

SCHOOL STAFF: EARLY YEARS

EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHERS

The early years staff who responded have concerns about ‘satellite’ leadership who are not based full-time in their schools.

“I am concerned that the Executive Head Teachers may lack experience to lead schools which also have ELC as a part of the primary schools. What if the current Heads and Executive Heads clash and do not have the same aspiration for the school. I am not entirely sure that this would work and there is no evidence to say that it would.”

“I don’t see how a strong team can be created when we will rarely see the satellite Head Teacher.”

“Personally I feel that the Head Teacher will be undermined by an Executive Head Teacher and not fully in control of how to lead individual schools.”

“Perhaps that the benefits may be diluted by more focus on management rather than improvements for the children.”



SCHOOL STAFF

NON-TEACHING STAFF

Non-teaching school staff are worried about ‘losing’ their school’s Head Teacher, and about the proposed Executive Head Teacher being too distant.

Methodology

The Empowering our Educators website included a dedicated area for school staff, with tailored information relevant to them.

Materials were shared with all school staff via direct email and also disseminated by their Head Teachers, many of whom self-organised discussions within their schools.

Two webinars for school staff took place, led by the Heads of Service and the Education Manager (Transformation).

School staff were directed back to the Empowering our Educators website to have their say and input into the ongoing development of the proposal. At this point they were able to indicate their role, allowing us to segment the non-teaching staff data.

Responses were received from 18 non-teaching school staff. Non-teaching school staff are part of 485 total APT staff* across Argyll and Bute’s schools as of April 2022.

* APT staff includes ASN, Classroom Assistants, Pupil Support Assistants, Clericals, Janitors, CCEW, etc.

Observations

The Head of School remit is not understood. Non-teaching staff are worried about losing their Head Teacher.

Non-teaching staff think the Executive Head Teacher role sounds like their existing Shared Heads. There are worries about the role being too far removed from school classrooms.

Even those who can see that the model would work on the mainland don’t believe the same system can work for island schools, with their particular challenges.



SCHOOL STAFF: NON-TEACHING STAFF

THE HEAD OF SCHOOL ROLE

The Head of School remit is not understood. Non-teaching staff are worried about losing their Head Teacher.



“Head Teachers are needed in schools, not out of schools, especially Joint Head Teachers. And Principal Teachers are needed for the days that the Head Teachers are not actually in the school. I like the idea of an Executive Head Teacher but only with the tier system we have at the moment.”

“Communication issues with a school Head who may not be able to visit the school for weeks on end due to the weather and no ferries. We will rely heavily on digital technologies and remote leadership.”

“Currently having a shared Head has had its issues with communication with staff and a lack of physical presence so I am worried that this may be even worse.”

“Our Head Teacher does not usually teach in class. so the main benefit you are describing we already have in place within our school.”

“Having your Head Teacher interacting with pupils is very important to strengthen the bond with with.”

“I feel a school needs a Head Teacher to be onsite to be there to help and give support when both are needed. I know at the moment finding someone to help in all departments in Argyll and Bute is impossible, there is no one person who can help solve problems and give advice when its needed. Working with a Head Teacher to improve the school and make changes can only work if the Head Teacher is at hand every day. If I have a problem in my school and I have to contact an Executive Head Teacher I could be looking at waiting over a week or two for a response - I know that for a fact, even with my Head Teacher at hand she finds it difficult to give me time to help resolve any problems.”

“Not having one figurehead and go-to person in a school will kill the personal feeling you get from a Head Teacher. A Head Teacher is the person who parents, children and staff get their direction and drive from, removing that figurehead person from a school will not only kill the good feeling from schools but will demoralise staff, children and parents.”

SCHOOL STAFF: NON-TEACHING STAFF**EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHERS**

Non-teaching staff think the Executive Head Teacher role sounds like their existing Shared Heads. There are worries about the role being too far removed from school classrooms.

“An Executive Head would be too far removed from the everyday life of the school, its pupils, parents, staff and the local community. This would have such a negative impact on all of the benefits presented.”

“The Executive Head Teachers will end up being solely budget managers and one or more schools within their cluster will lose out. This could be because either a high achieving school or a school with greater deprivation is favoured rather than each school having their own Head Teacher who is always championing their own school.”



SCHOOL STAFF: NON-TEACHING STAFF

LACK OF TRUST

Mistrust in both the Council and the consultation process has led non-teaching staff to believe the proposals are ultimately about cutting costs, or even closing schools.



“This is a step towards closing schools.”

“I see nothing in this proposal, and I mean nothing, that will benefit anyone except Argyll and Bute Council’s budget.”

“This looks like an overall reduction of budgets and staffing over time.”

“There is a lack of transparency and mistrust as a result of the process. Vagueness of the proposals. Lack of evidence to support claims, and importantly no evidence that they will cause no harm. I have real concerns over the process, and very imbalanced consultation. It causes significant distrust in the analysis of the data and any future consultation. Very much feels like this will be progressed regardless.”

SCHOOL STAFF: NON-TEACHING STAFF

ISLAND SCHOOLS

Even those who can see that the model would work on the mainland don't believe the same system can work for island schools, with their particular challenges.

“Although I agree that there could be improvement with a more structured leadership model, I'm not sure that there will be - owing to the location and logistics of recruiting and retaining staff on a remote island where the challenges are huge despite all the staff working above and beyond continually.”

