

# ***Sgoil nan Loch Parent Council Response to Consultation Document***

## **‘Review of Educational Provision Sgoil nan Loch March 2008’**



### ***A Way Forward- Options for Consideration***

- Retain Sgoil nan Loch as a S1/S2
- Develop a 3 Year Secondary School independently (or as an Annex of the Nicolson Institute) – thereby reducing the capital burden on the Comhairle and increasing potential flexibility in the absence of full cost analysis for the new Nicolson Institute.
- Review the catchment for Sgoil nan Loch.
- Refrain from making any decision on the transfer of pupils to the Nicolson Institute until the new Nicolson Institute is operational. On the grounds that it is unreasonable to move children from an “excellent” facility, to a facility which has aspects which are “unacceptable”.
- Refer the matter to Scottish ministers in the event of the Comhairle voting to close.

### ***Justice and Fair Play***

The Scottish Government Guidance states ***‘justice and fair play has to be done and be seen to be done’***.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the formal submission from Sgoil nan Loch Parent Council submitted on behalf of the Sgoil nan Loch Parent Forum on the proposed closure of S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch Secondary.

In this submission we believe we have put forward a reasoned, well balanced, argument for the retention of the secondary at Sgoil nan Loch (SnL).

We object to the proposed closure of S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch Secondary because;

- It would mean a movement from '*excellent facilities*' to a school judged to be 'unsatisfactory', is a retrograde step.(Section 5)
- It would mean a move from a safe secure environment to a school that allows pupils off campus at lunchtime and may not be fulfilling its legal duty of care, a retrograde step. (Section 15)
- It would mean a move from a school that can provide '*a very positive dining experience*' to a school with a canteen that is considerably 'too small', a retrograde step. (Section 13)
- It would mean a move from guaranteed access to 'healthy eating' to very limited access, a retrograde step. (Section 13)
- It would mean a move from a school that affords access to sporting facilities at lunchtime, and after school sports clubs regardless of ability to very limited lunchtime access (temporary) and more 'exclusive' after school sports clubs, a retrograde step. (Section 14)
- It would mean a move that would compromise the 'rights of the child' in terms of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Section 16)
- It would be a closure that would undermine the aims of an Initiative on the Edge Area. (Section 12)
- It would be a closure that can not be justified on the basis of falling school rolls; Sgoil nan Loch Secondary is growing year on year. (Section 4)
- It would be a closure that can not be justified on the basis of running costs; Sgoil nan Loch is a modern, efficient, fit for purpose building. (Section 6)
- It would be a closure that can not be justified on the basis of the financial information presented in the consultation document. (Section 9)
- It would be a closure that can not be justified on the basis of A Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE), Sgoil nan Loch can and has already begun to implement ACfE. (Section 8)
- It is a closure that can not be justified on the basis of a new or refurbished Nicolson Institute being available. There are NO APPROVED DETAILED PLANS.
- It is a closure that can not be justified because it does not 'synchronise' with other Comhairle policies. (Section 12)

The SnL parent Council further believe that;

- **A re-examination of the catchment area should include Uig, Bernera, Breasclete and Pairc to further relieve pressure on the capital requirements for the Nicolson Institute and save the council money.**
- **SnL could be a exemplar for new thinking in education, which could see a seamless provision from preschool to preparation for higher grade examinations This gives CnES flexibility in the design of the new Nicolson institute and could reduce the Comhairle's overall capital expenditure.**

**The Parent Council are also of the view that there are significant legal implications for CnES included within this document.**

It is the view of the Parent Council that the Comhairle has failed in its duty to; Consult with Parents in accordance with the guidance issued by the Scottish Government, or consult with affected children in accordance with its duty outlined in the Children's Act 1995, and breached children's rights in accordance with the European Charter (articles 3, 12, 13)

In the event of Sgoil nan Loch closing and children being transferred to the current Nicolson Institute the Comhairle will fail in its duty to ensure that children are safe, secure and supervised in breach of; Cnes duty to act in Locum Parentus and Guidance issued within Greens Scottish Education Manual 2007.

The Scottish Government guidance on school closure says that *'there is a requirement for referral to Ministers where the school's role exceeds 80% of the capacity.'* The Department of Education's School Estate Management Plan, September 2007 states that the capacity of SnL S1/S2 is 40. The consultation document says the current S1/S2 role is 49. As this is >80% if the Comhairle decide to close this S1 S2 school, it is our view that the Comhairle have a duty to refer the decision to Scottish Ministers.

### **A Way Forward- Options for Consideration**

- Retain Sgoil nan Loch as a S1/S2
- Develop a 3 Year Secondary School independently (or as an Annex of the Nicolson Institute) – thereby reducing the capital burden on the Comhairle and increasing potential flexibility in the absence of full cost analysis for the new Nicolson Institute and delivering in line with ACfE.
- Conduct a comprehensive review the catchment area for Sgoil nan Loch.
- Refrain from making any decision on the transfer of pupils to the Nicolson Institute until the new Nicolson Institute is operational. On the grounds that it is unreasonable to move children from an "excellent" facility, to a facility which has aspects which are "unacceptable".
- Refer the matter to Scottish ministers in the event of the Comhairle voting to close S1/S2..

### **Justice and Fair Play**

The Scottish Government School Closure Guidance states *'justice and fair play has to be done and be seen to be done.'*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This submission makes comments on three main areas of concern;

- Consultation Process and Procedure
- Consultation Document
- Other Relevant Factors

Within these areas, there are a number of issues that we feel should be considered, these are all listed in the contents above. For each of these sections a summary of the main points is provided at the beginning of the section. Our conclusions are presented in detail in Section 22.

In addition to the School Councils formal submission we have included at Appendices A and B and a copy of the views expressed by a parent at the public meeting (18 March 2008) and the views of a former secondary pupil. These clearly illustrate the high esteem in which Sgoil nan Loch is held within the community.

## 2. CONSULTATION PROCESS

- **The Scottish Government School Closure Guidance requires that balanced arguments for the proposed changes are presented during the consultation process. The consultation document issued by the Comhairle only presents the reasons for closure.**
- **The professional views of the teaching staff would have informed the debate considerably.**

### 2.1 - The Scottish Government School Closure Guidance

SnL School Council are of the opinion that the Comhairle's consultation document does not fulfil the requirements of National Government Guidance which says "*They should set out the case for change, the advantages and disadvantages, the costs and savings, fully, clearly and openly. Paragraph 19 describes the main statutory requirements for the formal consultation process. There should be great clarity about precisely what it is that the Council is seeking to achieve, and why, about the range of options, and why one in particular has been chosen, about the short term effects and the longer term considerations, and about how the authority plans to maximise the benefits and minimise any disbenefits.*"

**The Consultation document presents only one side of the argument, it does not present the disadvantages vs advantages, the costs and savings, a range of options etc. etc.**

### 2.2 - Views of the Teaching Staff

It would have been extremely useful if the professional views of the teaching staff had formed part of the consultation document. Informed debate is much more constructive; it would have aided the level of debate and informed the parents more on the educational merits or otherwise of what the Comhairle are proposing.

