

# The Highland Council

Agenda Item	10.
Report No	EDU/5/24

**Committee:** Education

**Date:** 21 February 2024

**Report Title:** Review of Statutory Consultation Exercise – Closure of Gergask Primary School

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, Education & Learning

## 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Following conclusion of the statutory consultation process, this report seeks Members' agreement to a recommendation to discontinue the provision of education at Gergask Primary School, which has been "mothballed" since September 2022.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Recommend that the Highland Council discontinues education at Gergask Primary School, transferring its catchment to that of Newtonmore Primary School. Gergask Primary has not been operational since September 2022, and a closure decision would formalise the current operational situation.

## 3. Implications

3.1 Resource - These are set out at **Appendix E** of the original proposal issued for consultation.

3.2 Legal - The proposed closure has been taken forward under the provisions of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 1980

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) - The Equalities and Rural impacts were assessed at Sections 15 and 16 of the original Proposal (**Appendix A**).

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - The attached report details the implications in relation to school buildings and school transport. It is estimated that in terms of the Council's carbon emissions, the proposal will see a net reduction.

3.5 Risk - The main risks associated with the recommendation relate to the potential for call-in by Scottish Ministers. Officials have sought to mitigate the risk through review and evaluation to ensure that procedurally the requirements of the Act and statutory consultation process have been met.

3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – None.

- 3.7 Gaelic - The proposed closure would have no effect on Gaelic Medium Education (GME) which was not offered at Gergask Primary School prior to the school being mothballed. GME is offered at Newtonmore Primary School. Pupils from the Gergask Primary School catchment were able to opt for GME at Newtonmore Primary School prior to Gergask being mothballed.

#### **4. Overview**

- 4.1 **Appendix 1** is the proposal for decision. The original proposal for consultation, and relevant documents for consideration by the Committee, are all also circulated as appendices to this paper. They provide details of all consultation comments received, the note of the public meeting, the report from Education Scotland, and the Council's response to comments arising from the consultation.
- 4.2 The views of pupils attending Newtonmore Primary School from the Laggan area can be viewed at **Appendix 3v**. There were 11 responses from pupils. One pupil thought the Council should re-open Gergask Primary School, and one thought the school should be permanently closed. Nine of the 11 pupils who responded expressed support for continued mothballing.
- 4.3 There were 4 written responses received from other stakeholders. All the respondents opposed the proposed closure due to the effect on the community. The responses did however come from local residents or parents from out with the Gergask catchment, rather than from parents of primary age children from within the catchment.
- 4.4 The public meeting was reasonably well-attended, given the small size of the local community. Although sadness was expressed over the demise of the school, there was a general feeling that closure was inevitable due to the lack of the children in the area.
- 4.5 In their report, Education Scotland agree that the council has clearly outlined a range of educational benefits in the proposal. The current school roll has fallen to two pupils and the building has been mothballed since September 2022. Future school roll projections for the area do not show a significant increase. Parents are already choosing home-schooling or placing requests to other primary schools such as Newtonmore Primary School. With a small roll, there are less opportunities for peer group learning, socialisation, work with partners and group activities such as team sports. Newtonmore Primary School has the capacity and the resources to meet the learning needs of the children from the Gergask Primary school catchment area. This includes provision for additional support needs and Gaelic Medium Education. Newtonmore Primary School also offers a range of out of school opportunities, including sport and music. Transport for children in the Laggan area to Newtonmore Primary School will continue to be provided by the council.

#### **5. Next Steps**

- 5.1 The legislation requires that any proposal for decision must be published at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting at which any decision may be made, to allow time for further representations. The proposal was published on 23 January 2024. Any further representations that are received will be tabled at the meeting for the attention of Members.
- 5.2 Following consideration by the Committee, if the recommendation is agreed, the following timeline will be followed as required by the legislation.

- The recommendation of the Committee will be considered by the full Highland Council.
- If ratified by full Council, the Council must, within 6 working days of the Committee decision, advise Scottish Ministers of the decision it has reached, provide them with the proposal paper and consultation report, and publish a notice stating that Ministers have been advised and the process through which representations may be made to Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal.
- From the date of the Council decision, there is a period of 3 weeks in which representations to Scottish Ministers regarding call-in of the proposal can be made by any interested party.
- Scottish Ministers then have a further up to 5 weeks in which to decide whether they will issue a call-in notice.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Education

Date: 25 January 2024

Author: Ian Jackson

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Review of Consultation Report  
Appendix 2 – Note of Public Meeting  
Appendix 3 – List of Respondents to the Consultation  
Appendix 3i - Response Redacted at the Author's Request  
Appendix 3ii - Response from Sally Spencer  
Appendix 3iii – Response from Cath Hamill  
Appendix 3iv - Response from Jo Cumming  
Appendix 3v - Pupil Responses  
Appendix 4 – Report from Education Scotland  
Appendix A – Proposal Paper issued September 2023  
Appendix B – Map of Gergask PS catchment  
Appendix C – Map of Proposed  
Appendix D - School Roll Forecasts for the Kingussie ASG  
Appendix Di – School Roll Forecasts Methodology  
Appendix E – Financial Analysis



## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

#### REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT GERGASK PRIMARY SCHOOL, RE-ASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF NEWTONMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting held at Laggan Community Hall on 3 October 2023.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 7 September 2023, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Gergask Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Newtonmore Primary School.

- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - E** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Gergask Primary School has been mothballed since September 2022, when the remaining pupils transferred to Newtonmore Primary School.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Gergask Primary, it is the Council's view that there is an insufficient number of children of suitable age in the Gergask catchment, who wish to attend Gergask Primary School, and that consequently the school is no longer viable. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Gergask Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:
- any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 below.
  - 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 effect on the local community was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 8 and 10 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
  - 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;
  - 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. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 11 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

## 2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period Monday 18 September 2023 to Friday 10 November 2023. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Newtonmore Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
  - (ii) The Parent Councils of Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School.

- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Newtonmore Primary School.
- (v) Laggan Community Council
- (vi) Newtonmore Community Council
- (vii) Trade Union representatives.

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held at Laggan Community Hall on 3 October 2023. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, X Account and Facebook page, and in the *Badenoch and Strathspey Herald*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

### **3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period**

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

### **4.0 Responses**

4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 4 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of these responses can also be found at Appendices 3i-3iv.

4.2 The views of pupils of a suitable age at Newtonmore Primary School (which included the pupils living within the Gergask catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3v summarises their views, which are also discussed at Section 5 below.

### **5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period**

5.1 There were 11 responses from pupils. One pupil thought the Council should re-open Gergask Primary School, and one thought the school should be permanently closed. Nine of the 11 pupils who responded expressed support for continued mothballing. The detailed comments from pupils can be viewed at Appendix 3v.

5.2 Education Scotland Inspectors who visited the school reported that the majority of children and young people who met with inspectors do not think that the school should open with the current roll of two. A few would like to see it become a school again with more children attending. They think that a delay to closure

to see if more children would attend would be helpful. Children and young people see advantages of a very small class including time with the teacher. They are positive about the outdoor environment at Gergask Primary School. However, they do not think that these advantages outweigh the benefits of a larger school like Newtonmore Primary School. This includes, more resources, more staff to approach for help and opportunities to make friends. Children and young people would like to see the building used for the benefit of children and young people in the area.

- 5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-3 below, together with arguments put forward in support of closure.
- 5.4 There were 4 written responses received from other stakeholders. All the respondents opposed the proposed closure due to the effect on the community. The responses did however come from local residents or parents from outwith the Gergask catchment, rather than parents of primary age children from within the catchment.
- 5.5 The public meeting was reasonably well-attended, given the small size of the local community. Although sadness was expressed over the demise of the school, there was a general feeling that closure was inevitable due to the lack of the children in the area.
- 5.6 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

## **6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation**

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of continued mothballing are set out at Issues 1-3 below, and addressed at Responses 1-3.

### **Issue 1**

Wait and see if a new family comes, then it can re-open and everyone would be happy.

### **Response 1**

There is an argument for doing this, which the Council has considered. However we think it is unlikely that enough new children will come to the school. Leaving a school mothballed for too long has a bad effect on the building.

### **Issue 2**

It's closer and has lots of nice areas. It's a nice school.



**Response 2**

When last operational, Gergask PS was a lovely school in a beautiful location. On balance though, the Council takes the view that the number of children who want to attend the school is too small to allow it to work well.

**Issue 3**

The building could be used by others.

**Response 3**

Yes, it could be, although it might be easier to arrange that if the school were closed, rather than just mothballed.

Laggan village also has a community hall at the moment.

- 6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of closing Gergask Primary School are set out at Issue 4 below, and addressed at Response 4.

**Issue 4**

Only three children isn't great for socialising.

**Response 4**

The Council agrees with this comment.

- 6.3 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 5-7 below, and addressed at Responses 5-7.

**Issue 5**

I don't think that the school should be permanently closed as it will discourage new families from coming to the area. This is already full of holiday properties and the loss of educational opportunities will potentially further reduce the likelihood of families settling in this area to live permanently and be part of the community.

The school has only recently been mothballed. There are some children in the village. If you go ahead and close it then the nearest school will be 8 miles away. This will be a huge deterrent to any family considering a move to the area and will kill future development of the village and for this reason I would propose delaying the permanent closure of the school.

