and young people, has been developed and is currently being considered at stage 2.
- The School Estate Review does not seek to remove schools from rural communities but rather to provide schools on a community basis, that are viable and able to deliver a quality education in quality buildings. This is consistent with the Comhairle's policy on community schools and with the Economic Development definition of sustainable communities.
- A school is only one of a number of services in any community and, like any other service, it can only exist where there is a viable demand. The level of service provision in a community more frequently reflects the demands placed upon it by demographics, population and the economy.
- Across the Western Isles, schools successfully serve multiple communities.
- The Balallan community has access to community facilities other than the school. These facilities are used in preference to the school. In the event that the school were to close, the community would have an opportunity to make a business case for its use and purchase.
- All Western Isles schools are required to include studies of their local community within the curriculum, and, on this basis, opportunities would be built into the curriculum for both community participation in the school, and school participation in the community. It is accepted that the increased distance will provide a greater challenge, but evidence suggests that in other school locations, this is not a barrier to participation within the community.

EDUCATION BENEFITS STATEMENT

ISSUES: The education benefits statement raised concerns regarding viable school numbers, class sizes and resources.

RESPONSE

- Effective learning and teaching is highly dependent on children's ability to interact with their peer group and teacher, in relation to their learning. There is no evidence to suggest that very small composite classes do better than classes with more than 20 pupils. The specific benefits of attending a school with a larger roll are listed below:
 - Increased opportunities for pupils, including both curricular and extra curricular
 - A larger pupil population offers greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching
 - There will also be greater flexibility in the development of staff to meet the learning needs of pupils
 - The pupils will have access to a wider range of activities than are available to them at present. This will be in larger groupings, alongside pupils of similar ages.
- In the event of Balallan School integrating with Sgoil nan Loch, class sizes would be within the maximum composite class size of twenty-five.
- It is the view of the Education and Children's Services Department that quality of teaching is the single most important factor, not the class size. This view is supported in the recent 'Review of Class Size Control Mechanisms' as reported in August 2010 by the Working Group set up by the Scottish Government.
- Douglas Cairns, HMIe Assistant Chief Inspector advised the Scottish Government's Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee (2010) that "by and large, the spectrum of quality across small rural primary schools seems to be much the same as the national average." Therefore it can be seen from the above comments that there is no definitive advantage to be gained for pupils being educated in a smaller school.
- Sgoil nan Loch has more facilities and resources, and the condition and fabric of the building is significantly better. Balallan School is an older building, with more limited facilities than Sgoil nan Loch. Sgoil nan Loch is a more modern school with particular advantages in relation to library facilities, sports facilities and outside play areas, classroom design, specialist facilities, off-road parking, etc.

AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

ISSUES: This was an area of significant concern to a lot of parents, worried (a) that children would not be able to participate in after-school activities; (b) about how would they get home; and (c) about the implications for after-school activities in the local community.

RESPONSE

- After-school activity funding is transparent and equitably distributed across all schools in the Western Isles. It is the case, that the bigger the school and the more staff within it, the broader the range and provision of after-school activities.
- If children want to participate in after-school activities, schools generally will make arrangements for children to get passes on the service bus, or where possible, will arrange other transport.
- After-school activities will also continue to be supported through Community Education, Sport and Health and the Voluntary Sector in local communities.
- In response to the issues raised in the community consultations, the Department is actively looking at ways of providing a community development resource in each area where a school may close. This is with a view to encourage and support local communities to develop and use local resources for recreational, learning and other community uses. A stage 2 ESF application has currently been submitted.

STAFFING
<p>ISSUES: A number of issues were raised in relation to the implications for staffing.</p> <p>RESPONSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Comhairle seeks to avoid compulsory redundancy. In the event of any school closures which may result in the displacement or redeployment of staff, the Department will implement the Comhairle's Human Resources Strategy.

HMIe REPORT

7.1 In line with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was provided by HM Inspectorate on the educational aspects of the proposed closure of Balallan School and the transfer of pupils to Sgoil nan Loch. This report is attached as Appendix D.