### 3. PROCEDURE

- If the Comhairle take the view that S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch should be closed it is the view of the Parent Council that there is a legal requirement to notify the Scottish Government as the current school roll is more than 80% of the capacity.

#### 3.1 - Question at Public Meeting

At the public meeting on 18 March 2008 held at Sgoil nan Loch the panel was asked the following question.

*“ The Scottish Government guidance on school closure says that ‘there is a requirement for referral to Ministers where the school’s role exceeds 80% of the capacity.’ The Department of Education’s School Estate Management Plan, September 2007 states that the capacity of SnL S1/S2 is 40. The consultation document says the current S1/S2 role is 49 , that works out at 122.5 % capacity for the S1/S2 at SnL, if the Comhairle decide to close this S1 S2 school, it is our view that the Comhairle have a duty to refer the decision to Scottish Ministers, do you agree with that?”*

#### 3.2 - Parent Council Reserve the Right to Make Further Comments

An answer was not given at the meeting but an assurance was made that an answer would be provided. As a response had not been provided by 5pm on 28 March, one working day before the deadline for representations to be submitted, SnL Parent Council reserve the right to make further representations on this issue.

#### 3.3 - 80% Capacity Rule

In the press there was an indication that the Comhairle may be including the capacity and school roll of the primary when assessing the 80% capacity rule. Even if you do this calculation for the total school roll of 116 as a percentage of 140 (total capacity as stated in the Comhairle’s Asset Mangement Plan 2007) the current school roll is 82.85 % of capacity. Therefore **there is no doubt that this should be referred to the Scottish Government.**

However, we do not agree that it is 80% of the total school role that should be considered for the determination of the 80% capacity rule. We are arguing that S1/S2 is not ‘a stage of education’ it is a school so it should be 80% of the secondary school role that should be considered. We believe that this is the case because there is considerable evidence that the Comhairle considers the S1/S2 schools as separate entities;

- On numerous occasions at the public meeting on 18 March 2008, the Assistant Director of Education made reference in her prepared script, to S1/S2 schools.
- School Estate Management Plan,
- The finance of the two are administered separately, and
- The consultation document in paragraph 1.3 quotes the decision of the Comhairle, which refers to *‘the proposed closure of Bayble, Daliburgh, Sgoil nan Loch, Paible, Shawbost, Lional and Back* **SECONDARY SCHOOLS’**

### **3.4 - Post Public Meeting Survey**

It is accepted that it is for the local authority to determine the capacity of the school but the Education Authority had already done this in a published document, The Asset Management Planning, School Estate Management Plan, dated September 2007. After the public meeting, a previously unscheduled capacity survey was undertaken on Tuesday 25 March by the Education Authority to establish capacity. The results of this had not been given to the Parent Council by 5pm Friday 28 March 2008.

Sgoil nan Loch Parent Council has major concerns regarding this issue. There have been no material changes in the school since September 2007, the date of their published document; and no new guidance relating to capacity that could justify a reassessment. Therefore, what justification is there for initiating a new survey? All that has changed is a realisation that any decision to close the secondary would have to be notified to the Scottish Government

### **3.5 - 'Justice and Fair Play'**

Throughout the process of school closure consultation the local authority is required to follow Scottish Government School Closure Guidance. This document clearly states '*Justice and Fair play has to be done and seen to be done.*' SnL Parent Council's main aim on this issue is to ensure that due process is followed and seen to be followed.

## **4. SCHOOL ROLL**

- **The current S1 / S2 school role of 49 exceeds the predicted figures of 40 maximum as illustrated by the built capacity, this therefore questions the methods used to predict future trends.**
- **The estimate for the future school roll of Sgoil nan Loch as stated in the consultation document should have made an allowance for an increasing trend for transfer requests to the school at S1 stage and the preschool children from out with the catchment area currently attending 'Little Lochies' pre school.**
- **The Catchment area for Sgoil nan Loch should be reviewed.**

### **4.1 - Predicted School Role**

The school was designed to accommodate 40 secondary pupils; presumably this figure was based on projected figures produced by the Education Authority. It is important to note that as the school is not even 7 years old those pupils currently on S1 and S2 would have been preschool when the school was at the planning stage. There are now 49 S1/S2 pupils. That works out as a 22.5% error. Given this degree of error how can we rely on the figures produced in the consultation document to predict future school roles?

### **4.2 - Transfer Requests**

It may be that the higher than expected current secondary school role is partly as a result of transfer requests from other schools. If the Council provides excellent facilities like this it is not surprising that so many from out with the official catchment area want to come to the school. Since opening 23% of the secondary role has been placing requests. It is accepted that this element is difficult to predict but some margin of error should have been built into the statistical exercise for predicting future school roles.

### **4.3 - Catchment Areas**

In view of this transfer request increase it is the view of the SnL Parent Council that the official catchment area is reviewed. Particularity with regard to Pairc, it doesn't make sense at the moment for the Nicolson Institute to be the official receiving school for pupils coming from Pairc given there is a shared headship for the two schools. Indeed there are children from Uig, Breasclete, Bernera and Pairc passing the front door to travel to the Nicolson because for some reason this is not their official receiving school. Furthermore it is our view that the transfer request system be reviewed to make it a simpler and less onerous task.

### **4.4 - Preschool Demand**

There is increasing demand from children out with the area for places at 'Little Lochies', the pre school provision at Sgoil nan Loch. There are children coming from Bernera, Tong and Stornoway to attend this facility, these children are our future pupils. No account has been taken of this fact in the prediction of future school roles.

## 5. BUILDINGS GENERAL

- The HMI reports for Sgoil nan Loch 2006 describes the facilities as excellent, the highest grade possible.
- The HMI report for the Nicolson Institute June 2005 states that the accommodation and facilities had major weaknesses and judged Accommodation and Facilities to be 'unsatisfactory'. These have not been addressed.
- The Comhairle would be failing in their 'duty of care' in moving children from excellent buildings to ones of deemed unsatisfactory.
- The closure of S1/S2 SnL and the transfer of pupils to the Nicolson Institute would therefore represent a diminution in quality of educational service.

### 5.1 - HMI Reports

Both Sgoil nan Loch and the Nicolson Institute have been inspected recently by the HMI. The report on SnL was issued in 2006, in this report it described the facilities as excellent, the highest grade possible.

The main report for the Nicolson was issued in June 2005 with a follow up report being issued in May 2007. The HMI report (2005) for the Nicolson states that '*the accommodation and facilities had major weaknesses, and were judged to be 'unsatisfactory'.* The report further states .