“I'm not quite sure that being on a small island will enable the staff and children to benefit fully from the vision. We are often overlooked/forgotten and although the children always have a consistently good learning experience it is often hard for the staff with limited support and resources from the authority.”

“It could be posited that adding another layer of management will only make a structure more top heavy and divisive and not necessarily more dynamic. It has happened in other public services. Interesting to see how it will work in an island setting.”

Don't forget the positives ...



“I can see that for a small island school like ours it will bring chances to collaborate with other schools in the area.”

“This in turn may help with the transition to secondary school on the mainland for our island children. It appears we will have the same leadership regardless of our small size. Great if it stops tiny schools from closing as the knock-on affects for a community if a school closes are huge.”

SCHOOL STAFF

CLASSROOM SUPPORT STAFF

The main fear for support staff is losing their Head Teachers. The Head of School role is not seen as an equal replacement.

Methodology

The Empowering our Educators website included a dedicated area for school staff, with tailored information relevant to them.

Materials were shared with all school staff via direct email and also disseminated by their Head Teachers, many of whom self-organised discussions within their schools.

Two webinars for school staff took place, led by the Heads of Service and the Education Manager (Transformation).

School staff were directed back to the Empowering our Educators website to have their say and input into the ongoing development of the proposal. At this point they were able to indicate their role, allowing us to segment the data from classroom support staff.

Responses were received from 16 classroom support staff. Classroom support staff are part of 485 total APT staff* across Argyll and Bute's schools as of April 2022.

* APT staff includes ASN, Classroom Assistants, Pupil Support Assistants, Clericals, Janitors, CCEW, etc.

Observations

Without fully understanding the new Head of School role, the main concern of support staff is losing their Head Teachers.

Support staff question whether an Executive Head Teacher (and their salary) is the best use of limited funds, which could be spent (for example) on ASN support instead.

There is a feeling that this is a 'big school' structure being imposed on small schools - and that it's not suitable.



SCHOOL STAFF: CLASSROOM SUPPORT STAFF

REMOVAL OF HEAD TEACHERS

Without full understanding of the new Head of School role, the main concern of support staff is losing their Head Teachers.

“As a parent I’m concerned, not sure I like the idea of no Head Teacher for a specific school, reason being Head Teacher becomes familiar with students and family and builds rapport which you would lose.”



“From a professional point of view, it is my opinion that the higher Head Teacher role needs to be based within each individual school. Whilst I understand that on occasion the Head Teacher is having to split their time between leadership and teaching which can be hard. There have been multiple times when the Head has been needed as a higher authority figure to get children to behave how they should.”

“My main reservations are that Head Teachers need to be physically present at the school in order to be able to know what the school, staff and children need. One school provides more than enough work for a Head Teacher to deal with and it is hard enough as it is, especially in a high roll school. Head Teachers have a pastoral care role to staff and children. How would they be able to provide a good level of care if they do not know their staff and pupils well? Pupils with Additional Support Needs will suffer the most. At present, as we deal with a pandemic, the presence and leadership of a Head Teacher that we know we can count on is paramount to ensure excellence levels of high adherence to rules and high staff morale. I feel that the Council is attempting to treat schools like a business with this new proposal.”

“I think the new proposals should be disregarded and Head Teacher positions as well as all other school staff posts should be kept as they are.”

“Our Head Teacher knows our families and most importantly our children so well. I feel that the new model may take away the strong ethos and community spirit that we have now and is remarked upon by visitors. I am a community member as well a staff member and can speak as an ex-parent also. I would hate to see our school stepping away from the amazing place it is now.”

“Our Head Teacher does not usually teach in class. so the main benefit you are describing we already have in place within our school.”

SCHOOL STAFF: CLASSROOM SUPPORT STAFF

EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHERS

Support staff question whether an Executive Head Teacher (and their salary) is the best use of limited funds, which could be spent (for example) on ASN support instead.

“Are we just creating a new job that doesn’t need to exist? Given current budget restraints surely the money could be better spent!”

“There seems to be no reason why resources etc can’t be shared at the moment. We don’t need an Executive Head to enable that, just better communication between schools. It mentions ‘more collaboration between schools’ Once again I am unsure why we can’t have this without an executive lead.”

“I also feel this new Executive role will come in and overrule Head Teachers with the Council’s best interests - rather than the childrens!”

“Overall, to me, this proposal will undermine trust in the leadership, weaken staff morale and relationships, and moreover, make it too big a structure for pupils (and parents) to feel valued and understood.”

“For staff I worry how a central leadership will only contribute to non-flexible situations. Something (e.g. a project that’s school specific) can’t be authorised by a local Head Teacher but has to be discussed with someone potentially far away from our school. It’ll make it a very sad environment where the person in charge can’t easily be approached and it weakens staff morale.”

“Not having an executive lead that knows every child and their families within the setting personally. I feel this may lose the ‘personal touch’ a Head Teacher currently has.”

“There seems to be no reason why resources etc can’t be shared at the moment. We don’t need an Executive Head to enable that, just better communication between schools. It mentions ‘more collaboration between schools’ Once again I am unsure why we can’t have this without an executive lead.”



SCHOOL STAFF: CLASSROOM SUPPORT STAFF

LACK OF TRUST

There is a feeling that this is a 'big school' structure being imposed on small schools - and that it's not suitable.



