



Agenda Item 6

**Consultation on the Proposed
Mothballing of Blackness
Primary School**

Falkirk Council

Title: Consultation on the Proposed Mothballing of Blackness Primary School
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 31 January 2023
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report seeks to:

- provide details of the feedback from the consultation exercise undertaken in respect of the proposal to mothball Blackness Primary School from August 2023; and
- make recommendations based on the outcomes of the consultation exercise undertaken.

1.2 This proposal will assist the service in meeting the Council Plan priority "Promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities".

2 Recommendations

2.1 Education, Children and Young People Executive is asked to:

- (i) note the feedback on the consultation exercise undertaken in respect of Blackness Primary School;
- (ii) agree not to proceed with the proposal to mothball the school from August 2023, based on the recommendations made by the Director of Children's Services as stated in Section 5.10 of this report and
- (iii) instruct the Director of Children's Services to monitor the position and to update the EC&YP Executive on the outcome in March 2024.

3 Climate Change

3.1 If this proposal is approved it will have a positive impact on the Council's energy and climate change ambitions, as less energy will be reduced.

4 Background

4.1 On 8 November 2022, the Education, Children and Young People Executive agreed to proceed with a consultation exercise on the proposal to mothball Blackness Primary Schools from August 2023.

4.2 The 4-week consultation period ran from Monday 14 November to Monday 12 December 2022.

5. Considerations

5.1 Consultees

Documents outlining the proposal were issued to:

- All parents of Blackness PS pupils
- Parents of children living in Blackness PS catchment attending other primary schools
- Parent Councils at Blackness and Grange Primary Schools
- Staff at Blackness and Grange Primary Schools
- Local Elected Members – Ward 1 (Bo'ness & Blackness)

In addition, pupils at Blackness Primary School were updated on the plans and invited to contribute to the consultation.

At the time the consultation was undertaken it was confirmed that there was no Community Council in place for the Blackness area.

5.2 Summary of Consultation Responses

There were **73** respondents to the consultation and **91** responses were received. These were received via:

- 42 - on-line responses
- 45 - letters
- 4 - emails
- **91** Total Responses

Note: **18** respondents submitted responses via both letter and on-line. The **73** respondents from the undernoted groups expressed their view in favour or against the proposed mothballing as follows:

| Respondents from Consultation Groups | Total Responses | For | Against | No Opinion |
|--|------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Parent Council (Blackness PS) | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Parents of pupils at Blackness PS | 13 | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| Parents of pre-school pupils living in Blackness | 9 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Parents of pupils at Grange PS | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Staff at Blackness PS & Grange PS | 9 | 5 | 4 | 0 |
| Pupils at Blackness PS | 8 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Pupils at Grange PS | 4 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Local Residents | 10 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| Councillor/MSP | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Consultation Group Total | 61 | 11 | 47 | 3 |
| % | 100% | 18% | 77% | 5% |
| Other Respondents | 12 | 0 | 12 | 0 |
| Overall Total | 73 | 11 | 59 | 3 |
| % | 100% | 15% | 81% | 4% |

5.3 Information on Other Respondents

Responses were also received from 12 respondents who were out-with the identified consultation group, these were from:

- 3 former parents (addresses unknown)
- 1 former teacher (living out-with Falkirk area)
- 1 former pupil (living in Falkirk area)
- 1 Grandparent (living out-with Falkirk area)
- Blackness Community Hall
- Royal Burgh of Linlithgow
- Local Branch of NFU
- 1 Other supporters of school (living within Falkirk area)
- 2 Other supporters of school (addresses unknown)

5.4 Summary of Comments and Opinions Expressed

From those in favour of the mothballing proposal

- There are educational benefits of moving to a larger school
- A school with such a small number of pupils is not financially viable

From those in opposed to the mothballing proposal

- The importance of the school's involvement in the local community
- The positive experience that the pupils have at the school
- The educational benefits of smaller class sizes and rural schools
- The increasing roll at Blackness PS that can be expected from future intake
- Concerns over children moving to larger classes at Grange PS
- Blackness PS is much closer to home
- Pupils are anxious and sad about the proposed move to Grange PS
- Concerns over potential capacity pressures at Grange PS
- The impact on the viability of the community hall next to the school
- Positive feedback on the quality of teaching staff at Blackness PS
- Concerns over the mothballing process (Committee report details, lack of a public meeting, need for a wider consultation)
- Suggestions of alternative options to keep the school open (e.g., open a nursery, consider encouraging more Linlithgow pupils to attend)
- Concerns over the future of the building if the school closes
- Concerns for the future of staff at the school
- Disagreement on the potential for financial savings
- Cost of transporting pupils to Grange PS
- Lack of any current links with Grange PS

Further details of the responses are available in [Appendix 1](#).

