

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	EDU/2/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: 26 February 2025

Report Title: Draft Learning Estate Strategy

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Government's Learning Estate Strategy and its guiding principles set out a strategic approach for managing the school estate across Scotland with the stated aim of improving the outcomes for all learners and adopting a more integrated approach.
- 1.2 This report sets out Highland Council's draft Learning Estate Strategy. The Vision behind the Strategy is for a well-maintained estate that supports the Council's ambitions for high quality inclusive education for all learners, focused on continuous improvement, raising attainment and sustained positive destinations. The Strategy is also fully aligned with the approach set out in the Council's Highland Investment Plan and the approved Sports Strategy, thereby ensuring that decisions around investment are consistent with the Council's wider strategic priorities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. Consider and note the Integrated Impact Assessment Screening in **Appendix 1**; and
 - ii. Approve the Learning Estate Strategy included in **Appendix 2**.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: The resources to deliver the Strategy are contained within the Highland Investment Plan. Additional external funding may be secured as an when the opportunity arises – for example SG Gaelic Capital or Sport Scotland funding.
- 3.2 Legal: The Learning Estate Strategy will support the Council in meeting its statutory obligations to provide accommodation that meets the needs of all learners, maintain compliance of buildings, and manage school roll requirements.
- 3.3 Risk: The Strategy will support the identification and management of risks across the learning estate. All risk matters relating to capital investment are managed on both individual projects and across programmes of work.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people): The Learning Estate Strategy and associated Highland Investment Plan will ensure that the Council's Health and Safety obligations in relation to its built estate are met.

3.5 Gaelic: The Strategy supports the delivery of Gaelic Medium Education.

4. Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary

4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment Screening has been undertaken on the proposed implementation of the LES. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.

4.3.2 The screening process has concluded that there are positive impacts from improved educational or childcare facilities in relation to disability, inclusion and educational opportunities for children from deprived areas. Mitigation measures would be implemented on any potential negative impacts from increased travel time arising from future rationalisation proposals. In relation to Climate Change, there would be a positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity. Members are asked to consider the summary in **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

4.3.3 Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening
Equality	Positive
Poverty and Socio-Economic	Positive and Potential Negative
Human Rights	Positive
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Positive
Data Protection	No impact
Island and Mainland Rural	No impact
Climate Change	Positive

5. Overview

5.1 The Highland Council's Learning Estate Strategy (LES) supports the overall vision and priorities within the National Improvement Framework with a focus on excellence and equity for all children and young people. The Strategy sets out the principles and

priorities to drive the development of the learning estate across Highland, consistent with the national agenda and the Council's wider strategic priorities.

- 5.2 The ten guiding principles contained within the Scottish Government's LES provide the basis to meet the requirements of the National Improvement Framework and support the delivery of the curriculum to ensure a commitment to excellence and equity.
- 5.3 The LES will underpin the Council's strategic approach to managing all assets that will be further defined in the Strategic Asset Management Plan that is currently under development. These strategies will support the development of improved, sustainable and efficient integrated services across Highland.
- 5.4 The intentions set out in the various reports to Council in 2024 on the Highland Investment Plan will result in significant improvements to the learning estate as part of the wider vision to create public services for the future. Significant capital investment in new Community Points of Delivery and improvements to existing school buildings will help to deliver these changes.

6. Capacity Modelling

- 6.1 Section 4 of the LES sets out the established approach to Primary School Capacity Modelling and the work that is underway to develop a methodology for Secondary Schools and Special Schools. This will result in a consistent approach to determining the Planning and Working Capacities of all schools in Highland.
- 6.2 One of the key outcomes from the implementation of the LES will be to ensure the provision of suitable accommodation in all school settings to meet the additional support needs of children and young people. The Planning Capacities of all schools will be reviewed to ensure that the appropriate level of enhanced or specialist provision is identified for each mainstream setting as well as for standalone special schools.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 In summary, the LES provides the vision and methodology for creating spaces that will enhance and sustain communities across the Highlands. At its heart, it will support children and young people through their learning journey from early years, primary and secondary school, college or university to the world of employment, education or training; equipped with skills for life, work and learning both they and society needs to succeed in the growing global knowledge economy of the 21st century.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 It is proposed that the LES will be reviewed each year, particularly to reflect any changes arising from the annual update of the School Roll Forecasts or from the annual Core Facts report to the Scottish Government on the extent, condition and sufficiency of the schools in the learning estate.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 12/02/25

Author: Robert Campbell - Service Lead, Capital Planning and Estate Strategy

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment Screening
Appendix 2 – Learning Estate Strategy Document

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

This Impact Assessment is marked as confidential or sensitive. If you intend to share this document please check with the Responsible Manager who this can be shared with.

