



EDUCATION, SPORT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE: 18 JUNE 2024

EDUCATION PROVISION: REVIEW OF MOTHBALLED SCHOOL PROVISIONS

Report by Chief Officer for Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Comhairle with an update in relation to mothballed educational provisions at Tolsta School, Breasclete School, Pairc School and Bernera School and to review the status of each, as is required annually.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle has four mothballed education provisions that were placed in that status due to significant falling rolls and by consultation and agreement with parents at the time the initial decision was made.
- 2.2 Tolsta School was mothballed from August 2019 and Bernera School followed in August 2021. In addition to the two full mothballed schools, there are two schools that have had part of their provision mothballed from August 2020: Breasclete School (English Medium) and Pairc School (Gaelic Medium).
- 2.3 In compliance with the School (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the decision to mothball all or part of a school should be subject to review at least annually.
- 2.4 Tolsta school has been mothballed for five years and, over that period, there have been no requests or expressions of interest from any party to reinstate provision at this school and no new roll has been identified. Approval is sought for a further period of mothballing to permit conclusion of closure consultation.
- 2.5 The English Medium class at Breasclete School was mothballed with effect from August 2020. In the first two years of mothballing there were some expressions of interest in reinstating the English Medium provision, supported by the school's Parent Council but no viable cohort was identified. There have been no expressions of interest in enrolment in Breasclete English Medium for August 2024.
- 2.6 Pairc School Gaelic Medium class was mothballed with effect from August 2020. No requests or representations have been received for enrolment into Gaelic Medium at Pairc School for August 2024.
- 2.7 Bernera School has been mothballed for two years. There have been no requests or representations for enrolment into Bernera School for August 2023.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle agree to:

- a) **continue to mothball Tolsta School for a period of one year or until conclusion of statutory consultation for permanent closure, whichever occurs first;**

- b) continue to mothball the English Medium provision at Breascleite School for a period of one year with a commitment to review this status again ahead of the commencement of the 2025-26 academic year;**
- c) continue to mothball the Gaelic Medium provision at Pairc School for a period of one year with a commitment to review this status again ahead of the commencement of the 2025-26 academic year; and**
- d) continue to mothball Bernera School for a period of one year with a commitment to review this status again ahead of the commencement of the 2024-25 academic year subject to a future report to consider moving to statutory closure consultation.**

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Appendix:

Background Papers: [School \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010 – Statutory Guidance](#)

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	Retaining the mothballed provision at Tolsta and Bernera schools will mean that the Comhairle will continue to incur small costs in relation to rates, utilities, services and maintenance. Reinstatement of any provisions will incur costs, particularly in terms of staffing and recommissioning of buildings/classrooms. More information about financial implications for each school is detailed in the relevant section below.
Legal	The mothballing of a school is a recognised action within the School (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 Statutory Guidance (para. 63). The mothballing process may not be used to undermine any part of the requirements of the 2010 Act in relation to consultation on closure.
Staffing	The reinstatement of all or part of any mothballed provision will require the appointment of teaching staff, equivalent to 1.1FTE for each class that is reinstated. This will have wider implications for workforce planning.
Assets and Property	Tolsta and Bernera schools require to be maintained in a condition where reinstatement as a school can be easily achieved. Sufficient classroom space and amenities must be retained (or capacity to do so) at Breasclete and Pairc schools for any full or partial reinstatement of provision in the future.
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	None
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	Where potential enrolments have been identified, consultation has been provided. Formal statutory consultation would be required if a permanent closure is proposed.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The use of the provisions within the 2010 Act to mothball a school or part-provision is intended as a measure to provide a period of time to allow a new viable roll to develop without having to immediately move to formal consultation on closure. Where the status relates to a part-provision, it would be typical that the mothballed status would be retained for such a time as there remains a viable roll in the remainder of the school.
- 5.2 Tolsta School was mothballed from August 2019 following consultation with parents of children on the roll at the time. The projected roll for 2019 was nine pupils. There was unanimous support for the proposal to mothball and all nine pupils transferred to Back School with additional transport being provided, as required, for primary pupils. Since that time, the Tolsta School building has been retained

and is subject to basic maintenance to preserve its condition. It has had occasional use as an office space by Comhairle staff.

- 5.3 The English Medium class at Breascleite School was mothballed from August 2020 after the projected roll fell to one pupil. At the point of mothballing, no pupils transferred to other schools.
- 5.4 Following consultation with parents, the Gaelic Medium provision at Pairc School was mothballed from August 2020. The roll of the class at the time was projected to be one or possibly two. The policy of identifying the alternative provision for GME as the next nearest school to the child's home address designated Sgoil nan Loch and one pupil transferred there at the time.
- 5.5 Bernera School was mothballed from August 2021 following consultation with parents and stakeholders. The projected roll for 2021 was three pupils, all in the P5-7 age group. This was expected to reduce to two in August 2022. Predictions for incoming roll in the area in 2021 indicated no new expected enrolments.