I'm concerned at the number of school closures and the impact on communities. No school means it is less likely that parents with young children will move into the community as we are seeing in Laggan.

A family from Laggan moved to the south of France quite near Carcassonne. There, in an area like Badenoch and Strathspey, they have taken a creative approach. They have avoided closing all the schools and clustering them in one location bursting at the seams. Instead community schools host 1 or 2 years. Children are bussed to and from school. There is more space and the communities are kept alive.

When we moved here in 2000, my son and grandchildren moved up a few years later and Gergask had 24 pupils. It is sad to see the decline in numbers. Surely we could look for more creative approaches here.

'The Community' is going to have to have a lot of discussions if it is to discuss what to do with (a) the church, (b) the school, and probably (c) the shop, if there are going to be so few people, such as tourists, to need coffee and sandwiches etc.

### **Response 5**

The extent of the decline of the roll of Gergask Primary, from what it was 20 years ago, is sadly typical of many communities across Highland and indeed across Scotland.

In August 2011 the Scottish Government established a Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014. The Commission examined the question of whether the future of a community is compromised without the incentive that a rural school provides to encourage young families to move to or remain in the area. The Commission noted that there were examples of communities which had thrived despite the loss of a local school, as well as examples of communities which had continued to depopulate despite the presence of a rural school. The Commission concluded there was a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.

The Commission also concluded that a school alone cannot sustain a rural community. They noted that other issues are likely to be as critical to maintaining a working age population. The Commission received a strong message on its visits to communities that while they place great value on a school in their community, the two most important factors in sustaining the community are jobs and housing. Without employment opportunities and affordable housing, families can neither move to an area nor remain there.

The Council agrees with this view.

### **Issue 6**

Having seen the article in The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald stating "No future so school's to be shut", there seems no point in making any further comment despite your statement that 'the consultation process remains open

until November 10th', - a contradiction in terms if I may say so! - and that a community meeting should take place to discuss future use for the building.

### **Response 6**

The wording used by *The Strathspey and Badenoch Herald* was that of the newspaper's journalists, and was not used by Highland Council. The statement made by Highland Council, that the consultation remained open until 10 November, was correct. There was no contradiction with any other statement made by the Council, as it was the newspaper, not the Council, that announced the "school's to be shut".

### **Issue 7**

What is needed are more jobs - good, well paid jobs, that will bring more families to the neighbourhood, with more houses for them and their grown-up offspring to afford to buy. I don't think Badenoch is the only 'dying' rural community, now life-styles have changed so drastically, but surely Scotland isn't totally devoid of intelligent, successful business men - or women - with good innovative ideas of what is needed in the C21st rural areas, and enough knowledge of modern technological means of bringing their ideas about? Surely those of you living in or around the rural parts of the Highlands must have SOME idea of what can be done up here other than sheep? Most Local Authorities in the UK seem to be - well perhaps it should be 'have been' - good at coming up with ideas to get things going in their area. We need them more than ever now if 'the Highlands' aren't going to die.

### **Response 7**

The Council agrees that issues around access to housing, transport, quality employment and the availability of skilled workers are all interconnected, and have a critical impact on the provision of schools within our area. Taken as a whole, the Highland Council area faces significant issues in terms of a declining and aging population. Younger age groups are decreasing in numbers, whilst the older age groups are growing. Between 2001 and 2021, the 0 to 15 age group in Highland saw a decrease of 6.7%. The 75+ age group saw an increase of 60.6%. This changing population structure clearly has a critical impact on the future pattern of our school provision. This is not an issue that is unique to Highland and the Scottish Government itself recognises that rural areas across Scotland are facing a depopulation crisis.

The Council is working with partners such as local Chambers of Commerce, the Regional Economic Partnership and other partnerships to address the issues identified above and to ensure that actions are attached to them. Further details are set out in a Report submitted to a meeting of the Highland Council on 14 December.

Nevertheless, given the low number of children living within the Gergask PS, and local parental preferences around education, the Council sees no realistic prospect that Gergask Primary School will develop a viable school roll in the foreseeable future.

## Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland agree that the council has clearly outlined a range of educational benefits in the proposal. The current school roll has fallen to two pupils and the building has been mothballed since September 2022. Future school roll projections for the area do not show a significant increase. Parents are already choosing home-schooling or placing requests to other primary schools such as Newtonmore Primary School. With a small roll, there are less opportunities for peer group learning, socialisation, work with partners and group activities such as team sports. Newtonmore Primary School has the capacity and the resources to meet the learning needs of the children from the Gergask Primary school catchment area. This includes provision for additional support needs and Gaelic Medium Education. Newtonmore Primary School also offers a range of out of school opportunities, including sport and music. Transport for children in the Laggan area to Newtonmore Primary School will continue to be provided by the council and is within the 30-minute guideline.
- 7.3 Education Scotland further noted that stakeholders, including children and young people, would like to see the building used for the benefit of the community if the school is closed. If this proposal is approved, the council should continue to engage with the community to discuss future options for the use of the building.

## 8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 Paragraphs 13.1 - 13.4 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, and advised that Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building and site could be turned over to community use.
- 8.2 The future of the site and building was one of the main issues that arose in the consultation exercise. As previously discussed, the Council cannot prejudge the outcome of the current consultation by agreeing any future use of the building at this stage. In the event the closure is approved, the Council would welcome a community bid for the future use of the building and site.
- 8.3 As highlighted above, the consultation exercise identified concerns about the effect of the school closure on the future health of the community. The issues raised are addressed at Responses 5-7 above.

## 9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

9.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

## 10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

10.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Gergask Primary School with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Gergask Primary School with an expanded catchment area.

10.2 Sections 6 and 7 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council’s consideration as to why Options i and ii above would not be viable options for Gergask Primary School. No additional suggestions were made during consultation.

10.3 Similarly, in respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, Section 8 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Gergask Primary School. Again, no suggestion to this effect was made during consultation.

10.5 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.

10.6 No further alternative approaches were suggested during the consultation exercise:

10.7 The Council has also reconsidered 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 potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

10.8 The Council has further reconsidered 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 impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Section 11 of the original proposal paper. Since Gergask Primary School has been mothballed since September 2022, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. Whilst it is accepted that the travel times would be shorter were Gergask Primary School to re-open, the travel times to Newtonmore are not excessive and are within the normal range of school journeys in Highland.

## **11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers**

- 11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 14 March 2024 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 3 April 2024. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 8 May 2024 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Gergask Primary School is asked to email [schoolclosure@gov.scot](mailto:schoolclosure@gov.scot) or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 3 April 2024.**
- 11.3 Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

## **12.0 Legal issues**

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and

all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

### **13.0 Financial Implications**

13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix E to the Proposal Paper.

### **14.0 Equality Impact Assessment**

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment can be found at Section 15 of the Proposal Paper. The consultation exercise did not identify any additional equality issues.

### **15.0 Rural Impact Assessment/Island Community Impact Assessment**

15.1 A Rural Impact Assessment can be found at Section 16 of the Proposal Paper. The public consultation exercise did not identify any additional rural issues.

### **16.0 Effects on School Transport**

16.1 The effects on school transport were considered at Section 11 of the Proposal Paper. As there are no pupils currently attending Gergask Primary School, there are no differing school transport arrangements to take into account.

### **17.0 Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

17.1 Adverse effects were considered at S.17 of the proposal Paper, and none were identified. Again, this assessment takes into account the fact that there are currently no pupils attending Gergask Primary School.

### **18.0 Conclusion**

18.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-8 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

18.2 The most significant reason for closure is that all the available evidence suggests that the number of children who would attend a re-opened Gergask Primary School would be too low to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Lastly, Newtonmore Primary School is itself a rural school.

18.3 Education Scotland staff visited Newtonmore Primary School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses. They agree that The Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of the Gergask Primary School catchment area.

18.4 The Executive Chief Officer (Education), on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Sections 5-10 above.

## **19.0 Recommendation**

19.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School.

Nicky Grant  
Executive Chief Officer (Education)  
23 January 2024



## **CONSULTATION MEETING – PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT GERGASK PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**HELD AT LAGGAN COMMUNITY HALL – 3 OCTOBER 2023 – 6.30pm**

### **MINUTES OF MEETING**

#### **Panel**

Cllr. Russell Jones - Chairperson  
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources  
Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager  
Sarah Fraser, Head Teacher, Newtonmore Primary School

#### **In Attendance**

Sheila Brown, Education Scotland  
8 members of the public

**The Chairperson – Cllr. Russell Jones** introduced himself as Chair of the Local Area Committee and welcomed everyone to the consultation meeting.

He continued as follows:

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the proposal to formally close Gergask Primary School, (as set out in the recommendation to the proposal Paper). The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

Other options identified in the proposal paper are re-opening the school, or continuing to “mothball” it. We can also discuss any other options or alternatives to closure which those present would like to raise.

The Council officials present tonight are Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager, and Ian Jackson, Education Officer, (Resources). Also present is Sarah Fraser, Head Teacher of Newtonmore Primary School.

Mr Jackson and Mrs Shearer will shortly make a couple of quick presentations, and following these, I will open to the meeting for questions and observations.

The Chairperson then invited Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process and the detailed reasons for issuing the Proposal.

