

ANGUS COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
22 JANUARY 2002
KILRY PRIMARY SCHOOL
REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report provides feedback to the Education Committee on a recent informal consultation exercise about the future of Kilry Primary School.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a notes the contents of this report and in particular the projected future enrolments of children in Kilry Primary School (see para 4.2 below);
- b in light of all the information currently available, affirms the viability of Kilry Primary School; and
- c instructs me to continue to maintain an overview of the geographical spread of primary school provision across Angus

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Reference is made to the following Committee meetings:

- Education Committee 14 October 1997 (Article 11)
- Education Committee 25 November 1997 (Article 10)
- Education Committee 10 March 1998 (Article 8)

At these meetings in 1997/1998 the viability of small schools was considered in general terms and specific criteria were adopted for future use.

2.2 Reference is also made to the meeting of Angus Council on 17 May 2001 (Article 6) when the Council noted the likelihood of having to undertake budget savings exercises in 2002/2003 and in 2003/2004 and to the meeting of the Education Committee on 21 August 2001 when the Committee approved the Improvement Plan arising from a Best Value Service Review of Primary Education in Angus (Article 2).

2.3 Finally, reference is made to the meeting of the Education Committee on 20 November 2001 when I was authorised to enter into discussions with the whole school community of Kilry Primary School about future roll projections and possible future options (Article 13 refers).

3 INFORMAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

3.1 Members of the Committee will recall that there are currently 13 pupils enrolled in Kilry Primary School. Accordingly, I wrote to the parents of all 13 of these pupils (and also to the parents of those 3 year old and 4 year old children who live in the area and of whose existence I was aware).

I offered each set of parents the opportunity to meet with me on an individual basis at a pre-arranged time in school.

3.2 Each parent replied indicating a preference for a joint meeting. That meeting was duly arranged for 10 December 2001 and the parents concerned issued an open invitation to other members of the community.

3.3 I duly attended a meeting in Kilry Primary School on the evening of 10 December 2001 which was attended by approximately 90 people.

3.4 The specific points raised at the aforementioned meeting are incorporated in the comments below.

4 CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERING THE VIABILITY OF SMALL SCHOOLS

4.1 The viability criteria for small schools, agreed by the Education Committee in 1997, relate to:

- cognitive development of pupils
- personal and social development of pupils
- alternative arrangements (ie capacity available at sufficiently closely situated neighbouring schools)
- community related factors
- value for money/value for effort (now more appropriately considered in the context of "Best Value")

Comments are offered below in the context of each of these criteria as they relate to Kilry Primary School. These comments encompass the various points made by members of the Kilry community at the public meeting held on 10 December 2001.

4.2 Cognitive Development of Pupils and Personal & Social Development of Pupils

- these criteria were adopted in 1997 in recognition of anxieties that unduly small schools (or unduly small year groups within a school) could possibly make it difficult for individual children to prosper as well as they should.
- in 1997, it was suggested that any school with fewer than 3 or 4 children at any stage may not be as viable as would be ideal; this very approximate threshold relates equally to Cognitive Development and to Personal & Social Development
- the current roll profile of Kilry Primary School is:
 - P3 – 4 pupils
 - P4 – 2 pupils
 - P5 – 1 pupil
 - P6 – 2 pupils
 - P7 – 4 pupils
- although the current roll configuration of Kilry Primary School does fall short of the notional threshold described above, there is considerable evidence of good

academic attainment by all the pupils on the current roll, as well as a very strong impression of a supportive pupil network which encourages the personal and social development of each and every one of the pupils currently in the school

- there is one specific anxiety which was implicit in my recommendation that I should be authorised to discuss informally possible future options as well as future roll projections: the current lack of any pupils in P1 or P2 may result in a situation where children enrolled in the school in future would not be well catered for (eg if a single P1 pupil were to be enrolled in August 2002 and no other pupils were to be enrolled, that pupil would possibly face an unacceptably difficult task in fitting in with the rest of the pupil community)
- the best information I have been able to glean from my discussions with staff and members of the Kilry community are that the undernoted future enrolments can be expected

P1 (August 2002) – 4 or 5 pupils

P1 (August 2003) – 1 pupil

P1 (August 2004) – 1 pupil

P1 (August 2005) – 2 pupils

- in addition to the above there are a number of houses in the area which may shortly be occupied by families with primary school aged children
- in summary, the current roll of Kilry Primary School (13 pupils) is likely to be maintained, and may well rise slightly over the next year or so; in these circumstances (particularly in terms of projected P1 enrolments in August 2002) the anxieties about unduly small year groups should become less acute

4.3 Alternative Arrangements

- the closest school to Kilry is Lintrathen Primary School
- the distance by road from Kilry Primary School to Lintrathen Primary School is 3½ miles
- although the closure of Kilry and the re-allocation of pupils to Lintrathen Primary School would result in a longer home-to-school journey for most pupils, that journey would not be an unacceptably long one for any of the pupils currently enrolled in, and living within the delineated area of, Kilry Primary School
- the capacity of Lintrathen Primary School is 50 primary pupils and the recorded primary roll of Lintrathen Primary School (September 2001 Census) is 25 pupils
- even the most optimistic roll projections do not suggest a combined Kilry/Lintrathen primary roll of more than 50 pupils
- alternative provision for Kilry pupils (within reasonable travelling distance) is therefore available

4.4 Community Related Factors

- the delineated area of Kilry Primary School is entirely rural in nature.
- whilst the school building is not generally used for community events, nonetheless the existence of a school is seen by members of the community as important symbolically.
- the existence of a local school and the opportunity for parents of pupils in that school to network amongst themselves but also with the wider community is something which is greatly valued in Kilry.