DETAIL

- 6.1 **Tolsta School:** During the period of mothballing of Tolsta School, there have been no requests received to enrol in the school, no expressions of interest have been lodged and there have been no representations from other groups or bodies to consider re-opening of the primary school.
- 6.2 It was agreed by the Comhairle to move to begin the preliminary phase of a statutory consultation on the permanent closure of Tolsta School. It was not possible due to service demands to commence this work within the 23-24 academic year but will now be prioritised.
- 6.3 The Comhairle has entered into a formal agreement with a community organisation in Tolsta to have a 'Licence to Occupy' the school hall, which is adjacent and connected to the community centre. There is informal interest in the school building being secured for community use following permanent closure, should that be the outcome.
- 6.4 Retaining Tolsta School as a mothballed provision incurs annual costs in the region of £12,000 for rates, water charges, utilities and basic maintenance. The costs of reinstating one class at Tolsta School would increase annual operating costs to an estimated £115,000.
- 6.5 **Breascleite School – English Medium:** During the first two years of mothballing, there were a small number of expressions of interest in reinstating the English Medium provision at Breascleite but none of them sustained their interest and a viable and sustained cohort was not achieved at that time.
- 6.6 There have been no enquiries, expressions of interest or enrolment requests for English Medium in Breascleite School for August 2024 and, as a result, there is no cohort to reinstate an English class at the school in the year ahead. The projected roll for Breascleite School in 2024-25 is 23 pupils.
- 6.7 Retaining the mothballed status of the English Medium at Breascleite School will incur an estimated annual cost in the region of £25,000 to provide transport to the alternative English Medium provision at either Shawbost School or Sgoil nan Loch. Reinstatement of English Medium would increase operating costs for Breascleite School by approximately £84,000, which predominantly relates to the additional staffing required.
- 6.9 Should English Medium provision be reinstated at Breascleite, the Comhairle would continue to be liable for costs to provide transport for English Medium pupils wishing to remain in alternative

provisions. This means that the total cost of reinstating the provision for both staffing and transport will be in the region of £110,000.

- 6.10 **Pairc School – Gaelic Medium:** Throughout the time that the Gaelic Medium provision at Pairc School has been mothballed, there have been no expressions of interest to seek Gaelic enrolment in the school.
- 6.11 Pairc School is expecting one new pupil to enrol in 2024-25 and has one leaver, resulting in the current roll of nine pupils to be retained in the year ahead. It is predicted that the roll of the school will remain stable for at least one further year.
- 6.11 Comhairle officers have continued to engage in meetings with community representatives in the area with the aim of working together to improve enrolment numbers in the school. It is universally recognised that retaining a school provision in the district is a key part of this co-ordinated approach and there is ambition to secure growth in the school roll in future years.
- 6.13 Retaining the mothballed status of the Gaelic Medium at Pairc School will incur an estimated annual cost of approximately £30,000 to provide transport to the alternative provision at Sgoil nan Loch. Reinstatement of Gaelic Medium would increase operating costs for Pairc School by approximately £84,000, which relates to the additional staffing costs involved in re-establishing the class.
- 6.14 Reinstating provision may incur both the transport and staffing cost above combined as there is an obligation on the Comhairle to continue to support transport for pupils enrolled in the alternative provision if they don't wish to enrol in Pairc. As a result, the full estimate of reinstatement will be in the region of £114,000 if existing children in the area chose to continue to attend Sgoil nan Loch.
- 6.15 **Bernera School:** No requests or expressions of interest have been received to enrol in Bernera school since it was mothballed in 2021. That remains the case for the year ahead. Transport is provided to take any children in the area to and from Sgoil nan Loch.
- 6.16 The Comhairle has continued to maintain the building in a condition suitable for future reinstatement, if required.
- 6.17 Retaining Bernera School as a mothballed provision incurs annual costs in the region of £14,000 for rates, water charges, utilities and maintenance/repairs. Transport costs to the alternative school are approximately £20,000 per annum. Reinstating one class at Bernera School would increase annual operating costs to an estimated £100,000.
- 6.17 As Bernera School has been mothballed for three years with no viable cohort identified to consider re-opening the provision, it is proposed that a report be taken to a future meeting seeking to move to the preliminary phase of statutory consultation on closure.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The four mothballed provisions at Tolsta, Breasclete, Pairc and Bernera have all been subject to review and, in each case, an educationally viable roll sufficient to consider reinstatement of the provision has not been identified and continuation of mothballed status should be considered in all four cases.