About proposal

What does this proposal relate to? Strategy, Redesign or change to existing service

Proposal name: Highland Learning Estate Strategy

High level summary of the proposal: The Strategy sets out the principles and priorities to drive the development of the learning estate across Highland, consistent with the National Learning Estate Agenda.

Who may be affected by the proposal? School age children in Highland, (and children attending school nursery classes), their parents, school staff in Highland, and potentially staff and users of associated functions such as health and leisure.

Start date of proposal:

End date of proposal:

Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service? Yes

Which Council services will be impacted by this proposal? People, Place

Does this relate to an existing proposal? Yes

Provide details of the existing proposal: Highland Council's Capital Planning Programme

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Sign off date: 2025-01-31

Equalities, poverty, and human rights

Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

Sex: No impact

Age: No impact

Disability: Positive

Religion or belief: No impact

Race: No impact

Sexual orientation: No impact

Gender reassignment: No impact

Pregnancy and maternity: No impact

Marriage and civil partnership: No impact

Protected characteristics impact details: The Strategy will primarily affect children in the 3-18 age group, but age is not a protected characteristic in terms of school provision. The new buildings that will be provided will have a positive impact on disability, since they will include up to date and more inclusive facilities.

Poverty and socio-economic

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

Prospects and opportunities: Positive, Negative

Places: Positive

Financial: No impact

Poverty and socio-economic impact details: The Strategy is an overarching document which will not have a direct impact on poverty or socio-economic issues. The improved educational and childcare facilities that arise from the programme will, in due course, provide better opportunities for children from deprived areas to progress educationally. In some cases, additional travel may be required to access schools and childcare facilities, as a result of buildings being consolidated in a single location. For school age children, this impact will be mitigated through the provision of school transport. For pre-school children, mitigation may be through the provision of alternative means of local delivery of childcare. Each of the individual proposals will be subject to an Impact Assessment, at the appropriate time.

Human rights

Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?

What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people? Positive

Human rights impact details: The proposal mainly affects educational facilities. The new Strategy provides a framework for improving such facilities.

Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights? Positive and negative impact (potential or actual)

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Children's rights and wellbeing

What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people? The Strategy will provide a framework for the provision of new educational facilities, and the consolidation of some facilities.

Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal? You are working in the best interests of the child (Article 3)

Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected: Impacts will be indirect as the Strategy is an overarching document. However, it should in due course deliver facilities that provide better educational and leisure opportunities, and improvements to inclusion.

Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing? Positive impact

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Data protection

Will your proposal involve processing personal data? No

Data protection screening assessment

What change will there be to the way personal data is processed? No personal data will be processed

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Island and mainland rural communities

Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities? No

Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities? No difference

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

Climate change

Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂e)? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? Yes

Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? No

Provide information regarding your selection above: The Strategy envisages the future construction of new facilities. Whilst the construction phase may result in additional CO₂e emissions, the new buildings will provide a long-term benefit in being built to the most modern environmental standards. Future proposals arising out of the Strategy could potentially affect woodlands, etc. A full IIA will be carried out for each such project.