5.5 Children's Services Responses to Comments Received

Officers have prepared responses, where appropriate to some of the comments received. These are contained in [Appendix 2](#).

5.6 Current School Roll Projections – 2023/24

Responses to the consultation have provided details, not previously available of pre-school aged children living in the Blackness Primary School catchment area and indications of parental intentions for enrolling at the school. In addition, the school roll has increased by 1 pupil from the 8 previously reported on 8 November 2022, to 9 currently.

The projected catchment roll at the school for 2023-24 is 7, which is still less than the threshold set of mothballing consideration. The projected overall roll when placing request pupils are included is 12. Based on current information the exact details of the expected school roll for 2023-24 is as follows:

| School Session | Current Session 2022/23 | New Session 2023/24 |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Projected New Catchment Enrolments (P1) | | 2 |
| Projected Existing Catchment Pupils (P1 – P6) | | 5 |
| Total Catchment Pupils | 5 | 7 |
| | | |
| Projected New Non-Catchment Enrolments (Placing requests) | | 1 |
| Projected Existing Non-Catchment Pupils (P1-P6) | | 4 |
| Total Non-Catchment Pupils | 4 | 5 |
| | | |
| Current School Roll 2022/23 | 9 | |
| Projected School Roll 2023/24 | | 12 |

5.7 Estimated School Catchment Area Demand from 2024/25 Onwards

The responses from catchment area families to this consultation has identified several pre-school aged pupils that had not yet been registered with the Council. Using this information to align to potential new primary 1 enrolments it could mean that the school catchment roll from 2024/25 onwards could rise to:

- August 2024 - 11 pupils
- August 2025 - 14 pupils
- August 2026 - 16 pupils

The above figures do not include any estimate for non-catchment pupils.

5.8 Future Maintenance, Upkeep and Use of the School

If the mothballing is approved the school would continue to be maintained on a wind and watertight basis with connectivity to the key utilities being kept. In addition, any essential repairs would also be undertaken.

5.9 School Use of Community Hall

Due to the limited space with Blackness Primary School, they have an agreement with the local community hall management committee to use their

hall, which is next to the school, each day for school use. This use includes the serving and provision for school meals.

An annual rent payment of £5,280 is made for the use of the hall. If a decision is made to mothball the school, then Children's Services would discuss some form of transitional financial support with the hall committee.

5.10 Recommendation by Director of Children's Services

In view of the additional information regarding the number of pre-school aged children living within the school catchment area that has been indicated from responses to the consultation, there is a possibility that from August 2024 onwards that the number of catchment children potentially enrolled at the school could be 11, which would exceed the current threshold for school mothballing consideration.

Given this it is Officers view that the school remains open for the 2023/24 session and the position is reviewed again in March 2024 when the total number of catchment pupil enrolments for the 2024/25 session are known.

This would mean that the school would operate as normal in session 2023/24 but with a catchment school roll which would again be less than the agreed mothballing threshold of 10.

6. **Implications**

Financial/Resources

- 6.1 If the decision is taken to mothball the school from August 2023, there would be financial savings that would arise from this. The current school financial budget position for 2022/23 is summarised in Appendix 3, along with an estimate of the additional costs and potential savings of **c.£171,000** that could accrue from making such a decision.
- 6.2 If approved discussions would take place with the staff currently employed at Blackness Primary School to ensure that they are relocated to Grange Primary School or to another school in the area. There will be no compulsory redundancies that will arise if this proposal is agreed.
- 6.3 The current 2022/23 budgeted operating cost of Blackness PS is £31,697 per pupil per annum, which excludes transport costs. This cost is significantly higher than Falkirk's average cost per primary school pupil. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) latest published figures showed Falkirk's average cost per primary pupil for 2020/21 to be £5,606. (Scotland £5,916). The figures for 2021/22 have not yet been published.