**Mr Jackson**

Since last September, Gergask PS has been in what we term a “mothballed” status, which means it is not operational, but neither is it permanently closed. The permanent closure of the school, which is what the Council is now proposing, is subject to a statutory consultation process, of which this meeting is part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 10 November, and I would urge anyone who wants to submit views in writing to do so by that date. The purpose of tonight’s meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

My colleague Fiona Shearer will shortly set out the educational basis for the Council’s proposal to formally close Gergask PS, but before that I will briefly describe the rest of the consultation process.

The formal process has a number of stages. Once the public consultation ends on 10 November, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form their own view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact Newtonmore Primary, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland’s view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council’s Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make “further representations” during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

After all that, there would still be a further opportunity for representations to be made to Scottish Ministers. All school closures in Scotland have to be ratified by Ministers, and they have 8 weeks from the date of the Council’s decision to themselves decide whether to ratify the proposal or to refer it to what’s called a school closure review panel. During the first 3 weeks of that 8-week period, Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person on whether the decision should be called in, or not called in, for review by a panel. Advice about how to make those representations will be provided at the relevant time.

In summary, I would say that the consultation process provides multiple opportunities for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made.

The Chairperson then invited Fiona Shearer to outline the educational benefits that would arise from the Proposal.

**Mrs Shearer** referred to the Proposal Paper, and advised that the Council believes the school environment should be a place that sustains and improves school education, pupil performance and outcomes for children. Our priority is to offer the widest possible opportunities for children, and that is very difficult when there is a total school roll of two or three. The information we have gathered to date suggest there is no prospect of the roll at Gergask increasing in the future. The children who are attending Newtonmore have better opportunities to engage in active learning and cooperative learning. We are implementing and encouraging the adoption of play pedagogy in our schools, taking that play experience into P1 and beyond. In a school with only 2/3 pupils there isn't the opportunity to engage in paired learning or group learning day-to-day. The larger school provides those wider opportunities, things like sporting events, taking part in the arts, and music events. Even things like school assembly – how can that be achieved with only 2 pupils? Transition experience is also quite key. Having that wider social interaction is important, especially in the transition to a secondary school with several hundred pupils. School trips and experiences, and social interaction are all limited in a school with too few pupils. The children who have attended Newtonmore have had a very positive experience.

**Mrs Fraser (Head Teacher)** added that the children from Gergask who are attending Newtonmore are thriving, due to the increased social opportunities there for them. A different learning experience is on offer at Newtonmore, and they have many more opportunities to interact with other children. It's worked very well for them so far.

The Chairperson opened the meeting to the floor.

**Q1** – How many children would we need to keep the school open?

**A1 (Ian Jackson)** – We don't have a set number, but we feel that, as Fiona indicated, the kind of numbers we had here prior to mothballing, when the school roll effectively fell to just two pupils, does create some educational disadvantages. If there were a lot of parents in the village who came to us and said they wanted to re-enrol their children in Gergask School, we would have to consider that, but we would need hard evidence that people were willing to take their children out of wherever they are enrolled at present, and enrol them at Gergask.

**Q2 (follow-up)** - There aren't a lot of children in the village at present, and some that are here are home-schooled.

**A1 (Ian Jackson)** – That's the parents' decision of course.

**Q3** - I had wondered whether those children were home schooled because Gergask was closed, but the parents aren't here, so I suppose not.

**A3 (Sarah Fraser)** – At the last meeting we had here, where we invited the parents, only one parent came, which highlighted there wasn't that desire amongst local parents to re-open the school.

**Q4** – It's understandable that you closed the school when there were only two or three children. We haven't lived here for that many years, but we have supported the school. When we first arrived there were a lot more children in the village – I think there were about a dozen children in the school then, even though it was only about 6 years ago. There are no new young families coming into this area.

**Response from the Floor** – It's a common issue in small communities. You have these peaks and troughs, and sometimes the trough gets too low. It's not fair to the children to enclose them in a school with only one or two others. They get no wider perspective.

**A4 (Fiona Shearer)** – It's a beautiful setting for a school, and some people might think that it's great the pupils get so much attention, but for me as a teacher, and as a parent, you know that they are missing out on wider social interaction, the opportunity to make more friends, and be confident when they move into to High School - all the things they can't do when there are just two children. When the numbers are that small it's detrimental to the children. That's my opinion at least, it's not necessarily the Council's. It's never an easy conversation, and that's why there is such a lengthy process around it. It's a big decision and not something we would do lightly.

**Q5** – What are the plans for the building if it does close?

**A5 (Ian Jackson)** – For the moment we can't anticipate that the school will close, as we need to consider all the views expressed in this consultation. Broadly speaking, and Cllr. Jones might correct me if I make any mistakes here – there is a 3-stage process when the Council has a surplus building. Initially the availability of the building and site is circulated internally within the Council – that would include our housing department for example. If there's no use identified from within the Council, there can be an opportunity for the community to request what's called a Community Asset Transfer. It's not a simple case for just asking for the building and getting it – communities would have to produce a business plan for the new use, and would have to show that the proposed new use does not undercut existing facilities in the community. You have a community hall here already. There would be things to think about. Failing that, the building would be disposed of on the open market. We have a duty to make efficient use of Council taxpayers' money, so we could not justify holding on to a building that was lying empty.

**The Chairperson** reiterated that tonight was about gathering views on the proposed school closure. If the closure took place, there would be discussions with the community about the building.

Views were expressed that there would need to be a community meeting in that event. One parent commented that there was a pressing need for more housing in the area.

**Q6** – Not much can be done about the school. There are simply not enough children. In some ways we would be better getting a decision rather than leaving it mothballed, because empty buildings deteriorate so quickly.

**Response from the Floor** – There are no children because there are no houses.

**Response from the Floor** – The problem is we would need a lot of houses to get enough children to restart the school. What is it, 0.3 children per house?

**A6 (Fiona Shearer)** – Yes, 0.3 children of primary school age per house, is the figure we work to in calculating school roll forecasts.

**Q7** - Also we can't control things like home educating, which is becoming more common.

**A7 (Fiona Shearer)** – The general expectation is that children attend their catchment school, but there is an element of parental choice, and it's the same all over. I saw something on Facebook today about the schools where I live. A family were moving from England and were asking about the local schools, and people were giving their opinions. I didn't agree with the comments, but the outcome could be that the family might put their child outside of catchment.

**Q8** – Over the last 40 years, there have been families who lived in Laggan but who sent their children to Kingussie or Newtonmore, so that has pulled the rug from under our feet. You can't tell parents what to do. Perhaps as a community we should be thinking what we can do to support families in the village, to create that sense of community. If we are worried about the loss of a sense of community, arising from children going to school elsewhere, we as a community ought to look at what we can do to counteract that.

**Q9** – If the school closed, could we move the community hall into the current school building, knock down this building and build houses here? We are desperate for new housing in Laggan.

**A8/9 (Ian Jackson)** – These are all ideas you would need to discuss as a community, if the school does close.

**Q10** – How will you get people to move to Laggan if there is no school here?

**Response from the Floor** - There are a lot of places that have lost their school but haven't lost their community, and where people haven't been put off from coming.

**Response from the Floor** – This is a different community though. You put on events in this community, you don't get many locals attending.

**The Chairperson** asked Ian Jackson to run through the process from here, commenting that this was the second meeting held.

**Ian Jackson** – The previous meeting was part of what we term informal consultation, and this meeting is part of the formal consultation process. Just to go back over the process, this stage ends on 10 November – we’ll take written views up to that time. The Education Scotland will carry out an assessment – that will be another opportunity for parents to submit views. After that we will review the consultation and put it back to the Education Committee, though there is the additional 3-week period for further representations. I would expect that the review report will be submitted to the Education Committee in May 2024. The Committee meets 4 times a year. The first after the end of consultation will be in February 2024, but we won’t go to that one as it will be too soon.

**Q11** – May 2024 seems a long way away!

**A11 (Ian Jackson)** – It does take a while. This consultation doesn’t end until 10 November, then the consultation with Education Scotland takes us up close to Christmas, then we have to review the consultation. We then have to publish the report at least 3 weeks before the Committee, but personally I prefer to publish more like 5 weeks in advance, otherwise I feel we may not have time to properly consider the responses.

Even after May, there’s then the stage with Scottish Ministers, they have another 8 weeks to make their decision. The final decision, if made, won’t therefore be until the late summer of 2024.

**(Fiona Shearer)** – That’s one of the reasons we felt we should move ahead with this process, rather than leaving the building empty year after year.

**Q12** The time you mentioned, in 2024, would that be it then?

**A12 (Ian Jackson)** – If it all goes through, then yes, once Ministers make their decision, that would be the school closed for good.

**Q13** – What is happening with the building at the moment. Is it still getting heated?

**A13 (Sarah Fraser)** – The janitors are down once a month to check the building. The water has been drained.

**Q14** – If the community wanted to take the building over, would you give us a report on the state of the building?

**A14 (Ian Jackson)** – I imagine that could be arranged. It wouldn’t be us, but we could ask a Maintenance Officer to produce a report.

**Q15** – It's understandable that the school has been closed, given the number of children. It just seems a shame the building is lying empty, into its second year now. The sooner a decision is made the better. How old is the building?

**The Chairperson** thought it dated originally from about 1876.

There being no further questions, the Chairperson thanked everyone for coming, and reminded everyone that representations should be sent to Ian Jackson, email [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk) (address circulated in the letter), or via the online form, to arrive **no later than Friday 10 November 2023**. He also advised that the record of the meeting will be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee where it is intended that the report of the meeting, plus any submissions/representations and the view of Education Scotland on the proposal, will be considered.

