Consultation Document on the Rural Schools (Scotland) Bill:
A proposal to introduce a presumption against the closure of rural schools.

21st January 2008
INTRODUCTION

I believe that Scotland’s rural schools serve children very well in both educational and social development terms. Additionally, such schools are often a linchpin in sustaining community life in many of the remoter parts of the country. However, having monitored the situation over the last few years and received many representations from families and the wider communities affected, it appears to me that many rural schools are being closed inappropriately. On a Scotland-wide level, too many are being lost each year.

I believe that the current legislative framework governing school closure decisions is too lax and requires reform. South of the border there is a “presumption against closure of rural schools” laid down by central government. In my view, a similar legislative presumption should be introduced in Scotland. To this end, I have launched this document in order to consult on a series of measures, with a view to incorporating them into a Member’s Bill for introduction to the Scottish Parliament.

Should this Bill be passed, my hope is that –in significantly more cases– a local authority’s initial tendency towards closure will be headed off and a school will remain open. This might be because the authority perceives the closure process as no longer being as stacked in its favour as it is now and so decides not to embark upon that process at all. Equally, it could be because a more meaningful consultation process has allowed it to see parents’ viewpoints better. In other cases still, the school could have remained open simply because of new powers for Ministers to intervene.

Like parents, I am less concerned with how a decision is taken than with ensuring that it is the correct one. In saying that, I also wish to see change in cases where preserving the status quo is genuinely not a realistic option. Even if a school really has to close, parents should take away at the end of the process a feeling of being listened to and they should, as far as possible, have been persuaded that the closure has its merits and that all alternatives have been considered.

I must finally acknowledge the assistance given to me by the Scottish Rural Schools Network in preparing this consultation. Its work, alongside that of other community campaigners and indeed individual MSPs of all political parties has been crucial in bringing the debate about rural schools to the stage where a favourable outcome seems achievable.

MURDO FRASER MSP
Responding to this consultation

Please send your response to this consultation to:

**Mail**
Murdo Fraser, MSP,
Room M2.17,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh,
EH99 1SP.

**Email**
murdo.fraser.msp@scottish.parliament.uk

**Telephone**
(0131) 348 5293

**Fax**
(0131) 348 5934

The consultation will run for 12 weeks from 21st January 2008; responses should therefore be received by 14th April 2008.

This document is being sent to the consultees listed in Annex B. You are welcome to pass a copy of this consultation to any other organizations or individuals that you believe would be interested in responding.

To help inform debate on the matters covered by this paper and in the interests of openness it is intended all the responses submitted on this consultation document will be made public. You should therefore be aware that by submitting this response you are indicating consent to the publication of all the material contained in your response. Unless you indicate otherwise this will include your name and address and any other biographical information you have provided about yourself. You should note that personal data referring to third parties included in the response cannot be accepted without explicit written consent from the third party. This consent should be provided with your response.

We are not entitled to process your personal data by publication without your consent. If therefore you want parts of your response to remain confidential please indicate which parts are not for publication. Similarly, if you wish all of the contents of your response to be treated in confidence and not made public then please indicate so.

All responses will be included in any summary or statistical analysis, which does not identify individual responses.
1. BACKGROUND

Scotland’s rural schools

1.1 Rural areas of Scotland are currently classified by the Scottish Government as settlements of fewer than 3,000 people. They are further subdivided:

| Accessible Rural | Settlements of fewer than 3,000 people within 30 minutes’ drive of a settlement of 10,000 or more |
| Remote Rural     | Settlements of fewer than 3,000 people that are over 30 minutes’ drive from a settlement of 10,000 or more. |

1.2 Using this definition, there are 902 primary schools, 86 secondary schools and three special schools in rural areas in Scotland.¹

1.3 These schools make up respectively 41%, 23% and 1.6% of all schools in each category in Scotland.²

1.4 As of 2006, 110,858 pupils (or 16% of all pupils going to local authority schools) are educated in rural schools.³

Table 1.2 – Comparative size of rural schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th></th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of teachers per school (FTE)</td>
<td>No. of pupils per school</td>
<td>No. of teachers per school (FTE)</td>
<td>No. of pupils per school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Urban</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>254.0</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>928.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Urban</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>263.5</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>963.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Small Towns</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>256.7</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>852.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote Small Towns</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>256.3</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>735.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Rural</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>874.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote Rural</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>202.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>185.2</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>817.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Email from Scottish Government to A. Rae, 31st July 2007. However, it should be noted that the Rural Schools Network suggests that the true number is much lower and the figure has been skewed by errors in the post-code software used to compile it.
³ Pupils in Scotland, Scottish Executive, February 2007, p.12, Table 1.3.
Reasons for closures
1.5 There are a number of factors that might prompt a local authority to consider closing a rural school, viz.:

- A declining or ageing local population
- Difficulties in recruiting staff to work in the (remote) area in question;
- The establishment/expansion of another settlement nearby to the degree where a new school is better built there, closing the one in the original village;
- Financial pressure to close the school. This may be:
  i) to cut overheads in the name of efficiency; or
  ii) because the building is deemed to be out-of-date or dilapidated and rectifying the problems or replacing the building is deemed financially prohibitive.

Rate of closures
1.6 Between 1998 and 2006, 71 rural schools closed in Scotland. This is an average of 8 per year.\(^4\)

1.7 In England, since the presumption against closure was introduced in 1998, rural schools have closed at a much reduced rate: only three per year on average in what is a far larger schools system.\(^5\)

2. CURRENT LEGISLATIVE POSITION

2.1 Local authorities have a general duty to provide “adequate and efficient” school education.\(^6\) It is their responsibility to organise the school building infrastructure covering their area and they have the power to close such buildings, subject to certain conditions. The authority might close several schools as part of a merger or simply close a single school outright. The procedure is the same in each case and also applies to the ending of provision of a stage of education e.g. the secondary wing of an “all-through” primary-secondary school or even just removing a single form.

2.2 The conditions are that the local authority must consult the public on its proposal before finalising its decision and, in certain cases, it must receive the consent of Scottish Government Ministers to proceed. The skeleton of these conditions is imposed by the Education (Scotland) Act 1981.\(^7\) and the detail of them is contained in Government regulations.\(^8\)

2.3 The local authority must notify every parent and/or guardian of children who attend (or are due to attend) the school concerned about the proposal. The authority is required to give details in outline only. Parents, school councils (where they exist) and the church/denominational body (in the cases of affiliated schools) are given a minimum of 28 days to respond.

2.4 Local authorities are required to have “due regard” to responses to their consultation before making their final decision on whether a closure will go ahead (see paragraph 4.6).\(^9\)

---

\(^4\) Scottish Parliament answer S2W-28604, Peter Peacock MSP (then Minister for Education and Young People)
\(^5\) Memoranda submitted to meeting of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, DfES and Defra, 8th April 2003
\(^6\) under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980
\(^7\) Sections 22A-D
\(^9\) Section 22A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980
2.5 Scottish Executive and Scottish Office guidance\textsuperscript{10} is in place to influence how local authorities meet their legislative requirements. This is ambiguous in places.

2.6 If, after the statutory consultation exercise, a local authority decides to close a school there is a requirement for referral to Ministers if any of the following apply:

**Distance:**
Closure would result in any pupil having to travel more than five miles (in the case of primary schools) or 10 miles (in the case of secondary schools) to their new school.

**Capacity:**
The roll of the school is sitting at more than 80\% of its capacity (of which there is no standard measure and which the local authorities set).

**Access to denominational schooling**
Some or all of the pupils concerned will not be able to attend a school affiliated to the same religion/religious denomination as the school in question.

3. THE BENEFITS/ADVANTAGES OF RURAL SCHOOLS

3.1 The closure of a rural school generally results in its pupils being transferred into a larger school located in a less remote settlement, with the school building falling out of public use.

\emph{i) Pupils’ education}

3.2 The Scottish Executive indicates that there is a link between educational attainment of pupils and the rurality of their school.

3.3 According to the Scottish Executive, “the broad conclusion is that attainment in remote and accessible rural primary schools alike is slightly higher than in other schools. Any urban/rural link is most noticeable in writing. For pupils in secondary schools, attainment during S4 appears highest in remote rural schools and lowest in schools in large urban areas.”\textsuperscript{11}

3.4 The Scottish Rural Schools Network has used the Angus local authority area as the basis for more in-depth analysis.\textsuperscript{12} It looked at the proportion of pupils attaining the relevant 5-14 attainment level. The results show that small schools in remote rural areas significantly outperform their rivals.