Legal

- 6.4 If approved, any future consideration of permanent closure of the school

would require a full statutory consultation to be undertaken in line with the “Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010”.

Risk/Equalities

- 6.5 In view of the recommendations a full EPIA is not required, as the recommendation is that the school will remain open for the 2023/24 term.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.6 Any cessation of building use results in reduced energy consumption and usage which has a positive impact on climate targets. In line with normal practice, if the recommendations are agreed then the school would be maintained and regularly checked to ensure it remains wind and watertight and in a reasonable condition.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 It is recognised that any school mothballing or closure proposal creates inconvenience and impacts on pupils, staff, local families and the local community. In this case the school roll has fallen below an agreed threshold meaning that the question of viability must be asked and explored. This question of viability has even more relevance given the significant fiscal and resource challenges that the Council currently faces over the next few years.
- 7.2 In view of the information received as part of the consultation exercise regarding potential future catchment area enrolments Officers have taken a pragmatic approach in allowing the school to remain open for session 2023/24 to assess if the enrolments for session 2024/25 will be 11 as suggested.
- 7.3 In the event that for session 2024/25 enrolments are 10 or less the position of the school will be reviewed again by Officers.

Director of Children’s Service

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Date: 9 January 2023

Appendices

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| Appendix 1a & 1b | Summary of Consultation Comments/Responses For and Against the Proposal. |
| Appendix 2 | Children’s Services Responses to Comments Received. |
| Appendix 3 | Financial Position Summary |

Background Papers

Previous Report – EC&YP Executive 8 November 2022

Survey Responses from those in favour of the Mothballing Proposal

Below is a representative selection of comments made in the online survey from those in favour of the mothballing proposal.

The responses have been categorised according to the main points or issues addressed.

Benefits of attending a larger School

“I see a real benefit in the children of Blackness joining Grange, or any other larger primary school. Larger schools can offer so much more in terms peers relationships, peer learning and extra-curricular activities.” (staff)

“We think that by mothballing the school and coming here the pupils would have a new experience, they may be surprised having a bigger school with more pupils. We think they would enjoy moving here because they have more opportunities for more friends. They may enjoy playing games with more pupils and coming to our after-school clubs.” (Pupil at Grange Primary School)

Financial implications

“I think this is the right choice for Falkirk Council in terms of benefits for the children of Blackness and for the current financial situation.” (staff)

“I do not believe that it is feasible in the current economic climate to keep a school open for 8 children, especially when only 4 live within the catchment. Blackness is not isolated miles away from other towns, children can easily travel to another school, especially since all children would have accessed nursery provision outside of Blackness.” (staff)

“I think it makes sense to mothball a school with 8 pupils when there are adequate schools nearby. This is better for the environment and hopefully the money and resources that would be saved could be utilised in Grange Primary School?” (staff)

“I think it is a reasonable proposal, Blackness primary is too small now to warrant the allocation of resources.” (parent at Grange PS)

“I believe that the school is no longer sustainable for only eight pupils especially in the current economic climate. It does not promote equity for all pupils across the authority.” (staff)

“I find it so hard to justify keeping a school with only 8 pupils open especially when only 4 are within the catchment. I understand that parents with children at Blackness primary like the idea of their children having one to one with an adult, we would all like that, but unfortunately in the current economic climate this is not feasible. It needs to happen before more important resources are cut.” (parent at Grange PS)

Survey Responses from those Opposed to the Mothballing Proposal

Below is a representative selection of comments made in the online survey, letters and emails received from those opposed to the mothballing proposal.

The responses have been categorised according to the main points or issues addressed.

The importance of the school's involvement in the community

"Regular outings to Blackness to learn about conservation, beach cleans, taking pride in our historic local area, Hopetoun woods, the strip, Rouken Glen garden centre to purchase plants and seeds to grow in our greenhouse then sell to the community through their honesty shop. Carol singing at Mannerstons farm shop, Or just learning outdoors in the playground. These are all very regular and practical skills they are learning". (parent)

"The school is the heart of the rural community and is not only used as a school it's utilised for a number of events in the community hall that is a joined to the school but not owned by Falkirk Council where we hold school parties, fayres, fund raising events, women's rural meeting, etc and by closing the school you will be closing the last amenity in Blackness" (parent)

