

Hugh Fraser
Director of Education, Culture and Sport
The Highland Council
Glenurquart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX



20 February 2012

Dear Mr Fraser,

CLOSURE OF HILLHEAD AND WICK NORTH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

I refer to my letter of 25 January 2012 informing you of the Scottish Ministers' decision to call in Highland Council's decision to close Hillhead and Wick North Primary Schools and amalgamate the two schools in a new school to be built on the Wick North Primary School site. As you know, the Scottish Ministers called in the proposal under sections 17(2)(a) and (b) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (the 2010 Act).

Ministers noted that part of the Educational Benefits Statement appeared to be an exact copy of a statement written by another local authority. As a result, Ministers were concerned that it might not have been possible for parents and others to judge precisely and clearly the educational benefits to accrue from the proposal. They also noted that there was confusion in the minds of some consultees about the precise number of classrooms to be built at the new school. In addition, Ministers also noted the Education Scotland report identified concerns from a large number of parents about the safety of children walking to the new school.

The Scottish Ministers have now considered carefully all the information given to them and have reached the following view.

First, Ministers are of the view that using wording from an educational benefits statement prepared for another local authority was unhelpful. However, they note this was prepared as a summary and following further investigation are satisfied that a detailed Educational Benefits Statement was written specifically for the schools in question. This is contained in the option appraisal report which is referred to in paragraph 2.2 of the Proposal Paper which was available to the public throughout the consultation process. As a result, Ministers are content that the Council has fulfilled its statutory duties in this regard. However, in coming to this view, Ministers wish to remind the Council of the importance of ensuring



clarity in all aspects of the educational benefits statement so that consultees understand fully the details of the proposal and the specific educational benefits expected to accrue from it.

Second, the Ministers note that the Council acknowledged that some confusion had arisen about the precise number of classrooms to be built at the new school. However, following further investigation, they accept this was due to a possible misunderstanding during a discussion about the proposal at a public meeting on 6 September 2011. The Ministers also note the Council took steps to address this by issuing a letter on 8 September 2011 clarifying the precise area of the new school, the number of classrooms to be built and other facilities which would be incorporated into it. Consequently, they are content that the matter has been dealt with and that the Council has provided clarity over the number of classrooms to be built.

Third, they note the Council's proposals about how it intends to deal with road safety aspects associated with the proposed closures and that it intends to work closely with parents in developing its plans. However, while Ministers are content that the Council has this matter in hand, they are of the view that it is important that any road safety plans are developed well in advance of the opening of the new school so that pupils and their parents/carers are fully familiar with them.

Therefore, in view of the above, the Scottish Ministers are content that The Highland Council has fulfilled its obligations under the 2010 Act and grant consent, subject to the conditions set out below, to the closure of Hillhead Primary School and Wick North Primary School.

The conditions attached to the consent are as follows:

1. The Council shall draw up a comprehensive School Travel Plan (or plans, as appropriate) for all children attending the new school. This will include a comprehensive set of safer routes to the school. In drawing up its plans, the Council shall have full regard to the guidance set out in Scotland's Road Safety Framework (www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/274654/0082190.pdf). The plan(s) shall be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure their continued relevance.
2. The School Travel Plan(s) and any supporting infrastructure shall be in place at least 6 months (or other such time as agreed by the Scottish Ministers) before the new school opens and all children attending the new school and their parents/carers will be provided with details of the safer route relevant to them. In addition, all children moving to the new school will be instructed in using the safer route(s) in order that they can become fully familiar with it before the new school opens.
3. The Council will establish an implementation sub group, with specific regard to road safety and traffic management, so that parents/carers and members of the local community are fully consulted and can contribute directly to the development of the travel plan(s).

Yours sincerely
J Moore

JONATHAN MOORE
Head of Schools Infrastructure Unit