\textsuperscript{10} Circular No. 1074, Scottish Office Education Department (SEED), 1981; Circular No. 1174 SEED, 1988; Additional Guidance on Local Authority Proposals for the School Estate, including School Closures (Circular 2), Scottish Executive Education Dept., 2004

\textsuperscript{11} Social Focus on Urban and Rural Scotland (Edinburgh: Scottish Executive, 2003), p. 22

\textsuperscript{12} Email from Rural Schools Network (RSN) to Murdo Fraser 10-09-07. RSN has categorised the individual school results in \textit{Attainment Information for Parents of Children in Angus Primary Schools 2003-2005}, Angus Council (www.angus.gov.uk/atoz/pdfs/ednleaflets/attainmentprimary.pdf, 10\textsuperscript{th} September 2007)
Table 3.1 — 5-14 attainment in Angus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remote rural schools with fewer than 100 pupils</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>87.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All schools</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
<td>83.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 There is a clearer link between attending a rural school and going on to higher education. Out of every 100 school leavers, six more go on to higher education from remote rural schools than from the average Scottish school.\(^{13}\)

**Small classes**

3.6 The issue of smaller classes has been subject to most study and there is now a reasonable body of research from which to draw. The new Scottish Government has used this to substantiate its policy of having reduced class sizes as one of its top priorities. Everything else being equal, smaller classes obviously allow pupils more access to individual attention and enable teachers to mark and prepare lessons more thoroughly and to become more familiar with individual pupils’ needs.

**Composite classes**

3.7 The Scottish Council for Research in Education literature review of research on composite classes found that “it seems reasonable to conclude that at least in Europe there is no evidence to show that composite classes affect pupils’ progress adversely. They may even gain socially from the experience”.\(^{14}\) Therefore, a common criticism of rural schools –that they have more composite classes– appears to be baseless.

**Small/rural nature of school itself**

3.8 There are many benefits in attending smaller schools. Pupils are well known to staff, especially the school management, meaning that the curriculum can be tailored more to their needs, and, equally, that there is not likely to be over-reliance on standardised routines or rules. Pupils are also given a morale boost by the fact that they are more “visible” within the school and that they are being asked to work hard by people whom they know and respect.\(^{15}\) As the Whitehall Department for Education and Skills (as it was then known) has explained, the pupils in small schools can go about their work with a “sense of security” which would presumably be less likely to exist in a larger institution.\(^{16}\)

**iii) Maintaining fragile rural communities**

3.9 While the interests of pupils should be considered paramount, the practical ramifications for the wider community are also important. When a rural school closes, villagers lose a focus for community interaction and a building that is often their only facility for community events. When a school closes it is unlikely that it will be purchased back or a new facility built in the village, even if needs or policies change in future. Furthermore, young families feel pressured to move away and there can be a knock-on effect on other services such as the closure of shops, post offices and other local authority facilities. The end result is that

---

\(^{13}\) Scottish Parliament written question S2W-7136 (Data is for 2002/03). The percentages are: remote rural – 37%, accessible rural – 34%, Scotland – 31%.


\(^{15}\) Expanded upon in the works of Prof. Ted Sizer, U.S. educationalist and formerly holder of the education chair at Brown University and the Deanship of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

\(^{16}\) *Individuals count: The small schools model*, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Education and Skills
community cohesion suffers, depopulation is made more likely and access to facilities becomes more difficult.

3.10 The Executive/COSLA School Estate Strategy\textsuperscript{17} emphasises the role of the school in being a community “hub” providing services for community members who are neither pupils nor parents. However, it is not clear that this is being borne out on the ground.

4. DIFFICULTIES WITH THE CURRENT CLOSURE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

4.1 The Scottish Government and its public bodies place requirements on local authorities, including a great number that have an effect on school education. It falls on local authorities to judge a compromise between these priorities.

4.2 The main competing priorities are as follows:-

On the one hand:
- The increasing demands on local authority budgets from areas outside of education;
- The use of school occupancy levels as “performance indicators” against which local authorities are judged. Additionally, the more general duty\textsuperscript{18} to secure “best value”;
- Emphasis placed on the importance of modern, well equipped buildings;

And on the other hand:
- Promoting the development of rural communities and the rural economy, in which rural schools are acknowledged as a key part.
- Cutting class sizes, and increasing the number of classrooms and teachers.
- The need to heed the wishes of parents

4.3 The threat of closure is more acute for rural schools, where lack of economies of scale and other extra costs associated with maintaining a rural service come into the equation, making cost pressures a more decisive factor.

4.4 In Scotland, a local authority decides whether its own proposal to close a school will go ahead. In only a few cases does the Scottish Government have a veto on closure.

