

PERMANENT CLOSURE OF BOTHKENNAR PRIMARY SCHOOL

A PROPOSAL DOCUMENT

February 2021

PROPOSAL

Proposed Change	That Bothkennar Primary School, which has been mothballed since August 2019, is closed permanently.												
Background	<p>During school session 2018/2019, the pupil roll at Bothkennar Primary School fell to just 4 pupils after a prolonged period of declining numbers. Following a consultation with affected parents and the school community, it was agreed that Bothkennar Primary School would be mothballed, subject to an annual review of demand for pupil places, and that Beancross Primary School would become the proxy catchment school for the area.</p> <p>Two years on, the primary age population in the Bothkennar Primary School Catchment area has declined further, with no prospect of this trend changing in the foreseeable future. For this reason, it is now proposed that the school is permanently closed.</p> <p>Before any final decision can be taken on a permanent school closure proposal a formal consultation is required in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. This proposal document provides full details of the proposal and the consultation process now underway.</p>												
Pupil numbers in the area	<p>In the 5 years running up to the decision to mothball the school, demand for places had declined each year to very low levels. The following table shows the school roll over this period (taken from the annual school census):</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2014/2015</th> <th>2015/2016</th> <th>2016/2017</th> <th>2017/2018</th> <th>2018/2019</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>No. Pupils</td> <td>27</td> <td>25</td> <td>17</td> <td>11</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Pupil data shows that the number of primary age children in the Bothkennar catchment area has reduced by 18% over the last 3 years, and other data shows just 8 pre-school children aged 4 and younger living in the catchment area. This suggests that the primary age population will continue to decline over the next 5 years.</p> <p>Based on all known data, there will be no increase in catchment demand for places in the coming 5 years to justify re-opening the school.</p>		2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	No. Pupils	27	25	17	11	4
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Proposed Alternative Arrangements	The arrangements in place from August 2019 will continue. Beancross Primary School will remain the catchment primary school for children living in area and free school transport will be provided to pupils choosing their catchment school.												
Educational Benefits Statement	<p>Falkirk 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 Falkirk.</p> <p>With this in mind, Falkirk Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing the school estate:</p>												

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
5. Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary).
6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.

Falkirk 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 young people. It is the Authority's view that Bothkennar Primary School cannot meet all of these criteria, whereas the current alternative catchment school, Beancross Primary, can.

While it may seem that having fewer pupils in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, fewer is not always better, when it comes to our pupils learning experiences. Classes low in pupil numbers, have disadvantages. These disadvantages are further compounded when we have a single class school, potentially with only one or two children at each year stage. Some of the problems commonly associated with teaching a small group of pupils are:

(i) Attendance Issues

While one or two pupils missing a large class isn't a major issue, a small number of absent pupils can make a big difference in a small class. If there are only five or 10 pupils in a class, two missing pupils represent a much larger percentage of the class population, making it more difficult for the teacher to continue with planned lessons.

This will also significantly impact on the class dynamics and learning experiences of children in the single class setting, with the likely consequence that a child may be the only pupil at a particular stage. Thereby having no other pupil to share their learning experience with and benefit from those interactions;

(ii) Lack of Diversity

A smaller class is less likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of diverse classes because they have the

opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own. While some small classes do have a diverse array of members, many are relatively homogeneous in nature and, as such, do not offer pupils the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting;

(iii) Overly Rapid Work Completion

While pupils having the opportunity to complete their work quickly may seem like a good thing, there are benefits to pupils moving through work more slowly and deliberately. In larger classes, pupils are commonly slowed in their work efforts by peers who need additional guidance. This temporary slowing gives these potentially speedy pupils the opportunity to more fully explore the topics covered in the lesson instead of simply racing through and failing to absorb the information;

(iv) Fewer Activity Options

Some academic activities require a minimum number of participants. Activities such as small group projects, group discussions or peer to peer learning activities are much harder to implement in a small class because there are fewer pupils to divide into groups, limiting pupils' options. Other options, such as large-scale games, may be impossible in single small settings because there are not enough pupils to allow for game play, or due to the wide variation in the age and physical development of the pupils, potentially making an activity unsafe. These opportunities help to stimulate and motivate the children, and provide them with skills for life.

Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern 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. Beancross Primary has sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and the group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work.

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;

(v) Increased Pupil Anxiety

Some pupils enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a large class. These pupils are uncomfortable in the spotlight and prefer to blend in with the crowd as they move through the process of learning. For pupils of this nature, small classes are far from desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers they do not have the same opportunity to mix in with their peer group.