- '*the showering and toilet facilities in the school for physical education were poor;*
- '*the school buildings were not secure and a public right of way passed through the campus;*
- '*there was limited social accommodation for pupils and the dining hall was too small;*
- '*the ICT facilities were poor and the library was only equipped with six computers; and*
- '*disabled access was limited in some of the buildings.'*

### 5.2 - Plans for Upgrade

One of the main points for action identified in the Nicolson HMI report 2005 was that '*the education authority should continue with its plans to improve school security and address the unsatisfactory accommodation.'*

Although some work has been done to address the issue of security access none of the facilities in the Nicolson Institute have been upgraded since the publication of this report. Indications have been given by the Comhairle that it plans to either refurbish the existing campus or build a new school on a 'green field site.' To date, no decision has been made on a preferred option and there are **NO APPROVED DETAILED PLANS**, i.e detailed planning consent has not been obtained.

### 5.3 - Relocation of Pupils

By closing the secondary in Lochs and transferring the pupils to the Nicolson we are of the opinion that the Comhairle would be failing in their duty of care. The Comhairle would be denying these children access to the excellent facilities they have at SnL by moving them to accommodation which is agreed to have major weaknesses. How can a move from a higher quality facility to one of poorer quality be justified and be in the pupils interests?

## 6. RUNNING COSTS OF BUILDINGS

- One of the factors identified in the consultation document is the cost associated with maintaining old buildings, but Sgoil nan Loch is a state of the art, modern building and is more efficient to run than older buildings elsewhere.
- It does not make sense to close the S1/S2 at SnL in a modern, efficient state of the art building and send children to a campus with unsatisfactory accommodation in many old buildings, to make savings to pay for the building of more modern schools.

### 6.1 - Energy Systems

It is a generally accepted fact that older buildings are more expensive to run than modern, state of the art buildings. The quality of the building at Sgoil nan Loch is detailed in the previous section. In terms of the energy system used the building is connected to the Comhairle's BEMS system and boasts a modest renewable energy supply. Also, in line with the Comhairle's Estate management Plan Policy Statement 2 the school harnesses a passive stack ventilation system to regulate the internal environment.

The proposed receiving school is formed by a disparate collection of separate facilities with no overall management system to reduce the carbon footprint in line with the Comhairle's Estate management Plan Policy Statement 2, but rather separate stand-alone heating systems all working in isolation producing more carbon. The HMI report also pointed to the lack of properly regulated heating in certain of the accommodation blocks in the Nicolson Institute. Appendix N1.4 of the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Schools Administration Handbook point 4 states that in some circumstances this can justify evacuation of the classroom

### 6.2 - Efficient Use of Buildings

It says in the consultation document that the Comhairle needs to make savings so it can help fund build new schools, through the Western Isles Schools Project. However it does not make sense to move children from **a modern efficient, state of the art building** to a campus with old, inefficient buildings so it can make savings to fund the building of **modern efficient state of the art buildings**.

## 7. WESTERN ISLES SCHOOLS PROJECT

- The consultation document indicates that the '*potential*' savings from closing S1/S2 here would be used to fund Western Isles Schools Projects but there are **NO APPROVED DETAILED PLANS** for these yet. This raises questions about timescale; formulation of detailed plans, planning consent process, construction work, etc.
- The establishment of Sgoil nan Loch took as much as 18 years from the date of initial meetings to the opening of the school in 2001. How long will a new Nicolson take to establish?
- How can the cost of the Western Isles Schools Project be budgeted for if there are no detailed plans?
- Given that there are so many unknowns regarding the future of the Nicolson Campus it would be unreasonable and illogical for the Comhairle to take the decision to close the S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch, given the quality of the surroundings and the benefits of a modern 'fit for purpose building'

The consultation document indicates that the '*potential*' savings from closing S1/S2 here would be used to fund Western Isles Schools Projects (WISP). It states that '*There is a need to release and redirect the financial resources required to fund the proportion of the cost of The Western Isles Schools Project which falls to the Comhairle.*'

### 7.1 - Costing

Although there has been much speculation about these school projects there are **NO APPROVED DETAILED PLANS** for any of the schemes included in WISP. How therefore can any realistic costing be made given that the Comhairle doesn't know what it will be building?

### 7.2 - Timescale

With regard to the Nicolson no decision has even been made on whether to refurbish the old site or build a new school on a green field site. Given the time required to prepare a design brief, prepare plans, go through the planning process, and the construction/refurbish process it would be difficult to prepare a realistic timescale given the number of unknown factors.

It is important for the Comhairle to be reminded of how long the construction of a new school can take. As early as 1983 meetings took place to discuss the provision of a new school in Lochs, finally in 2001 Sgoil nan Loch was opened.

In these circumstances of so many unknowns it is **unreasonable and illogical** to take the decision, now to close the secondary at Sgoil nan Loch.

## **8. BALANCE OF EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGE**

- The argument that the proposed closure of S1/S2 is necessary for the implementation of the 3-18 Curriculum for Excellence (ACfE) is not accepted. We have written evidence at a national level that these changes are not necessary.
- There is no real assessment of SnL.
- Given that there are still so many unknowns regarding the implementation of ACfE the decision to close SnL secondary on this basis would be premature.
- There is no single model that effectively meets the full range of needs of ACfE.
- SnL is already implementing many of the aims of AcfE
- The inter discipline relationships that are already well established at SnL are consistent with the ethos of CfE
- One of the current emphases in education is the seamless transition from 3-18, no school in the Western Isles is more equipped to provide this than SnL.
- The Pastoral care afforded to 11 and 12 year olds at S1/ S2 schools is greater than could be provided at large S1-S6 schools. The importance of this should not be under estimated.
- There are other models that could be adopted for delivering ACfE which would not require closing S1/S2 schools e.g Islay High School.

### **8.1 - Scottish Government Letter**

Maureen Watt, Minister for Schools and Skills wrote to Jamie McGrigor MSP on 19 February 2008 regarding the possible closure of S1/S2 secondary schools in the Western Isles. Although she was not in a position to comment in detail on any individual case she did say *'The curriculum for Excellence is intended to deliver an integrated curriculum, and there is no question, in terms of overall policy, of it requiring a change of structure or a certain type of school.'*

### **8.2 - No Assessment of what SnL Provides**

Other than a few general comments on S1/S2 schools there is no assessment in the consultation document of what SnL provides, neither is there an assessment of what potentially it could provide if given the opportunity to implement fully ACfE.

### **8.3 - Premature Decision**

At this stage, A Curriculum for Excellence has not been sufficiently defined at the S4-S6 level in order to enable anyone to state how progression should be achieved. It is therefore premature for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to state that the Nicolson Institute is in a better position to enable a seamless progression.

#### **8.4 - Meeting the Requirements of ACfE**

Very few schools are able to provide the full range of 3-18 levels and options which underpin ACfE. SnL provides education from P1-S2; it can deliver a seamless 3-14 provision. Graham Donaldson, Senior Chief Inspector, HMIE, states in an article on curriculum flexibility, 'We make it clear that the future success of Scottish education will, in many ways, depend on carefully designed local innovation, which has the support of parents and carers, meets the needs of pupils and makes learning and teaching more relevant.'

It is evident from the level of debate that there is no single model that effectively meets the full range of needs of CfE. Each school is required to deliver CfE within the constraints of the age of its pupils, the expertise of the staff and the type of community it serves. We are also very clear that providing quality education takes precedence over the structures that are put in place to deliver education in our schools.