4.5 Generally, the only check that all the facts and the views of affected parties are taken into account is the statutory requirement to have a consultation. The local authority is free to frame this and, subject to the aforementioned legislation, to manage it as it sees fit. Much to parents’ distress, consultations often appear to be seen by local authorities as simply a hurdle over which they must jump on the way to a pre-determined conclusion.

4.6 Furthermore, although local authorities are theoretically required\textsuperscript{19} to have “due regard” to responses to their consultation in making their final decision, legislation does not set out what “due regard” entails and there is no easy mechanism for judging whether it has been given.

Use of Capacity Figures

\textsuperscript{17} Building our Future, Scotland’s School Estate, Scottish Executive and COSLA, February 2003
\textsuperscript{18} under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003
\textsuperscript{19} Section 22A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980
4.7 The added cost of maintaining a rural school is assessed largely by the extent to which the roll is under the notional maximum number of pupils that could be accommodated. Audit Scotland regards 61-100% as properly occupied and use occupancy as one of the annual performance indicators against which local authorities are judged. As a result, an occupancy level of 60% has been explicitly put "as being a realistic focus on the potential for rationalisation".20

4.8 The method for assessing the capacity of a school is left to discretion of the relevant local authority. It may be tempted to err on the high side in order to bolster the case for closure or even to bring a school under the 80% capacity threshold where ministerial consent is required for closure. Additionally, some capacity figures may simply be out-of-date. "Excess capacity" might simply be due to a couple of unused classrooms, which add little to a school's overheads.21

5. THE PRESUMPTION AGAINST CLOSURE IN ENGLAND

5.1 South of the border, there exists a “presumption against closure of rural schools”. This is laid down in the guidance issued to local authorities by central government.22

5.2 Since the presumption against closure was introduced in 1998, on average only three rural schools have closed per year.23 In the 15 years prior to the presumption, an average of 30 rural schools closed per year in England.24

5.3 A list of designated rural primary schools against which the presumption operates has been compiled. It was decided that individually assessing schools to decide whether they were “rural” and therefore subject to the presumption was the best approach to an admittedly difficult question.

5.4 Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance requires local authorities to show that they have considered:

- The transport implications of rural school closures, including the welfare and safety of the children, the recurrent cost to the LEA of transporting pupils to schools further away, the quality and availability of transport links to the alternative provision, the effects on road traffic congestion, and the environmental costs of pupils travelling further to schools.

- The overall and long-term impact on local people and the community of closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility.

- Alternatives to closure including the potential for federation with another local school to increase the school’s viability; the scope for “extended school” or “children’s centre” status to provide local community services and

21 See for example Professor Neil Kay, The Accounts Commission and School Closures21 (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde, November 2005) Scottish Parliament ref. ED/S2/06/18/3
22 Guidance on Statutory Proposals for Decision Makers (SOCs and Schools Adjudicators), DfES (a rolling document)
23 Memoranda submitted to meeting of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee of the House of Commons, DfES and Defra, 8th April 2003
facilities e.g. child care facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc.

5.5 England has more robust structures for considering these decisions. For the past few years, each English local authority area has had a School Organisation Committee (SOC) comprising five or six groups representing stakeholders in education provision. An SOC had to reach a unanimous decision in order to approve or reject a proposed school closure. If a decision was not reached, the proposal was passed to a Schools Adjudicator. England has 11 Schools Adjudicators who are public appointees who operate independently of Whitehall and local government. While SOCs have now been abolished, this decision “should be seen in the overall context of changes to the local decision making regime, particularly the role of the LA as commissioner and guarantor of educational provision in the area rather than direct provider … The authority, assisted by the Schools Commissioner, will have a duty to promote choice, diversity and fair access and respond to parental demand”\textsuperscript{25}. Such changes have not taken place in Scotland.

5.6 A Small Schools Fund of £80m a year operated alongside the SOCs. The fund was created to enable schools to unite to pay for teacher training, IT equipment, support staff and joint lessons.

6. POSSIBLE AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN SCOTLAND

6.1 Tighten the criteria for referring final closure decision to Ministers, even to the point of returning to the situation where every case was referred or alternatively giving the community the right of appealing to the Scottish Government; or

6.2 A specially convened body which operates independently not only of the local authority but also of the Scottish Government.

6.3 Reforming the consultation procedure itself. For example, there could be put in place a stronger requirement for a local authority to consider the effect on the community of closure and the alternatives to closure and to clearly demonstrate that it had done so. Again, it may be worthwhile to look south of the Border, with the rules detailed in paragraph 5.4 perhaps being a useful model. It may also be desirable to insist that certain aspects of the consultation are put on a more formal basis, as there has been criticism of local authorities persisting with consultation on a strictly informal basis too long into the process.