**List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation Exercise – Proposal to  
Discontinue Education at Gergask Primary School**

1. [REDACTED] – NOT for publication
2. Sally Spencer
3. Cath Hamill
4. Jo Cumming
5. Pupil Responses – Newtonmore PS



Dear Mr Jackson,

Having seen the article in The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald stating "No future so school's to be shut", there seems no point in making any further comment despite your statement that 'the consultation process remains open until November 10th', - a contradiction in terms if I may say so! - and that a community meeting should take place to discuss future use for the building. 'The Community' is going to have to have a lot of discussions if it is to discuss what to do with (a) the church, (b) the school, and probably (c) the shop, if there are going to be so few people, such as tourists, to need coffee and sandwiches etc.

What is needed are more jobs - good, well paid jobs, that will bring more families to the neighbourhood, with more houses for them and their grown-up offspring to afford to buy. I don't think Badenoch is the only 'dying' rural community, now life-styles have changed so drastically, but surely Scotland isn't totally devoid of intelligent, successful business men - or women - with good innovative ideas of what is needed in the C21st rural areas, and enough knowledge of modern technological means of bringing their ideas about? Surely those of you living in or around the rural parts of the Highlands must have SOME idea of what can be done up here other than sheep? Most Local Authorities in the UK seem to be - well perhaps it should be 'have been' - good at coming up with ideas to get things going in their area. We need them more than ever now if 'the Highlands' aren't going to die.

Yours sincerely,

Sally M. Spencer

On Thu, 5 Oct 2023 at 11:32, Education Consultations <[Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)> wrote:

Dear Mrs Spencer

Thanks for your email. By all means send in further comments to add to those you have already sent. I could easily replace your previous email with your revised version.

It's entirely up to you.

Ian Jackson

Education Officer

Highland Council

07435 982557

**From:** Sally Spencer  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 3, 2023 10:41 AM  
**To:** Education Consultations <[Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Re: Closure of Gergask Primary School

**CAUTION:** This email was sent from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mr Jackson,

Thank you for your swift reply to my email. I have no objection to my comments being made public, a lot of people will have heard them anyway.

Oddly, some of my text seems to have vanished, but I don't suppose it matters.

Yours sincerely,

Sally M. Spencer

On Mon, 2 Oct 2023 at 09:34, Education Consultations <[Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)> wrote:

Dear Mrs Spencer

Thank you for your representation regarding the Highland Council's proposal to permanently discontinue the provision of education at Gergask Primary School.

Your comments, along with any others received, will be presented in due course to the Highland Council's elected members for their consideration.

Please note that, as this is a public consultation, written submissions will be made available to the public and that, unless you have specified otherwise, your comments may be published on the Council's website – [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk) . However, all signatures, personal telephone numbers and personal e-mail addresses will be removed.

Ian Jackson

Education Officer

Highland Council

07435 982557

**From:** Sally Spencer  
**Sent:** Friday, September 29, 2023 7:11 PM  
**To:** Education Consultations <[Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** Closure of Gergask Primary School

**CAUTION:** This email was sent from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Sirs,

As a grandmother you may think I am too old to consider such matters, but a school is not just something for children and parents, it is something for the whole community, and very much one of the things that make a proper village serving the whole local community.

There are 5 things that are needed for a 'living' village:

1. A 'working' church with a congregation prepared to do their best to keep the local community doing well and happily
2. A Primary School, and if the community is large, possibly a secondary one too,
3. A pub, where the men can meet and put the world to rights,
4. A shop, supplying the village's basic needs, where the women can also put the world to rights

**Name of consultation:** Gergask Primary School

**Your comments:** The school has only recently been mothballed. There are some children in the village. If you go ahead and close it then the nearest school will be 8 miles away. This will be a huge deterrent to any family considering a move to the area and will kill future development of the village and for this reason I would propose delaying the permanent closure of the school.

**Upload documents or letters :**

**I am commenting as:** Local resident

**I am commenting on behalf of:**

**Name:**

Title	First name	Last name
Ms	Catherine	Hamill

**Address:**

postcode_search	Choose address	Did you find the address on the list above?
PH20 1BT	Leathad Easter Breakachy, Laggan, PH20 1BT	Yes

I'm concerned at the number of school closures and the impact on communities. No school means it is less likely that parents with young children will move into the community as we are seeing in Laggan.

A family from Laggan moved to the south of France quite near Carcassonne.

There, in an area like Badenoch and Strathspey, they have taken a creative approach. They have avoided closing all the schools and clustering them in one location bursting at the seams. Instead community schools host 1 or 2 years. Children are bused to and from school. There is more space and the communities are kept alive.

When we moved here in 2000, my son and grandchildren moved up a few years later and Gergask had 24 pupils. It is sad to see the decline in numbers.

Surely we could look for more creative approaches here

Regards, Jo Cumming  
The Kennels  
Glentruim

HELLO EVERYONE!

CAN YOU HELP HIGHLAND COUNCIL WITH AN IMPORTANT DECISION?

For a while Highland Council has been trying out an idea for pupils from Laggan to go to Newtonmore Primary, instead of Gergask Primary.

Now we have to decide what to do for the future. We have 3 choices:

1. Close Gergask Primary for good, with children from Laggan going to Newtonmore Primary instead.
2. Re-open Gergask Primary, so any children from Laggan would go to that school and not to Newtonmore.
3. Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer before we decide for good.

Which idea do you think is best? In the table below, place a tick next to which one you think is best.

Idea No. 1 – Close Gergask Primary for good.  ✓	
Idea No. 2 – Re-open Gergask Primary.  ✓	
Idea No.3 – Keep trying out the idea for a bit longer.  ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	wait and see then if a new family comes it can re-open then everyone's happy.

2. Why did you give the answer above?

E.C - It's closer. It has lots of great areas

D.Y - It's not looked after at the moment

Z.G - Its a nice school

L.F - The building could be used for others

E.C - I like having friends but maybe if the new neighbours used it then it would be good.

C.H. Only 3 pupils isn't great for socialising

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School and re-assign the catchment area to Newtonmore Primary School.**

November 2023



# 1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School and re-assign the catchment area to Newtonmore Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 3 October 2023 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Gergask Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

## 2. Consultation process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 Between 18 September and 10 November 2023, the council carried out a public consultation on the proposal to permanently close the school and reassign the catchment area to Newtonmore Primary School. Copies of the proposal paper were available online and at Newtonmore Primary School. The proposal document was sent to relevant stakeholders including parents and carers within the Gergask Primary School and Newtonmore Primary School catchment areas; Laggan and Newtonmore Community Councils; staff at Newtonmore Primary School and local MSPs and MPs. A public meeting was held on 3 October 2023 attended by eight local residents. The council received four email submissions from local residents, none of which were in favour of the proposal. The council also surveyed 11 children from Newtonmore Primary School.

2.3 Attendees at the public meeting and local residents who emailed the council are concerned that the proposal to close the school permanently will make the area less attractive to families. A few members at the meeting, thought that it was not viable to have the school open for only two children. It was noted that there are more children in the catchment area, however, they are being home-schooled or attending other schools due to placing requests. Should the proposal go ahead, local residents wish to have further discussions with the council about the future use of the building for the community. One email respondent wished to see the mothballing continue at the moment.

2.4 Most children, responding to the survey, wished to see a delay to permanent closure of the school. They like the school building and the surrounding area. However, they also recognise that only having a few children at the school is not good for socialising and making friends.

## 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that the council has clearly outlined a range of educational benefits in the proposal. The current school roll has fallen to two pupils and the building has been mothballed since September 2022. Future school roll projections for the area do not show a significant increase. Parents are already choosing home-schooling or placing requests to other primary schools such as Newtonmore Primary School. With a small roll, there are less opportunities for peer group learning, socialisation, work with partners and group activities such as team sports. Newtonmore Primary School has the capacity and the resources to meet the learning needs of the children from the Gergask Primary School catchment area. This includes provision for additional support needs and Gaelic Medium Education. Newtonmore Primary School also offers a range of out of school opportunities, including sport and music. Transport for children in the Laggan area to Newtonmore Primary School will continue to be provided by the council and is within the 30 minute guideline.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who engaged with HM Inspectors said that they think the current roll is too small to reopen the school. Community members are reluctant to see the village of Laggan lose an important resource but accept that there are not enough children currently who wish to attend. Parents and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors, do not think operating from Gergask Primary School, offers the best learning experience. Children may miss out on group activities, team sports, peer group learning and important socialisation and relationship building skills. A few school staff would like consideration given to using the school for children with additional support needs. They feel that this is a need within the area and the school environment could be suitable.