- of the current school roll, only three pupils live within the school's delineated area; the remaining pupils are attending Kilry Primary School as a result of parental placing requests, most of which come from Perth & Kinross Council - some very close to the Council boundary and also quite close to Kilry Primary School, and some from a more substantial distance away. Of the likely P1 enrolments in August 2002, three live within the school's delineated area.
- there are obviously several community-related factors which argue for the retention of Kilry Primary School, although these factors would not be sufficiently strong to outweigh educational concerns were the pupil roll to dip much below its current level.

4.5 Best Value

- it is difficult to argue with the proposition that it is more costly to run a large number of small schools than it is to run a smaller number of slightly larger schools.
- it is also difficult to argue with the proposition that the cost to the public purse would be reduced were Kilry Primary School to close.
- when the Council is expected annually to make cuts in its services, it is perfectly correct to consider school closures as one among a range of options for consideration; the Best Value report on Primary School Education rehearses the various options systematically and fairly: in summary, if Kilry Primary School remains open, then the cost of maintaining its existence will have to be met by making small reductions which would not otherwise have to be made across a range of services (*Note – although the revenue costs relating to a single school may be seen as marginal, if no attempt were ever to be made to rationalise existing school provision in line with shifts in population, then inevitably the consequence would be that the level of resourcing per pupil would reduce across the board*)
- as far as capital expenditure is concerned, the recently completed Asset Management Plan identifies the Elliott Hut which forms part of the Kilry accommodation as deteriorating and having lasted beyond its designated lifespan. It seems possible that this particular part of the building may not be suitable for use beyond the next 5 years.
- issues relating to capital funding will inevitably become more pressing as time goes by, and the challenges presented by the need to maintain and improve the school estate simply reinforce the desirability of adopting a proactive approach to the review of the geographical pattern of school provision.
- there are, therefore, strong "Best Value" arguments in favour of the closure of Kilry Primary School at some point in the short to medium term future.

5 OTHER ISSUES

5.1 School Buildings

- as noted above, Kilry Primary School (in common with a number of other schools) continues to make use of temporary accommodation well beyond the lifespan originally envisaged for that temporary accommodation
- it is possible, therefore, that a significant capital investment may be required at some point in the future. Prior to any firm decisions being taken about such an investment, there would clearly need to be a long-term view taken about the viability or otherwise of Kilry Primary School

5.2 Attraction and Retention of Staff

- Kilry Primary School has been exceptionally fortunate in having been served by immensely able, hard-working and committed members of staff (similar comments apply to schools across Angus)
- the complex demands of the modern education service, combined with the ever-increasing expectations of society, have made the post of Head Teacher in particular one to which fewer teachers now appear to aspire. The demands of teaching in an exceptionally small school (especially one which may function from time to time as a one-teacher school) are seen by many teachers as possibly excessive and in these circumstances, recruitment of staff to schools such as Kilry may well be difficult in future

5.3 Parental Placing Requests

- at present Kilry Primary School has enrolled a number of children from outwith its delineated area as a result of Parental Placing Requests
- in the small school situation, the movement of a small number of families can make an enormous difference to the viability of any individual school; given the way in which the current legislation is framed, it is perfectly possible that in future years Kilry will either benefit even more significantly from parental placing requests, or that parental preferences may take pupils away to other schools
- in these circumstances, the constant fear is that a small number of coincidences will combine to result in the school suddenly becoming non-viable; were this to happen, the pupils in attendance at the school at that time (and possibly those who had been in attendance immediately prior to any crisis arising) may experience a less satisfactory educational provision for a short time than would normally be considered acceptable

5.4 Given all the above it is essential that the Council continues to be proactive in assessing the viability of all its schools on a regular basis

6 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The very strong levels of parental and community support currently in evidence are clear arguments in favour of the retention of Kilry Primary School.
- 6.2 At present, the academic and social attainments of pupils in Kilry Primary School are of a high order and, on the basis of current arrangements, there is not a strong case for closure on these grounds. (Although it is important to acknowledge that transfer of these pupils to another school could be expected to be undertaken in such a way as to ensure at least the maintenance of the high standards they have already attained).
- 6.3 Were finance and "Best Value" to be the only considerations, there would be an unanswerable argument that the school should close.
- 6.4 It is relevant to note that financial considerations of a capital nature may have to be addressed within the next few years and that the capital cost of making the necessary improvements to Kilry Primary School at that time may be so prohibitive as to leave the Council with little option but to consider the closure of the school at that time.
- 6.5 There are also a number of factors outwith the control of the Council or of the local community. Although it is possible that these factors may combine in ways which bolster the roll of Kilry Primary School, it is also possible that these factors may combine in ways whereby Kilry Primary School may become non-viable with little advance warning. The only approach to make absolutely certain of this situation being avoided would be to agree in advance to close the school whenever circumstances appear least

disadvantageous to pupils. One way forward, therefore, may be to put in place plans to close the school at some specified date in the future (some years from now), thereby enabling children currently at the school to complete their education and for systematic consideration to be given to the most appropriate ways in which alternative arrangements for future generations could be made. Continuing consideration should be given to this possibility.

- 6.6 On balance, although there are some very strong arguments in favour of closing Kilry Primary School at the end of the current school session, there are also strong arguments against this course of action. At present the most appropriate option would appear to be to maintain the status quo on the understanding that future roll fluctuations must be closely monitored along with any other changes in circumstances which may arise.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS

- 7.1 There are no Human Rights issues arising as a direct result of approving the recommendations contained within this report.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

Jim Anderson
Director of Education

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/CJ