

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended

**Overview and guidance for
education authorities
August 2014**

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Links to:

Relevant legislation

- [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)
- [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)

Education Scotland reports on council proposals

- <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/schoolconsultations/index.asp>

Introduction and Overview

This guide has been prepared by Education Scotland to support councils when they propose changes to the school estate. It has been prepared to complement the Statutory Guidance produced by Scottish Government. It summarises the key points set out in the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#). The Act was amended in part 15 of the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#). *The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* received Royal Assent on March 27, 2014 with the majority of part 15 commencing on 1 August 2014.

The amendments to the Act cover the following main areas. The amendments:

- introduce a five year moratorium on consulting on a closure proposal after a decision¹ is made not to implement a closure proposal;
- introduce a requirement to include information about the financial implications of a proposal where a proposal paper relates to a closure proposal;
- place new duties on a council where it is notified of alleged inaccuracies or omissions in its proposal paper;
- make new, more specific, requirements for determining a rural school closure;
- make minor changes to the call-in process, including timescales and extending the role of Education Scotland² to include providing advice on educational aspects of a proposal for Scottish Ministers when Ministers consider whether to issue a call-in notice and to School Closure Review Panels; and
- establish School Closure Review Panels which will be responsible for determining closure cases that have been called in by Scottish Ministers.

The majority of the changes will be implemented from 1 August 2014. However, the School Closure Review Panels will not be in place until early 2015. Until this time, Ministers will continue to determine cases that have been called in.

The transitional arrangements from 1 August 2014 with regards to the five year moratorium and the changed arrangements for rural school closures are as follows.

- The five year moratorium on a closure proposal will come into force where the final decision on a proposal is made after 1 August 2014. A final decision is defined as a decision where a council decides not to proceed with an ongoing proposal or where a Minister determines a council cannot close a school. This means that closure proposals currently underway will be subject to the five year moratorium if the Minister refuses permission to close a school after 1 August 2014.
- With regard to the changed arrangements in relation to rural schools, these will apply only to consultations on the closure of rural schools that commence **after** 1 August 2014.

The Act, as amended, establishes a rigorous, open and transparent system for consulting on school closures and other changes to the school estate as proposed

¹ The Act defines a decision as a decision of the education authority or the School Closure Review Panel, or, until the panels are established, a decision by Scottish Ministers.

² The Act requires that reports are prepared by HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE).

by councils. The Act requires all councils to follow the same basic sequence, the key phases of which are:

- a council makes the decision to consult on a proposal;
- the council prepares a proposal paper, including an educational benefits statement and other required information;
- the council publishes the proposal paper, advertises the fact and notifies Education Scotland and mandatory consultees;
- the council meets certain consultation requirements, including holding a public meeting;
- the consultation ends, after a minimum of six weeks, including at least 30 school days³;
- once the consultation period is complete and upon receipt of relevant papers from the council, HM Inspectors have three weeks⁴ to prepare and finalise a report on the proposal and send it to the council;
- upon receipt of the report from HM Inspectors, the council reviews the proposal having regard to the report by HM Inspectors and representations received during the consultation period and then prepares and publishes a final consultation report; and
- following publication of the final consultation report, the council must allow three weeks to elapse before taking its final decision on the proposal.

If the proposal concerns a school closure, the council must notify Scottish Ministers within the period of six working days after taking its final decision. The council must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and specify the period during which consultees have the opportunity to make representations to Ministers. Once notified, Ministers will be involved in the following way.

- Ministers have a power to call in a closure decision, but only where it appears to Ministers that the council has failed in a significant regard to comply with the Act's requirements or, in coming to its decision, has failed to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the proposal. Ministers have up to eight weeks to decide whether or not to issue a call-in notice.
- During the first three weeks of this period, anyone is able to make representations to Ministers on whether the decision should be called-in.
- During this period, the council may not proceed further, in whole or part, with the proposed closure. Ministers may come to a decision in less than eight weeks (but not before the three weeks for representations to be made to them has elapsed).
- The Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels (once established) the right to call on advice from Education Scotland in relation to a proposal at the call-in or determination stage.