Climate change screening assessment

Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? Yes

Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No

The Highland Council Learning Estate Strategy

Connecting People, Places and Learning

February 2025

www.highland.gov.uk



Document Version Control

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Document Owner	Robert Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning & Estate Strategy	Date:	12/02/25
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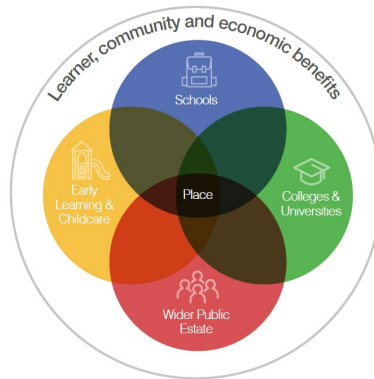
1. Foreword

- 1.1** The Highland Council Learning Estate Strategy (LES) supports the overall vision and priorities within the National Improvement Framework with a focus on excellence and equity for all children and young people. The Strategy sets out the principles and priorities to drive the development of the learning estate across Highland consistent with the national agenda and wider Highland strategic priorities.
- 1.2** The LES also aligns with the local priorities set out within the Highland Investment Plan (HIP) vision for developing its learning estate. In May 2024, Highland Council agreed an approach to develop sustainable local services and communities for the future. The HIP sets out how the Council will work over the next 10 years to optimise its investment of resources in its learning estate in a prioritised manner to meet the needs of 21st century learning and teaching. A new generation of community facilities is envisioned for the Highlands, with Points of Delivery (PODs) seeing a range of public services brought together in a single location.
- 1.3** PODs can take a range of forms depending on specific needs and opportunities but could include spaces for education services being provided directly alongside health, leisure, childcare, and other public services.
- 1.4** Adaptable to the needs and circumstances of individual communities, it is envisaged that there are opportunities to create localised services using this model across the Highlands. Work has already been done to consider the different buildings, land and services provided, along with where the need for new facilities might be, and the opportunities to deliver this. This is achieved by taking a place-based planning approach.
- 1.5** The LES supports the school estate management planning process allowing the Council to identify the need for investment going forward and to prioritise accordingly and in a way that is open and objective.
- 1.6** For the avoidance of doubt, any reference in this document to a primary school includes any Local Authority operated pre-school provision within that school.
- 1.7** In summary, the LES provides the vision and methodology for creating spaces that will enhance and sustain communities across the Highlands. At its heart, it will support children and young people through their learning journey from early years, primary and secondary school, college or university to the world of employment, education or training; equipped with skills for life, work and learning both they and society needs to succeed in the growing global knowledge economy of the 21st century.



2. Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy

- 2.1** Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy was published by the Scottish Government in 2019. Its guiding principles provide a platform for investment in the learning estate across Scotland and set out a strategic approach for managing the learning estate.
- 2.2** The stated aim of the Strategy is to improve the outcomes for all learners and enable sustainable and inclusive economic growth by placing the whole learning estate at the heart of meeting the needs of Scotland's communities, learners and businesses and adopting a more integrated approach.



2.3 The Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles are:

1. Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners.
2. Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners.
3. The learning estate should be well-managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy, and representing and delivering best value.
4. The condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function.
5. Learning environments should serve the wider community and where appropriate be integrated with the delivery of other public services in line with the place principle.
6. Learning environments should be greener, more sustainable, allow safe and accessible routes for walking, cycling, and wheeling and be digitally enabled.
7. Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised.
8. Good consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and an involvement in decision making processes should lead to better outcomes for all.
9. Collaboration across the learning estate, and collaboration with partners in localities, should support maximising its full potential.
10. Investment in Scotland's learning estate should contribute towards improving learning outcomes and support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

3. The Learning Estate in Highland

3.1 The Learning Estate in Highland comprises 197 operational schools (excluding schools that are currently mothballed) as detailed below.

- a)** 164 Primary Schools; 3 are solely Gaelic Medium and 17 provide both English and Gaelic Medium Education.
- b)** 29 Secondary Schools.
- c)** 4 Special Schools (3 of which have enrolled pupils).
- d)** 135 Primary Schools have Council operated Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings on campus.
- e)** 5 School Residences.

3.2 Information on the arrangement of Associated School Groups and 3-18 Campuses in Highland can be viewed at the following links, and the range of pupil roll numbers is summarised in the table below.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/30028/associated_school_groups

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/30029/3-18_campuses



Primary and Secondary Roll Numbers

164 Primary Schools (Average Roll – 97 Pupils)

- 10 or Fewer Pupils – 19 Schools
- 11 to 25 Pupils – 28 Schools
- 26 to 50 Pupils – 33 Schools
- 51 to 100 Pupils – 23 Schools
- 101 to 200 Pupils – 31 Schools
- 201 or More Pupils – 30 Schools

29 Secondary Schools (Average Roll – 480 Pupils)

- 100 or Fewer Pupils – 4 Schools
- 101 to 250 Pupils – 7 Schools
- 251 to 500 Pupils – 5 Schools
- 501 to 1,000 Pupils – 9 Schools
- 1,000 or More – 4 Schools



3.3 These are the Scottish Government’s definitions of the Condition and Suitability Core Facts.

“Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security.”