7.2 The Report also identifies issues for consideration by the Comhairle as follows.

HMIe REPORT
<p>ISSUE: The Comhairle should assess the impact of its travel proposals on children and their learning, particularly on those living some distance from a main road. Travel arrangements could also limit children's participation in after-school activities.</p> <p>RESPONSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education and Children's Services Department has assessed the travel implications to ensure that all travel is within the Comhairle's Home to School Travel Policy. • If children wish to participate in after school activities, schools will usually make arrangements for children to get passes for the service bus, or where possible, will arrange other transport. • After-school activities will also continue to be supported through Community Education, Sport and Health and the Voluntary Sector in local communities. • In response to the issues raised in the community consultations, the Department is actively looking at ways of providing a community development resource in each area, where a school may close. This is with a view to encouraging and supporting local communities to develop and use local resources for recreational, learning and other community uses. A stage 2 European Social Fund application has currently been submitted.
<p>ISSUE: The Comhairle's proposal to relocate the Croileagan from Balallan Primary School to Sgoil nan Loch would have significant travel, cost and time implications for parents of pre-school children wishing to access the relocated facility. The proposal could limit the participation of families with limited access to private transport. The Comhairle should accurately determine the demand for pre-school provision in the Kinloch area over the next two years. It should assess the impact of its proposal on families in the area who may wish to access that provision.</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Education and Children's Services Department, through its early years framework, has evaluated demand for pre-school provision in all areas of the Western Isles, and has put in place provision that is considered viable and accessible. • The Comhairle, in order to support providers and prevent the collapse of groups in rural areas, has undertaken to incorporate independent providers within school provision, and to integrate pre-school education with mainstream primary education. • Issues of particular hardship or additional support needs are addressed on an individual basis.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pre-school provision is run by a voluntary organisation, but housed in the mobile unit which is attached to the school. If the school were to close these services could continue to operate within Balallan village.
<p>ISSUE: The Comhairle should discuss with the local community and with Bòrd na Gàidhlig how it intends to maintain the area's Gaelic language and culture, should it proceed with its proposal. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar should take full account of the composite response submitted by Bòrd na Gàidhlig</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bòrd na Gàidhlig commented on areas where the Education and Children's Services Department should do further work to promote Gàidhlig and, in particular, the uptake of Gaelic Medium Education. As a result, the Education and Children's Services Department has re-focused its bid proposal for Gaelic Specific Grant to work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and partners to increase the primary enrolment numbers and maximise opportunities for Gaelic Medium Education. This will also include the possibility of later entry to Gaelic Medium Education and an emphasis on Gaelic Medium Education in all pre-school provision associated with local primary schools. The revised Departmental Gaelic Plan has specific initiatives designed to increase the retention rate in primary and to encourage greater participation and take-up in secondary. The Education and Children's Services Department is committed to partnership working with Bòrd Na Gàidhlig.
<p>ISSUE: The Comhairle should consider how its future use of the school could continue to benefit the community. The Comhairle should also set out clearly how it intends to ensure that the implementation of its proposal does not have an adverse impact on the sustainability of the community and the community's access to facilities.</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In response to the issues raised in the community consultations, the Department is actively looking at ways of providing a community development resource in each area where a school may close. This is with a view to encourage and support local communities to develop and use local resources for recreational, learning and other community uses. A stage 2 European Social Fund application has currently been submitted. The school is rarely used as a community facility. Kinloch has a Community Hall located at the rear of the school.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION WITH PUPILS

- 8.1 Dependent on the size of the school, consultation with pupils was carried out on the basis of a representative focus group and a cross section of stages or whole school. In each school the children and young people were asked to work in groups to identify:
- Benefits in bringing the schools together
 - Issues of concern
 - Areas they felt they might need help with

Summary of Consultation with Balallan School Pupils

Balallan School parents objected to a meeting with pupils, therefore no consultation was undertaken with them.

Summary of Consultation with Sgoil nan Loch Pupils as the receiving School

Benefits

- More money for school, easier to raise money for the school
- More school events and more chances to enter competition, e.g. volleyball and hockey
- Other personalities, getting to know new people
- New friends/chance to make more friends
- Moving to Nicolson along with a lot more pupils which you knew well so making for an easier transfer – fitting in.