This guide is organised in such a way that it provides an overview and summary of the Act. It also provides a summary of the timeline for consultation and the various activities that take place during the period of consultation.

³ The Act defines a school day as a day on which a school is ordinarily open to pupils for the purpose of their school education.

⁴ The three week period can be extended by agreement between the council and Education Scotland.

Summary of The Act

The overarching objective of the Act and its amendments is to establish consistent consultation practices and procedures across Scotland that apply to all proposals for school closures and other major changes to the school estate. To achieve this, the Act's provisions are three-fold:

1. to establish a coherent and robust, workable, open and transparent consultation process for all school closures and other proposals affecting schools;
2. to ensure that a decision by a council to close a rural school is only taken after the council has taken into account a number of other considerations, explored all reasonable alternatives and assessed the likely implications of the closure; and
3. to establish a system for referring closure decisions to the Scottish Ministers for consent with a power to call in decisions and determine these. In due course, School Closure Review Panels will be introduced to determine closure proposals when Scottish Ministers have called in a proposal.

1. Consultation Process

Proposals requiring consultation

The Act defines ten types of proposal that trigger the consultation process.

Proposals requiring consultation are those where a council proposes to:

- discontinue permanently a school (this includes special schools and nursery schools) or a stage of education in a school (this includes years in a secondary school or a special class in a mainstream school or where the council proposes to discontinue Gaelic medium provision);
- establish a new school or stage of education in a school;
- relocate a school or nursery class;
- vary the catchment area or modify the guidelines for placing requests for a school;
- vary the arrangements for the transfer of pupils⁵ from a primary school to a secondary school;
- change the school commencement date of a primary school;
- vary arrangements for the constitution of a special class in a school other than a special school;
- discontinue arrangements for the provision of transport by the council for pupils attending a denominational school;
- change a denominational school into a non-denominational school; and
- discontinue a further education centre which is managed by the council.

Proposal Paper

The council must publish a proposal paper containing the following:

- details of the proposal;
- proposed date for implementation;

⁵ Throughout, the Act makes reference to pupils rather than children and young people. The use of pupils in this document relates to its specific use within the legislation.

- the educational benefits statement;
- other appropriate supporting evidence or information; and
- a summary of the consultation process.

There are two additional requirements:

- where a proposal relates to closure of a school or stage of education, it must also contain information about the financial implications of the proposal; and
- for rural school closure proposals, it must detail the steps the council has taken to comply with sections 12, 12A and 13 of the Act, as amended.

Educational Benefits Statement⁶

Within the proposal paper, the council must produce an educational benefits statement. The educational benefits statement should set out the council's assessment of the likely educational benefits that it believes will result from implementation of the proposal. The council should set out its assessment of the effects of the proposal (if implemented) on:

- the pupils of any affected school(s);
- other users of the school(s);
- children who would be likely to become pupils at the school(s) within two years of the publication of the proposal paper; and
- other pupils in the council area.

The statement should include an analysis of the following:

- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

It is important that the educational benefits statement sets out clearly the positive benefits that would accrue from implementation of a proposal. It will be important for the council to set out and summarise clearly why it believes implementation of a proposal is of overall benefit to the pupils of the affected school, children who would be likely to become pupils at the school(s) within two years of the publication of the proposal paper and other children and young people in the council area.

Statements of educational benefits prepared under the terms of the Act need to be comprehensive and detailed. They need to be specific to a particular proposal and not rely on generalised assertions. For example, it is not sufficient for a council to say the creation of a larger school will enable it to improve the curriculum. If it makes this claim, a council will need to demonstrate the specific improvements to the curriculum implementation of the proposal will bring.

