

## ESKDALEMUIR PRIMARY SCHOOL - SMALL SCHOOL REVIEW

### 1. Reason for Report

To seek Members' approval to open formal consultation procedures on the proposal that Eskdalemuir Primary School should close at the end of session 2004-05.

### 2. Background

2.1 In line with the agreed guidelines on undertaking reviews of schools where the roll has dropped to a point which threatens the continuing viability of the school, a Small School Review was conducted in respect of Eskdalemuir Primary School over November 2004 - January 2005.

2.2 A group representing local and Council interests was established. This group met on two occasions in November and December 2004 with the resulting report issued in early January to the membership of the group for comment. The finalised paper is attached as **Appendix 1** to this paper.

2.3 The roll at Eskdalemuir Primary School in the current session is 4 with the likelihood that the roll for session 2005-06 will be 2 with little prospect of it rising much further in subsequent years.

2.4 There is widespread recognition that this does not represent a sound base on either educational or social grounds for children in the area and, accordingly, it is suggested that the school does not have a viable future.

2.5 A possible alternative school would be Hutton Primary School which is 7 miles from Eskdalemuir and has the capacity to accommodate pupils from the area. This would, however, be an issue which could be addressed during the consultation discussions as could the strong feeling within the community that, should the school close, the building should be retained within Council ownership for a period of years to allow for community use or, possibly, for the establishment of hostel accommodation to allow advantage to be taken of the potential of the outdoor resources in the area.

2.6 It should be noted that were Eskdalemuir Primary School to close and pupils to transfer to Hutton, this would involve a change of secondary school since Hutton falls within the catchment of Lockerbie Academy. The implications of this could also form part of the discussions at consultation.

### 3. Recommendation

**It is recommended that formal consultation procedures should be opened with a view to the closure of Eskdalemuir Primary School with effect from the end of session 2004-05.**

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**APPENDICES - 1**



**SMALL SCHOOL REVIEW  
ESKDALEMUIR PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**1. School Review**

- 1.1 As a result of the roll for 2004-05 having fallen to 4, the Education and Community Services Committee agreed that a review should be carried out to determine the future viability of the school. A School Review group was established comprising:

Fraser Sanderson, Corporate Director of Education and Community Services (Chair)  
Claire Brown, Secretary, Community Council  
Nancy Ellis, Manager, Pupil/Parent Support Unit (Schools)  
Alison Goodfellow, Non-Teaching Staff Representative  
Fiona McDonald, Headteacher of Eskdalemuir Primary School  
Denis Male, Councillor for Langholm and Upper Eskdale  
Anne Minto, Education Officer  
Reverend Alan Ross  
Maud Sulter, Parent Representative  
Lynda Whitford, Non-Teaching Staff Representative

- 1.2 The Group met on two occasions: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2004 and 14<sup>th</sup> December 2004.

- 1.3 In its deliberations, the group gave consideration to the following issues:

- Trends in school roll
- Future roll projections
- Pre-school figures
- Extra-territorial placing requests pattern (in both directions)
- Proposed housing development
- Role of school in community
- Alternative schools and related transport considerations
- Condition of school building
- Education / social issues for pupils

## 2. School Roll

2.1 The school roll in session 2004-05 is:

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
-	-	1	-	1	-	2

No pupils from outwith the school catchment area attend Eskdalemuir but one pupil from within the Eskdalemuir catchment attends a school outwith that area. There is, however, no significance to these figures.

2.2 The school roll has shown a steady decline over the last 10 years:

Year	Roll
1995-96	16
1996-97	14
1997-98	13
1998-99	8
1999-00	9
2000-01	6
2001-02	6
2002-03	7
2003-04	7
2004-05	4

2.3 In terms of future roll, there are no anticipated enrolments for August 2005 while known enrolment figures for future years are:

August 2006 - 1  
August 2007 - 2

2.4 There is a pre-school facility available in the school as and when required but there are currently no children making use of this provision.

## 3. General Situation

3.1 In common with the general picture across Dumfries and Galloway, the population of the community is ageing and reduced employment opportunities in traditional industries of forestry and agriculture mean that there is little to attract young families into the area.