“Overall, to me, this proposal will undermine trust in the leadership, weaken staff morale and relationships, and moreover, make it too big a structure for pupils (and parents) to feel valued and understood”

“Each individual school in Argyll and Bute has very different needs and I don't see anything positive about bringing them all together as one. The needs of smaller schools are very different from the needs of the larger ones in the area. This proposal would take in children from the age of three years right up to the age of 18. Nursery, primary and secondary level. Once again, very different needs and very different skill sets are required.”

“The main drawback is the fact that a small island school like ours can't geographically benefit from shared resources as is mentioned. We are a small school on a small island and what might work on the mainland is not going to work here. Same problem with a shared curriculum.”

“This appears to be a proposal based on financial reasons rather than the educational needs of each individual child.”

“This proposal might sound fine on paper but in practice it's something I can't see working out to be beneficial to pupils or staff alike.”

“Instead of this programme being implemented, there should be better communication between services to allow children to access the services needed for the best outcome for the child, their peers and the staff.”

“My main concerns are whether budgets will allow enough support staff - ASNs, Classroom Assistants etc - to work in classes and throughout the school. They currently support the teaching staff by supporting the pupils, especially in classes where individuals require frequent support but they have no supported hours allocated. This role will still be necessary regardless of how many teachers are allocated in the new collective model.”

PUPILS

Both primary and secondary pupils were quick to see the benefits in theory of collaboration and sharing between schools. But, like their parents, they have concerns about equity - particularly between smaller and larger schools - and ask for more detail on their own collectives before they would be able to form a properly considered opinion.

The respectful, kind, caring, articulate and balanced views we received are a credit to Argyll and Bute's children and young people.

As these sessions were supported by school staff it is important to recognise that the teacher's own opinion may play a part in the feedback.

"We like that other schools can help us find solutions to our problems. It is good for all of the teachers to get to work together as a team."

"We could make more friends if schools mix."

"If a teacher has a good way to help us learn, then they can go to the other schools and show them what they do and then everyone will learn much better."

"It makes schools more equal if we share - though we think that it helps smaller schools more than bigger ones."

"The risk is the Executive Head Teacher may take over a bit more and the schools may change to all being the same."

"It's important that all schools are equal, no matter what their size."

"Some schools would be the Executive Head's favourites and get more."

"If schools are doing fine, why change?"

"There was mention of increasing teachers in schools through this model. Why are they not doing that anyway?"

PUPILS

Pupils think that collaboration and sharing between schools are good ideas, but they worry about how equitable it might be in practice.

Methodology

Overall, responses were received from 53 Pupil Councils, from schools across Argyll and Bute.

Pupil Councils have a remit to represent the voice of their school.

We engaged the Pupil Councils of each school in Argyll and Bute with an age-relevant presentation. Their sessions were facilitated independently by their own teachers, allowing the conversation to be delivered sensitively with reassurance on hand for the pupils if required.

We asked pupils what they liked about the proposal, and what they didn't.

Pupil Councils had their own section of the Empowering our Educators website, including presentations, videos and feedback forms. These were developed through focus groups with pupils and feedback from teachers and Head Teachers across the local authority.

The Education Service's Inclusion and Equity Team supported specially tailored engagement sessions with a selection of ASN pupils across the local authority.

Context

It is important to acknowledge that by using teaching staff to facilitate these sessions there may have been a natural element of how the teaching staff member themselves feels about the proposal coming through in the children's understanding, but this was accepted as the best way to manage the conversations with children, keeping their wellbeing front of mind.

Not all schools responded officially with the thoughts of their pupils. Some schools left it to their Head Teachers to respond on their behalf.

Observations

Primary pupils think the changes are too complicated and don't understand why they might happen. But they all saw schools working together as a good thing, with social benefits as well as learning benefits.

Sharing resources was seen as a major positive and primary pupils were very enthusiastic about equality and fairness. But they worry about more sharing (especially of leadership) making their schools too similar. They are all quite proud of their differences.

Primary pupils think that schools working together could be a good way to share ideas. But they worry about how it would work - especially if the schools disagree on anything.

Many primary pupils, especially in smaller schools, are used to seeing their Head Teacher every day and don't want that to change. And they worry that the Executive Head Teacher will be an outsider who doesn't really know what their school needs.

Primary pupils from all kinds of schools think this model would benefit smaller schools. But pupils from bigger schools are less sure about it for themselves.

Secondary school pupils questioned the lack of detail in the proposal, asking for examples of real collectives and evidence for why the proposed structure would succeed.

Secondary pupils are not as used to seeing their Head Teachers taking classes, except as cover. They worry about equity, with Executive Head Teachers covering multiple schools.

Some secondary pupils wanted the direct benefits to children in the proposal made clearer, but many commented on collectives being helpful for the primary/secondary transition.

Secondary pupils showed a keen sense of fairness, wanting to ensure resources would be shared equitably across collectives.

The respectful, kind, caring, articulate and balanced views we received are a credit to Argyll and Bute's children and young people.

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

SCHOOL COLLECTIVES

Primary pupils think that schools working together could be a good way to share ideas. But they worry about how it would work - especially if the schools disagree on anything.



“Working together could improve all schools.”

“We think that it would be good because maybe one Head Teacher who was not sure on something could ask another Head Teacher for help.”