In setting out the educational benefits of a proposal a council needs to set out clearly and specifically how a proposal will improve outcomes for children and young people and enable them to do their best⁷. This may include how the proposal will help improve levels of children and young people's achievements and broaden the range of opportunities for young people to develop their skills for life, work and learning.

⁶ Education Scotland has produced a self-evaluation toolkit for councils to assist in the preparation of educational benefits statements. For details please see [Annex 2](#).

⁷ Section 3 of the Standards in *Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000* requires councils to endeavour to raise standards and secure improvement in the quality of school education provided in their schools for all learners.

An educational benefits statement that merely states a proposal will be of benefit without setting out clearly the specific benefits implementation of a proposal will bring will be open to criticism.

In preparing educational benefits statements, councils may wish to consider how a proposal will improve the quality of the curriculum and create a more positive environment for effective learning and teaching better matched to the needs of learners. A council may wish to consider the ways in which a proposal will improve the depth, breadth, coherence, relevance, challenge and enjoyment provided by the curriculum. It may also consider the ways in which the proposal creates opportunities for greater personalisation and choice for children and young people with improved continuity and progression in their learning. The proposal may also wish to consider how the proposal will create more opportunities for children and young people to participate in well-judged paired and group activities.

A strong educational benefits statement will set out clearly how approaches for meeting children and young people's learning, personal, social, health and emotional needs will be improved as a result of implementation of the proposal. This will include setting out how implementation of the proposal will improve support for children and young people who require additional support with their learning⁸. In making such cases the council may make reference to relevant legislation such as the requirements of the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* and *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009*.

The council may also wish to consider setting out the positive impact implementation of the proposal will have on the overall morale and ethos of the school, including the care and welfare of children and young people and their personal and social development. A key aspect a council may wish to consider is the positive impact of the proposal on ensuring equality of opportunity for all⁹ within an inclusive educational experience. The council may also wish to set out the ways in which access to improved accommodation and facilities will bring improvements to the environment for learning for children and young people.

Where appropriate, the council may wish to consider how implementation of the proposal will enhance and build leadership and leadership capacity within the schools covered by the proposal and will improve arrangements for planning and taking forward improvements through effective self-evaluation. The council may also wish to consider the ways in which the proposal will improve school improvement planning, partnership working and liaison between schools.

When considering the impact of the proposal on other children and young people in the council area within the educational benefits statements, it is appropriate for a council to take appropriate and relevant account of financial and budgetary considerations¹⁰. This is particularly the case where the costs of the delivery of education may be to the detriment of the quality of education provided to other children and young people in the council area. However, in doing so, the council must set out in an open and transparent way the financial case for the proposal and how it will enable the council to secure best value through the effective, efficient and

⁸ Groups and individuals who may have additional support needs arising from, for example, the learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health needs, or social and emotional factors.

⁹ The proposal may set out how it assists the council to fulfil its duties under a range of equalities legislation such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975*, the *Race Relations Act 1976* and the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*.

¹⁰ Section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requires councils to secure for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education. Section 17 of the Act requires councils to provide sufficient school accommodation.

sustainable use of its resources. Any financial information needs to be accurate, clearly set out and rigorously evidenced. The impact, if any, of implementation of the proposal on the General Revenue Grant needs to be set out clearly.

In assessing the likely benefits and effects on other users, councils will need to take into consideration a range of factors that may vary in scale and from case to case, depending on the particular circumstances and the type of proposal. In many circumstances, the affected groups will not necessarily share a common benefit from what is proposed. In these cases, it is important that the educational benefits statement demonstrates clearly how the council has identified and intends to balance these diverse interests.

Correction of the proposal paper

The amendments to the Act have clarified the duties for councils. Where a council is notified of any alleged inaccuracy or omission in a proposal paper or where an inaccuracy or omission is discovered, the council must investigate and then inform the notifier of its decision and its reasons for reaching its decision. The council should also invite the notifier to make representations to it if the notifier disagrees with the council's decision. Where the omission or inaccuracy relates to a material consideration, the council must take action. This should include:

- publishing a corrected proposal paper;
- sending the corrected paper to Education Scotland; and
- issuing a notice to all consultees correcting the inaccuracy or providing the omitted information.