3.3 The majority of children and young people who met with inspectors do not think that the school should open with the current roll of two. A few would like to see it become a school again with more children attending. They think that a delay to closure to see if more children would attend would be helpful. Children and young people see advantages of a very small class including time with the teacher. They are positive about the outdoor environment at Gergask Primary School. However, they do not think that these advantages outweigh the benefits of a larger school like Newtonmore Primary School. This includes, more resources, more staff to approach for help and opportunities to make friends. Children and young people would like to see the building used for the benefit of children and young people in the area.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. In preparing this proposal, the council considered three options; to continue mothballing the school; to reopen with the existing catchment area or to reopen with a wider catchment area. The council states that further mothballing is not necessary as the roll is unlikely to change significantly in the future. A continued period of mothballing makes the future of the building unclear and could delay the development of proposals for future use. The council states that reopening the school with the current catchment would not make the school viable. If the Gergask Primary School were open, the journey time would be shorter than to Newtonmore Primary School. However, there is no impact for the current cohort of children, as they already attend Newtonmore Primary School. Transport is in place and this will continue if the proposal goes ahead. The council also states that an expanded catchment area would not increase the school roll. Therefore, the preferred option of the council is to re-assign the Gergask Primary School catchment area to Newtonmore Primary School.

## 4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits in this proposal. The school roll is not predicted to change in the near future. Children from the Laggan area are already benefiting from the educational opportunities available at Newtonmore Primary School. Newtonmore Primary School has the capacity and resources to meet the needs of the proposed wider catchment area. The majority of stakeholders are concerned that should this proposal go ahead, the area would be less attractive as a place for families to live. Stakeholders, including children and young people, would like to see the building used for the benefit of the community if the school is closed. If this proposal is approved, the council should continue to engage with the community to discuss future options for the use of the building.

**HM Inspectors**  
**November 2023**

## **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

### **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School.**

### **EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT**

#### **THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010**

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To discontinue education provision at Gergask Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School. A map of the current Gergask Primary School catchment is at **Appendix B**, and a map of the proposed merged catchment is at **Appendix C**.
- For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Newtonmore Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes.
- The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

## **SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

### **PUBLICATION INFORMATION**

#### **Proposal Paper Published**

The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

Newtonmore Primary School, Main Street, Newtonmore PH 20 1DN

and published on the Highland Council website:

[www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations](http://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations)

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Business Support Team

Education Support

Highland Council

Headquarters Building

Inverness

IV3 5NX

E-mail: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g., large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please contact The Business Support Team

Education Support, Highland Council, Headquarters Building, Inverness, IV3 5NX

E-mail: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Newtonmore Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Councils of Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School.
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (iv) Staff of Newtonmore Primary School.
- (v) Laggan Community Council
- (vi) Newtonmore Community Council
- (vii) Trade Union representatives.

## **Advertisement in Local Media**

A notice announcing the public meeting will be placed in the local press and on the Highland Council's Facebook page.

## **Consultation Period**

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 18 September 2023 and will end on 10 November 2023. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

## **Public Meeting**

A public meeting will be held at 6.30pm on 3 October 2023 at Laggan Community Hall. Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Education Service.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be taken into account. A note will be taken at the meeting of questions asked and views expressed. This note will be published on the Council website. The meeting will also be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

## **Meetings with Pupils and Staff**

School staff will arrange to discuss the proposal with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. Questions, responses and views will be taken down and the results published in the Consultation Report.

## **Responses to the Proposals**

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions on the Proposals to:

Business Support Team  
Care and Learning  
Highland Council  
Headquarters Building  
Inverness  
IV3 5NX  
E-mail: [Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk)

Or via an online form, to be found at:

<https://www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>

## Appendix A

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. However it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Highland Council”. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available. All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, 10 November 2023 at 5.00pm.

### **Involvement of Education Scotland**

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will be sent to Education Scotland the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 20 November 2023, a copy of any written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period. Education Scotland will also receive the summary note of the public meeting that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 8 December 2023. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

### **Review of Consultation Exercise**

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website and at the affected school and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council’s considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Education Committee of Highland Council, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

At the present time the Council intends to publish its Report in the spring of 2024, prior to submission to the Education Committee in May/June 2024. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

## Appendix A

Any proposal approved at the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

As the proposal involves the closure of a school, Highland Council would be required to notify Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers would have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person.

### **Note on Corrections**

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal Paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction or the reissuing of the Proposal or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised.



## **DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL**

### **Legislative Background**

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Gergask Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the school is classed as "very remote rural") and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the school roll projections for Gergask Primary School, taking into account the current pattern of enrolments, has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 6-9 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 15 below) and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Gergask catchment (Section 11 below).

### **Reasons for the Proposal**

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
  - Gergask Primary School has been mothballed since September 2022, after the total roll fell to 2 pupils.
  - Consequently, no children have attended the school since September 2022.
  - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.
- 2.2 In April 2023 informal discussions were held with local parents and with Laggan Community Council about the future of the school. There was little interest from local parents in attending the meeting, and the Community Council were of the view that a statutory consultation would be appropriate, in order to come to a decision on the school's future.
- 2.3 There are a very small number of children resident with the Gergask Primary School catchment, all of whom have alternative arrangements for their education. The results of the informal discussions would suggest there is no demand for children to attend Gergask Primary School, and that the school is no longer viable.

### **Current Details – Gergask Primary School**

- 3.1 Gergask School serves a sparsely populated rural area, with the small local population mainly concentrated in the village of Laggan, where the school is located. The school is a traditional granite building consisting of an entrance hall and three classrooms. An office and a general purpose room which was

## Appendix A

also used as a dinner canteen is located in Spey Lodge, a spacious demountable building which was installed in the playground in 2007.

- 3.2 The school has been mothballed since September 2022 when the remaining pupils transferred to Newtonmore Primary School.
- 3.3 There were no nursery children at Gergask Primary School prior to mothballing, but the school did operate a nursery class when there were children to attend it. As mentioned above, this closure proposal encompasses both the primary school and nursery class stages.
- 3.4 The school has a registered permanent capacity of 44.
- 3.5 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). Prior to mothballing, Gergask Primary School was rated as "C" for the educational suitability of the building and "B" for building condition.
- 3.6. In the five sessions from 2019-20 to 2023-24, there were 5 placing requests to leave Gergask Primary School, and 1 placing request to join.
- 3.7 No current HMle Report is available.
- 3.8 Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions from the Gergask Primary School building are estimated at 13.3 tonnes.

### **Current Details – Newtonmore Primary School**

- 4.1 Newtonmore Primary School is located in the large village of same name, which has a population of around 1100-1200. Only schools located in communities with a population of 3,000 or more are not classed as rural schools, so Newtonmore Primary falls within the category of a "very remote" rural school. It provides education in both English (EM) and Gàidhlig (GM). Its English Medium catchment formerly drew pupils mainly from Newtonmore and its immediate surrounds, but since 2016 the catchment has also included that of the former Dalwhinnie Primary, which closed at that time. The school's Gàidhlig Medium catchment covers a still wider area, including the EM catchments of all of the other primary schools in the Kingussie Associated School Group (ASG), Alvie Primary, Aviemore Primary, Kingussie Primary and Gergask Primary.
- 4.2 Newtonmore Primary School, situated in the middle of Newtonmore, was completely modernised in 1991. The building offers spacious accommodation of a very high standard with a tarred and paved play area and an enclosed grass playing area to the rear. There is a seated area for outdoor classroom activities. The school hall offers a multi-purpose area for the school and community.

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- 4.3 At the time of writing, the anticipated roll for 2023-24 is 111 pupils within P1-7, with 66 in English Medium (EM) education and 45 in Gaelic Medium (GM). There are further 23 children in the two nursery classes, 9 in English Medium and 14 in Gaelic Medium.
- 4.4 The school (excluding the nursery) has a registered capacity of 122. The 2023-24 roll of 111 therefore represents 91% use of capacity.
- 4.5 The Council publishes roll projections for each of its currently operational schools. The latest forecast for Newtonmore Primary School is attached at **Appendix D**, alongside the forecasts for the other schools in the Kingussie High School group, whilst a copy of the Council's methodology for calculating the forecasts can be found at **Appendix Di**.
- 4.6 It can be seen from Appendix D that the roll at Newtonmore Primary School is forecast to see a modest decline over the course the rest of the current decade.
- 4.7 The accommodation at Newtonmore Primary School is rated as "C" for educational suitability and "B" for Condition.
- 4.8 In the 5 sessions from 2019-20 to 2023-24, there were 4 placing requests to leave Newtonmore Primary School, and 15 requests to join.
- 4.9 There is no current HMle Report for the school.
- 4.10 Annual CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from Newtonmore Primary School building from April 2021 to March 2022 are estimated at 7.3 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Gergask Primary School.

## 5 Examination of Alternatives

- 5.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must give due consideration of alternative courses of action that could be considered. The following reasonable alternatives to closure have been considered:
- i. To continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement.
  - ii. To re-open Gergask Primary School with its current catchment area.
  - iii. To re-open Gergask Primary School with an expanded catchment area.
- 5.2 As part of the consideration of alternatives, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections.
- 5.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the reasonable alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices.

### Option 1 – Continued Mothballing

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current "mothballing" arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. The very low number of

## Appendix A

children in the Gergask Primary School catchment indicates strongly that the school is no longer viable. "Mothballing" would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school and would prevent the community from developing options for the future use of the accommodation. Informal discussions suggest that the local community does not favour a lengthy "mothballing" arrangement.

- 6.2 In the past, Highland Council has left schools mothballed for a number of years before they have been finally closed. One disadvantage has been that the empty building has deteriorated, limiting limitations for the community, in terms of making use of the building following closure. Continued mothballing would also leave the Council burdened with the costs of maintaining the empty building.
- 6.3 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation. The status of mothballed schools should be regularly reviewed. Having undertaken such a review, Highland Council does not see continued mothballing as a realistic alternative to closure.
- 6.4 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.