“This depends on good teamwork across schools - what if leaders cannot get on?”

“Maybe some Head Teachers don’t want to work together.”

“Head Teachers working together is good teamwork and it creates more ideas.”

“What if all teachers and Head Teachers don’t agree with what the Executive Head Teacher wants? What if the Executive Head Teacher has an idea and no one wants it? What if one school gets resources and another doesn’t?”

“We don’t like the idea that the Head of School has another boss. This could lead to arguments and we are worried that the Executive Head Teacher could stop decisions being made for our school. We are worried that if we choose to do something for our school then the Executive Head Teacher could come along and change it.”

“Also what if an Executive Head Teacher spent lots of money on another school and there wasn’t enough to buy essential materials for our school?”

“We are worried that it will be overwhelming for students too because the Executive Head might disagree with the Head of their school and give one of their other schools what they want instead.”

“We like that other schools can help us find solutions to our problems. It is good for all of the teachers to get to work together as a team.”

“The Executive Head Teacher can help our Head Teacher.”

“Will the Executive Head Teacher just get to know Heads of Schools or will they get to know the teachers?”

“The Head of School and the Executive Head Teacher would need to have a good relationship so they can share ideas. The Executive Head Teacher would need to take in all the feedback they can instead of doing all their own ideas.”

“We think that it would be good because maybe one Head Teacher who was not sure on something could ask another Head Teacher for help.”

“It’s important that all schools are equal, no matter what their size.”

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

EXECUTIVE HEAD TEACHERS

Primary pupils worry about the Executive Head Teacher not being in, and knowing, their school - and whether they will really know what each particular school needs.

“Some schools would be the Executive Head’s favourites and get more.”

“The Executive Head Teacher might make changes we don’t like - for example changing our uniform.”

“It is too much work for one person. They would get no sleep.”

“Executive Head Teachers won’t know us all.”

“People who don’t know you and your school would be making decisions that affect you.”

“We think we should keep it simple with one Head Teacher for every school.”

“If we had a Head Teacher above our Head Teacher they might tell them what to do but it might not be the right thing to do for our school.”

“It sounds like the Executive Head would be too busy to spend time with us, maybe they would be rushing to visit everyone. How much time would we get? I don’t know why we need another Head Teacher?”

“We feel that we wouldn’t connect to an Executive Head Teacher well as we wouldn’t get to know them.”

“Executive Head Teachers wouldn’t know everyone the way our Head Teachers do, so won’t know what is best for us and might not make the best choices for our school.”

“Would we have to change the way we do things just because the new Head Teacher wanted to change things to how other schools do them. Things like our breaks, we have three breaks but other schools only have two.”

“We don’t understand what an Executive Head Teacher will do. Will they get to know us?”

“It is odd that the Head Teacher has another boss. Schools are different and Heads from other schools might not know my school.”

“Do we know who Executive Heads and Heads of School would be? How would it be decided?”

“Head Teachers would get more sleep because the Executive Head would do all the worrying.”



PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

NON-TEACHING HEADS

Many primary pupils are used to seeing their Head Teacher daily and don't want that to change. But they appreciate that not teaching would give their Head Teacher more time to do other important things.

“Our Head Teacher is special and we like it when she sometimes teaches us.”

“What if Head Teachers want to teach?”



“The Head Teacher won't have to teach classes and can concentrate more on leading.”

“The Head Teacher would get more of a break as they would not have to think of what children need to learn.”

“Children would rather Head Teacher kept teaching as the Head Teacher would know children better.”

“Executive Head Teachers and Heads of Schools would not be teaching and we would not see them.”

“We would not see the Executive Head Teachers. How often would they get to Jura?”

“When we have the Head Teacher in class, we can talk to them, tell them how we are feeling. They are the one that runs the school and can do something about it. We don't have to go through another teacher who then has to ask the Head Teacher.”

“For the bigger schools it would be harder as we won't be able to have quality time with our Head Teacher because they will be helping other schools.”

“The Executive Head Teacher won't get to know their pupils and staff.”

“We think that there will be too many children for the Executive Head Teacher to get to know.”

“If the Executive Head Teacher is off sick the Head of School can run their own school.”

“If our Head Teacher goes we will miss her.”

“Some children might want their Head Teacher to teach them.”

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

UNIQUE SCHOOL IDENTITIES

Some pupils thought that schools might end up more similar as a result of closer collaboration. Maybe too similar.

“We like our school being different. Over the years we have made it the way we all want it. We think that people are trying to make us identical except for our name and colours. We don’t want to be identical. We like being different.”

“This is a terrible idea. We would become part of a chain of schools - a bit like a branch of McDonald’s.”

“One boss over all collective schools means that schools will end up the same as the same Executive Head Teacher is in charge”

“All the schools would be the same. It’s like a rainbow, if the red colour took over then it wouldn’t be a rainbow.”

“Our school would not stay as individual as we are just now.”

“The risk is the Executive Head Teacher may take over a bit more and the schools may change to all being the same.”

“It is important to me that my school is different, but if we have the same Head of School, our school might be the same as the others.”

“It might make our school not Dalintober - it might change the school and make it not the same as it was before. Our identity might change. It wouldn’t just be our school - it would be someone else’s school.”

“I don’t want to be learning exactly the same thing as other schools because I like that our school is unique. I don’t really get what it wants to achieve because I like that schools are different in their own way.”



PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

CHANGE AND UNCERTAINTY

Primary pupils think the changes are too complicated and don't understand why they might happen. They like their schools as they are.



“I’m not very good with change. It makes me nervous.”

“There is nothing wrong with our school how it is.”

“If schools are doing fine, why change?”

“What are the risks? Will it work?”

“Would we have to change the way we do things just because the new Head Teacher wanted to change things for other schools to do them. Things like our breaks, we have three breaks but other schools only have two.”

“Would we still have our teachers and would we get more teachers?”

“Everything is ok as it is. Five years is too long, what's the point?”

“We think it is a bad idea because sometimes people make big changes that some people don't like and things don't always go to plan.”

“We worry that the new Head Teacher won't like us.”

“Another Head Teacher would have different ways of doing things. I don't handle change very well, when I don't know what is happening.”

“We like our school the way it is.”

“It's not our job to say what the teachers want to do. We feel it is for adults.”

“We think it sounds very complicated.”

“I think this is a big thing to change and it will take too long.”

“It may take a long time to make collective schools. We don't know what the journey would be and why it would take so long.”

“We think that if the changes need to be made they should be made quicker - five years is too long.”

“It could take years to be undone if it's not working.”

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

CONNECTING SCHOOLS

All pupils saw schools coming together as a good thing, with social benefits as well as learning benefits.

“Small schools should come together.”

“We could make more friends if schools mix.”

“We could have clubs running across schools, like basketball or football clubs.”

“We might have more money for things if all schools worked together.”

“We would get different influences from other teachers. Our school could get more support.”



“This might help connect schools together.”

“It could be nice to visit other schools more.”

“It would be really good for our transition to High School as the P7 would get to know more people. We have the cameras now and they can help us work with the other P7s in our group of schools.”

“We’ve had joint trips away with other schools and events together, so we understood how this could work.”

“For the Primary 7s there may be more opportunity to meet with other P7s.”

“We can share how we learn with other schools.”

“We could join together on school trips to help with the cost.”

“Pupils can learn together if they can travel to other schools sometimes.”

“Some schools might want to be part of a group of schools. Other schools might not want change.”

“We could do collective fundraising for bigger charities and raise more.”

“There will be more teachers to teach us”

“If a teacher is off they can ask a teacher from another school to teach and cover a class - staff can be shared out”

“This might give some schools teachers/staff that they need.”

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

SHARING RESOURCES

Sharing resources was seen as a positive, but the pupils need more clarity on how it would work. What materials and resources could be shared?



“Everyone in Argyll and Bute would get the same education.”

“If a teacher has a good way to help us learn, then they can go to the other schools and show them what they do and then everyone will learn much better.”

“If our bus breaks down we could borrow one from another school.”

“How will it be equal? What if we get more money than we need and bigger schools get less?”

“We could also share ideas on eco, climate change, rights, respecting schools and learning.”

“Specialist Head of Schools could help a new Head of School in numeracy or gymnastics for example.”

“We would have access to more teachers if we needed it.”

“I came from a school with over 500 pupils and our small school has better resources than they had.”

“It would be good to share equipment.”

“We like the idea of sharing money with other schools.”

“Bigger schools can help smaller school and we are quite big so could help others. There are bigger schools than us so they could help us. We can share resources around.”

“We are a bigger school and have good IT equipment. What if we get less time using it and what if we share it and another school doesn't look after it properly and breaks it?”

“Our pupil council only think this proposal is a good idea because of sharing resources. It means some schools can have things they don't have now.”

“Who will make sure resources are looked after and take them to places?”

“What if we get fed up sharing?”

“Would bigger schools share their things with smaller schools or would everything stay with bigger schools?”

“If we share people and materials there will be a transport cost.”

“Each school could get a big barn to keep all of their resources in.”

PUPILS: PRIMARY PUPILS

IT'S NOT FOR ALL SCHOOLS

Primary pupils from all kinds of schools think this model would benefit smaller schools. But pupils from bigger schools are less sure about it for themselves.

“It’s good for smaller schools to get together, but not schools like ours.”

“We think that smaller schools should be in collectives, but not the others. We can’t see the benefit to bigger schools.”

“It makes schools more equal if we share - though we think that it helps smaller schools more than bigger ones.”

“This is only a good idea for rural and small schools. It doesn’t suit the needs of larger towns and schools and I don’t think there are any benefits to our school.”

“Smaller schools would be as well equipped as bigger schools.”

“Each school would have different things to improve, how does the collective decide?”

“We think smaller schools will get more opportunities and it would be more equal. The smaller schools could get more resources.”

“All the rural schools might get more out of it - more equipment and they can experience what it is like in a bigger school.”

“This gives smaller schools better opportunities because the Head Teachers have more time to lead their schools.”

“Some schools are quite well equipped and some are less well, but we can already share stuff right now instead of being in a collective.”



PUPILS: SECONDARY PUPILS

CRITICISM OF THE CONSULTATION

Secondary school pupils questioned the lack of detail in the proposal, asking for examples of real collectives and evidence for why the proposed structure would succeed.



“The pupils wanted clearer examples of what this would actually look like.”

“The students had a vague understanding of the proposal but didn’t feel that the information offered answered all of their questions about how it would work in practice.”