If it is appropriate, the council may choose to extend or restart the consultation period. The council's final consultation report should set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

Notice and consultation period

The council must give the relevant mandatory consultees notice of the proposal which would include:

- a summary of the proposal, where to get a copy of the proposal paper and how to make written representations;
- the closing date of the consultation, which will be a minimum of 6 weeks to include at least 30 school days; and
- the time, the date and venue of the public meeting, if these are known at the time, otherwise this information must follow in an additional notice.

Consultees

The Act requires that in respect of every proposal, a council must consult:

- the pupils at any of the affected school(s), (in so far as the council considers them to be of a suitable age and maturity);
- the Parent Council(s) of those affected school(s);
- the parents of pupils and children, including those expected by the council to attend any affected school within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and
- all staff (teaching and other) at the school, including relevant trade unions and professional associations.

For certain categories of proposal, authorities must consult other relevant people or groups. These include persons authorised by the relevant church or denominational body (where the school is a denominational school), community councils and community planning partnerships (where there is a direct community interest in the proposal), Bòrd na Gàidhlig (where the proposal affects Gaelic medium education). The council must also consult such other users of any affected school as the council considers relevant, but only in cases of proposals to close, establish or relocate provision. These may include adult users of the school's educational facilities, community users of the buildings or users of the sports facilities both indoor and outdoor. Finally, the council must also consult such other councils as it considers relevant.

Public Meeting

The council must hold and be present at a public meeting and give advance notice of the date, time and venue of the meeting to relevant consultees and Education Scotland. It is not a legal requirement for HM Inspectors to attend the public meeting. However, when HM Inspectors attend, they do so solely as an observer and should not be drawn into discussion or debate. The responsibility for conducting the public meeting rests solely with the council.

Involvement of Education Scotland

The Act requires that reports are prepared by HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) working for Education Scotland. HM Inspectors have three weeks to consider the educational aspects of a council's proposal and submit a report to the council. The three-week period may be extended in by agreement between the council and HM Inspectors. Although not specified in the legislation, week one of the three-week period should be during term time. This approach enables HM Inspectors to visit schools as part of their consideration of the proposal and to meet with children, young people, staff and parents who may be affected by the proposal.

The three week period commences on the day Education Scotland receives the relevant papers from the council, **not** from the last day of the initial consultation period. The relevant papers the council should provide to Education Scotland include:

- a copy of the proposal paper;
- copies of the written representations, or, if HM Inspectors agree, a summary of them;
- a summary of oral representations made at the public meeting; and
- any other related documentation.

Upon receipt of the proposal paper and other relevant documentation, HM Inspectors will consider the educational aspects of the proposal. HM Inspectors will ensure that their report has regard to:

- the educational benefits statement;
- the representations received by the council; and
- any further written representations made directly to Education Scotland on any educational aspect of the proposal which is considered relevant.

The Act reinforces the powers of HM Inspectors to enter schools and make such enquiries as are considered appropriate. The Act requires the council to consider

the report from HM Inspectors and then prepare its final consultation report. The consultation report must include the report from HM Inspectors in full.

Consultation report

The Act requires the council to consider the report from HM Inspectors and then prepare its final consultation report. The council must publish its final consultation report after the end of the consultation period and receipt of the report from HM Inspectors. It is important that a council gives itself sufficient time to consider the report from HM Inspectors and other responses to the consultation before preparing its final consultation report. The final consultation report must contain:

- an explanation of how the council has reviewed the proposal;
- the report in full from Education Scotland;
- a summary of points raised during the consultation – both written and oral – and the council's response to them;
- the substance of any alleged inaccuracies and details of the council's response and any action taken; and
- any omitted information.