The move from S2 to S3 in the Nicolson Institute after the implementation does not need to be a barrier against the continuation of S1/S2 at SnL. We as school council believe that SnL will ensure that the best possible transition arrangements are in place in preparation for ACfE and that it will continue to provide high quality learning experiences for all children within the new curriculum.

#### **8.5 - A Curriculum for Excellence in Action**

In its consultation document, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar states that S1/S2 schools cannot meet the full aspirations of A Curriculum for Excellence.

Sgoil nan Loch already provides pupils with a good choice in the range of subjects available to them. There are many examples of how SnL has already started to deliver ACfE.

#### **8.6 - Nursery to Primary Transition**

One of the key aims is to make the transition between nursery and primary as seamless as possible. SnL has a nursery provision, also managed by the head Teacher, on-site where children from 2 ½- 5 year olds are catered for. Every effort is made to make this transition to P1 as smooth as possible, with joint working between P1/P2 and Little Lochies on specific projects.

#### **8.7 - Primary/Secondary Joint Environmental Projects**

There are many examples of joint projects as to how the transition between primary and secondary is made as smooth as possible.

#### **8.8 - Cross Sector Teaching**

Cross sector teaching is something SnL has always encouraged. Staff from the primary and secondary has the opportunity to give of their expertise in appropriate circumstances in other sectors. This enables the school to cater for different learning styles and needs.

#### **8.9 - Cross Sector Learning**

SnL caters for all pupils' needs, for each pupil to work at a level that is appropriate to them. Particularly in language and Mathematics pupils move between classrooms so that they are in a position to receive the correct level of teaching at the best time.

### **8.10 - Cross-Curricular Topics**

Sgoil nan Loch already delivers teaching within the ethos of A Curriculum for Excellence in that pupils are encouraged to research topics as individuals and by collaborating in groups. They have the resources to be able to do so. By preparing presentations and projects utilising computer software, they are extending their skills in several directions. Cross-curricular activities are already present. By giving presentations and speeches within a class and a school environment, pupils are being empowered to communicate effectively.

### **8.11 - Seamless Transition**

A seamless progression is on the areas in focus in A Curriculum for Excellence and retaining the secondary level at Sgoil nan Loch certainly enables this in a better manner than the transfer of pupils to another school at that important stage in their lives. The proposed achievement framework for A Curriculum for Excellence recognises that pupils will reach the different levels at different times, acknowledging that pupils develop at different paces. It seems that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar wish to constrain pupils rigidly within the broad phases of S1-S3 and S4-S6. A rural school environment such as exists in Sgoil nan Loch is the better framework within which to give pupils an opportunity to progress at their own pace.

### **8.11 - Utilisation of New Building**

Sgoil nan Loch is a new 'fit for purpose building' the internal design of which lends itself to close integration between different disciplines which is encouraged in ACfE

### **8.12 - Overcrowding**

One of the issues that the National Debate wished to address was overcrowding. It is widely known, and accepted, that the Nicolson Institute is already overcrowded, that it suffers from insufficient resources in terms of teaching rooms and ICT. The proposal to close the secondary provision at Sgoil nan Loch and move these extra pupils to the Nicolson Institute is hardly in accordance with A Curriculum for Excellence.

### **8.13 - ACfE Values**

The Consultation Document states that the curriculum is to be based on the values of wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. It is hoped that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will utilise these values when considering a proposal to move pupils from a school which is located in their own community, provides good education, has excellent resources, has a happy environment **to one which will be under severe pressure to accommodate them.**

## 9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- The spending on education by the Comhairle is above the national average but by no means is the Comhairle the highest spender in Scotland. It is important to note that the local authority spending most on education is East Renfrewshire which consistently tops the league tables for exam results. Also St Ninians School, which recently received the highest marks possible in an HMI report, is within the East Renfrewshire area.
- The Scottish Government School Closure Guidance states that '*all aspects of the financial picture need to be factored in*', these have not been presented as part of the consultation process.
- The financial information provided in the consultation document is very limited therefore any critical analysis is difficult.
- What savings? There will be no real savings by closing S1/S2 in the short to medium term.
- From the information contained in the consultation document the view that the savings are required for WISP can not be substantiated in the short to medium term.

### 9.1 - Education Spending in Other Scottish Authorities

In a recent article in the Herald newspaper the proportion of gross expenditure on six main services across councils 2006/7 was illustrated. Although the Comhairle as proportion of its total spending spent more on education than average it was not at the top of the table. What is interesting to note is that East Renfrewshire was at the top of the table, spending nearly 50% of its gross expenditure on Education 2006/07. The Comhairle by contrast spends 40% of its total budget on Education. The Comhairle would need to increase its expenditure by 25%, or £10M to match East Renfrewshire's Expenditure on education. East Renfrewshire consistently tops the league tables for exam results. Also St Ninians School which recently received the highest marks possible in an HMI report is within the East Renfrewshire area

### 9.2 - Scottish Government School Closure Guidance

The Scottish Government School Closure Guidance states that '*the financial advantages of proposals, as compared to the status quo, are of major relevance.*' It also says that '*all aspects of the financial picture need to be factored in e.g the costs of the proposals and the expected returns, considerations of cost effectiveness over the long term, savings in future revenue and maintenance expenditure which may accrue from capital expenditure now, additional cost elements such as transport.*'

### 9.3 - Limited Financial Information

The financial information contained within the consultation document is very limited and does not fulfil the requirements of the guidance quoted above. It therefore makes it difficult to critically assess the arguments put forward on a financial basis. Nonetheless the SnL School Council would wish to make the following comments.

## 9.4 - What Savings?

The consultation documents identify the main costs to be borne by the education Authority as the following.

- Staff (teaching and non teaching)
- Premises ( eg heating and lighting, maintenance)
- Supplies ( including books, materials, and educational equipment)
- School transport
- Catering
- Other School Costs ( e.g. Parental Councils, Administration etc)

The question then to ask is **where are the savings going to come from** by closing S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch?

- Staff- the Education Authority has given an assurance that no one will have to lose their job as a result of this closure, any reduction in staffing would be as a result of 'natural wastage'. Without knowing the personal details of the secondary staff it is difficult to assess accurately, however a fair assessment would be that there would be no change in the staffing costs immediately, limited savings in 5- 10 years with most teachers having at least 15-20 years before retriial. Therefore **NO SAVINGS** for at least 5-10 years.
- Premises- the building will still have to be heated and maintained, therefore **NO SAVINGS**.
- Supplies- no change therefore **NO SAVINGS**.
- School transport- Pupils will have to be bused further form an earlier age therefore there will be **AN INCREASE IN COSTS**.
- Catering-children still need to be fed - **difficult to assess given the status of the canteen facilities at the Nicolson Institute**.
- Other School Costs- no change therefore **NO SAVINGS**.

From the information contained in the consultation document we have shown that there is a question over whether or not there will be any real savings in the short to medium term. Any pressure that the savings are needed to help fund the 'imminent' WISP can not be substantiated on the basis of the information provided in the consultation document.