“Not enough detail offered to make a decision on this.”

“Not sure how this benefits pupils as presentation not specific enough (what are the wages for new posts, will primary teachers run secondary schools and vice versa? We want a Head Teacher who knows their pupils.”

“Would it affect the structure of middle management, i.e. less Principal Teachers?”

PUPILS: SECONDARY PUPILS

COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Secondary pupils are not as used to seeing their Head Teachers taking classes, except as cover. They worry about equity, with Executive Head Teachers covering multiple schools.



“Head Teacher could focus more on the job if not teaching.”

“Most Head Teachers don’t have time to teach anyway so this seems an irrelevant point.”

“They like the idea of working collaboratively across schools but do not like the idea of an Executive Head.”

“The idea of the Executive Head Teacher and the Heads of School working together is a benefit.”

“They felt students might not get to know the Head Teacher well and vice-versa.”

“We sometimes need the help of Deputes and Head Teachers to teach or cover classes when teachers are off. Some Head Teachers might actually like to teach!”

“We are worried about the impact on current Depute Head Teachers who are already dealing with heavy workloads. This could also impact on other staff like Principal Teachers. If the staff aren’t happy, the school won’t be.”

“There won’t be as much diversity in the education system or different views/opinions as there won’t be a mix of Head Teachers from different backgrounds.”

“They couldn’t see how this would be equitable and felt that smaller schools would inevitably lose out to bigger ones in the day to day demands of an Executive Head.”

“It would be difficult to spend equal amounts of time at each school - what if island schools become the poor relation?”

“This might slow everything down – if something was happening within a school, it may require the answer of the Executive Head Teacher and therefore this delays getting answers to things.”

“The quality of education might decrease because an Executive Head Teacher has to focus on a number of schools and can’t concentrate on the one.”

“Lack of trust and respect for the Executive Head Teacher because pupils won’t know them, they won’t know the pupils. It will just be a figure in an office running schools.”

PUPILS: SECONDARY PUPILS

SHARING RESOURCES

Secondary pupils showed a keen sense of fairness, wanting to ensure resources would be shared equitably across collectives.

“More learning resources could be shared – but this would need to be done fairly.”

“There was mention of increasing teachers in schools through this model. Why are they not doing that anyway?”

“Might making sharing equipment easier between primary schools.”

“Some schools would benefit from the sharing of money and equipment.”

“Money could be shared across the collective.”



“Sharing of money and equipment might disadvantage some schools as well. The Executive Head Teacher might not fully appreciate the impact of this on a day to day basis”

“Sharing of staff might not work due to timetabling in the secondary school.”

“Expenses for Executive Head Teachers dependent on where they are based will be an additional cost.”

PUPILS: SECONDARY PUPILS**WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Some secondary pupils wanted the direct benefits to children in the proposal made clearer, but many commented on collectives being helpful for the primary/secondary transition.

“P7 would be able to transition easier if there was a shared Head Teacher across primary and secondary.”

“It would help with primary pupils getting to know other pupils before they moved to secondary.”

“Not sure how this benefits pupils as presentation not specific enough. We want a Head Teacher who knows their pupils.”



COMMUNITY BODIES

After being talked through the proposal, 93 Chairpersons of Community and Parent Councils were given toolkits to share and discuss the proposal independently with their members, and respond collectively as a Council.

These community groups responded overwhelmingly against the proposal for change, and the consultation process was heavily criticised by them.

Many of the benefits of the proposal were recognised, however, any positivity was quickly extinguished by common negative themes, some repeated by multiple groups.

“We want the benefits that it is claimed will be brought about but, instead of a serious dialogue about how to achieve them, Argyll and Bute Council has simply provided us with PR-led assurances.”

“The proposal seems to lack any empirical data to base its assumptions on.”

“Who will be in our collective? There was considerable concern that we don’t know what schools will comprise our local collective.”

“There is concern that the individuality of our school may be lost amongst the homogeneity your plan clearly seeks.”

“Rural schools are well resourced and there is no need to share with the larger schools.”

“The new Head of School roles appear to be a demotion of Head Teachers.”

“They need to improve their recruitment policies in order to attract teachers to remote and rural areas, rather than this smokescreen of executive leadership which is a savings plan in disguise.”

COMMUNITY BODIES

Quantitative research methodology

An email was sent to representatives of Community Councils, Parent Councils, and selected other bodies in Argyll and Bute, with a personalised link to an online survey (hosted on the Empowering our Educators website).

There were some misunderstandings on how the response form worked. The multiple choice question of “What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?” was not mandatory, and users could choose to select none. However, many responders selected “Other (please explain below)” and used this opportunity to express, in their view, there were no benefits. Therefore, any selection of “Other (please explain below)” was not quantified and counted as a benefit.

For open-ended questions in the response form (“Other Benefits”, “What are your main reservations about the proposal?” and “Is there anything else you would like to share?”) and any responses received via the *support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk* email address, responses were categorised under 26 wide-ranging themes. For example, if one respondent mentioned the “Consultation process”, “Detail of the proposal” and “Mistrust of the council” within their question responses, then this would be counted against all three themes. This was to give a broad overview of the most common points of discussion.

Those submissions received outwith the portal (to the *support@empoweringoureducators.co.uk* email address) did not answer the multiple choice questions - therefore these responses are not quantified in: “Which of these best describes you?”, “What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?” and “Having engaged with the proposal, do you believe the School Collective Leadership model will positively affect the future education of young people in Argyll and Bute”.