“Suitability is a measure of whether a school is fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum.”



3.4 A list of all Highland schools along with their overall Condition and Suitability ratings, Planning Capacities, Pupil Rolls and Percentage Occupancy is available to view at the following link.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/30024/school_core_facts_summary

3.5 The table below summarises the overall Condition and Suitability ratings for all Highland schools. A total of 92 schools are rated as “C – Poor” or “D – Bad” for Condition and/or Suitability, with 42 schools rated as “C” or “D” for both.

	Condition			Suitability		
	A	B	C or D	A	B	C
Primary	27	84	53	26	82	56
Secondary	10	8	11	11	6	12
Special	2	1	1	1	2	1
Totals	39	93	65	38	89	69
Percentage			33%			35%

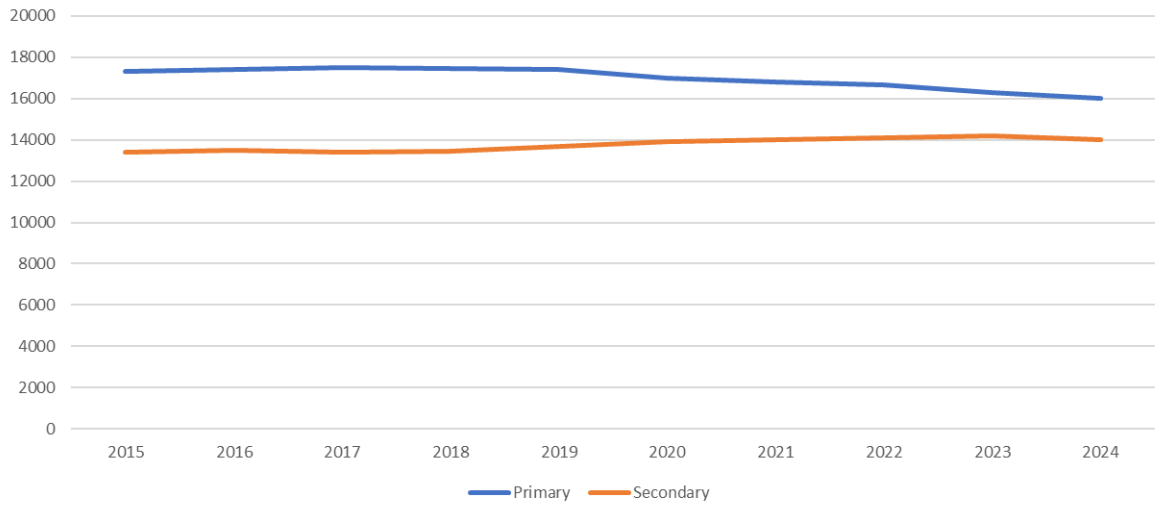
3.6 The LES will support the strategic prioritisation of future capital investment linked to the Highland Investment Plan approach outlined in Section 7. Through this long-term investment strategy, we will bring all our schools up to, or sustain them at, Condition and Suitability ratings of at least “B”. The required works will range from minor fabric improvements or refurbishment projects to major renovations and new builds.