3.2 This position is not helped by the lack of housing for young families since house prices are high. Further, there is a lack of social housing. There is some house building activity in the area but these are not likely to be suitable for young families.

3.3 For several years, the school roll has been bolstered by children from the nearby Samye Ling Centre but these numbers have dropped significantly in recent years and the Abbot from the Centre has commented that ...

#### 4. **The School in its Community**

4.1 Community events organised by the school are well supported but there is currently no community use made of the school building since activities tend to focus on the village hall.

4.2 Comment has been passed about the impact which the loss of the school would have on the community since it would remove yet another facility and would be a further deterrent to attracting young families to the area.

#### 5. **School Performance**

5.1 The school delivers a very good service to its pupils and this was recognised in the report published by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education in June 2004.

5.2 The Inspectors identified the following strengths:

- Well-maintained, attractive and spacious accommodation which, along with the external play area, offers pupils very good opportunities for learning.
- The calm environment in which pupils demonstrated very good behaviour and showed respect to each other and adults.
- The good level of pupils' skills in using a range of information and communication technology (ICT).
- The strong sense of commitment and the very good team-work amongst all staff.
- The high quality pastoral care provided for pupils.

5.3 The Inspectors highlighted the following areas as those in which action had to be taken to improve learning and teaching and the meeting of the needs of the pupils:

- Increase more systematically pupils' personal and social development and improve pupils' skills in imaginative writing by further development of aspects of relevant programmes of study.
- Review approaches to planning and assessment to ensure the needs of all pupils are more fully met.

- Share with pupils what has to be taught and learned.
- Improve procedures and practice in quality assurance to ensure more vigorous monitoring of the quality of learning and teaching.

5.4 The school is well staffed with a very high pupil:adult ratio. In addition to the headteacher, there is a range of visiting specialists covering Modern Languages, PE, Music and Art as well as support from two non-teaching members of staff.

5.5 The school works closely with the other primary schools associated with Langholm Academy - Glenzier, Canonbie and Langholm Primary School - and with Langholm Academy itself.

5.6 The accommodation is in a very good state of repair and consists of two classrooms, GP room / hall, kitchen and servery, office accommodation.

## 6. **Catchment Area (see Appendix)**

6.1 If the catchment area were to be extended, it would require to reach almost to the edge of Boreland before it would embrace more children. Although there might be more children in the Westerkirk / Langholm direction, it would, overall, be unlikely that any attempts to extend the catchment area would add significantly, if at all, to the school population.

## 7. **Alternative Schooling**

7.1 The nearest alternative school would be Hutton Primary School in Boreland. This is 7 miles from Eskdalemuir.

7.2 The Physical Capacity of Hutton is 39 while the present school roll is 24. The school roll at Hutton is configured as follows:

P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
3	2	4	3	3	4	5

Known enrolments in future years at Hutton are:

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Enrolments	2	3	4	4
Projected Roll	21	20	21	22

7.3 Although Eskdalemuir Primary School is linked to Langholm Academy, there is a group of secondary-age pupils from the area who at present travel at their own expense to Lockerbie Academy. Lockerbie and Langholm are equidistant from Eskdalemuir. In 2002, a request was received from some parents in the Eskdalemuir area for consideration

to be given to dual-zoning of Eskdalemuir to Lockerbie and Langholm Academies but it was agreed at that time that any such consideration, given that it would involve additional expense to the Council, should be left to a full review of education in the area.

- 7.4 Should Eskdalemuir Primary School close and pupils in the area be zoned to Hutton Primary School, one implication of such a move would be that Lockerbie Academy would become the catchment secondary school for the area.

## 8. **Alternative Uses of Building**

- 8.1 In the event of closure, the Council should be sympathetic to the building being used to house projects which represent some form of enhancement to the community. The following possibilities were considered:

- a) Retaining the building "on ice" for a period of two years to see if there was any significant change in numbers of young children to the area. During this time, there may be the possibility of the building being used to provide services to the community including, possibly, a Creative Arts Workshop.
- b) Establishment of hostel accommodation under, possibly, the Council's Outdoor Education Service. There is a notable lack of such facilities in the area and yet considerable potential in developing outdoor pursuits.