### **Option 2 - Re-Opening of Gergask Primary School with its Current Catchment Area**

- 7.1 The results of informal consultation suggest there is insufficient parental interest in re-opening Gergask Primary School. The number of children within the catchment is now insufficient to enable the school to continue.

### **Option 3 - Re-Opening of Gergask Primary School with an Expanded Catchment Area**

- 8.1 The Gergask Primary School catchment is linked by road to the Newtonmore and Spean Bridge catchments, the latter being part of the Lochaber ASG. Spean Bridge Primary School is located 31 miles from Laggan, which is the main population centre for the Gergask catchment. It would not be a realistic option to change the catchment boundary in favour of Gergask Primary School. Any such proposal would of course require a statutory consultation.
- 8.2 At present the Gergask/Newtonmore catchment boundary is at a point roughly equidistant from the two schools. Within the Newtonmore catchment, there is no substantial population until the village of Newtonmore itself, so a catchment change would not be practical suggestion of improving the roll at Gergask. Any such proposal would of course require a statutory consultation.
- 8.2 It should also be borne in mind that Newtonmore Primary is also a very remote rural school. Spean Bridge Primary School is also on the Rural Schools list.

- 8.3 Taking all the above into account, it would not be appropriate to alter either catchment boundary in order to expand the Gergask Primary School catchment.

### **Educational Benefits**

- 9.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.
- 9.2 Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its' school estate:
- Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
  - Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
  - Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
  - Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
  - Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural council area such as Highland.
  - School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
  - School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
  - Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
  - Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
  - The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
  - Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built-up community.
- 9.3 As mentioned above, evidence gathered by Highland Council to date suggests that there is no realistic prospect of a viable roll at Gergask Primary School.
- 9.4 Children at Newtonmore Primary School regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes. The very small roll of a re-opened Gergask Primary School would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A very small roll would also limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.

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- 9.5 A larger school roll makes it easier for the school to attract visiting speakers and other external partners to work with the children. In many cases external partners look for a certain threshold in the number of children they will be working with.
- 9.6 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.
- 9.7 The existence of pre-school classes at Newtonmore Primary School enables a strong transition process for children moving into P1.
- 9.8 The language programme at Newtonmore Primary School aims to develop listening, talking, reading and writing skills. Listening is developed by games, stories, radio & television programmes, music, and use of ICT. The school aims to develop fluency and clarity of expression and to extend vocabulary. Talking is developed by role playing, mime, reporting, interviewing etc. They are also used for the teaching of other languages, which are introduced to pupils as part of the 1+2 language initiative. Once again, the emphasis is on oral work and role play. In all cases, working with others plays an important role.
- 9.9 It is self-evident that an overall school roll in single figures restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling.
- 9.10 As with sports, the larger roll at Newtonmore provides a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of group musical and artistic opportunities, events that are more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers.
- 9.11 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.
- 9.12 In summary, there are positive educational benefits to be derived from the closure of Gergask Primary School, due to the significantly increased opportunities that can be provided at Newtonmore Primary. Collaborative working within the classroom, language learning, and artistic and sports activities can all benefit from the greater numbers that are available. Conversely, the roll of a re-opened Gergask Primary School would be insufficient to keep the school viable.

## **Re-allocation of Gergask Primary School Catchment**

- 10.1 A map of the current Gergask Primary School catchment is at Appendix B.
- 10.2 In the event that Gergask Primary School closes, its catchment will be transferred to that of Newtonmore Primary School. The proposed merged catchment is shown at Appendix C.

## **Effect of Differing Transport Arrangements**

- 11.1 As there are currently no children attending Gergask Primary School, no differing transport arrangement would need to be applied in the event of the formal closure of the school.
- 11.2 The driving time between Gergask Primary School and Newtonmore Primary School is given as 13 minutes (source: Google Maps). There may, in the future, be children undertaking this travel time. It is appreciated that potential driving times from the extreme ends of the catchment would be longer.
- 11.4 Calculations of the additional emissions of greenhouse gases arising from the current transport arrangements from Gergask to Newtonmore Primary suggest that the mothballing, and by extension the formal closure of, Gergask Primary, is currently resulting in about 0.9 tonnes per annum of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions. The figures can however only be estimates as emissions are affected by the type of vehicle used for the transport contract, the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.

## **Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements**

- 12.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Newtonmore Primary School from a formal closure of Gergask Primary School.
- 12.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.

## **Effect on the Local Community**

- 13.1 The community of Laggan does have a village hall and therefore has a public space where the community can meet.
- 13.2 Gergask Primary School was not used for school lets prior to mothballing, as this would have taken income away from the community hall.
- 13.3 There are two areas of land adjacent to the school, that have been used by the school under lease agreements. However these will revert to the landowners when the school closes.
- 13.4 Subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community over the future use of the building and site. Any such proposal would however have to

## Appendix A

be progressed within the terms of the Council's current asset management arrangements.

### Financial Consequences

14.1 The Table at **Appendix E** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger. As the school is currently mothballed, the savings identified are already being made and no additional saving would arise to the Council from closure.

### Equalities Impact Assessment

15.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no impact on the following Equality areas:

- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy or Maternity
- Marriage/Civil Partnership
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sexual Orientation
- Looked After Children
- Young Carers
- Children and Young People Living in Deprivation

15.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to a primary school and as such primarily affects children in the 3-12 age group, and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in the area concerned. No negative age-related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of school provision.

### Rural Impact Assessment

16.1 Gergask Primary School and Newtonmore Primary School are classed by the Scottish Government as "very remote rural schools". Although the proposal involves a formal closure of service, the service itself has not operated since September 2022. In practical terms the proposal will not change the current position.

16.2 The relocation of service (which in practical terms has already taken place) involves moving local school provision from Laggan to Newtonmore, a distance of 8 miles.

16.3 As set out in Section 9 above, the Highland Council believes that the proposal offers educational benefits.

16.4 The maximum additional travel time for school pupils from the Gergask Primay School site to Newtonmore Primary School is 13 minutes (source: Google



Maps). As school transport is provided by the Council, the proposal would not be expected to have any impact on accessibility to education or on fuel poverty.

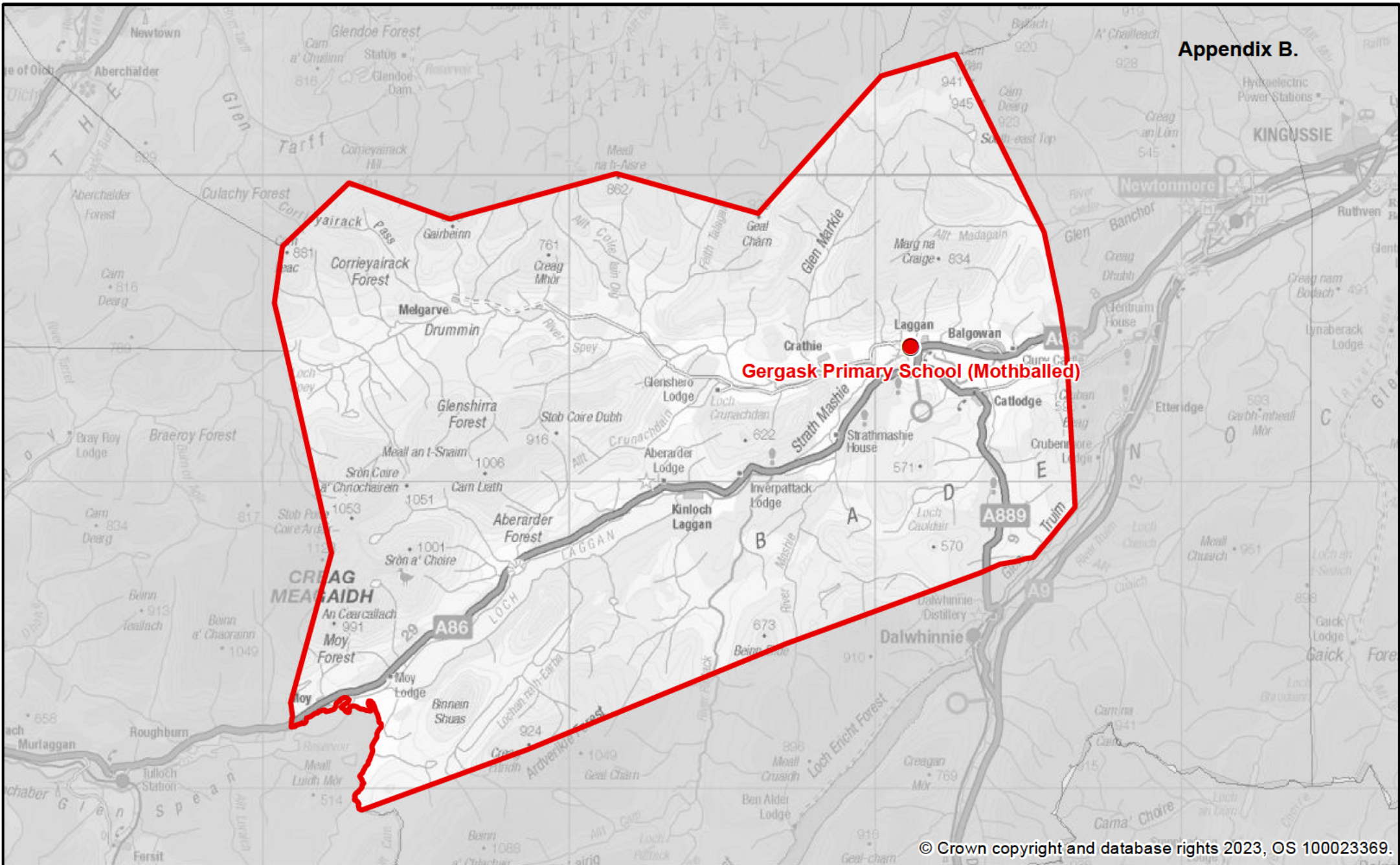
### **Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

- 17.1 As all the pupils within the Gergask Primary School catchment are already attending Newtonmore Primary School, no adverse effects arise in respect of current pupils.
- 17.2 There is a potential adverse effect for future children in the length of journey from the Gergask catchment to Newtonmore, details of which are provided above, which would not arise if Gergask Primary remained open. As the school has been mothballed since 2022, the current pupils are already making this journey. The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted.
- 17.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from the Gergask Primary School catchment who are attending Newtonmore Primary.