"The school plays an important role as a meeting facility bonding the community and upholding and identity going back generations" (Local resident)

"Blackness is a fantastic school and our children love attending , it's the heart of the community. There is so much support for our fantastic school, it may be small but we are a great school!... The children at Blackness get to go on beach cleans and walks up the woods doing projects , they have their own greenhouse which we fundraiser for and the grow all their own veg to sell to raise more funds. We have an honesty box where the children leave veg and plants out and the community love this and see how hard the children are working, the kids won't get that at a bigger school they will get lost in a class of 30 with two teachers!" (Parent of a Blackness Pupil)

"..the community is very upset at the upcoming proposal as the school is not just for the children but the bringing together of the community for fundraising through coffee mornings, raffles, Christmas fayres and the opening of the childrens greenhouse that they saved and purchased for themselves learning how to grow their own fresh fruit and vegetables all of these things will be lost if our children go to the grange primary school" (parent)

"It would isolate the families more as the close knit friendships they have would disperse due to them being split up, resulting in a loss of community.... Loss of the school would impact the strong community we have here in Blackness and provides a much needed space for various events allowing us to support our rural way of life and families." (parent)

“Although small Blackness Primary School is an integral part of our local rural community. On several occasions at events at the school I've witnessed the entire school taking themselves off to play a game of football together joined by ex-pupils who have moved on to Bo'ness academy and early years pupils who are yet to start, so ages 3 to 11 all cooperating and playing together, it is such a unique and wonderful thing to see and is testimony to the role that the School and it's staff play for our community.” (parent)

“This school is integral to the village, you are effectively removing something which has served the community for over 100 years...Your focus should be why this school should remain open, looking for the positives as opposed to stating why it should be mothballed. A village school will never be a “big” school, it serves it’s community in the same way other schools serve their communities, and no two are the same. Schools work together with their communities to ensure they are delivering what the young people/families of that community need. Blackness is no different.” (former parent)

“...this would break up the close community links drastically, with the use of the hall which is owned by the community , not the council, the hall would need to close as the venue hire would be cut considerably, the links with the school to the village and areas wouldn't have beach and litter cleans completed, social events held by the pupils , which brings everyone together would disappear. Blackness School isn't just utilised by the local residents, the South Queensferry Band practice in the hall and school grounds , and then attend the Linlithgow Marches and Boness Fair. The children take part in the Marches when the participants walk by on their way to the village.” (councillor)

Positive experience at Blackness Primary School

“I went to Blackness Primary in the sixties. It was a lovely school with an excellent approach to learning and teaching, led by inspirational teachers”. (local resident)

“I like being at Blackness because everyone is my friend. I like all the teachers and staff.” (pupil)

“They loved their years at Blackness Primary School - from the start it was a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment. They immediately felt welcome and settled quickly thanks to a smaller peer group.” (former parent)

“We enjoy the social interaction with peers and teachers after the school day. Providing my son with the skills to be more socially confident, and for myself to feel part of the school community”. (parent)

“This proposal will affect me and my family greatly, my child has a stable and unbelievable education at Blackness primary and with the upcoming child that I have also wanting to attend this great primary school they maybe a small school but the one to one education they receive is next to none. Generations of my family have attended this school and have prospered very well from the education supplied by the primary school.” (parent)

“Please do not let Blackness Primary school close, it's a safe, happy place where our children love learning. It produces confident, engaged learners who transition really well when they move to the Academy. Let's keep getting it right for every child, let them stay at Blackness Primary and continue to thrive socially and academically in a place they love. Our numbers will grow.” (parent)

“The proposal to mothball the school would have a hugely detrimental effect on both my children. Blackness primary has provided the best educational start for my child I could ever have hoped for. To see the standard he has reached with his work has blown me away and I am in no doubt whatsoever that he would not have progressed so well in another school and if he were to move now it would seriously impact on his educational progress. I believe that learning in a multi-age classroom has been a big reason for my child's development. The class and the school have more of a family feel where the older children can help mentor the younger ones. It also taught my child to socialise with a varied age group not just his own. This becomes obvious in social situations outside school, his ability to communicate confidently with children of other ages and adults alike I believe is down to his experience at Blackness Primary School. The multi-age class also means my child has been able to learn at his own pace, I am certain moving him to a larger single age class would dramatically slow down his development.” (parent)