## **10. STRATEGIC PLANNING**

- **A long term Strategic Plan for the provision of education in the Western Isles is required to avoid the 'piecemeal' approach that is currently under consideration.**

### **10.1 – Long Term Plan**

There is no evidence presented in the consultation document of a long term plan for education in the Western Isles, the only plan is the Business Plan which has a four year life span. As with many aspects of public service provision long term planning is crucial. One would expect the Education Authority to have a long term strategy for the provision of educational establishments throughout the islands, with identified short (0-5 years), medium (5-10years) and long term goals (10-15 years). Such a strategy could have reviews built in to it, with pre-planned options if certain circumstances existed. This would require forethought and vision but would mean that the whole community would be aware of the long term aims of the Education Authority and how it plans to achieve them. It would avoid the 'piecemeal' approach that is currently under consultation.

## 11. COMMUNITY VIEW

- **The community would like an assurance that the views of the community will be listened to and the decision to close S1/S2 schools has not already been predetermined.**
- **The community has clearly shown a commitment to the retention of the Secondary at Sgoil nan Loch.**
- **It is the responsibility of a democratically elected council to listen to communities and to account for its decisions to its local electorate.**

At the public meeting on 18 March 2008 held at SnL, concerns were raised that the consultation process was a 'mere' formality and the decision to close the secondary had already been made. Quoting from a letter from Cllr Angus Campbell dated 13 February 2008. One of the audience made the assertion that Comhairle budgets had already been prepared on the basis that these S1/S2 secondary schools were going to close. A quote from Mr Campbell's letter said that '*The Comhairle had in it's own business plan that funding released by S1/S2 closures would meet the funding gap.*' This letter was written before a final decision was made on the Bayble and Daliburgh School Closures. This we believe questions whether the consultation process is '*robust*' and that the decisions have already been made to close the S1/S2 schools.

## 12. POLICY ALIGNMENTS

### *INITIATIVE ON THE EDGE*

- Lochs is designated as an Initiative on the Edge Area (Iomairt aig an Oir)
- It is a strategy that aims to empower local communities; it aims to retain populations in fragile areas and ensure a clear mix of population.
- Maintaining education facilities in fragile areas is crucial.
- The Education Department has failed to acknowledge the importance of this designation.
- The closure of S1/S2 Sgoil nan Loch would be contrary to the aims of Iomairt aig an Or.

### *ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT*

- The Comhairle is contradicting itself. On the one hand the Comhairle is trying to encourage economic development, such as the development of renewables with associated in migration, but on the other it proposes to reduce the educational provision in the area to which it is trying to attract people.
- This divergence in policy is not in accordance with Scottish Government School Closure Guidance re Rural development which states that *'Authorities need to manage change in the provision of rural schooling alongside and in a way that SYNCHRONISES with other policies relating to rural development and sustaining the viability of rural communities. This will require fine judgement on the authority's part, recognising and responding to trends but avoiding precipitating them'*
- Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) could have a positive effect on the economy of the Western Isles, a reduction in educational provision should not compromise this benefit.
- 

#### **12.1 - Background**

Lochs is one of ten areas in the whole of Scotland and one of only two in the Western Isles which has been designated as an Initiative at the Edge area. This is a designation restricted to those areas considered to be the most fragile.

Initiative on the Edge has now been established since 1998 and in that time it has encouraged and supported a community-led, multi-agency approach to achieving a sustainable future for selected areas designated as the most economically and socially fragile in the Highlands and Islands.

Initiative at the Edge is part of Scottish Government Policy and is headed by Jim Mather MSP, providing an input to the National Steering Group. This input ensures effective feedback to the Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for Finance and Sustainable Growth via the Enterprise Networks.

#### **12.2 - Aims of Strategy**

The Initiative is no longer a pilot programme, it is now a well established, well organised vehicle. It looks to stimulate the changes needed to ensure that our most fragile communities have the same opportunities as others to engage with Government and public sector agencies. They must be able to compete on a level playing field. While the Initiative is a unique and targeted programme it is also part of the Scottish Executive's wider rural economic development strategy for a Smart Successful Scotland as a whole.

It is a strategy that aims to empower local communities; it aims to retain populations in fragile areas and ensure a clear mix of population.

### **12.3 - Importance of Education in Fragile Areas**

When the Pilot Scheme was reviewed it was found that one of the key failures across Scotland was the failure of education departments to recognise the crucial importance of maintaining education in fragile areas.

### **12.4 - Lochs Iomairt aig an Or**

The three main Iomairt aig an Or strategies for development in the Lochs area are;

- To retain and improve infrastructure and services
- Retain and create new employment opportunities
- To address the need for appropriate housing in fragile areas. (Iomairt aig an Or is currently in the second year of a pilot scheme for housing and is currently looking at sourcing land.)

### **12.5 - Contrary to Aims of Iomairt aig an Or**

The current proposals to close S1/S2 are contrary to the aims of Iomairt because

- There would be a reduction in the educational provision in the area.
- There would be a reduction in the number of jobs in the area.
- The strategy for housing would be compromised.

### **12.6 - Large Scale Economic Development**

There are proposals within the Lochs area at Eisgein Estate to develop a large scale wind farm, which is going to a Public Local Inquiry in May. There are varying opinions within the community and this is not the forum to discuss them. However, the Comhairle has taken the decision to support the application. In a letter from the Convenor to the Scottish Government it states that '***the proposal would make a significant contribution to reviving the local economy and, thereby help to overcome the threats to the Western Isles from reducing and aging population, low GDP and consequent threats to the future viability of schools and other services***'.

This is a very significant development, the Comhairle's own Economic Development Section in a report estimates that > 100 FTE (Full time Equivalent) jobs will be created. We have all seen or heard in the media Councillors actively supporting windfarm development in order to stimulate the local economy and encourage immigration to the area as well as other benefits.

## 12.7 - Divergence in Policy

The purpose of raising this issue is not to question the Comhairle's view on windfarms, which it has clearly considered in great detail. The purpose is to point out the apparent divergence in policies. Why, particularly as this is an Initiative on the Edge area is the Comhairle actively promoting a large scale development on the one hand, and on the other proposing to reduce the educational provision in the area that could accommodate the expected in migration?

A further point relating to that is that the Comhairle has to consider the Scottish Government Guidelines on School closure. This says in respect of Rural sustainable development that '*Authorities need to manage change in the provision of rural schooling alongside and in a way that **synchronises** with other policies relating to rural development and sustaining the viability of rural communities. This will require fine judgement on the authority's part, recognising and responding to trends but avoiding precipitating them.*'

We are suggesting that as there is a clear contradiction between these policies and the Comhairle is not acting in accordance with the Scottish Government School Closure Guidance.

## 12.8 - Road Equivalent Tariff

The Scottish Government has recently announced the introduction of a pilot scheme for Road Equivalent Tariff. If this has the economic benefits that are forecast there will be a positive benefit to our area. RET involves setting ferry fares on the basis of the cost of travelling an equivalent distance by road. High ferry fares have been seen by many as a barrier to economic growth on the islands.

