

Media Release

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Rural schools can help combat cuts for Scottish families

Using school buildings better as a local hub for other services would increase the viability of rural schools and communities, reduce the impact of cuts to services for families and improve employment, Children in Scotland has told the Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education.

Children in Scotland recommended:

- Using the school building programme to develop models that can deliver a wider role, by serving a broader age range; working with other partners; and extending the hours buildings are in use.
- National leadership in funding that encourages innovative leadership and creative use of the local area, culture, facilities and environment, and explores how rural schools can help urban schools deliver *Curriculum for Excellence*.
- Systematic national support to build on existing projects by extending clusters and learning communities.
- Monitoring the extent to which schools make better use of their premises.
- Improving consultation procedures on school closures to ensure more effective independent consultation with children and parents, and to take into account a wider spectrum of potential partners and users across the community.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: "The debate should focus less on whether schools are there or not, and more on how we can use them more effectively. Rural schools could become leaders in integrated services that result in better lives and better life chances for all children. Why shouldn't Scottish schools provide lifelong learning from early childhood to adulthood, or be a local centre for healthcare or social services, as in other European countries such as Norway?"

"Using facilities more creatively – for example, hosting summer schools to give holiday care in rural settings for children who live in towns and cities – could bring enormous benefits to both rural and urban areas, especially given the increasing contribution to learning from farms, forests and national parks. We should be developing schools, not closing them."

Notes to Editors:

Participants, not pawns: consulting with children and young people on school closures, offering guidance for local authorities on pupil consultations under the Schools

(Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, was produced by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People with the assistance of Children in Scotland and is available to download at www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

Children in Scotland's experience of consulting independently with children includes involvement in Scottish Borders Council's Access All Areas programme, consulting with children on issues of accessibility, inclusion and additional support needs.

Issue 18 of Children in Europe magazine, *A Sense of Place: environments, community and services for young children*, considers the value of place-based learning and the link between learning centres and local communities. For more information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

Children in Scotland is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children's sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk.

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