3.7 The table and graph below summarise pupil numbers in the primary and secondary sectors over the last 10 years. The total number of primary pupils has been steadily decreasing since 2017 and this trend is starting to be reflected in secondary pupil numbers.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Primary	17,312	17,396	17,496	17,451	17,403	16,973	16,807	16,661	16,302	16,021
Secondary	13,390	13,495	13,380	13,453	13,684	13,913	14,020	14,111	14,173	13,993
TOTALS	30,702	30,891	30,876	30,904	31,087	30,886	30,827	30,772	30,475	30,014



Highland School Rolls



4. School Capacity Modelling and Roll Forecasting

4.1 Planning Capacity is a measure of the number of pupils that could be accommodated in a school, based on the number and size of teaching spaces, the different maximum class sizes for year groups in primary schools, and the accommodation required for practical subjects in secondary schools. A consistent basis to calculating the capacity of all schools is essential for the following reasons:

1. **Forward Planning:** The assessment of the need for future investment in the school estate (e.g. new builds, extensions, improvements) and to anticipate the impact of new housing to secure appropriate developer contributions.
2. **Curricular and Organisational Needs:** To establish the number of children that the school can deliver the curriculum to, and to assess the implications of any new standards or changes to methodologies and resource requirements.
3. **Placing Requests:** To provide information to assist in the consideration of placing requests and identifying schools that are currently over capacity or may exceed capacity in the future.
4. **Calculation of Performance Indicators:** Accurate capacity and roll information for each school to monitor and evaluate the usage of school places.
5. **Informing Consultations on Proposed Changes to the School Estate:** To meet legal requirements to provide clear, accurate information in consultations on changes to the school estate that the public can have confidence in.
6. **Impact of Changes in Policy:** To take account of any revised Scottish Government priorities and objectives, such as class sizes, teachers' terms and conditions, changes to policy and guidance, and the facilities required to deliver the curriculum.
7. **Additional Support Provision in Mainstream Schools:** Any assessment of the usage and designation of teaching spaces in a school should ensure that the needs of all learners are met, and that the appropriate level of enhanced or specialist provision is available. Planning Capacities therefore need to be reviewed annually or as required to take account of any change in requirements at a school or across an Associated School Group.

4.2 Working Capacity is a measure of the total number of pupils that can be accommodated in a school in a particular school session. This takes account of the organisational needs of the school in that session e.g. the number of classes and teachers required, the number of composite classes, and the amount of ancillary accommodation required to meet the needs of all learners and support inclusion. The Working Capacity will identify the number of pupil places available in a school during that session to help inform decisions around admissions during term time and any placing requests that may be received.



- 4.3 School Capacity Modelling:** The Report from the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education published in 2013 proposed that “A consistent approach to school capacity modelling should be agreed between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities”.
- 4.4 Primary School Capacity Modelling:** The Scottish Government issued the guidance document “Determining Primary School Capacity” in 2014. This was subsequently adopted by Highland Council and is used as the basis to determine the Planning and Working Capacity of all Primary Schools. The guidance stated that “Following consultation with Local Authorities, it was generally agreed that providing guidance on calculating Secondary School capacities was not a priority at this time.”
- 4.5 Secondary School Capacity Modelling:** The Highland Council has been leading on a workstream on Secondary School Capacity Modelling with the Northern Alliance (the Regional Improvement Collaborative between eight local authorities across the north and west of Scotland). The outcome of the work to date has been presented to the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland in 2024. Feedback from other local authorities is being collated with the intention to complete by June 2025, following which the proposed methodology and user guidance will be considered for adoption across Scotland.
- 4.6 Special School Capacity Modelling:** Although local authorities are not required to report to the Scottish Government on the capacity of Special Schools, a separate exercise is underway to establish a consistent approach to this as well. This will result in a consistent approach to determining the Planning and Working Capacity of all schools in Highland.
- 4.7 ELC Capacity Modelling:** This takes into consideration the services required, to include both funded ELC and other childcare facilities where appropriate. The operating model impacts on the modelling formula for class sizes and other requirements. Standards and requirements are set out in the Space to Grow guidance document.
- 4.8 Occupancy Levels:** The optimum occupancy level across all settings is generally around 90% of the Planning Capacity. This level is used as a benchmark to assess the sufficiency of the estate in general, and to support the consideration of future options around individual schools or groups of schools.
- 4.9 School Roll Forecasts:** The Council publishes 15-year forecasts which are updated each year to take account of pupil numbers at the start of each session, information from the annual Housing Land Audit review of actual and predicted new build numbers and timescales for housing developments, and data on the number of pre-school age children in each catchment area. These forecasts are used as a baseline to enable effective management of the school estate and form an essential part of the Council’s evidence base for informing planning decision making and to establish if developer contributions are required for any new housing development. The Planning Capacities of schools are reviewed regularly, and any changes are reflected in the information published with the updated School Roll Forecasts and in the annual Core Facts report to the Scottish Government.



5. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 5.1** The Act establishes a consultation process in respect of school closures and other major changes that affect schools. It provides for Scottish Ministers to 'call in' a local authority decision; special safeguards for rural schools and sets out a five-stage consultation process, including the preparation of an Educational Benefit Statement. Scottish Government has provided further guidance for Local Authorities on the Act.
- 5.2** This guidance sets out the requirement to thoroughly prepare before undertaking any consultation exercise. Local Authorities must undertake significant preparation, have robust information, and ensure any proposal demonstrates educational benefits before consulting on any changes.
- 5.3** The authority must also identify other reasonable alternatives, and full consideration should be given to maintaining the current school. The authority is required to invite representations on these alternatives, as well as requesting suggestions regarding other reasonable alternatives.
- 5.4** The 2010 Act makes special arrangements regarding rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against their closure. A list of the geographical classification of all rural Highland schools as adopted by the Scottish Government is available to view at the link below.
https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/30025/rural_schools_list
- 5.5** The 2010 Act specifies that the above process applies equally to any proposal to permanently discontinue all the nursery classes in a school, or permanently discontinue the provision of Gaelic Medium Education in all the nursery classes in a school that also provides a nursery class through English medium education, or permanently discontinue the provision of English medium education in all the nursery classes in a school that also provides a nursery class through Gaelic Medium Education.
- 5.6** In considering alternatives to closure, authorities may choose to consider "mothballing" a school (or a stage of education or a nursery class at a school). This is a temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act. It is only appropriate in restricted circumstances. When a school roll falls very low, the authority and/or community may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.
- 5.7** In respect of pre-school provision only, closure may also be considered for a school nursery class where favourable alternative provision could be made available to support childcare needs within the community.



6. Additional Support Needs and Enhanced Provision

6.1 The Highland Council has statutory duties in relation to Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended in 2009, to meet the additional support needs of children and young people who face a barrier, or barriers, to learning; and to ensure they are provided with the necessary support to help achieve their full potential. These duties apply across early learning and childcare settings, primary and secondary schools. The recently amended Code of Practice (third edition) provides the following helpful definition of additional support needs:

“This broad and inclusive term applies to children or young people who, for whatever reason, require additional support, in the long or short term, in order to help them make the most of their school education and to be included fully in their learning.”

6.2 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 includes statutory duties in relation to Getting it Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), a statutory definition of wellbeing and direction on the Assessment of Wellbeing (section 96), specifically in relation to use of the 8 wellbeing indicators: Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included.

6.3 The Scottish Government Guidance on the Presumption to Provide Education in a Mainstream Setting, March 2019, provides guidance of the local authority’s duty to provide education for children and young people in a mainstream school or early learning and childcare setting and sets the presumption of mainstreaming within inclusive practices, delivered within an inclusive approach with the Scottish vision for inclusive education:

“Inclusive education in Scotland starts from the belief that education is a human right and the foundation for a more just society. An inclusive approach which recognises diversity and holds the ambition that all children and young people are enabled to achieve to their fullest potential is the cornerstone to achieve equity and excellence in education for all our children and young people.”

6.4 All new builds will support accessibility in mainstream settings through innovative design and technology, including for those with a non-physical disability. They will be suitable for access by the wider community with facilities designed so that they can be used as fully as possible beyond the school day.

6.5 All learners should have access to positive learning environments and opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, ambitions, confidence, and self-esteem to the fullest potential. School buildings have a significant role to play in raising educational standards. Schools are required to be well-designed and have facilities that inspire young people, teachers and communities and meet their aspirations and evolving needs.



6.6 Inclusive practice has four key features of inclusion to set expectations and evaluate inclusive practice in schools and early learning and childcare settings.



6.7 The four features support the delivery of inclusive learning environments for all children and young people that enable them to reach their full potential.