For rural school closure proposals, the council is required to give its assessment, following consultation, of the proposal in terms of the three factors it is required to take into account. This is required both for the proposal and any reasonable alternatives, including those proposed through the consultation. The council must then confirm whether, and if so, why, it considers the proposal (wholly or partly) as the most appropriate response to the reasons it identified for bringing forward the proposal.

Additional time for consideration

The council cannot take a decision on a proposal until three weeks have elapsed from the date it publishes its final consultation report.

2. Rural School Closures

The Act establishes a presumption that no rural school will be proposed for closure (nor even the consultation process commenced) unless and until a number of factors have been taken into account as part of a preliminary consideration. However, this does not mean that rural schools cannot be proposed for closure as there will be circumstances in which that is the right or only course of action.

Before proposing to close any rural school, the council must identify its reasons for formulating the proposal. It must also consider if there are any reasonable alternatives to closure of the school. Reasonable alternatives include steps that would result in the school or stage of education remaining open. In formulating a closure proposal on a rural school, the council must assess for the proposal, and each of the alternatives to the proposal, the likely educational benefits of the proposal and the alternatives, the effect on the local community, and the effect of any different travelling arrangements. The council may only publish a proposal paper to discontinue the school or stage of education if it considers that implementation of the proposal is the most appropriate course of action.

In its proposal paper, the council must:

- explain the reasons for the closure;
- describe what steps, if any, it took to address those reasons before formulating the proposal and, if it did not take such steps, explain why it did not do so;
- set out any alternatives to the proposal identified by the council; and
- explain the council's assessment of these alternatives and the reason why the council considers implementation of the proposal is the most appropriate course of action.

In reviewing the proposal and preparing its final consultation report, the council needs to carry out a further assessment of the proposal and each of the alternatives set out within it. If, during the consultation period, the council receives written representations on other reasonable alternatives, it must, for each of them, assess the likely educational benefits of the proposal and the alternatives, the effect on the local community, and the effect of any different travelling arrangements.

The Scottish Government maintains a rural school list that lists all those schools that are considered to be rural schools for the purposes of the Act.

3. Ministerial Call-In

If the proposal relates to the closure of a school or stage of education, the council must notify Scottish Ministers within the period of six working days after taking its final decision. The council must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and of the period during which consultees have the opportunity to make representations to Ministers. For rural school closures, a council must also give notice of the reasons why the council is satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for bringing forward the proposal.

Once notified, Ministers will be involved in the following way.

- Ministers have a power to call in a closure decision, but only where it appears to Ministers that the council has failed in a significant regard to comply with the Act's requirements or, in coming to its decision, has failed to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the proposal. Ministers have up to eight weeks from the date of the council's decision to decide whether or not to issue a call-in notice.
- During the first three weeks of this period, anyone is able to make representations to Ministers on whether the decision should be called-in.
- During the call-in period, the council may not proceed further, in whole or part, with the proposed closure. Ministers may come to a decision sooner than eight weeks (but not before the three weeks for representations to be made to them has elapsed).
- The Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels (once established) the right to call on advice from Education Scotland in relation to a proposal at the call-in or determination stage.

As a safeguard for the continued provision of denominational education local authorities must submit for Ministerial consent proposals which fall to be considered under section 22C and 22D of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*. The 2010 Act

revoked sections 22A and 22B, but left sections 22C and 22D untouched. Specific criteria apply in both sections before a proposal would fall to be considered.

- Section 22C requires an education authority to submit for Ministers' consent a proposal which, if implemented, will have the effect that all or some of the pupils who attend the school will no longer receive school education in a denominational school, or that all or some of the children who would, but for the implementation of the proposal, have been likely to receive their education in a denominational school will not receive education in a denominational school.
- Section 22D requires an education authority to submit for Ministers' consent a proposal which relates to a change to a denominational school eg closure, amalgamation; and the church disagree with the proposal and after consultation with the authority and the church that the proposal if implemented would result in a significant deterioration for pupils in the local authority area (or to pupils belonging to the area of any other authority) in the provision, distribution and availability of school education in denominational schools compared with the provision, distribution and availability of other public schools.