“The school has been a massive part of our family with everyone going through it and going on to have very successful careers and businesses. The opportunity my daughter gets from being a pupil in the school is outstanding and she would not get this in a class of 30+ with being able to grow their own and sell with their own from the green house, beach cleans and walking to the village, one to one teaching, standing up at the age of 5 and doing a class talk, reading and writing and being able to learn well before her years with other children..” (parent)

“My eldest child thoroughly enjoyed his time at Blackness Primary and it gave him opportunities and an education I don't believe he would have got if he attended a larger school. My youngest child is thriving (at Blackness PS), eager to learn, gaining in confidence and to date has enjoyed his time at school.” (parent)

The educational benefits of smaller class sizes and rural schools (36 responses)

“The opportunity my daughter gets from being a pupil in the school is outstanding and she would not get this in a class of 30+ with being able to grow their own and sell with their own from the green house, beach cleans and walking to the village, one to one teaching, standing up at the age of 5 and doing a class talk, reading and writing and being able to learn well before her years with other children with other learning disabilities” (parent)

“Blackness Primary being a small school provides better education to kids as they receive more attention 1 to 1 from the teachers thus they learn more this way. I have also noticed that my son's confidence has grown a lot as well. He had been shy in the past. He loves the school, the teachers and his school friends. He's very good at subjects taught in the school. I believe that moving to another, much

busier school which has more kids and classes would deteriorate his studies as teachers divide their attention to many more kids which also impacting the quality of teaching and interaction with kids in my opinion” (parent)

“My son will not get from the grange in a class of 30 what he gets at Blackness. It is a fantastic school and the staff are all amazing and I wouldn’t want my son going anywhere else.” (parent)

“It’s a proven fact that children in smaller schools have a higher grade and improved reading scores. My son is a very good reader which proves this point and I’m concerned this would not continue to develop getting lost in a bigger class, As learning in the small school is more tailored to the child’s needs.” (parent)

“Being in a smaller school makes it easier to get used to things. I am not sure how I feel because I don’t know what it would be like in a bigger school. I feel more comfortable in Blackness school.” (pupil)

“In a small school setting, activities can be tailored to suit all mixed age groups and opportunities for individual, paired and group tasks can be delivered effectively.” (staff)

“The school has always been multi streamed and has produced well rounded children including several who have went on to be head boy / girl at Bo’ness Academy” (parent)

“My son will not get from the grange in a class of 30 what he gets at Blackness. It is a fantastic school and the staff are all amazing and I wouldn’t want my son going anywhere else.” (parent)

“The size of the school is preferable for those children with Autism or other issues, as it offers a more personalised education than a larger school.” (staff)

“Working in a small school can certainly allow children of all ages and stages to work with and learn from each other. Interacting with children of different age groups can increase children’s social awareness and interaction. A small class size can allow children to discuss and talk about diversity within the community without embarrassment or criticism. These skills can be developed within a comfortable, nurturing and engaging environment. Small numbers can allow for tailoring of learning needs, individualised learning opportunities which can then be shared and enhanced in a mixed age environment. Support and challenge is evident within any class setting including a small class. In a small school setting, activities can be tailored to suit all mixed age groups and opportunities for individual, paired and group tasks can be delivered effectively. Active Schools co-ordinators have engaged very successfully with multi-composite groups and have commented on how well the pupils work together. A small school setting can de-escalate pupils who experience emotional difficulties and nurture all pupils to encourage them to self-regulate effectively.” (staff)

“My son’s social confidence has improved dramatically at Blackness. He has gone from not really knowing how to interact with his peers in P1 to being a child who is

always happy and confident to go to new activities and join in with new people. Blackness Primary offers our children the opportunity to share their passions and be proud of their uniqueness. Being a mixed age class means that my child enjoys learning from the older children and loves teaching and sharing his knowledge with the younger children. When my son started school he had no interest in picking up a pencil, he didn't even like to draw or colour in. He is now so engaged with his learning, he is always telling us interesting facts he's learnt in class and he loves reading and writing stories in his spare time. He has already started teaching maths and literacy to his little sister who is very excited to start Blackness Primary after the summer. I really hope she gets the same positive start to school as her brother by joining the Blackness family.” (parent)

