The Moray Council

Education & Social Care

Schools for the Future:
A Policy for Sustainable Schools

(Consultation Draft)
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1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The focus of this document is on monitoring the schools provision in Moray to ensure that provision continues to meet the needs of learners, parents, communities and enables the Council to meet its requirements to secure best value. It is intended that the application of this policy will result in a more sustainable education service across Moray.

1.2 The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 places a duty on local authorities to make arrangements which secure best value. Best value is continuous improvement in the performance of the authority’s functions. In securing best value, the local authority shall maintain an appropriate balance between the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance.

1.3 The Schools for the Future policy is intended to contribute to the aim of ensuring all children and young people in Moray have equality of opportunity in terms of access to educational provision and facilities.

1.4 This policy should ensure that all schools are sustainable in terms of a range of criteria including the educational experience of children, school roll, financial position, staff wellbeing and development, accessibility, and the strength of schools’ links to the community. It will guide the Council in formulating proposals for changes to the school estate under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

**Vision for Education**

1.5 Education is central to our future. In the education and development of young people, and in the continuing learning of the adult population, it represents one of the most significant investments in developing the individual, society and the economy. Moray has a challenging vision for everyone involved in education:

   **Ambitious to achieve excellence together**

1.6 **Curriculum for Excellence** aims to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from
3 to 18 firmly focused on the needs of the child and young person and designed to enable them to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

All children and young people are entitled to experience:

- a coherent curriculum from 3 to 18
- a broad general education, including well planned experiences and outcomes across all the curriculum areas. This should include understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it and understanding of the environment
- a senior phase which provides opportunities for study for qualifications and other planned opportunities for developing the four capacities
- opportunities for developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
- opportunities to achieve to the highest levels they can through appropriate personal support and challenge
- opportunities to move into positive and sustained destinations beyond school.

1.7 In meeting these aims, all Moray schools should help improve levels of children and young people’s achievements and broaden the range of opportunities for young people to develop their skills. Schools should provide a quality curriculum and create positive environments for effective learning and teaching matched to the needs of learners. They should create opportunities for greater personalisation and choice for children and young people with improved continuity and progression in their learning. They should create more opportunities for children and young people to participate in well-judged paired and group activities. Schools should be able to meet children and young people’s learning, personal, social, health and emotional needs in a supportive ethos which addresses the care and welfare of children and young people and their personal and social development.

1.8 Strong, sustainable schools providing quality education and access to the full curriculum are central to the achievement of this vision and delivering these entitlements.
2. **RATIONALE**

2.1 This document examines the issues relevant to achieving sustainability of schools which should be central to the planning of future school provision. It sets out criteria and indicators for use by the education authority and the wider community, to help assess whether a school may be considered fit for purpose, or whether action is required to address emerging problems of sustainability. The objective is to improve the quality of education offered to pupils of all ages and backgrounds. The criteria should also have a role in helping a school to monitor and self review its current position and to consider how it might be strengthened and improved.

2.2 Too often, concerns about a school’s viability are addressed only when school rolls have already declined over a period of years to an untenable position. The set of criteria set out in this document is much broader than school roll and is intended to provide a framework for earlier consideration and action as necessary so that options can be considered which best meet the educational needs of the local community. The criteria will also ensure transparency, consistency and equity in decision-making on sustainability across schools and sectors.

2.3 In examining these issues, this document also considers the importance of sharing and collaboration and how through such approaches the education sector can impact on and support the sustainability of schools.

**Associated Schools Groups (ASG) Area Planning**

2.4 Associated Schools Groups (ASG) Area Planning is an iterative process informed by reviewing schools against the Sustainability Criteria and Indicators described in this policy document and as such ASG plans will be reassessed and updated on a regular basis, normally every four years for each ASG. The aim of ASG planning is to facilitate the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools which can effectively deliver the curriculum. In Moray, the education authority operates provision within eight ASGs which are based on a secondary school and its associated primary schools. The network of schools must provide access to a range of
educational provision that is appropriate to the needs of the children and young people in Moray.

2.5 Developments at one school may have significant impacts on other schools in its area, including their sustainability. This underlines the importance of examining provision on a locality basis, taking account of the overall projected need for provision in the area. While school reviews against the criteria will be carried out on a school-by-school basis, the outcomes will feed into the plans for each ASG.

2.6 In developing ASG plans, a central consideration must be the need for schools which will be viable. The sustainable schools policy is therefore to help provide a planning framework to inform the preparation of ASG plans to support all in making informed decisions about schools in Moray. Local Elected Members and the Children and Young People's Services Committee have a key role to play in the formulation of ASG plans and will be kept fully informed of the process.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The majority of the smallest primary schools and a quarter of the secondary schools in Moray are located in rural areas (Scottish Government’s Rural Schools List – see Annex B). Effective delivery of the curriculum in the smaller schools often presents particular challenges and difficulties. These schools are also generally more expensive to run but it must also be noted that such schools are often at the heart of rural communities, helping to ensure their sustainability whilst providing valuable and often scarce facilities.