When the announcement was made in Stornoway Mr Swinney said:

*"This Government recognises the vital importance of lifeline ferry services in supporting Scotland's island communities. We understand the genuine concerns from our remote and fragile communities about the affordability of ferry travel and the impact this has on islanders.*

*"I believe that the way forward is to consider the benefits of introducing a Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) approach to setting fares in Scotland. This approach would not just benefit islanders by providing cheaper fares but could also boost island economies by attracting tourists and supporting businesses.*

*"I am pleased to announce today that we have moved ahead to fulfil our commitment to carry out a study into the benefits of RET. As part of that study we will undertake a pilot scheme on one or more of the routes between the mainland and the Western Isles."*

Economic growth is key to maintaining people in an area and encouraging growth; policies for educational provision should concur with these aims.

## 13. CANTEEN FACILITIES AND HEALTHY EATING

- The Comhairle would be failing in their 'duty of care' moving pupils from a facility providing a '*very positive dining experience*' to one that can not provide adequate canteen facilities for all its pupils and allows children of 11 and 12 off the campus at lunchtimes, unsupervised.
- The implementation of the Comhairle's Policy on healthy eating would be further compromised; by moving children from SnL to the NI the Education Authority would in effect be reducing the Lochs pupils' access to healthy eating.

### 13.1 - Sgoil nan Loch Facilities

The HMI report for Sgoil nan Loch 2006 describes the facilities at the school as excellent, it stated that this included '*the very good use of the dining room at lunchtimes allowing pupils and staff to share a very positive dining experience.*' No pupil leaves Sgoil nan Loch at lunch time.

### 13.2 - Nicolson Institute Facilities

This is in contrast to the canteen facilities at the Nicolson Institute where the HMI report indicated that '*the dining hall is too small.*' There are only 186 seats in the canteen in the Nicolson, so even with two sittings at best the canteen can only cater for less than 1/3 of its 1069 school role. The remaining children have packed lunch, go home or wonder down town.

There are currently **NO APPROVED PLANS** to either upgrade the existing facilities at the Nicolson or replace them.

### 13.3 - Healthy Eating

The Council by closing S1/S2 want to move children from 'excellent' facilities where all pupils have their lunch within the campus to one where at best only a third of the pupils can be fed in the canteen facilities.

The benefits from adopting a balanced diet are not only in relation to the health of our children but are also reflected in their behaviour and concentration levels. The Comhairle's healthy eating policy for school pupils is welcomed but the SnL School Council are of the opinion that by closing the S1/S2 secondary the Education Authority would be denying children guaranteed access to healthy eating. Again this represents a diminution in the provision afforded by the education authority.

## **14. HEALTHY OPTIONS**

- **The Education Authority would in effect be reducing S1/S2 pupils' access to sporting facilities by closing SnL Secondary and moving them to the Nicolson.**
- **Access to after school sporting clubs at SnL is available to all pupils, in the Nicolson they are limited to those who are likely 'to make the school team' eg football.**

### **14.1 - Lunchtime access to Sporting Facilities**

We are all aware of the links between sport and health Scottish Government is trying through encouraging healthy eating and increasing activity to improve the health of school children. As parents we try and encourage children to be more active and take part in sports, it is particularly important as children move from primary to secondary. In SnL S1 and S2 have access to the sports hall or the football pitch at lunch times. There is no such provision at the Nicolson for S1/S2 pupils. Active schools are currently providing supervision at the all weather pitch at lunch time, two days a week but this is only on a temporary basis.

### **14.2 - After school Sports Clubs**

At Sgoil nan Loch there are a range of after school sporting clubs, these are open to all to attend, regardless of ability. Although the Nicolson Institute does provide after school sporting clubs because of the size of the school and the facilities available it is not always possible for these clubs to be open to all who wish to participate in them. For example only those likely to be in the school football team will be able to attend football training.

Sport should be inclusive, open to all levels and abilities.

## 15. DUTY OF CARE

- A decision to move pupils would be a retrograde step when applying the Comhairle's Care and Welfare Policy which aims to provide a 'Secure, caring, learning Environment'.
- The closure of S1/S2 SnL would mean the transfer of pupils to a school which can not fulfil its legal duty of care.
- It would also be a retrograde step when applying this policy and breaches the Comhairle's 'Quality Improvement Policy And Procedures' mission statement which has a desires for continuous improvement as one of its missions.
- The proposed closure of the secondary would in the opinion of the Sni School Council represent a dimunition in the care currently afforded to S1/S2 pupils at Sgoil nan Loch.

### 15.1 - Unsupervised Access to the Town for Lunch

One of the main concerns voiced by parents is the unsupervised access of Nicolson Institute pupils to the town centre at lunch times. For those pupils who can not be accommodated in the canteen, one option is for them to go 'down town', unsupervised. This aspect was discussed at the public meeting on 18 March 2008 in SnL; when asked if anyone in the audience would be happy to let their 11 or 12 year olds go down town, unsupervised at lunch time no one said they would.

The proposed closure of the secondary would in the opinion of the Sni School Council represent a dimunition in the care currently afforded to S1/S2 pupils at Sgoil nan Loch.

### 15.2 - Legal Responsibilities

It states in Greens Scottish Education Manual 2007 that '*All schools must take reasonable care for the safety of pupils when under their charge. This applies not only to periods during break, or playtime, but also the periods between the pupils' arrival at school and the start of the day and from dismissal in the afternoon until e.g the school bus leaves.*' It further states that although there are no regulations governing for example the requirement of playground supervisors in secondary schools the general duty of care still applies. Greens says '***The duty of care can not be discharged by not exercising any supervision at all, even in secondary schools.***' How can the Nicolson exercise its duty of care by allowing its pupils access to town at lunch time with no supervision?

### 15.3 - Safety and Security

Safety and security are key issues when assessing the implications of closing SnL Secondary and transferring children to the Nicolson. One of the 'Key Features' within the Comhairle's 'Care and Welfare Policy' is to provide a 'Secure, Caring, Learning Environment'. A decision to move pupils would be a retrograde step when applying this policy and breaches the Comhairle's 'Quality Improvement Policy And Procedures' mission statement which has a desire for continuous improvement as one of its missions.

## 16. RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

- **Local authorities are under obligation to take the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) into account when making decisions that affect children.**
- **SnL Parent Council is of the view that closure of S1/S2 and the transfer of pupils to the Nicolson would represent a contravention of the UNCRC Articles 3.**
- **SnL Parent Council is of the view that failure to seek the views of the children, in an appropriate manner represents a contravention of the UNCRC Articles 12 and 13.**

### 16.1 - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

In 1991, the UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has had a significant impact on Scottish law and practice. The passing of the Human Rights Act 1998 made the European Convention on Human Rights a part of Scottish law. This has positive implications for children who are as entitled as adults to benefit from its provisions. The principles of both conventions shaped the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child's explicit focus on children means that it has more obvious implications for child protection. Ratification means that all practice should be shaped by it unless this is actually contrary to Scottish, or European human rights law. The convention's particular relevance for child protection lies in its commitment to:

- support for family life;
- respect for the child's views;
- provision of an adequate standard of living, **education and health services, to leisure and to a cultural and spiritual life;**
- **making the child's best interests a primary consideration for Scottish society;**
- prevention of abuse and neglect;
- protection from harm;
- help to recover from abuse; and
- identification and investigation of concerns about child abuse and neglect, and follow-up, including involvement of the courts where appropriate.