### **Recommendation**

- 18.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Gergask Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area re-assigned that of Newtonmore Primary School.
- 18.2 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority’s procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

**END OF PROPOSAL PAPER**



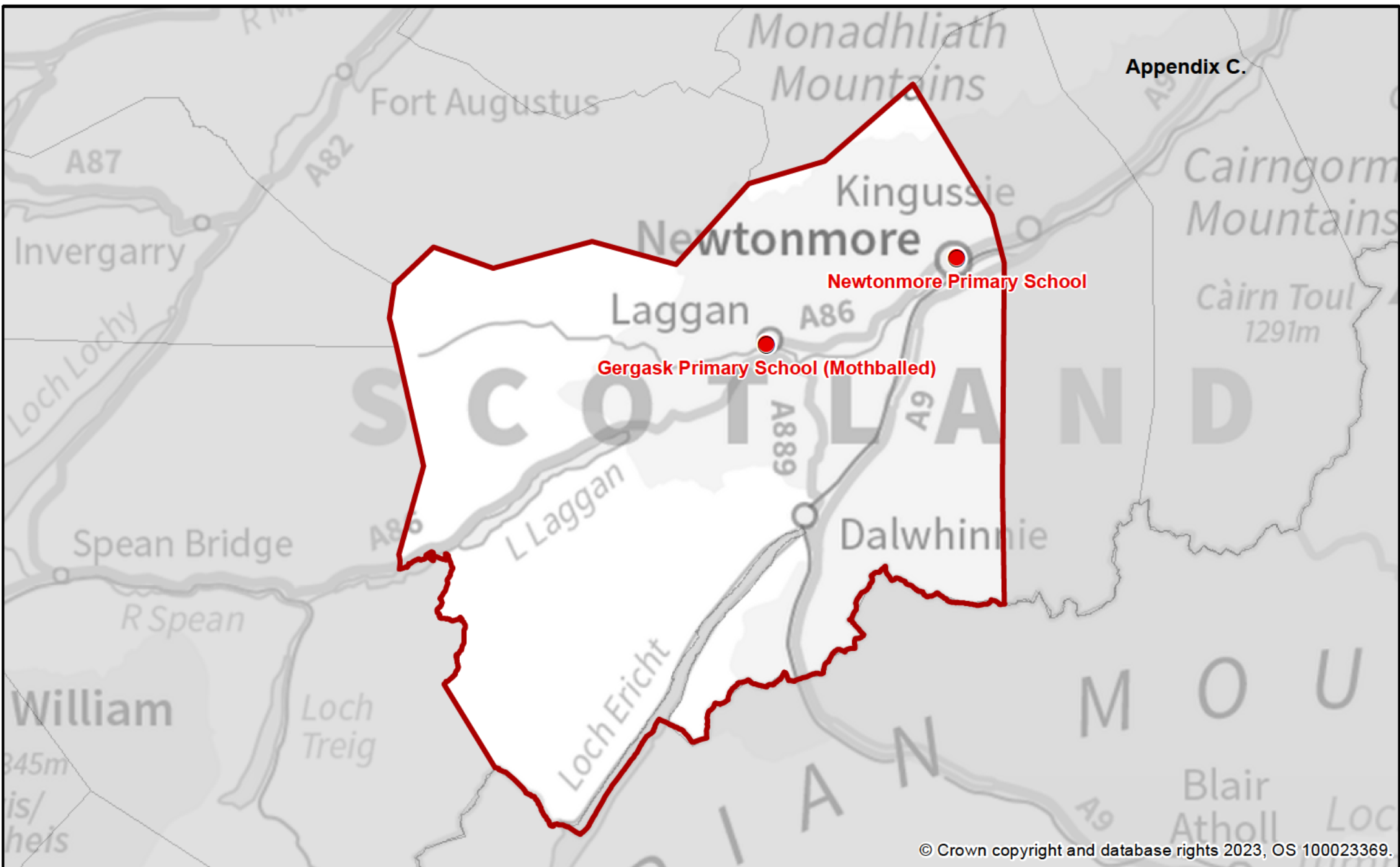
**Gergask Primary School (Mothballed)**

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# Gergask Primary School Catchment

Ref: gis2737  
Date: 11/May/2023





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# Proposed Newtonmore Primary School Catchment

Ref: gis2737  
Date: 11/May/2023

N  
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School Roll Forecast  
 Kingussie High School  
 Kingussie High School

5146038	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
S 1	69	97	69	84	81	57	78	68	68	64	78	71	72	72	73	73
S 2	77	70	99	71	85	82	58	79	69	68	65	79	72	72	73	73
S 3	61	78	72	101	72	86	83	59	80	70	69	65	79	72	73	73
S 4	88	62	80	74	102	73	87	84	60	81	71	70	65	79	73	73
S 5	65	77	55	71	65	90	64	76	73	53	71	62	61	57	69	63
S 6	51	43	51	37	47	43	59	42	50	48	35	47	40	40	37	45
<b>Total Roll</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>400</b>
<b>Total Capacity</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>660</b>
<b>Tot Roll - Tot Cap</b>	<b>-249</b>	<b>-233</b>	<b>-234</b>	<b>-222</b>	<b>-208</b>	<b>-229</b>	<b>-231</b>	<b>-252</b>	<b>-260</b>	<b>-276</b>	<b>-271</b>	<b>-266</b>	<b>-271</b>	<b>-268</b>	<b>-262</b>	<b>-260</b>
<b>Used Capacity (%)</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>61%</b>





School Roll Forecast  
Kingussie High School  
Kingussie Primary

5146224	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
Catchment Flow	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%	78.3%
New Housing (Catchment Only)		14	19	17	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
P1 New Housing Pupils (All Catchments)		0.2	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.8	3.0	3.2
P1 CHI Pupils		6.7	11.4	9.4	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2
P 1	7	7	12	10	10	10	10	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12	12
P 2	13	7	7	12	10	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
P 3	9	13	7	7	12	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
P 4	9	9	13	8	8	12	11	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
P 5	12	9	9	14	8	8	13	11	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
P 6	14	12	10	10	14	8	8	13	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
P 7	17	14	12	10	10	14	8	8	13	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
<b>Total Roll</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Total Capacity</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>125</b>
Tot Roll - Tot Cap	-44	-54	-55	-54	-53	-53	-55	-49	-46	-48	-48	-47	-41	-41	-41	-41
Used Capacity (%)	65%	57%	56%	57%	58%	58%	56%	61%	63%	62%	62%	62%	67%	67%	67%	67%

School Roll Forecast  
Kingussie High School  
Newtonmore Primary

5145929	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	2036/37	2037/38
Catchment Flow	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%	88.9%
New Housing (Catchment Only)		4	14	14	14	14	17	17	17	17	17	8	8	8	8	8
P1 New Housing Pupils (All Catchments)		0.1	0.3	0.6	0.8	1.1	1.4	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.8	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.7
P1 CHI Pupils		12.2	6.3	13.7	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8	10.8
P 1	16	12	7	14	12	12	12	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14	14
P 2	20	16	13	7	15	12	12	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14	14
P 3	16	20	16	13	7	15	12	12	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14
P 4	13	16	20	17	13	7	15	12	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14
P 5	14	13	16	21	17	13	8	15	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14
P 6	12	14	13	17	21	17	14	8	16	13	14	14	14	14	14	14
P 7	23	12	14	14	17	21	17	14	8	16	14	14	14	14	14	14
<b>Total Roll</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Total Capacity</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Tot Roll - Tot Cap</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>-23</b>	<b>-19</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>-25</b>	<b>-32</b>	<b>-35</b>	<b>-33</b>	<b>-28</b>	<b>-27</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-24</b>	<b>-24</b>
<b>Used Capacity (%)</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>80%</b>



## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This background paper describes the high level approach taken in preparing school roll forecasts for primary and secondary schools in Highland. It describes the basic methodology used and changes introduced to the processes to improve transparency and ease of use of the forecasts.
- 1.2 The existing school roll forecasting methodology has been iteratively developed over several decades with improvements and adjustments to account for circumstances in Highland. Given the school capacity pressures experienced in recent years, Highland Council's Development and Infrastructure - Information and Research department, together with Care and Learning, took the opportunity to look afresh at the forecasting process. This research has informed the 2017/18 School Roll Forecasts and the preparation of the draft Developer Contributions Supplementary guidance (consultation 2018).
- 1.3 It has been recognised that there is a need for a simplified approach to determining the effect of residential development on the school estate. In preparing the forecasts, a key consideration was the usability of these forecasts to easily identify all anticipated residential developments which feed into the forecasts and undertake development scenario modelling. This information is critical for effective planning of the school estate and assessing Local Development Plan site allocations as well as individual development proposals.
- 1.4 An integrated primary and secondary school Excel spreadsheet based approach has been developed to give confidence in school roll forecasting. A baseline forecast is updated and published annually, which also acts as a template that can now be used for modelling future school rolls based on testing various potential development and school estate management scenarios.