6.4 There may be merit in laying down an unambiguous statement in legislation to avoid the over-reliance on capacity figures in deciding whether a school should be closed.

6.5 A Scottish Rural Schools Support Fund may be desirable. Local communities would get together with headteachers to apply for funding from such a fund, which would be administered by the Scottish Government. As little as £5m p.a. could have a large effect. Eligible uses for the money could be:

- Rectifying deficiencies in the school building;
- Subsidising the ongoing running costs of the school

\textsuperscript{25} School Organization Changes: Frequent Questions, Department for Children Schools and Families (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg/faqs.cfm?id=41, 4 January 2008).
- Facilitating the sharing of expertise, facilities and teaching materials so that schools can get the required use out of resources without being expected to bear their full cost.

Since school closures are often financially driven, being able to access such a fund could prevent the school from being put up for closure in the first place or provide a solution allowing threatened schools to be retained.

QUESTIONS

1. What would be an appropriate appeals mechanism for those objecting to the closure of schools?

2. What consultation criteria should apply to authorities who are considering rural school closures?

3. How much weight should be given to school capacity figures in reaching closure decisions?

4. If a Scottish Rural Schools Support Fund is established, how could it best be used?

5. What weight should be given to the effect of a school closure on the community generally?

6. Are there any issues which arise from this proposal? In particular, are there any equality issues which arise?

7. What are the cost implications of these proposals?

Please send your response to this consultation to:

Mail: Murdo Fraser, MSP, Room M2.17, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP.

Email: murdo.fraser.msp@scottish.parliament.uk
Telephone: (0131) 348 5293
Fax: (0131) 348 5934

The consultation will run for 12 weeks from 21st January 2008; responses should be received by 14th April 2008. Please note that copies of this paper can be made available in Braille or audio cassette on request.

All the responses submitted on this consultation document, including names and addresses, will be made public unless you mark it as “confidential”. Personal data referring to third parties included in the response will not be accepted without explicit written consent from the third party. If you wish the contents of your response to be treated in confidence and not made public, then please indicate so. All responses will be included in any summary or statistical analysis, which does not identify individual responses.
Case Study A: Showing educational and community value of a rural school

Inveravon Primary School, Moray Council

In 2003, Inveravon Primary had a roll of 33 pupils. In the same year, HMIe judged that the school was “very good” (the top rating) in 14 out of its 22 “performance indicators” and “good” in the remainder.

However, in 2004, Moray Council produced the School Estates Management Plan (SEMP) in which it proposed the closure of several schools, including Inveravon. In response to public criticism, the local authority withdrew the SEMP but instead pressed ahead with having a review of all schools operating at less than 60% capacity. Inveravon therefore remained under threat. The final stage of this review concluded that, in addition to its outstanding educational qualities, there was also:

- extensive community group use of the Inveravon school building already and proposals underway to increase this further;
- no alternative community facility nearby;
- a considerable number of rented properties waiting to be reoccupied as well as a number of pending applications for new family accommodation, which together presented a “distinct potential” of the roll rising and therefore pushing the school over into occupying a second classroom, thus “utilising any potentially ‘spare’ space”.
- fitting in with this, the school was a “vitaly important factor” in attracting new families into the area; and finally
- that travel times of up to 40 minutes had been calculated to the alternative school and that “significant geographical factors” could push this up further.

Only then did the local authority reverse its wish to close the school. While this was the correct decision, if a legislative presumption against closure had been in place in 2004, two years of uncertainty and campaigning work would have been avoided.

INFORMATION FROM: SCOTTISH RURAL SCHOOLS NETWORK
Case study B: Showing how the public can lose confidence in the processes leading up to a closure and how village life can suffer as a result of it

Hutton Primary School, Berwickshire, Scottish Borders Council

Hutton Primary was closed in 2005 after a fight to retain it. The building was in need of improvement – a report by HMIe, the inspectorate, in October 1999 drew attention to accommodation and health and safety matters. However, as a result the school was placed third on the local authority’s priority projects list and the required rebuild was scheduled for completion by 2005. Indeed, in 2002, the local authority met parents of the schoolchildren to outline the work and discuss plans for decanting pupils on a temporary basis the following February.

However, despite being told that the £334,000 budgeted to improve their school was secure, within months Hutton parents were told that the work was to be put off while a PPP school-building bid was put together. Then, the community was told that the local authority had decided to close the school. It now said that even the “interim costs” of refurbishing the school were £450,000.

