

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Moray Council to close Crossroads Primary School.

December 2024

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 a proposal by Moray Council to close Crossroads 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply 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 22 October 2024 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; and
- visits to the sites of Crossroads Primary School, Keith Primary School, Rothiemay Primary School, St Thomas RC Primary School, Keith Grammar School, including discussion with relevant consultees, and a meeting with Strathisla Community Council.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 Crossroads 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 Moray Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 Moray Council mothballed Crossroads Primary School in January 2023, after the school roll had reduced to five children in August 2022. It has remained mothballed since that date. The statutory public consultation ran from 23 September to 15 November 2024. Copies of the consultation paper were made available to stakeholders, and at a range of local venues and on Moray Council website. A public meeting was held on 22 October 2024, which was attended by nine stakeholders. An online survey received 50 responses. Of those that answered the question “do you support the closure of Crossroads Primary School?” a majority were in favour with 24 agreeing and 17 against. Of those who stated they live in the Crossroads Primary School catchment area, nine agreed with the proposal and seven disagreed. Stakeholders raised concerns about the proposal. These included worries that closing a rural school makes a community less attractive for people considering moving there. A few are concerned this could reduce opportunities for children to attend a small, local school, which they feel may suit some children’s needs better than a larger school. Stakeholders expressed mixed views about whether Crossroads Primary School catchment area should be zoned only to Keith Primary School or split between Rothiemay and Keith Primary Schools. A few questioned if the catchment area should be further divided up to include other nearby local schools.

2.3 Groups of children at St Thomas RC, Newmill, Rothiemay and Keith Primary Schools were consulted on the proposal. They had mixed views on whether the school should be closed. A minority thought the school should be reopened as this would reduce travel time for children getting to school. However, they had a range of concerns about the school reopening including that they might miss friends they have at their existing schools. They also said that moving to secondary school from a very small primary school might be harder.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors broadly agree that there are education benefits to this proposal. Children from the Crossroads Primary School catchment area are settled into other local schools and enjoying learning alongside their peers from the wider area. Children that HM Inspectors met with at Rothiemay, Keith and St Thomas RC Primary Schools are experiencing opportunities to build friendships and increase their social skills. Whilst the council’s educational benefits statement lays out a range of potential statements that HM Inspectors agree with, elsewhere in its proposal the council states that a school roll of fewer than 15 pupils provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. HM Inspectors do not support the view that a small school roll is, in itself, a significant impediment to the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

3.2 HM Inspectors met with children from Rothiemay, Keith and St Thomas RC Primary Schools and young people at Keith Grammar School who live in Crossroads Primary School catchment area. Several of these children and young people previously attended the school. The majority agree the school should be closed, but a few thought it should reopen. This was mainly as this would reduce their travel time to school. Most recognise that different sized schools suit different children and therefore feel it is important that families have the choice to send children to Rothiemay or Keith Primary Schools. The young people at Keith Grammar School that HM Inspectors spoke with, value the whole school and community approach they experienced at Crossroads Primary School. However, they also value the opportunities for friendship and shared learning they experienced when they moved to a larger school.

3.3 If the proposal is agreed, most stakeholders that HM Inspectors spoke with support splitting the Crossroads catchment area between Keith and Rothiemay Primary Schools. Stakeholders at Rothiemay Primary School think it is important that their school roll is supported by part of the catchment area being zoned to their school. For several stakeholders, access to school transport is an important consideration in regard to how Crossroads Primary School catchment area may be divided up. Several stakeholders spoke about children being able to attend their nearest school and all felt parent choice is an important factor.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also considered the factors to which the council should give special regard. Moray Council have explored alternatives to closure with stakeholders. At the time the school was mothballed, most parents had already elected to move their children to other schools. During engagement by the council with parents prior to the formal consultation, most had indicated they would not choose to send children to Crossroads Primary School if it reopened. There are several other small, rural schools across the wider area whose rolls could be affected to a small extent if Crossroads were to reopen. Children in the area now have journeys to school that are longer. However, for most, travel times have increased by only around 10-15 minutes. Stakeholders report that travel disruption in winter is mainly due to challenging conditions on local roads. Reopening the school or choosing between the different catchment options is unlikely to greatly affect supporting children to attend school.

3.5 Community members who spoke to HM Inspectors felt that it is sad that a school with such a long history may close. However, they consider that this is probably the best option given the small number of families who have indicated interest in sending their child to the school were it to reopen. They also understand that the council must make best use of their resources. All stakeholders, including those who live near the school, who met with HM Inspectors think it is important that the school site and buildings are not allowed to deteriorate further. As there is a community hall fairly near the school, most felt the site should be made available for housing or businesses. Several children who spoke with HM Inspectors would like some of the school playground to be turned into a playpark. All wanted to ensure any equipment or resources left at the site are distributed to local schools or other community facilities so they could be used.

3.6 HM Inspectors spoke with the church representatives of Moray. A few children from the Crossroads Primary School catchment area attend St Thomas RC Primary School. The representatives do not perceive any issues with the proposal in regard to denominational education.

4. Summary

Overall, HM Inspectors consider that Moray Council have made a reasonable case to permanently close Crossroads Primary School. Children are settled in the schools they now attend and most families had elected to send their children to other schools prior to the temporary closure. Most stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors support splitting the Crossroads Primary School catchment area between Rothiemay and Keith Primary Schools if the closure is agreed. If the proposal goes ahead, the community are concerned that the school site should not be left to deteriorate but quickly be made available for another use such as housing.

**HM Inspectors
December 2024**