6.8 The National Improvement Framework has a focus on excellence and equity for all our children and young people, underpinned by the GIRFEC approach using the wellbeing indicators within:

- a. **“Included”**: Children and young people should have the opportunity, and be encouraged, to play an active part in the communities in which they live and learn and being part of a wider peer group and community,
- b. **“Achieving”**: Enable children and young people to be supported to help them to progress and develop to reach full potential for a positive future. This included given opportunities to engage in a range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama, art and out of school activities.
- c. **“Respected”**: Children and young people should be treated with dignity and respect, with their voice heard and taken seriously by those who care for them. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out children’s rights to respect for their views.

6.9 Most children and young people who need additional support go to a mainstream school, with a smaller number going to Special Schools. In Highland there are three Special Schools with enrolled pupils: Drummond, St Clement’s, and St Duthus. Highland also has a number of schools with enhanced provision to meet the needs of young people who are not able to fully access mainstream education. A list of all these schools is available to view at the following link.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/30026/special_schools_and_schools_with_enhanced_provision

6.10 Admission to the provision at these schools is based on a joint admission process to make sure procedures are in line with the Scottish Government redrafted guidance on supporting learners, 'with a presumption of mainstreaming in an education setting'. The guidance sets out a range of information and advice that is required to support decision making around whether a child or young person should access a mainstream school, an enhanced provision, Special School, or a combination of these.

6.11 In Highland, most of the Enhanced Provisions are co-located within mainstream schools and are overseen by the Headteacher of the school. The three Special Schools are all currently standalone. However, when the new community campus opens in Tain, St Duthus School will be located within the school site. It will continue to have its own Head Teacher. However, the young people attending St Duthus will have access to the wider facilities and learning opportunities available within the campus. This is the optimum model for Special Schools as it allows for improved educational experiences for learners while still retaining the unique identity of the Special School.



7. The Council's 5-Year Capital Programme

- 7.1** The Council approved a revised 5-year capital programme in September 2023. This includes several specific new build projects along with an annual generic budget heading (School Estate Improvement Programme) of approximately £5M per annum for small to medium sized projects.
- 7.2** The revised programme reaffirmed the Council's commitment to deliver the three projects included in the Scottish Government's Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP). Scottish Government revenue funding totalling over £70 million will be provided to Highland Council through annual payments over 25 years following occupation of the new buildings and on the achievement of defined outcomes for the following projects.
- a) Phase 1: Tain Campus (co-locating Tain Royal Academy, Craighill and Knockbreck Primary Schools and St Duthus School) – At construction stage and due to operational in August 2025.
 - b) Phase 2: Nairn Academy – At construction stage and due to be operational in August 2026.
 - c) Phase 2: Broadford Primary (co-locating the Public Library and Service Point) – At design and planning stage and due to be operational in October 2026.
- 7.3** The programme includes funding for a new primary school to serve the housing development at Tornagrain and this is programmed for completion in 2027/28.
- 7.4** Separate funding was included for Beauly, Dunvegan and Park Primary Schools and St Clement's Special School to allow for essential investment in the existing buildings which may arise over the 5-year period and pending a potential new build in the future.

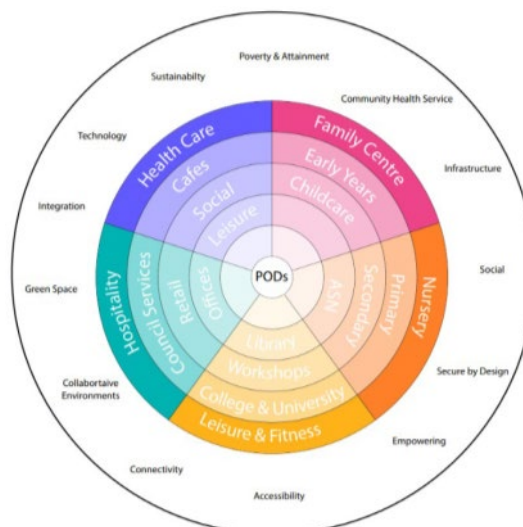


8. The Highland Investment Plan

- 8.1** The Council approved a report in May 2024 setting out a HIP worth £2 billion over the next twenty years. The Plan will see wide ranging investment across communities in the Highlands, with over £1bn of capital investment in schools and roads over the next 10 years in the first phase of the programme.
- 8.2** The planned capital investment through the HIP will result in significant improvements to the school estate as part of the wider vision to create public services for the future. It is not affordable to rebuild all these establishments on a like-for-like basis and so the LES is critical to inform the Council’s investment priorities.