“All children at Blackness go on regular beach cleans where the children meet with a member of Marine Conservation; enjoy frequent outdoor learning at school and in the local woods; are very involved with the school greenhouse and raised beds, where they plant, grow and harvest their own vegetables and fruit. The children cook and eat the vegetables they grow and sell plants and produce in an honesty shop in front of the school; are in the nativity every year; help organise community events meet with the local community and raise money for good causes; participate in lunch clubs such as archery, football, tennis and dodgeball. I am aware that many of these activities take place in other schools in the area, but in these bigger schools not every child gets to participate in every activity every time they happen. Our children at Blackness Primary are therefore benefiting from many more opportunities now than they would if they moved to a larger school.” (parent)

“Blackness Primary being a small school provides better education to kids as they receive more attention 1 to 1 from the teachers thus they learn more this way. I have also noticed that my son's confidence has grown a lot as well. He had been shy in the past. He loves the school, the teachers and his school friends. He's very good at subjects taught in the school. I believe that moving to another, much busier school which has more kids and classes would deteriorate his studies as teachers divide their attention to many more kids which also impacting the quality of teaching and interaction with kids in my opinion” (parent)

“It's a proven fact that children in smaller schools have a higher grade and improved reading scores. My son is a very good reader which proves this point and I'm concerned this would not continue to develop getting lost in a bigger class, As learning in the small school is more tailored to the child's needs.” (parent)

“...children will have less opportunities moving to a bigger school. Currently my child in P3 partakes in violin lessons and is vice-captain of his house, these would not have happened in a larger school. Every time there is a lunch club or a sports club visit or even when the fire brigaded visited every child in the school has participated, this does not happen in larger schools where only a few of the children are selected to take part in these activities. Meaning moving to a larger school would mean both of my children missing out on taking part in these things.

In short moving to a different school will be detrimental to both my children's education, their social skills, it will be detrimental to their mental health and will impact on the number of opportunities they have” (parent)

“We are residents of Blackness and our 3 year old child is due to start at Blackness Primary School .. We are concerned to hear of the potential closure of the school, the loss of one of the few remaining community facilities in the village will no doubt be significant. The proposed alternative is a very different schooling proposition, changing from the small, rural and personal approach we had anticipated, to more generic larger scale.” (future parent)

“Working at a small rural school lends itself to good teamwork and the provision of an exciting curriculum. A small school also provides the opportunity for pupil - specific lessons that accommodates all types of learning. The needs of pupils can be managed more effectively within this setting and a good rapport with pupils and parents develops over the 7 years in school. A small school is efficiently managed regarding aesthetics and resources which is of great benefit to the multi-composite setting. As a result the pride and satisfaction has made my job very enjoyable.” (staff)

“Our children will get missed should they get put in classes of 20-30 children. They will not get the level of teaching they are receiving from the fantastic staff at Blackness. Our children do lots of outdoor learning, they grow their own veg from their own greenhouse which our parent council raised money for and are very much up and running. The children get to go on woodland walks and beach cleans all while learning , our children will not get this kind of learning should they move to another bigger school. Our child loves attending Blackness primary, the children all get on very well with one and other, there is no bullying and no child gets left behind or left out.. It's very disappointing as we plan to send our daughter to Blackness in the next few years too.” (parent)

“My 2 children ... loved their years at Blackness Primary School - from the start it was a warm, welcoming and nurturing environment. They immediately felt welcome and settled quickly thanks to a smaller peer group. Throughout their time at that school they developed strong, respectful relationships with their teachers, beyond what is possible in larger schools and classrooms. Whilst I understand that small classes and schools can be thought to bring limited opportunities for learning discussions with peers, I think it is very important to recognise the increased opportunities that this small school offered my children to lead their own learning and to support others. In addition, the school was excellent in engaging my children in their local environment with regular beach cleans (notably the only beach clean that seems to happen regularly in Blackness these days), visits to the woods to explore nature, and participating in community events. Furthermore, the small size of the school has meant that my children were able to gain and deepen their experience of some subjects in ways that is just not possible in other schools, for example - every child in Blackness has a part in their Christmas Show every year and every child has the opportunity to dance in the Bo'ness Fair Day” (former parent)