Ministers will consider such a referral separately to their call-in powers under the 2010 Act and, if required, grant or withhold consent to a closure proposal under sections 22C or 22D of the 1980 Act.

Annex 1 Consultations Timeline

The Act requires a report from Education Scotland in the case of **every** proposal requiring consultation. The council and Area Lead Officer¹¹ will need to work together closely in agreeing the three week period for the completion of the report by HM Inspectors. Such an approach enables Education Scotland to plan the efficient, effective and proportionate deployment of its resources to meet its duties as set out in the Act. This is particularly important with regard to reaching agreement with the council with regard to the three week period within which HM Inspectors must complete their report. The following table sets out a timeline for the various phases¹² of the consultation process.

Phase One: A council consults on a proposal – lasts a minimum of six weeks, including at least 30 school days

The council has to:

- prepare a proposal paper, including an educational benefits statement and other required information¹³;
- publish the proposal paper, advertise the fact and notify Education Scotland and mandatory consultees;
- give the relevant mandatory consultees notice of the proposal which would include:
 - a summary of the proposal, where to get a copy of the proposal paper and how to make written representations; and
 - the closing date of the consultation, which will be a minimum of six weeks to include at least 30 school days.
- give advance notice of the date, time and venue of the public meeting to relevant consultees and Education Scotland;
- investigate and determine what action is required where an inaccuracy or an omission in the proposal paper is alleged or discovered;
- conclude the consultation, after a minimum of six weeks, including at least 30 school days; and
- provide Education Scotland with a copy of the proposal paper, copies of the written representations, or, if HM Inspectors agree, a summary of them, a summary of oral representations made at the public meeting and any other related documentation.

Phase Two: Involvement of Education Scotland - within three weeks HM Inspectors finalise their report

The three week period commences on the day Education Scotland receives the relevant papers from the council, **not** from the last day of the initial consultation period. At this stage, HM Inspectors will consider the proposal, including:

- the educational benefits statement;
- the representations received by the council;
- any further written representations made directly to Education Scotland on any

¹¹ The Area Lead Officer is the HM Inspector who links with an individual council.

¹² The Act does not specify phases. The term is used in this summary for ease of use and clarity.

¹³ Before consulting on a proposal to close a [rural school](#) a council must give itself sufficient time to identify its reasons for formulating the proposal and consider if there are any reasonable alternatives to closure of the school.

<p>educational aspect of the proposal which is considered relevant; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finalising a report within three weeks and sending it to the council.
<p>Phase Three: Consultation Report - within no specified timescale, the council prepares and publishes a final consultation report</p>
<p>The council publishes its final consultation report. It is important that a council gives itself sufficient time to consider the report from HM Inspectors and other responses to the consultation before preparing and finalising its final consultation report. It must contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an explanation of how it has reviewed the proposal; • the report from HM Inspectors in full; • a summary of points raised during the consultation – both written and oral – and the council’s response to them; and • the substance of any alleged or discovered inaccuracies and omissions details of the council’s response and the action taken. <p>For rural school closure proposals, within the final consultation report the council needs to carry out a further assessment of the proposal and each of the alternatives set out within it. If, during the consultation period, the council receives written representations on other reasonable alternatives, it must, for each of them, assess the likely educational benefits of the proposal and the alternatives, the effect on the local community, and the effect of any different travelling arrangements.</p>
<p>Phase Four: Council Decision - a minimum of three weeks after the publication of the consultation report the council publishes its final decision</p>
<p>The council takes its final decision on the proposal and implements the decision. However, where the council makes a closure decision, it must notify Scottish Ministers within six working days of making the decision, starting with the day on which the decision is made, and send a copy of the proposal paper. The council must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and of the period during which consultees have the opportunity to make representations to Ministers.</p>
<p>Phase Five: Call-in and determination in the event of a closure decision</p>
<p>Ministers have the power to call in decisions, but only in relation to school closure decisions and where it appears to Ministers that the council has failed in a significant regard to comply with the Act’s requirements or, in coming to its decision, has failed to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the proposal. Ministers have up to eight weeks to decide whether or not to issue a call-in notice. The Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels (once established) the right to call on advice from HM Inspectors in relation to a proposal at the call-in or determination stage.</p>