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; and

	<p>(vi) Pupil performance</p> <p>Smaller classes do not help children achieve better marks in primary school, according to research published recently. The findings, by academics at the University of London's Institute of Education, contradict the popular beliefs of teachers and parents that smaller classes make for a better learning environment.</p> <p>There are many other similar research papers detailing the negative impact of small class sizes on the pupils' learning experience and academic performance, due to the negative impact of the factors described above.</p>
<p>Community Impact</p>	<p>Bothkennar Primary School is classified as a rural school and, as such, this proposal to close it must consider the impact that this closure will have on the local community it serves. Prior to mothballing use/lets of the school was limited to Councillor Surgeries only.</p> <p><u>What will happen to the school building?</u></p> <p>The school is currently being used as temporary office accommodation for Council staff. There are plans underway to move these staff to other accommodation.</p> <p>Once the building becomes empty, it would be deemed surplus to Children's Services operational requirements and the Council's Asset Management Team would then consider what future options there are for the property, which could include potential sale. However, it is important that all community views are considered prior to this happening and we would welcome your views on possible future uses for this building, should the school close permanently.</p>
<p>Transport/ Sustainability Implications</p>	<p>Another important consideration with any rural school closure is the transport demands arising from the relocation of pupils to a school that is further away. Bothkennar Primary School has been temporarily closed for nearly 2 years now and all pupils from the area are entitled to free school transport to Beancross Primary School, which is 2.5 miles from Skinflats.</p> <p>School transport is currently provided through extending the existing school bus route by half a mile from the Grangemouth Old Town. There is no cost implications to families affected by the closure. A permanent closure would continue to have very little impact in this respect on costs to the council or distance covered by vehicles.</p> <p>With regard to sustainability concerns, the requirement to transport pupils to Beancross Primary School is more than offset by the closure of this facility which would require disproportionate levels of heating, electricity and maintenance to keep open for so few pupils in comparison.</p>
<p>Financial Considerations</p>	<p>The annual operating costs for the school for 2018/19 was £ 186,632 which represented £ 46,658 per pupil.</p> <p>Based on a slightly different financial assessment used for national benchmarking purposes the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) this shows the cost per pupil for 2018/19 to be £ 40,627.</p>

This cost per pupil is significantly higher than both the Falkirk and overall Scottish average cost per primary pupil, which were £ 4,655 and £ 5,259 respectively and reflects the disproportionately higher level of cost per pupil that schools with small rolls have.

The permanent closure of Bothkennar Primary School would result in a net annual saving of £ 166,535 which would allow additional financial resources to be redistributed to support the education sector.

Note: This saving does not take into account the temporary additional costs being incurred whilst operating this vacant building as an office.

In addition, following closure, any costs associated with the upkeep and associated on-going maintenance of this buildings, which is now circa 50 years old, would no longer need to be met. This would allow the Council to use these funds to invest in the wider school estate where it can benefit a larger number of pupils.

CONSULTATION

Legislation	<p><u>Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010</u></p> <p>A formal consultation is required for any proposal to permanently close a school. This consultation is fully in accordance with the requirements of this legislation.</p>
Consultees	<p>We will be consulting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and carers of all primary and nursery age pupils living in the catchment areas of Bothkennar and Beancross Primary Schools • Beancross Primary School Parent Council • Pupils at Beancross Primary School • School staff and trade unions • Grangemouth Community Council • All households in the Bothkennar Primary School catchment
Consultation Period	<p>The consultation will take place over an 8 week period running up to the Easter holidays, between Monday 8 February and Thursday 2 April 2021. If Covid-19 restrictions during this period do not permit public meetings then a virtual/ digital alternative will be provided.</p> <p>The consultation period has been extended to allow flexibility to be applied to local engagement and to take cognisance of the Covid restrictions and guidance in place at that time.</p>
Public Meeting	<p>Subject to Covid restrictions in place at the time, and social distancing requirements, there will be a public meeting at Bothkennar Primary School on Tuesday 2nd March at 6:30pm.</p> <p>In the event that Covid restrictions at the time do not permit indoor, socially distanced meetings, a video meeting will be arranged.</p> <p>If you would like to be involve in this meeting, please provide us with your contact details so that we can manage numbers attending and keep you updated on the format of the meeting when Covid restrictions affecting the date are confirmed (contact details below).</p> <p>Also, we would urge anyone that would like to participate, but feel that they would be limited by Covid restrictions and/or an online video meeting to contact us directly to discuss (contact details below).</p>
How to Respond	<p>Please respond online using the Consultation Hub on the Falkirk Council at: say.falkirk.gov.uk/</p> <p>If you would prefer to write to us directly then you can using the email or postal address shown in the contact details below.</p> <p>All responses should be provided by Thursday 2nd April 2021.</p>

Following the Consultation	<p>With the current Covid restrictions that are in place all submissions should be in writing or via email.</p> <p>Education Scotland will receive details of consultation responses and the public meeting and will provide Children's Services with a report after the consultation.</p> <p>Children's Services will then prepare a consultation report which will be published on the council website. All respondents to this consultation will be notified when it is available.</p> <p>The consultation report will be discussed by councillors at the Education, Children and Young People Executive later in the year where they will decide on the matter.</p>
Contact Details	<p>Informal telephone enquiries concerning these proposals can be made on 01324 506621. (This service may be restricted due to Covid restrictions)</p> <p>Please respond to the online consultation response form if you can (see above), but if you would like to write to us directly in response, please email us at educ.consultation@falkirk.gov.uk or use the following postal address:</p> <p>Bothkennar Primary School Closure Consultation Children's Services Sealock House 2 Inchyra Road Grangemouth FK3 9XB</p>