“The smaller scale school environment is something that has directly benefitted my son with additional support needs and this setting has drawn in a number of children both within and without catchment for the same reason. The school provides a vital tool for supporting children and mothballing it would be to the detriment of the educational options available locally.” (parent)

The increasing roll at Blackness PS that can be expected from future intake

“...there haven't been more than 10 catchment children in many years but figures suggest the next few years show a good increase in catchment children. Placing requests have generally always been higher than catchment and that in itself speaks volumes about the school.” (parent)

“Has the council considered reviewing catchment areas or promote Blackness facilities to draw more demand if required?” (parent)

“Our intention is to send both kids to Blackness Primary School when they reach the appropriate ages (ages 4 and 2). We have chosen to live in Blackness as we love the feel of the rural community which is significantly different to that of a town. We believe the school plays a critical part in maintaining this element of community togetherness and want our children to experience this as they grow up.” (future parent)

Concerns over children moving to larger classes at Grange PS

“It will force children to move schools and disrupt the continuity of their education. It would also force them into larger class sizes thereby reducing the teacher's ability to differentiate according to their individual needs.” (parent)

Blackness PS is much closer to home

“The school is one minute down the road from our house. If my son needs to come home I can be there in minutes to collect him. He has after school activities which we would be late for should he have to attend a different school.... we had hoped our daughter would attend blackness as well.” (parent)

“Blackness Primary is within walking distance to our home and we walk every day to and from school.” (parent)

Pupils anxiety regarding proposed move

“How does the closing and re-opening of Blackness Primary School, resulting in pupils frequently changing schools coincide with the councils findings that constant change contributes to anxiety amongst children?” (parent)

“I feel really sad and I really like my school. It makes me sad that we might lose our school.” (pupil)

“I feel really sad that the school might close because it is not noisy so everyone can hear me when I am speaking to them.” (pupil)

“It is sad that the school might close because I don't like loud noises and with lots of children it makes me feel angry. In a big school lots of people need help and it would take a long time for them to get to you.” (pupil)

“This whole process is causing my daughter a lot of stress, anxiety and sleepless nights that a child of her age should not be experiencing and will have a further impact on her wellbeing should the decision be made to close.” (parent)

Potential capacity pressures at Grange PS

“From the education capacity statement February 2022 school role projections, its clear that due to the increase in new housing developments Grange Primary is already reaching capacity. How can children benefit from a crowded school and class sizes at maximum capacity?” (parent)

Impact on the viability of the Community Hall next to the school

“The Community Hall will be very underused and possibly not viable financially, if the school is closed, as it is used for lunches on a daily basis” (staff)

“The closure of the school would also have a knock on effect to the village hall, which, I believe, relies on the rent from Falkirk Council to stay open. The hall might close if the school closes.” (staff)

“The loss of the school would spell the demise of the community hall which is owned and maintained by the community. The loss of the hall would mean that there would be nowhere for locals to gather for events, parties, ceilidhs and services.” (local resident)

“To what extent, for example, could the eastern extremities of the Grange PS catchment be relocated to Blackness, potentially easing pressure on the former whilst sustaining the latter? We've seen no evidence of such consideration.” (parent)

“This hall is owned by the community of Blackness and is used by the school for lunches, PE, drama and other activities. We have always worked well with the school. We are also concerned that the closure of the school may result in the closure of the Community Hall which is used by local groups in the evenings. It is also a designated Rest Centre for Blackness.” (Community Hall Committee)

Alternative arrangements that can be considered

“Has anyone considered opening a Nursery and Early Years establishment at the school? I believe this would ensure a good school role in future years, as generally parents will send their children to the school attached to the Nursery they have attended as a pre schooler.” (staff)

“Has consideration been given by the Council to widen the catchment area for Blackness given the huge building development of family homes at this of Blackness?” (parent)

“... could there be a collaboration with the adjacent authority to take some of their students (who live close to Blackness Primary) to relieve capacity pressures off this adjacent authority’s schools?” (MSP)

Mothballing Process

“How does the closing and re-opening of Blackness Primary School, resulting in pupils frequently changing schools coincide with the councils findings that constant change contributes to anxiety amongst children?” (Parent at Blackness Primary School)