Annex 2

Self-evaluation toolkit

This self-evaluation toolkit has been prepared by Education Scotland to assist councils in the preparation of educational benefits statements¹⁴ within proposals taken forward by councils under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* as amended. It sets out the key features of best practice and poses a series of reflective questions. It should not be seen as a prescriptive list. An education benefits statement need not contain references to all areas covered by this toolkit. However, neither should the toolkit limit the range of factors that a council may deem to be relevant in the case of a particular proposal. It is intended to provide support to council officers when developing, preparing and reviewing educational benefits statements. Statements of educational benefits prepared under the terms of the Act need to be comprehensive and detailed. They also need to be specific to a particular proposal and not rely on generalised assertions.

Key features of best practice	Reflective question
Statements of educational benefits prepared under the terms of the Act are comprehensive and detailed.	To what extent is the educational benefits statement comprehensive and detailed?
The benefits accruing from a proposal are specific to a particular proposal and do not rely on generalised assertions.	How well does the proposal set out the specific benefits that will accrue from implementation of the proposal?
The proposal sets out how it will help improve outcomes for children and young people and enable them to do their best ¹⁵ .	How well does the proposal set out how it will improve outcomes for children and young people?
The proposal sets out how it will help broaden the range of opportunities for young people to achieve and develop their skills for life, work and learning.	In what ways will the proposal help improve young people's achievements? How well does the proposal make a case for broadening the range of opportunities for children and young people?
The proposal indicates the ways in which the curriculum will be improved and gives due attention to the principles of challenge, enjoyment, breadth, continuity, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance.	What specific improvements to the curriculum will result from the proposal? For example, to what extent does the proposal make a case for improving the curriculum with regard to the breadth, range and depth of children and young people's learning, including continuity and progression in their learning?

¹⁴ The toolkit applies to Educational Benefits Statements as they apply to all schools and pre-school centres.

¹⁵ Section 3 of the Standards in *Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000* requires councils to endeavour to raise standards and secure improvement in the quality of school education provided in their schools for all learners.

<p>The proposal indicates the ways in which learners' experiences, including involving learners more actively in their own learning and development will be enhanced.</p>	<p>How will the proposal improve the overall quality of children and young people's learning experiences, including enabling them to be active in their own learning and development? How well does the proposal make it clear that learners will benefit from improved learning experiences with, for example, increased opportunities to work together in pairs, groups and teams?</p>
<p>The proposal sets out clearly how approaches for meeting children and young people's personal, social, health and emotional needs will be improved.</p>	<p>In what ways will the proposal improve approaches for meeting children and young people's needs? For example, to what extent does the proposal set out clearly how it will improve approaches for meeting children and young people's personal, social, health and emotional needs and enhance their personal and social development?</p>
<p>The proposal sets out clearly how arrangements for meeting children and young people's learning needs, particularly for those who require additional support with their learning will be improved¹⁶.</p>	<p>In what ways will the proposal improve arrangements for meeting children and young people's learning needs? How well does the proposal set out clearly how arrangements for meeting the needs of all learners and addressing potential barriers to learning will be improved, including for those who require additional support with their learning?</p>
<p>The proposal sets out clearly the positive impact it will have on enhancing equality of opportunity for all within an inclusive educational experience.</p>	<p>To what extent does the proposal set out clearly how it will enhance equality of opportunity for all within an inclusive educational experience?</p>
<p>The proposal sets out the ways in which the environment for learning for children and young people will be improved, particularly through access to improved accommodation and facilities.</p>	<p>In what ways will the proposal improve the environment for learning? How well does the proposal set out clearly how improvements to accommodation and facilities will improve the environment for children</p>