- 8.3** New or repurposed Community PODs will support the delivery of services for the “Council of the Future” as well as co-locating public bodies, other partners, and community facilities.
- 8.4** Community PODs will be places where a wide range of Council services are delivered, which may include education, alongside other partner and community services. The principle is to have a future integrated operating model for partnership working.

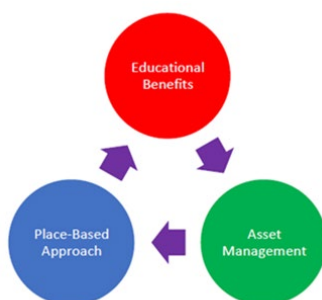


8.5 The HIP will see the development of a Community, Sports, and Leisure Facility Strategy following on from the report approved by the Education Committee in November 2023. This set out a two-stage approach to the development of vibrant community hubs in Highland communities incorporating community, sports, leisure, library, and other services through the implementation of a Highland Council strategic framework for the development of community hubs. Local plans will also be developed at associated school group area level to create 29 blueprints for community, sport, leisure, library, and other facilities important to communities. The strategy provides the opportunity to:

- 1) Ensure that best use of available capital investment is made, and opportunities to develop hubs within existing capital plans are recognised at an early stage in project planning.
- 2) Support the Council's asset rationalisation plan by looking to co-location of provision within communities.
- 3) Support the leveraging in of external funding, including from agencies such as SportsScotland, through a clear and articulated vision and strategy for facilities.
- 4) Support the council's commitment to meet both local and national net zero targets.

8.6 Significant capital investment in school buildings will help to drive the change strategy. Taking into account school capacity modelling and roll forecasting, future changes to the Learning Estate should demonstrate how they will be able to meet the 10 Learning Estate Strategy Guiding Principles set out in 2.3 above. In addition, investment in the Council's Learning Estate will reflect the following principles agreed by The Highland Council in May 2024 for future strategic capital developments:

- 1) Prioritising the improvement and increased utilisation of existing assets through retrofitting buildings identified as core assets to modern efficiency standards, including maximising opportunities for solar, wind and replacement heating systems for oil, gas, and wood as appropriate.
- 2) Accelerate asset rationalisation and co-location opportunities wherever appropriate.
- 3) Urgent and/or emergency capital spend to improve our educational and depot estate in advance of our planned replacement programme.
- 4) Emerging capacity issues, either exceeding capacity or significant underutilisation.
- 5) Anything else that can be shown to make a positive contribution to key themes: addressing poverty, inequality and the challenges of our geography and rurality.



9. Scottish Government Guidance and Documents

- 1. Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy (2019)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-learning-estate-strategy-connecting-people-places-learning/>
- 2. Determining Primary School Capacity (2014)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/determining-primary-school-capacity-guidance/>
- 3. Report of the Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education (2013)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/commission-delivery-rural-education-report/documents/>
- 4. Space to Grow: Design Guidance for Early Learning and Childcare and Out of School Care Settings (2017)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/space-grow-design-guidance-early-learning-childcare-out-school-care/documents/>
- 5. Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010: Guidance (2022)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/schools-consultation-scotland-act-2010-statutory-guidance/>
- 6. Rural Schools in Scotland: Definition (2025)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/rural-schools-in-scotland-definition/>
- 7. Supporting Children's Learning: Statutory Guidance on the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Act 2004 (as amended) Code of Practice (Third Edition) (2017)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-childrens-learning-statutory-guidance-education-additional-support-learning-scotland/documents/>
- 8. Guidance on the Presumption to Provide Education in a Mainstream Setting (2019)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-presumption-provide-education-mainstream-setting/pages/3/>
- 9. Included, Engaged and Involved Part 3: A Relationships and Rights-based Approach to Physical Intervention in Schools (2024)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/included-engaged-involved-part-3-relationships-rights-based-approach-physical-intervention-schools/>
- 10. National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan: Summary Document (2024)**
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-national-improvement-framework-improvement-plan-2024/>