The community argued that the existing building could be cost-effectively upgraded and that this was a more satisfactory approach than providing a new PPP school further away. It also said that the local authority’s concern that the school site was overly restricted for modern provision was rendered redundant because the owner of the adjacent land had offered some of his land free of charge.

Since the closure of the school, the village children attend three separate schools (all over five miles away). As a result, the children do not mix socially in the way that they did before closure. Moreover, the cohesion of village life has been lost, with no school plays, fetes or sporting events at which the community gathers together. The school building, which had accommodated thousands of Hutton children over a century and a half, has been converted into a private house.

INFORMATION FROM: SCOTTISH RURAL SCHOOLS NETWORK
Case Study C: Showing how capacity measurements and other financial calculations can be misleading

Channelkirk Primary School, Scottish Borders Council

Channelkirk Primary serves the families in and around the village of Oxton in Berwickshire. The nearest large settlement is 5 miles away in Lauder. In 2005, Scottish Borders Council proposed replacing Lauder Primary School with a new, larger building in order to meet the demand created by new housing developments. However, the local authority also sought to subsume the Channelkirk catchment into the new school. The 53 pupils would be bussed to Lauder.

In the lead up to the consultation on the closure of Channelkirk, the roll of the school fluctuated between 47 and 53 pupils as families. The capacity of the school was put at 75.

At a roll of 47, the school was 63% occupied. As soon as the roll fell below 50, one of the three teachers was redeployed elsewhere, so that 45 pupils in such a school would meet Audit Scotland’s trigger of 60% occupancy and yet would have a teacher cost per pupil of £2000. Whereas, at 53 pupils the school was at 71% occupancy and “properly occupied” in Audit Scotland’s eyes, yet it carried a teaching cost per pupil that is nearly £400 higher, at £2377. Far from being more efficient, the school was actually less efficient immediately above the capacity threshold in terms of staffing costs. In terms of property costs, the Oxton Action Group argued that the saving in running only two classrooms rather than three was slight – the fabric of the empty classroom had to be maintained, if not heated and lit. This again shows just how uninformative an indicator capacity measurements can be. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, capacity measurements take into account neither the recurrent costs of transporting children to an alternative school or the additional staffing and property costs put on that school when it takes in the displaced pupils (the 53 children would still need classrooms heated and cleaned, used water etc). It should also be noted that the property cost is generally only a small fraction of the staffing costs for even the most rural of schools, so should not be given as much emphasis as it apparently was at Channelkirk.

On the issue of transport costs, Channelkirk also provides a good example of a local authority allegedly electing to use less-than-ideal costing methods in order to sway elected councillors and the community behind its predisposition for closing the school. The authority used 2002 tender rates to work out the recurrent transport costs. Oxton Action Group campaigners produced more up-to-date quotes which it had obtained from local contractors, the lowest of which suggested that the recurrent cost was over £35 000 more pa than the local authority claimed.

INFORMATION FROM: SCOTTISH RURAL SCHOOLS NETWORK
ANNEX B: List of Consultees

This document has been sent to the following organizations and individuals:

**Local government**
- The Heads of Education in every local authority in Scotland
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

**Scottish Government public bodies**
- Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIe)
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Learning and Teaching Scotland

**Independent statutory entities**
- The General Teaching Council for Scotland
- Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People

**Teachers’ and parents’ representative organizations**
- The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
- Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA)
- Professional Association of Teachers Scotland
- The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT)
- Association of Head Teachers & Deputies in Scotland (AHDS)
- Headteachers’ Association of Scotland (HAS)
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- Association of Scottish Catholic Primary Head Teachers (CHAPS)
- Catholic Headteachers’ Association of Scotland (CHAS)
- Scottish Parent Teacher Council
- Scottish Parent Councils Association

**Denominational schooling**
- Scottish Catholic Education Service

**Rural-interest organizations**
- The Rural Community Gateway
- The Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
- The National Farmers’ Union Scotland
- Scottish Countryside Alliance

**Petitioners to the Scottish Parliament on rural school**
- Alexander Longmuir, Scottish Rural Schools Network/Arbirlot Parents Group
- Christine Grahame, MSP
- Richard Lock, Midlothian Rural Schools Action Group

**Equal opportunities organizations**
- Children in Scotland
- Capability Scotland

**Other**
- Scottish Human Rights Centre
- Scottish Consumer Council