¹⁶ Groups and individuals who may have additional support needs arising from, for example, the learning environment, family circumstances, disability or health needs, or social and emotional factors. In making such cases the council may make reference to relevant legislation such as the requirements of the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* and *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009*.

	and young people's learning?
The proposal sets out how it may have a possible positive impact on the overall morale and ethos of the school.	In what ways will implementation of the proposal improve the overall morale and ethos of the school? How well does the proposal set this out?
The proposal sets out the ways in which leadership, leadership capacity and arrangements for planning and taking forward improvements through effective self-evaluation will be enhanced and improved.	To what extent does the proposal set out clearly how the proposal will enhance leadership, build leadership capacity and/or improve arrangements for planning and taking forward improvements through effective self-evaluation?
The proposal sets out the way in which partnership working and liaison between parents, other schools and possible partners will be improved.	In what ways will the proposal improve partnership working and liaison? To what extent does the proposal set out clearly how it will improve partnership working and liaison with parents, other schools and other possible partners?
The proposal sets out in an open and transparent way the case for securing best value ¹⁷ through the effective and efficient use of the council's resources ¹⁸ .	To what extent does the proposal set out the case for securing best value through the effective and efficient use of the council's resources in an open and transparent way?
Any financial information is accurate, clearly set out and rigorously evidenced.	Is financial information accurate, clearly set out and rigorously evidenced?
If appropriate, the proposal needs to set out clearly an assessment of the impact of the proposal on the General Revenue Grant that the council may receive in future.	How well does the proposal set out clearly an assessment of the impact of the proposal on the General Revenue Grant that the council may receive in future?
The proposal sets out clearly how the council will monitor the impact of its implementation?	How well does the proposal set out the council's arrangements for monitoring the impact of the proposal to ensure it leads to sustained educational benefits?
Rural school factors	

¹⁷ *The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003* and the 2004 statutory guidance set out the duties councils have to secure best value in the delivery of services.

¹⁸ Section 1 of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980* requires councils to secure for their area adequate and efficient provision of school education. Section 17 of the Act requires councils to provide sufficient school accommodation.

<p>The proposal clearly demonstrates that the council has identified its reasons for formulating the proposal and has considered fully reasonable alternatives to the closure of the school before consulting on the closure of the school.</p>	<p>To what extent does the proposal demonstrate that the council has given reasonable consideration to reasonable alternatives to the closure of the school? Is it clear that the council only published its proposal paper after establishing that implementation of the proposal was the most appropriate course of action?</p>
<p>The proposal demonstrates that the council has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explained the reasons for the closure; • described what steps, if any, it has taken to address these reasons before formulating the proposal and, if it did not take such steps, explain why it did not do so; • set out any alternatives to the proposal identified by the council, and explained the council's assessment of these alternatives and the reason why the council considered implementation of the proposal as the most appropriate course of action. 	<p>To what extent does the proposal explain the council's reasons for the closure? How well does the proposal describe the steps taken by the council to address the reasons for closure? Does the proposal set out alternatives to closure the school? How well does the council explain its assessment of these alternatives? How valid is the council's assessment that closure of the school is the most appropriate course of action?</p>
<p>The proposal carefully considers the likely impact on the local community of the school's closure. This may include a community impact assessment.</p>	<p>How well has the council assessed the impact of the closure of the school on the local community? For example, the impact on the sustainability of the community, the role the school plays in the community and on the community's access to and use of the buildings, grounds and facilities if the school were to close.</p>
<p>The proposal sets out clearly the council's consideration of the impact of the travelling arrangements for those children and young people directly affected by implementation of the proposal.</p>	<p>How well does the proposal explore and set out the impact of the revised travel arrangements on children and young people? For example, any increases in the length of time required to travel to school and the possible impact of adverse weather on the closure of routes to schools.</p>

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