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Review of Education Provision
at
STONEYBRIDGE SCHOOL
Isle of South Uist

CONSULTATION REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2010

Roinn an Fhoghlaim is Seirbheisean Chloinne

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CONSULTATION REPORT FOR STONEYBRIDGE SCHOOL
Isle of South Uist

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Review of Education Provision at Stoneybridge School, Isle of South Uist Consultation Report

Report by Director of Education and Children's Services

CONSIDER THE PROPOSAL THAT :

- **Education provision at Stoneybridge Primary School be discontinued with effect from 30 June 2011**
- **That the pupils of Stoneybridge Primary School continue their education at lochdar School, from 18 August 2011**
- **That the catchment area of lochdar School be extended to include the current catchment area of Stoneybridge Primary School.**

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Comhairle, at its Meeting on 18 February 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 Stoneybridge 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 Stoneybridge 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 Monday, 21 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 Consultations meetings were held as follows:
- Public meeting at Stoneybridge Primary School on 21 June 2010
 - Meeting with staff at lochdar School was held separately
 - Meeting with pupils at lochdar School was held separately.

OMISSIONS AND INACCURACIES

- 4.1 Within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 there is guidance on how errors or omissions should be addressed. In paragraph 9.1 of the Proposal Document Stoneybridge 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. Attention was drawn to the error at the Public Meeting and the correct definition was given. 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
• Staff Professional Associations	2
• Bòrd na Gàidhlig	1
• NHS Western Isles	1
• Fire Service	1
Total:	5

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: Parents enquired if the savings from the closure of Stoneybridge school would be allocated to Iochdar School building improvements.</p> <p>RESPONSE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings from the implementation of the School Estate Review are being prioritised for the upgrading of the remaining schools to Condition B. • Any further savings would revert to the Comhairle capital and revenue budgets

TRANSPORT
<p>ISSUE: Parents were concerned that the travel arrangements would remain the same from August 2010.</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be no change to the transport arrangements for the pupils from Stoneybridge School to Iochdar School.

BUILDING
<p>ISSUE: Parents enquired about the proposals for the use of the building if the school were to close?</p> <p>RESPONSE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any vacant building will be maintained at the level of it being wind and water tight and minimum heating, representing a reduced cost until disposal where a capital asset may be received. • 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 consultation, the Education and Children's Services Department has developed an ESF application which is currently at stage 2 proposing community-based economic regeneration projects and the appointment of community development workers in all areas where schools may close.

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 Stoneybridge 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 take full account of the concerns of parents in relation to Gaelic medium education and the composite response to the consultation, 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. • Iochdar School has a successful GME provision and all pupils from Stoneybridge have integrated well within that provision. • The addition of pupils from Stoneybridge School into the GM classes of Iochdar School has enhanced the educational and social experience of all pupils. • The Education and Children’s Services staff will continue to work with Iochdar School to ensure the strong Gaelic ethos is supported and developed. • The Comhairle in recent years has seen a steady growth in its enrolment 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 over the next 3 years. 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 there local school only provides education through the medium of English.

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 Stoneybridge and Iochdar School Pupils

<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better facilities at Iochdar school eg all weather area, social areas. • Opportunities for more games • New teachers • Learning new things • Opportunity to make new friends

Issues of Concern

- The children did not have any worries about the move to lochdar.
- Would miss TV at Stoneybridge

RESPONSE:

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

Areas where we might help

- Pupils have been going to lochdar School for two days per week in the last few years and are comfortable in lochdar School. The children had an induction period prior to the closure of Stoneybridge and are now feeling at home in lochdar School.

RESPONSE:

All pupils reported being settled at Iochdar School.

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.

- All pupils from Stoneybridge had gone to the Gaelic Medium classes in lochdar School and the group dynamic has improved.
- The roll in lochdar has grown and the catchment area is bigger.
- The only boy on P7 in Stoneybridge has opportunities to work with his peer group.
- Staff from Stoneybridge have more opportunities to work with other staff.
- Children enjoy working in bigger groups – increased pace and challenge.
- Better balance of skills and development needs in classes.
- Bigger groups have helped with socialising issues.
- The transition period has been very useful.
- Fire regulation and disabled access issues being addressed.
- More investment now could save money later – south facing windows in poor condition.
- Traffic management requires review especially with the cròileagan coming under school management.
- Secure entry to be completed by August.
- The external appearance of the school is poor

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)

- 10.5 HMle visited Stoneybridge 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.
“The proposal from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to close Stoneybridge Primary School and transfer children to lochdar Primary School with effect from August 2011, offers educational benefits to children directly affected by the proposal and more widely across Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. These benefits relate to the social and personal development of children moving to the larger school, and to the efficient and effective use of available resources for the education service. The proposed move to the larger school offers children from Stoneybridge Primary School an enhanced range of educational experiences. There is sufficient space in the proposed receiving school to accommodate the children from Stoneybridge Primary School. The proposal will not adversely affect the quality of education for children in lochdar Primary School. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s proposal has the support of parents and other members of the local community.”
- 10.7 The HMle report provides evidence that the proposal to amalgamate Stoneybridge School with lochdar School 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 Stoneybridge 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 Stoneybridge Primary School would be provided at lochdar School and that the education provision should be discontinued at Stoneybridge Primary School from 30 June 2011.
- 10.10 The Director of Education and Children’s Services recommends that a transfer of pupils from Stoneybridge School to lochdar School 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 Stoneybridge 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 Stoneybridge School attending a building that is modern and better designed for the delivery of a 21st Century curriculum.
- 10.13 The closure of Stoneybridge School will both improve efficiency of the school estate and enable investment in education and provide a better educational experience for pupils.

10.14 All pupils transferred from Stoneybridge School to lochdar School in April 2010 as a result of parental placing requests.

RECOMMENDATION

11.1 It is recommended that:

- a) the Education provision at Stoneybridge Primary School be discontinued with effect from 30 June 2011;
- b) the pupils of Stoneybridge Primary School continue their education at lochdar Primary School, from 18 August 2011; and
- c) the catchment area of lochdar Primary School be extended to include the current catchment area of Stoneybridge Primary School.