Issues of Concern

- Some people who can't make friends may feel left out
- Not as much room on the bus
- We might not adapt to them well
- Being bullied by pupils that you have never seen before
- It would cost more for transport
- Teachers would be more challenged if big classes and might find them harder to control
- Might lose friends

RESPONSE:

These issues were discussed with the pupils and where possible answers provided.

Areas where we might help

- Tell them where things are so they don't get lost around the school
- Make them feel welcome by being kind and helpful
- Have an Open day for them – Induction day
- Assign buddies
- Introduce them to other people and teachers
- Involve them in partner and teamwork tasks

RESPONSE:

Most of the suggestions provided by pupils were reasonable and an undertaking was given that, should the proposal be accepted, there would be further discussion with the pupils in order to prepare a transition plan.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION WITH STAFF

- 9.1 All teaching and non-teaching staff were invited to attend consultations regarding the Comhairle's proposals. The staff made the following observations which they wished to be recorded.

Balallan School Staff

- Improved ICT – Staff believe Balallan School to have equal or better ICT facilities
- Staff believe they have a better staff to pupil ratio
- Staff believe Balallan School has equal cafeteria provision
- Staff believe they have adequate gym and art facilities in the school together with an excellent outdoor learning facility and classroom including poly tunnel provision
- Staff believe that the Gaelic provision in Balallan School is good and that Sgoil nan Loch would have to provide Gaelic provision.
- All staff in Balallan School speak Gaelic and the school has a strong Gaelic ethos in comparison to Sgoil nan Loch
- Staff feel that the P5 provision is well linked to the school
- Privileged transport being provided to those who make placing requests is seen as having a negative effect on the school roll.
- Staff feel that no placing request should be provided transport and this would encourage greater enrolment of local children in Balallan School
- Staff feel that the department should look at other areas of cost cutting such as removal of free fruit etc

- Staff are concerned that the document gave the impression of extra-curricular activities in Sgoil nan Loch being greater in number and occurrence. They are concerned that the activities at Sgoil nan Loch do not take place all year round and included activities, which only second year pupils can access.

In relation to the Proposal Document Balallan School staff wished to make specific comments on the followings sections.

- Staff believe integration with Sgoil nan Loch will produce a major reduction in community engagement in learning and teaching in the school. They consider that the adult engagement within the school promotes familiarity between the children and the community and this would be a significant loss.
- Staff are concerned that this section implies that Balallan School does not meet the needs of the pupil or deliver CfE, which they strongly contest. Staff feel that both schools are fully designed and resourced to deliver CfE. The library is the only resource in Sgoil nan Loch that is not available in Balallan.
- Staff are not convinced that there is a wider range of activities. All activities in Balallan are agreed, based on the interests of the children, and in consultation with the parents. Staff are concerned that children from Balallan would not be able to stay for extra-curricular activities. Some children may be able to access them if their parents have cars and if the council were to provide a bus this would mean an increased travelling time for the youngest of children.
- Staff do not feel the community will be able to integrate at the same level at present e.g. they do not feel that the old folk would travel the same way. There is a concern that Sgoil nan Loch is being presented as part of the community, when in fact it is distinctively different.
- There is significant concern that with the 30 wind turbines proposal and the prospect of 100 jobs that families will move to the area and that the school and the community would be a significant attraction.
- Staff believe that there would be an increase in the carbon footprint due to travel. Staff are also concerned what use would be made of the hall and building. Staff are concerned also that the employee expenses did not appear to be accurate.

Sgoil nan Loch Staff

- Clarification was requested on the issue of written representations, specifically if individual members of staff could make written representations as part of the consultation or could these only be made through the Unions.
- Concern was expressed that during the previous consultation for closure of the Secondary there had not been the opportunity, as now, for staff to be consulted. Did this mean that the previous process was unsound?
- Given that the proposed closure included the Nursery provision in Balallan, it was suggested that there was insufficient capacity in Sgoil nan Loch for these addition nursery pupils.
- Transport arrangements were discussed including the early time of arrival of the service bus. It was noted that in the proposal document arrangements in the form of an additional midi coach would be provided.
- Concerns about staffing in the receiving school were expressed.

CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Throughout this consultation the Comhairle has given special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010,
- 10.2 In recognition of the impact of school closures on local communities, the Comhairle undertook, in addition to statutory consultation, community conversations in order to share with stakeholders the challenges for education together with its aspirations for a review of educational provision designed to provide 'Quality Education in Quality Buildings'.
- 10.3 The consultation process was robust and provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Comhairle's response detailed in sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 above.

- 10.4 The Standards in Schools (Scotland) Act 2000 requires local authorities “to secure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential”. (para 2.1)
- 10.6 HMle visited Balallan School to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They attended the public meeting on 2 June 2010 and had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 10.6 In summary, the HMle Report recognises the merits of the closure proposal.
“On balance, the proposal from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to close Balallan Primary School in June 2012 and to transfer children to Sgoil nan Loch with effect from August 2012, offers some educational benefit for the children directly affected by the proposal and more widely across Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Children would benefit from learning and working in larger groups with others of their own age and stage, particularly within the context of Curriculum for Excellence. They would benefit from access to the wider range of facilities available at Sgoil nan Loch. There would be more opportunity for staff development and for staff to work together to develop the curriculum and learning materials.”
- 10.7 The HMle report provides evidence that the proposal to amalgamate Balallan School with Sgoil nan Loch will produce:
Educational benefits:
- Can deliver Curriculum for Excellence effectively
 - Will assure more effective use of resources – financial, staffing and estate
 - Will ensure that pupils are educated in buildings fit for the 21st Century
- 10.8 In its submission in response to the consultations, Bòrd na Gàidhlig commented on areas where the Education and Children’s Services Department should do further work to promote Gàidhlig and, in particular, the uptake of Gaelic Medium Education. However, the Bòrd welcomed Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s aspiration that GME should be available in all primary schools in the Western Isles through the implementation of the Schools Estate Strategy. In particular, Bòrd na Gàidhlig would not oppose the closure of Balallan School.
- 10.9 The Director of Education and Children’s Services, on reviewing all of the submissions, the HMle report, Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s response and the Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix C) recommends that the best and most sustainable educational provision for the current catchment area of Balallan Primary School would be provided at Sgoil nan Loch and that the education provision should be discontinued at Balallan Primary School from 29 June 2012.
- 10.10 The Director of Education and Children’s Services recommends that a transfer of pupils from Balallan School to Sgoil nan Loch will have educational benefits and that the learning opportunities and experience for pupils will be significantly widened. There will be :
- increased opportunities for pupils, both curricular and extra-curricular activities;
 - greater flexibility in grouping children for learning and teaching;
 - greater flexibility in the deployment of staff to meet learning needs;
 - a larger staff will offer a wider range of expertise resulting in increased opportunities for sharing effective practice, more collegiate support and a wider range of learning and teaching approaches;
 - more management support to promote school improvement.
- 10.11 Pupils and parents of Balallan School would have access to a modern educational establishment, which is fully equipped and designed to meet the needs of pupils and fully deliver a Curriculum for Excellence. There is an opportunity for the pupils, staff and parents of both schools to benefit from working together to ensure that the very best quality of learning and teaching is available to all pupils, irrespective of their needs or abilities.
- 10.12 The proposal will result in pupils at Balallan School attending a building that is modern and better designed for the delivery of a 21st Century curriculum.

- 10.13 The closure of Balallan School will both improve efficiency of the school estate and enable investment in education and provide a better educational experience for pupils.
- 10.14 Should the proposal be approved the Director of Education and Children's Services will work with parents and staff in Balallan and Sgoil nan Loch to develop a transition plan that will ensure an effective transition for pupils and staff to Sgoil nan Loch.

RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is recommended that:
- a) the Education provision at Balallan Primary School be discontinued with effect from 29 June 2012;
 - b) the pupils of Balallan Primary School continue their education at Sgoil nan Loch, from 16 August 2012; and
 - c) the catchment area of Sgoil nan Loch be extended to include the current catchment area of Balallan Primary School.