### 16.2 - Scottish legal framework

The Scottish legal framework in relation to child protection centres on:

- Scottish and UK Acts of Parliament, in particular the Children (Scotland) Act 1995;
- rules and regulations made under powers delegated by these Acts;
- principles derived from decided cases; and
- the European Convention on Human Rights, which acts either as a lens through which the above must be interpreted or, in some cases, an immediate corrective where the law does not meet the requirements of the Convention.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is not an integral part of Scottish law in the same way as the European Convention; however, following the practice of the European Court on Human Rights, it should be taken into account when interpreting the European Convention. Scottish courts have also increasingly referred to the UN Convention when considering matters relating to children.

Three articles are relevant to our cause – 3, 12 and 13, and are discussed below:

### **16.3 - Article 3**

*“1. In all actions concerning children.....the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. “*

By discontinuing an S1/S2 with an excellent facility and transferring them to a facility which does not meet or exceed the standard they currently have is not complying with Article 3

2. States Parties *‘undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being’*

3. States Parties *‘shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision. “*

Local authorities are under obligation to take the UNCRC to which the UK signed up to in the early 1990s into account. If the children are wandering the streets unsupervised at lunchtime CNES are breaching the UNCRC. There are serious child protection issues regarding this.

### **16.4 - Article 12**

1. States *‘Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.’*

### **16.5 - Article 13**

*‘The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.’*

Regarding the above 2 articles and which is also imported into Children’s Scotland Act 1995 – CNES has not given the most important group affected by the consultation, the children, time to respond or indeed sought the views of the children in a manner which is practicable to the children concerned.

The Comhairle has failed to consult in accordance with the National Standards for community engagement which were adopted by the Comhairle.

## **17. HOUSING PROVISION**

- **There is a link between the provision of housing in an area and the demand placed on the education service and vice versa. This has not been taken account of in the assessment of school roles or how it would affect any economic development in the area.**
- **The Laxdale area clearly illustrates these links.**
- **The review of Initiative on the Edge Areas showed that across Scotland Education Authorities failed to recognise the crucial importance of maintaining education provision in fragile areas.**

### **17.1 - Link to Housing**

It was evident by the answers given by the panel at the public meeting held in SnL on 18 March that the Education Department has not considered the link between housing and educational provision in an area, as part of their proposal to close the S1/S2 secondary.

In the Lochs area, there is outline planning consent for six houses at the old school site in Leurbost, and 4 houses on another croft, and many more in the planning process or under construction. Indeed the Initiative on the Edge program is involved in a pilot project for housing and is currently trying to source land for this purpose.

### **17.2 - Laxdale Area**

The relationship between housing and educational provision is clearly evident in the Laxdale/Newmarket area. In recent years there have been a large number of houses built in the area and the effect on the school is well documented. The school is in a confined location and it is struggling to cope with the numbers it has.

At the last series of Comhairle meetings an application for planning permission was considered for a housing scheme for 16 houses at Bridge Cottages, Newmarket. Although the houses were approved the Education Department did raise concerns in the report about the implications for Laxdale School.

The Education Department should therefore be aware of the links between housing and educational provision but has failed to consider them as part of this consultation process.

### **17.3 - Initiative on the Edge**

The relationship can also work the other way, the provision of education facilities can affect the location and number of houses, and the movement of families into an area. The important link between education, housing and population stability was not appreciated by many education authorities in the review of Initiative on the Edge Areas.

## **18. ALTERNATIVES/ LATERAL THINKING**

- **The Scottish Government School Closures Guidelines (27 i) say that an authority should consider ‘alternatives, lateral thinking’ in terms of buildings , their use, and they should also consider changes to management systems and arrangements such as networks of smaller schools sharing management, teaching and other resources and facilities.**
- **The example of the system adopted in Islay shows how systems can evolve and adapt to suit local circumstances. The Comhairle should not feel obliged to adopt the mainland system.**
- **Why not look at the possibility of providing S1-S3 at Sgoil nan Loch?**

### **18.1 - Alternatives**

We have already established that Sgoil nan Loch is an excellent facility and that there are many inadequacies with in the Nicolson Campus. and many of the other schools. Before closures are considered the Education authority are required by the Scottish Government School Closure Guidelines to consider other alternatives in terms of use of buildings and changes to management systems. There is no evidence in the consultation document that this has been done for the proposed closure of S1/S2 at SnL. If no alternatives to the existing use of buildings and management structures have been considered why not?

### **18.2 - Islay High School**

At a recent event organised by the Education Department a member of SnL Parent Council noted the comments made by one of the speakers. A presentation was made by a member of staff from Islay High School which has developed its own organisational structure to suit Islay’s own specific needs. What would be appropriate for Islay may not be acceptable in Lewis, but what is important to note is that we should be able to evolve and adapt a system to suit our own circumstances in the Western Isles and not feel obliged to adopt the mainland system.

### **18.3 - S1-S3 Provision at Sgoil nan Loch?**

As discussed in the section on procedure the Education Authority may now have a very different view on capacity from that published in its own Asset Management Plan 2007. Clearly if the school is more than 80% full any decision to close the secondary would require referral to the Scottish Government. However if the authority are now saying that the school is less than 80% full why does it not investigate the possibility of using the investment the Comhairle has already made to its full potential. Could Sgoil nan Loch provide S1-S3? This could mean the cost of a new or refurbished Nicolson Institute would be less.

## **19. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

- **Moving children with additional support needs from a secure and safe environment at Sgoil nan Loch to the proposed receiving school would be a retrograde step.**

### **19.1 – Well Being & inclusion**

Sgoil nan Loch provides a secure and safe environment in which discipline is respected and educational achievement is valued. This is even more important for children with additional support needs.

Sgoil nan Loch provides excellent support and has gained significant expertise in enabling these children to flourish in a mainstream environment. Transition is recognised as a particularly difficult time for children with additional needs and is less problematic if the change in educational style, teachers etc., can be achieved in a familiar environment. If these children also have to learn new places and move to very crowded, noisy unpredictable areas they often will not cope, resulting in additional costs to educational and health services to provide remedial support and care, but far more importantly would have lifelong effects on these children's welfare including mental health.

