

# safeguarding our rural schools and improving school consultation procedures

summary of proposals for changes to legislation



SUSTAINABILITY

FAIRNESS

RURAL COMMUNITIES

EDUCATIONAL BENEFIT



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scotland  
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

## Introduction

The Scottish Government would welcome your views on improving the way school closures are handled. We want to make sure the system for school closures is fair and open. Local councils should provide people with the information they need to give their views on a closure. We also want to make sure that the decision to close a rural school is one of last resort. This is because of the impact a school closure can have on a rural community.

## What we propose

### **Educational Benefit Statement**

We want to change the law so councils **must** publish a statement on who would benefit educationally from a school closing, and how. Councils would also have to publish such a statement if they wanted to change a school's site or its catchment area. We believe this will make it clearer to everyone how a proposal would benefit pupils and others.

### **Improving the consultation process**

We want to make sure that all consultations on changes to school buildings, sites and catchment areas meet the highest standards. We think that when considering making certain changes (including closing a school) a council should have to:

- publish a consultation paper
- consult for at least 6 weeks of term time
- seek the independent views of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE)
- hold a public meeting on its proposals
- publish a report of what people said during the consultation (including HMIE's views), and how the council has responded.

We think these changes will make the consultation process clearer and more open. These are some of the main changes we're proposing to the consultation process. If you would like the full list of proposals, the "Further Information" section tells you how to get more details.

### **Safeguarding rural schools**

We want to make sure that councils look at all the options, and effects on communities, before they decide to propose closing a rural school. So for rural schools, as well as the points above, we also want councils to have to consider:

- alternatives to closing a rural school
- the impact on the community of closing a rural school
- the impact of closing a rural school on the community's use of the school's buildings, facilities and grounds
- impact of new travel patterns on pupils, others, and on the environment if a rural school closes.

### **Cases coming to Scottish Government Ministers**

Currently Scottish Government Ministers have the final say on whether or not some schools should be allowed to close. There are three reasons for a council's decision to close a school to come to Ministers. One of these has to do with the distance pupils would have to travel if their local school closed, and another with how full a school is. The last is to do with providing denominational education. Ministers then decide whether or not they agree to the council closing the school. If you would like more details, please see the "Further Information" section for how to get a copy of the full consultation paper.

We'd like your views on whether Scottish Government Ministers should continue to have the final say on some school closures, and if so, which cases should come to Ministers.



## What is a “rural school”?

We propose that “rural schools” are those located in the the rural categories of the Scottish Government’s Urban/Rural classification. There is a map of these areas on-line at [www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk](http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk), or phone us on 0131 244 0166 if you would like a copy.

## Further information

The full consultation paper with our proposals is available on-line at [www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations), or by phoning 0131 244 0166. The Parentzone website ([www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk](http://www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk)) also contains useful and up-to-date information about the consultation.

## Please tell us what you think

There are a number of important questions to be considered:

- Do you support requiring local authorities to publish a statement setting out the educational benefit of the school closure proposal?
- Do you support the proposal to require local authorities to have regard to certain matters before they can proceed to consultation on the closure of a rural school?
- Do you support the proposed changes to the way consultations should be conducted?
- Are you content with the present system of referrals of closure cases to Scottish Government Ministers? If not, what changes would you wish to see made, and why?

If you would like to see the full list of consultation questions, the “Further Information” section tells you how to get more details.



## How to respond

We want to know your views on the changes we are proposing. You can

- e-mail your views to us at:  
[schoolclosure.consultation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schoolclosure.consultation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)
- fill in an on-line response form on the Scottish Government's website. You can access the form from the list of consultations at:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations)
- send them by post to:

School Closure Consultation CRE995  
CSU, Spur U5b, Saughton House  
Broomhouse Drive  
Edinburgh  
EH11 3XD

Whether responding by e-mail, on-line or by post, please complete a **Respondent Information Form**. This is available on the Scottish Government website, along with the full consultation paper, at [www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations) (look for the consultation title among the list of 'current' consultations).

The consultation finishes on **19 September 2008**.

Further copies of this document are available, on request, in audio and large print formats and in community languages; please contact:

[schoolclosure.consultation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:schoolclosure.consultation@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or Tel: 0131 244 0166.



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Government**

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