## **2 Input Datasets and Factors**

- 2.1 A key factor in school roll forecasting is a detailed and accurate assessment of the likely residential build-out timescales for new developments. The annual Housing Land Audit (HLA) provides this base information. Since 2016, the HLA has been prepared in parallel with the creation of the annual School Roll Forecasts. In addition to programmed build out rates for Local Development Plan site allocations, allowance for smaller scale 'windfall' development sites is also applied to the forecasts. This windfall rate is based on the prevailing average for the primary school catchment in the previous two years. The build out and delivery of multiple residential developments, which often take place within a similar timeframe, contribute to cumulative pressures on the school estate.

- 2.2 The ratio of additional pupils expected to derive from newly constructed housing (the Pupil Product Ratio or PPR) is the major influence on increasing school rolls. The rates used in Highland are 0.3 primary pupils and 0.13 secondary per new home. These figures are comparable with those used across many Scottish Local Authorities and have been found to be accurate and reliable as recently assessed and reported in the School Pupil Product Ratio Review, prepared by The Highland Council - Information and Research, September 2017.
- 2.3 Forecasts are informed by an annual school pupil census, combined with information on current school capacities to provide the baseline and start point for forecasting and roll pressure analysis. These are provided by Care and Learning and are updated regularly to comply with the latest legislation and regulatory requirements.
- 2.4 Pre-school year group values are populated using GP registration figures supplied by the NHS, to identify children which are not yet of school age. These will be included in the calculation of future P1 intakes for Primary Schools.
- 2.5 A significant exercise was undertaken in 2017 to increase the accuracy of pupil flow modelling. We analyse the current flow of pupils attending schools outwith their catchment area school to determine future roll adjustments from Placing Request applications, as well as calculate intake numbers for Gaelic and Denominational schools.

### **3 Methodology**

- 3.1 Once the input datasets have been refreshed with the latest values, the spreadsheet can be used to forecast school rolls for the next 15 years. As a baseline, each projection sheet shows the number of pupils in each year group for the current school year.
- 3.2 For every additional year to be forecast, the number of pupils expected in each year group will be updated to take account of the influences from the various input datasets, including additional pupils from new housing development completions.
- 3.3 Using the residential development information, estimated build out rates are aggregated by primary catchment and an updated windfall contribution is added to give a year by year additional housing count for each. These values are combined with the Pupil Product Ratios to predict the number of additional pupils expected per school for each year forecast.

- 3.4 These anticipated new housing yields are combined with expected Placing Request numbers and are used to adjust the pupil numbers moving through the education system. Primary School P1 rolls are based on the Pre-school figures collected from the NHS and Secondary School S1 rolls use the product of last years Primary P7 pupils. All other Primary and Secondary year groups are based on the number of pupils expected to progress through from the previous school year. Adjusted year group figures for each projected year are displayed alongside baseline roll figures.
- 3.5 Total school rolls forecasted are reported against school capacities to highlight current and future school's capacity constraints or where schools have excess capacity.

## **4 Outputs**

- 4.1 Forecasts are aggregated into a single summary sheet for each Associated School Group (ASG) and published annually via the Highland Council's Website. From 2018, we will also be publishing mid-year update sheets to reflect any significant changes to the school estate.
- 4.2 The published School Roll Forecast is used internally as a baseline to enable effective management of the school estate and forms an essential part of the Council's evidence base for informing planning decision making.

END

The Highland Council - Information and Research  
Development and Infrastructure  
September 2017

# Appendix E.

## Financial Template

Table 1	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Row 1	<b>Current revenue costs for school proposed for closure</b>			
	<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)</b>	<b>Additional financial impact on receiving school Newtonmore Primary School</b>	<b>Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)</b>
Row 2	Gergask Primary School			
Row 3	<b>School costs</b>			
Row 4	<i>Employee costs - note 1</i>			
Row 5	teaching staff	£117,020	£46,564	£70,456
Row 6	support staff	£10,649	£0	£10,649
Row 7	teaching staff training (CPD etc)	£254	£8	£246
Row 8	support staff training	£0	£0	£0
Row 9	Supply costs - note 2	£4,022	£0	£4,022
Row 10				
Row 11	<i>Building costs:</i>			
Row 12	property insurance	£240	£0	£240
Row 13	non domestic rates	£0	£0	£0
Row 14	water & sewerage charges	£1,102	£0	£1,102
Row 15	energy costs	£26,481	£0	£26,481
Row 16	cleaning (contract or inhouse)	£8,587	£0	£8,587
Row 17	building repair & maintenance	£139	£11	£128
Row 18	grounds maintenance	£0	£0	£0
Row 19	facilities management costs - note 6	£4,944	£0	£4,944
Row 20	revenue costs arising from capital	£0	£0	£0
Row 21	other	£0	£0	£0
Row 22				
Row 23	<i>School operational costs:</i>			
Row 24	learning materials	£1,220	£110	£1,110
Row 25	catering (contract or inhouse)	£13,497	£0	£13,497
Row 26	SQA costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 27	other school operational costs (e.g. licences)	£0	£0	£0
Row 28				
Row 29	<i>Transport costs: note 3</i>			
Row 30	home to school	£0	£15,200	-£15,200
Row 31	other pupil transport costs	£0	£0	£0
Row 32	staff travel	£174	£34	£140
Row 33	<b>SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>£188,329</b>	<b>£61,927</b>	<b>£126,402</b>
Row 34				
Row 35	<i>Income:</i>			
Row 36	Sale of meals	£0	£0	£0
Row 37	Lets	£0	£0	£0
Row 38	External care provider	£0	£0	£0
Row 39	Other	£0	£0	£0
Row 40	<b>SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>£0</b>
Row 41				
Row 42	<b>TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL</b>	<b>£188,329</b>	<b>£61,927</b>	<b>£126,402</b>
Row 43				
Row 44	<b>UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR</b>	<b>94,164</b>	<b>30,964</b>	<b>63,201</b>

Note: As Gergask PS is currently mothballed the costs in column 2 of table 1 above reflect the estimated costs of running the school if it were to reopen, as the school is currently mothballed these

Table 2	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
<b>Capital costs</b>		<b>School proposed for closure</b>	<b>Receiving school</b>
Capital Life Cycle cost - note 7		£15,000	£0
Third party contributions to capital costs			

Table 3	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
<b>Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling) until disposal</b>			
property insurance		£240	
non domestic rates		£0	
water & sewerage charges		£359	
energy costs		£9,998	
cleaning (contract or inhouse)		£0	
security costs		£0	
building repair & maintenance		£0	
grounds maintenance		£0	
facilities management costs		£0	
other		£0	
<b>TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL</b>		<b>£10,597</b>	

Table 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
<b>Non-recurring revenue costs</b>			
<b>TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS</b>		<b>£3,500.00</b>	

Table 5	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
<b>Impact on GAE - note 5</b>			
<b>GAE IMPACT</b>		<b>-£4,514</b>	

### Notes

1. The total costs incurred for teaching staff (row 5) and support staff (row 6) are required to be included. Column 2 should include the current costs for a full financial year for the school proposed for closure, and column 3 should include the *additional* cost to the receiving school as a result of staff transferring.

For teaching staff, this should include regular teachers, itinerant teachers, learning support teaching staff and special education (ASN) staff.

Itinerant teaching staff includes central support services such as English as additional language support, hearing, visually impaired services, educational psychology services.

For support staff, this should include classroom assistants, administration staff and janitorial staff.

For all staff the costs entered should include salary, NI and pension costs.

If the school proposed for closure has less than 3 staff members, then the cumulative staff costs only should be given in row 5 (for both teaching and support staff), so as to avoid possible disclosure of individual salaries.

Training costs should be identified separately in rows 7 and 8.

2. Supply costs to cover teaching and support staff. This may be held in a central budget, be devolved or shared across the budgets.

3. 'Home to school' pupil transport costs should include those school transport costs incurred in accordance with Council policy. 'Other pupil transport costs' will cover costs incurred for the transport of pupils for activities such as swimming etc

4. Row 30 of column 3 should include the additional transport costs related to the increased home to school transport arrangements that are put in place in accordance with Council policy. This figure is therefore likely to be considerably higher than current costs.

5. This table is to capture the impact on the revenue support grant as a result of changes to GAE. Impact on GAE should consider the issues covered in the GAE section of the guidance document that accompany this template.

6. Facilities management costs will include costs related to caretaking, janitorial and security.

7. The capital costs for the receiving school should be taken across the life cycle of the school in line with the life expectancy of that school. The capital costs for the school proposed for closure should be taken across the same life cycle period.