Two parent councils submitted their response to the wrong response form, but have been included in this data.

Responses

Total number of responses	67
Duplicates omitted	0

Respondents (Selected from list)	Number
A Parent Council	52
A Community Council	13
An employer or organisation	2

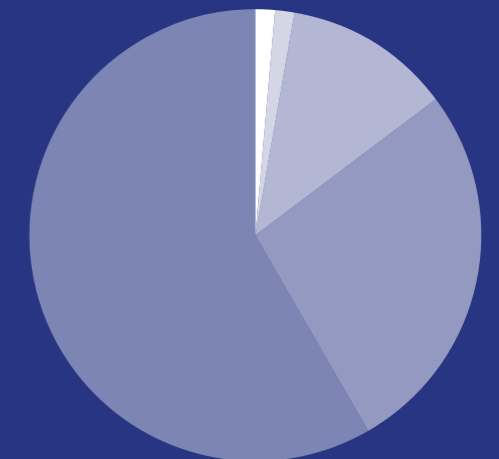
Q. What do you think the main benefits of this proposal could be?

Benefits (Selected from list*)	Positive responses
More teachers in classrooms	3
Sharing specialists (like science teachers) with neighbouring schools	12
Giving Heads more time to lead schools, instead of having them teach as well	5
More equality between schools, with resources better shared	9
Expert specialists in local schools (like assessment specialists, or early years specialists)	8
More collaboration between schools	10
Improved progression for pupils between primary classes and when moving to secondary	4
An Executive Head Teacher whose job is to drive improvement across all the local schools	4

* Respondents were able to select multiple or no answers.

Q. Having engaged with the proposal, do you believe the collective leadership model will positively affect the future education of young people in Argyll and Bute?

Answer (Selected from list)	Number of responses
Strongly Agree	1
Agree	1
Neither agree nor disagree	8
Disagree	18
Strongly disagree	39



COMMUNITY BODIES

COMMUNITY AND PARENT COUNCILS

Lack of detail has allowed misinformation and suspicion to take root, with bad feeling towards the proposal overwhelming the consultation.

Methodology

Overall, responses were received from 27 Community Councils and 76 Parent Councils across Argyll and Bute (13 and 52 of those submitted via the dedicated website forms with the remainder submitted outwith).

Five Q&A sessions were hosted for chairpersons of Community Councils and Parent Councils. The Heads of Service and Education Manager (Transformation) presented the proposal and answered questions from a total of 93 chairpersons from across Argyll and Bute at these sessions.

Chairpersons were encouraged to then share the proposal independently with their Community Councils and Parent Councils for discussion, using a supplied toolkit including presentations, email invitations and filmed content, and feed back through the Empowering our Educators website.

Argyll and Bute Council offered the support of an education professional to attend their discussions and answer any questions. 37 Community and Parent Councils took that offer up.

Parents were invited as individuals to visit the Empowering our Educators website to access information on the proposal. Ongoing information was disseminated through the existing Xpressions app for school-to-parent communication. Drop-in Q&A sessions for both parents and other Argyll and Bute residents were promoted through local press and social channels.

Context

Parent Councils exist to represent the parent voice for each school in the authority.

The remit of a Parent Council is defined in the *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006*. "The Parent Council is designed to be a vehicle for promoting communication. It is required to promote contact between the school, the Parent Forum, parents of prospective pupils at the school, pupils in attendance there, the community and such other persons as the Parent Council consider it appropriate to include (Section 8(1)(c)). A Parent Council for a primary school should promote contact between itself and the providers of nursery education to prospective pupils at the school (Section 8(2) and (3)). A key function of the Parent Council is to represent the interests of the Parent Forum, pupils and relevant others."

It was expected that each Parent Council would bring the unique context of their own local school to the consultation process.

However, due to a significant level of lobbying directed at the Parent Councils, they mostly fed back with broader, less school-specific views. Key themes were around the consultation process and mistrust of the key drivers for change, citing budget cuts instead.

One parent wrote to us by email to express concern that the local Parent Council did not represent her own views as a parent. They had not consulted locally and her voice was not heard.

Observations

Community and Parent Councils are overwhelmingly against the proposal for change, and the consultation process was heavily criticised by these groups.

Many of the benefits of the proposal are recognised, however, any positivity was quickly extinguished by common negative comments from multiple groups.

Sharing of resources was almost universally welcomed, however, questions were asked as to why this can't currently be the case. It is not seen as enough justification for transformation on this scale.

Equity between schools (not pupils) is at the heart of most concerns.

Catholic/Gaelic schools are very concerned at perceived threat to their identity/autonomy and teacher specialisms.

Smaller/island schools are concerned they will go overlooked, disadvantaged and unheard.

COMMUNITY BODIES: COMMUNITY AND PARENT COUNCILS

CRITICISM OF THE CONSULTATION

A perceived lack of detail, clarity and evidence has been seen as deliberate and manipulative. Community groups feel the proposal has been ‘spun’ in an attempt to manufacture consent.



“We want the benefits that it is claimed will be brought about but, instead of a serious dialogue about how to achieve them, Argyll and Bute Council has simply provided us with PR-led assurances.”