Disability access to the Nicolson Institute is sporadic. This jeopardises true inclusion

## **20. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- **The closure of the Secondary at SnL could further exacerbate the traffic management problems at Manor roundabout at peak times.**

### **20.1 – Traffic Management**

The Comhairle is well aware of the traffic management problems at Manor roundabout at peak times. Although most children will be given the opportunity to travel to Stornoway by bus, it is inevitable that some parents will choose to coordinate their journey to town with the school timetable. This is evident by the distinct difference in the traffic congestion during school term as opposed to school holidays. It is the traffic coming from the Lochs direction that causes serious delays on the Laxdale / Newmarket traffic, where it is currently not unusual for traffic to be 'backed' up to the Newmarket/ Tong junction. The views of the Comhairle's Principal Road Safety Officer should be sought on this aspect.

## **21. NEW TRENDS**

- **There is an increasing, but as yet unquantified trend of immigration from foreign nationals, particularly from Eastern Europe.**

### **21.1 – New Trends**

The Comhairle are aware that there is an increasing trend for foreign workers to come to the Western Isles in pursuit of employment. Although initially this did not involve the movement of families there is evidence to suggest that this is increasing; amongst the pupils of Stornoway Primary, other than English or Gaelic there are now nine different '*mother tongues*.' The Parent Council were not able to ascertain any figures for this but it is certainly something the Education Authority should be looking at before reducing educational provision in any area.

## 22. CONCLUSIONS

The parent forum hope that you will take on board our views and make a decision based on this submission and the clear community support for retaining the secondary in Lochs.

To close Sgoil nan Loch Secondary Members should be satisfied that what they are proposing would represent an overall betterment for our S1/S2 pupils, we believe that we have shown clearly why this would not be the case.'

The Lochs community fought long and hard for the establishment of a new primary and secondary in Lochs. A decision to close the secondary would be a 'bitter pill' to swallow given that only one year group would have been afforded the opportunity to progress from P1-S2. Those pupils who started on P1 in 2001 when the school was opened will be the last to enjoy secondary education in Lochs if the proposals currently under consultation are approved.

We have made this submission because we believe the S1/S2 provision at SnL is what is best for our children. Sgoil nan Loch is much more than the sum of the individual parts, SnL is a school with drive and enthusiasm at all levels, it embraces new ideas and initiatives with energy and commitment while ensuring the needs of the individual are met.

To us how children develop into responsible, confident young adults is as important as their academic achievements. We believe what they have at SnL with the seamless transition from 21/2 to 14, the support that they need, SnL pupils are already successful, confident, responsible, and effective learners, individuals, citizens and contributors.

The success of Sgoil nan Loch is acknowledged in the excellent HMI report and reflected in the increasing trend for transfer requests to the school. This is a school the Comhairle should be congratulated up on; it is a model that should be built on not one that should be demeaned. The investment has already been made here; why not use it to its full potential.

## Appendix A

### **PARENT PLEA TO COUNCIL – Contribution made by a concerned parent at the public meeting on 18/03/08**

At the public meeting held at Sgoil nan Loch on 18 March 2008, a mother of two children currently attending the school made a plea to the panel and other Council Members present to retain the secondary in Lochs. What she said is a clear reflection of what the community feel about this proposal. This is what she said.

*“As a parent of 2 children in this school, I would like to plead with the Education Dept and our elected council members to consider deeply the decision they are about to make on closing S1/S2 provision at Sgoil nan Loch.*

*We all know the Council have difficult decisions to make and no parent wants it to be their secondary provision that closes, but it is maybe harder for us to accept when you been given such a good, new facility and been given it so recently to now have it taken away. If I thought for one minute that this school could not progress to meet the new Curriculum for Excellence with a bit of flexibility then I certainly wouldn't be speaking up in front of you all tonight. But this **is** a School that can meet the criteria required, a school that is growing each year by its reputation, a school that you as a Council should be proud off. You have all read the excellent HMI report, this school should be encouraged to keep moving forward not curtailed back. You already have in place a seamless transition from nursery to P1 and then P7 to S1 which is a credit to you and especially to the teaching staff here. As a result of this Sgoil nan Loch is already turning out Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors,*

*We hear that pupils are to be given a greater choice but for you to achieve this you are going to take away choices for parents., alternatives to going to the one Secondary school . Alternatives that to a parent might be crucial to their circumstances and to the children affected.*

*Stornoway and its surrounding area is subject to a lot of new housing over the next few years, please don't box yourselves in and take away good secondary schooling that makes such a difference to vulnerable ,rural communities and which will put more pressure on an already over subscribed school.*

*Can I finally plead with you all that when you have to make the decision on this school that you make the decision on Sgoil nan Lochs own merits, its enthusiasm to move forward and its enthusiasm to its pupils to achieve any standard asked of it.”*

## Appendix B

### A FORMER PUPIL'S VIEW

It is always good to get the views of those who will be affected most directly by any changes in the educational provision. Sgoil nan Loch Parent Council is fortunate to have co-opted a former pupil; this is the view of a former pupil.

*'As an ex-pupil of Sgoil nan Loch and co-opted member of the Parent council I feel that I have a joint interest in the proposal to close the 2 year secondary unit as I can give the opinion of a pupil who has attended both Sgoil nan Loch and also the potential receiving school.*

*I arrived at Sgoil nan Loch an anticipant 11 year old, fairly terrified to leave the safe haven of a 24 pupil school - Uig Primary. As most pupils making the transition from primary school to secondary school I was apprehensive to say the least! Arriving on my first day of first year i was pleasantly surprised however to find a friendly environment where after only a week I knew my every worry would be taken seriously by the friendly and helpful teachers. Any concerns I had, I knew that there was always a teacher there to go to, accountable and approachable, this was a luxury that was not exclusive to my first term or so but was throughout my whole 2 years there. This is something small - not even looking at the educational benefits that made attending this school a special experience, along with the amazing fairly cutting edge facilities etc.*

*The academic support that I received during my time at Sgoil nan Loch was such that it set the foundations for all my achievements in later school life. I can confidently say that the additional maths support that I received aged 12 at Sgoil nan Loch would not have been available to me had I been at another school; my lack of confidence in this particular subject became clear to my teacher as we had smaller class numbers which meant that I could receive the one on one support that I badly needed, it made a huge difference because I wasn't made to feel inadequate or any less competent than any of my other classmates as the teacher was able to help me within the class environment. If I had been in a class with a greater number of pupils it is unlikely that a teacher would have been able to afford to give one pupil such attention.*

*From my understanding the 'Curriculum for Excellence' is designed to encourage the best from every pupil in Scotland - surely this will not be achieved by cost cutting and bringing together a larger number of pupils in one place, in a facility whereby first and second years are in maximum capacity classes in a building that has been deemed unfit for purpose.*

*It is compromising the future of these pupils when eight miles away there is a facility that is seven years old capable of catering for these children and providing them with an optimal educational experience.*

*After 2 years at Sgoil Nan Loch my classmates and I were just about ready to make the jump to fourth year where we felt able to cope with the challenges of attending a 1000+ pupil school, the stresses of being independent and that 'little fish in a big pond' philosophy. Our maturity can be attributed to the fact that we were given the fantastic opportunity of attending this school, where we could build a close relationship with teachers and classmates alike and gain the requisite maturity to prepare for our standard grades; it would be a great shame to lose this asset to the educational structure of the Western Isles.'*