“The “mothballing” policy appears fundamentally flawed. Take for example a 2022 intake P1 pupil at BPS. Presumably they will be moved to another primary school for 2023. What if the BPS projected roll increases, as it is projected to do? Are they then moved back to BPS in 2024/25? What if the BPS roll again falls in 2026? Are they relocated again? This could continue throughout the duration of their primary school period, continually unsettling and upsetting any child. We are unwilling to expose our son to such risk and suggest any policy which facilitates such events is intrinsically flawed.” (parent)

Children's Services Responses to Comments Received

The increasing roll at Blackness PS that can be expected from future intake

- Information received from the consultation has been used to assess future school rolls

Concerns over children moving to larger classes at Grange PS

- This is understandable and children will be supported to prepare for and transition to larger classes. The move to larger classes and a much larger school already exists, as children transition to secondary school. A potential move to Grange PS will provide the children a greater opportunity to form relationships and friendships with a wider **group of children**, ahead of their transition to secondary school.

Concerns over potential capacity pressures at Grange PS

- Primary schools can effectively operate up to 90-95% occupancy rates.
- The current capacity at Grange PS would cope with the transfer of Blackness PS pupils

The impact on the viability of the community hall next to the school

- We have highlighted this as a concern and are prepared to discuss a transitional arrangement with the Hall Committee.

Suggestions of alternative options to keep the school open (e.g., open a nursery, consider encouraging more Linlithgow pupils to attend)

- The assessment of a small school's financial viability must be undertaken when catchment pupil numbers fall below the agreed thresholds set in our mothballing assessment.
- It is not viable to open a nursery class at the school when there are so few early year children within the catchment.
- It is not normal practice for local authorities to encourage enrolment of children from other local authority areas.

Concerns over the future of the building if the school closes

- When a school is mothballed it continues to be maintained and kept in a reasonable condition.
- Prior to any future decision being taken on the permanent closure of a school a full statutory consultation exercise has to be undertaken. Part of this exercise considers what the community views as future options of the school. This could also include the potential for community transfer.

Concerns for the future of staff at the school

- All staff currently employed at the school would be offered redeployment to another post.
- No staff would be made compulsory redundant.

Disagreement on the potential for financial savings

- Unsure what disagreement there was however the estimated potential savings are shown in this report and have been approved by our Finance Team.

Cost of transporting pupils to Grange PS

- As school transport is already provided from Blackness to the primary school and also Bo'ness Academy it is not expected that significant additional costs would be incurred.
- Transport Planning Unit have however provided an estimate of £7,000 p.a. for potential additional costs.

Lack of any current links with Grange PS

- Blackness PS and Grange PS have been jointly managed for several years.

Pupils are anxious and sad about the proposed move to Grange PS

- This is normal. Change is a challenge for all. Pupils and staff will be fully supported to prepare for and transition to Grange PS if it is agreed.

The positive experience that the pupils have at the school

- Children will be supported to transition to Grange PS and will over time build many more positive relationships and experiences through access to a broader range of opportunities and activities.

The educational benefits of smaller class sizes and rural schools

- The national research in this area is very limited. Schools where positive experiences have been evidenced have rolls of around 50 pupils.
- We have engaged with local universities to seek research evidence in this area but unfortunately there has been no research undertaken for schools where the numbers are 10 or below in Scotland.

Financial Position Summary – Blackness Primary School 2022/23

1. Current 2022-23 Operating Revenue Budget

| | £ | <u>Includes</u> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Employee Costs | 232,380 | (Staff & Management costs) |
| Property Costs | 42,410 | (Utilities, Cleaning, Repairs & Rent) |
| Supplies & Services | 11,450 | (Catering, Per Capita, Stationery) |
| Income | (970) | (School Meals) |
| Total Revenue Budget | 285,270 | |

Note: Transport contract costs are managed from a separate budget.

2. Estimated Annual Revenue Budget Savings If School Was Mothballed

| | £ |
|---|----------------|
| Employee Costs | 175,000 |
| Property Costs | 28,000 |
| Supplies & Services | 5,000 |
| Sub-total | 208,000 |
| Less: Est Add Transport Costs | (7,000) |
| Less: Est. Reduction in GAE Grant Funding | (30,000) |
| Total Estimated Annual Savings | 171,000 |

3. Current Annual Budgeted Cost Per Pupil

| | | |
|---------|------------|-----------------|
| 2022/23 | (9 pupils) | £ 31,697 |
|---------|------------|-----------------|