“We are presented with meaningless, feel-good sentiments”

“No evidence/balance of information provided - the process was likened to buying a house without a surveyor’s report.”

“We have no doubts that the ‘PR’ literature published by the council gives a very biased view with very little to no supporting evidence to back it up.”

“How much has been spent on the consultation/proposal?”

“Agreeing to the principle before detail has been developed is very risky. We understand the plans for further consultation, but no legal framework exists for parent and teacher decision-making involvement subsequent to Councillors’ approval.”

“As the chair of the Parent Council, too much of my time and energy has been spent on this process of consultation which has either been incredibly poorly thought out, or Argyll and Bute Council has been disingenuous with some of its proposed costs/impacts.”

“A parent commented, “I would be interested to hear the views of the teaching community. After all, they are the ones with the most experience on education matters, not the parents! It would be useful if there was a mechanism for this at some point in the consultation process”.”

“Gaelic appears to have been an afterthought in the proposal”

“The Parent Council have found this to be a very time consuming process and are concerned that the voices of parents will not be taken into consideration by those promoting the change. There are also concerns that parents have not fully understood why their involvement is important and the implications the change may have on for their children’s education.”

“We now wish to register our strong disappointment in the consultation process undertaken by Argyll and Bute Council. We remain keen to work constructively with the council in a process of genuine engagement, ideally to explore multiple options. At the least, we strongly request that the Community Services committee is not asked to approve proposals until local communities and other stakeholders can genuinely understand what is being proposed for their local area – including cluster groupings, costings and salaries.”

“We feel it was highly inappropriate to expect a Community Council to lead any part of the consultative process. This should have solely fallen upon the Education Department to engage with parents and consult via local meetings, online sessions and one-to-one parent sessions.”

COMMUNITY BODIES: COMMUNITY AND PARENT COUNCILS

LACK OF TRUST

There is a core belief among community groups that these proposals are driven by cost savings and the Council are dishonest to say otherwise.

“It is difficult to understand how the various assertions in the proposals can be sustained without any clear financial plan. The claim in the Council’s report last June that there are no financial implications does not seem credible.”

“The proposal seems to lack any empirical data to base its assumptions on.”

“This set of proposals seems like a defensive move by Argyll and Bute Council after an initial pilot scheme of local clusters was knocked back.”



“In the absence of costings, cluster plans or examples, many members of the school community expressed the fear that the main motive for the proposals is cost savings (especially as cluster plans for Kintyre, Bute and Cowal published in 2021 identified “an annual saving of around £300k”).”

“There has been a lack of transparency and clarity within the process of consultation. Despite detailed modelling having clearly been done to work out that this project is ‘cost neutral’ none of these figures, salaries or the collectives that will have been put through the modelling have been shared.”

“A number of other Community Councils have experienced ‘withholding’ of information when making Freedom of Information requests from Argyll and Bute Council. This has caused great concern amongst parents in our area causing them to doubt the validity of the proposal.”

“An added layer of complexity when none is required. This feels like change for the sake of change. If there are issues with the running of schools, it is at Argyll and Bute Council level and not in the schools.”

“This abrogation of responsibility by Argyll and Bute Council concerned the Community Council. We are not education professionals and putting the Community Council in between the parents and Argyll and Bute Council had the potential to cause serious harm to the reputation and perception of the Community Councils by the local residents.”

“It was wholly inappropriate for the responsibility of engagement to fall on the shoulders of the Community Council. It was not appropriate for a group of unpaid part-time volunteers to have to help coordinate a very complex and sensitive consultation.”

“It was felt that the department was not being open or transparent, or treating parents with respect. People felt that the council hired a marketing company to ‘sell’ the plans to parents, rather than genuinely trying to elicit feedback and honest responses.”

“The Council has not proven, or even stated a case, for why change is needed and, without that background information, we cannot understand the need for change when it appears the purported benefits could be achieved via a less drastic programme of improving the current system rather than making a whole new system.”

COMMUNITY BODIES: COMMUNITY AND PARENT COUNCILS

UNIQUE SCHOOL IDENTITIES

There is widespread belief that Executive Head Teachers would be micromanaging from on high with a remit to make all schools identical, and the power to actually do so.

“There is concern that the individuality of our school may be lost amongst the homogeneity your plan clearly seeks.”

“We are concerned about the risk of interference from above and lack of autonomy at school level if the authority lies with the collective lead. This could also cause a loss of the schools’ individual identity.”

“Each school is unique, with their own values”

“Personalisation will be non-existent”

“Schools don’t need managers, they need role models”

“We cannot have confidence that schools in island and rural areas will not be diminished, and that our communities will not be diminished with them”

“The pastoral care provided by the Head Teacher at a primary school is beyond price and extends far beyond the school gate.”

“One size doesn’t fit all”

“This proposal would, in our view, be likely to have a negative impact on our many excellent Head Teachers who exercise their skills and experience to ensure the highest standards of education are maintained while retaining the unique identity, values and stewardship of their schools.”

“Losing Head Teachers risks undermining the independence, functioning and identity of each school – even if the consultation materials claim that schools would retain their unique character.”

“Control of budgets and decision making by a single Executive Head seems very likely to remove autonomy from Heads of Schools and to dilute school identities.”

“Personalisation of schools will be non-existent as Executive Head won’t know the schools as well as the Head Teacher.”