3.2 Whilst small schools often face particular challenges in providing the full curriculum and an educational environment which maximises the opportunities which they can offer their pupils, the pressures become even more evident at a time of falling rolls. The pressures are faced, not just by the smallest schools, but also in much larger schools, when they experience falling rolls.
3.3 It is important to examine the range of factors which are relevant to a school’s longer term viability. School roll is one factor, not least with regard to educational experience and the capacity of schools to provide a rich learning environment. However, school rolls are only one aspect of the sustainability considerations and schools which fall under the proposed school roll thresholds will be subject to review against all the sustainability criteria and indicators detailed in Annex A and sections 4 – 10. Budgetary issues are closely related to school rolls, since the majority of funding being provided to schools is through the Devolved School Management distribution. Pupil numbers are the major factor in determining budget allocations to schools. Account is also taken of individual circumstances which may not be capable of adequate determination by a simple roll-based formula. However, sustainability is wider than issues of school rolls and budgets, since a school’s longer-term viability may also be significantly affected by other factors such as community support, the quality of school buildings, the local geography and the overall provision in the immediate area.

3.4 Of prime importance must be educational performance and the quality of leadership and management. A sustainable school should provide a high quality educational experience to children in as cost effective a manner as possible. The focus should be on providing a high quality schools’ estate, based on local ASG plans which reflect current and projected pupil numbers, and take account of the quality of existing school buildings. The sustainable schools policy should ensure that regardless of the financial position of a school or the services it provides, it is not considered viable if the quality and breadth of the education it provides is less than satisfactory.

3.5 The demographic trends being experienced in the Moray area present our education system with a major challenge of ensuring that schools remain educationally viable and avoid the inefficiencies arising from excess surplus capacity. The numbers of children in Moray schools are projected to rise by some 1700 over the next seven years – a rise of around 14%. While roll
3.6 The following sections of the document outline the relevant policy context for sustainable schools, identify the educational, financial and other factors affecting sustainability and identify approaches to address sustainability.

4. SUSTAINABILITY CRITERIA AND INDICATORS

4.1 The characteristics of a sustainable school have been outlined in the preceding paragraphs. There are a number of quantitative and qualitative criteria and indicators linked to consideration of the longer-term viability of a school which are summarised under six headings. These are:-

1. **Quality Educational Experience** - Are there indications that the school will not be able to provide a broad and balanced educational experience for the pupils and sustain and realise high standards of educational attainment? Pupils should be able to have a full set of option choices and pursue their chosen subjects to the highest level. Are the school buildings fit for purpose?

2. **School Roll** - Is the roll stable, increasing or decreasing year on year, impacting on capacity and finance? In a situation of declining rolls across many areas, it is a challenge for schools to sustain their intake levels. Sustainability considers whether the annual changes should raise concerns for the longer term.

3. **Financial Position** – Do the school’s budget trends indicate that it can live within its means? Are running costs significantly greater than the Moray averages? Is the school financially viable?

4. **Staff Wellbeing and Development** - Is there evidence of successful leadership and effective management in the school?
Are there any staffing issues? Are staff able to exercise initiative and take lead roles within and beyond the classroom? Is professional learning improving outcomes for learners?

5. **Accessibility** - Is the distance to school and the travel time for pupils reasonable with regard to statutory and policy requirements? In the absence of a suitable alternative school in the local area should the school be retained? Are there suitable transport arrangements between local schools?

6. **Strong links with the Community** - Are the links and relationships with parents and the local community strong? Where poor relationships exist, the standing of the school within the community can be affected adversely and subsequently generate negative attitudes towards the school and the value that the community places on education. This must also be viewed in the context of overall availability of school places.

4.2 These form the set of quantitative and qualitative criteria which, together with the associated indicators set out separately in Annex A below provide a framework for assessing the range of factors which may affect a school’s sustainability. Some indicators will be more important in one school rather than in another. All those considered relevant are shown. The three major ones: Quality Educational Experience, School Roll and Financial Position will be looked at first for each school and if any fall below a threshold or give cause for concern, the Corporate Director (Education and Social Care) may initiate a more detailed school sustainability review against all six Sustainability Criteria and Indicators.

5. **THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR CHILDREN**

5.1 The core issue for sustainability must be the continuing provision of a high quality education for the children. This section examines the educational issues arising particularly from schools with increasing or declining school
rolls. There is not a simple correlation between school rolls and educational attainment. There are many instances where there is a high quality of teaching and learning in both large and small schools which is reflected in favourable Education Scotland inspection reports. Where the quality of teaching and learning is very good in a small school, it is not surprising that parents and the wider community are content with the status quo. The costs in human and financial terms, however, can often be considerable. In some schools there may be undue and substantial pressures on staff, for example in planning to address the wide range of needs, year groups and abilities, in self-evaluation, developing the curriculum and in managing educational change. The following paragraphs summarise the key educational issues for primary and secondary schools in Moray.

**Primary Schools**

5.2 Small primary schools face a particular difficulty in delivering a high quality of education where staff members may have to contend with unduly demanding workloads and small (and perhaps diminishing) school rolls. Small primary schools can face challenges in meeting the educational requirements of the children. The challenges can become increasingly greater when there are composite classes with more than two age-groups within most classes. This is likely to occur when there are fewer than four teachers, one of whom will be a teaching head. Challenges will again be greater when there are only two teachers, one of whom may have responsibility for four different age groups, and the other for three different age groups. In addition, one of the two teachers may also have a responsibility as a teaching head. While educational outcomes can be strong in any size of school these often come at a cost of pupils missing opportunities to develop wider skills for life as a result of limited opportunities for interaction with a wide range of peers. Experience has shown that recruitment of teachers and head teachers to small rural schools, with multi-stage composite classes can often be more difficult compared to recruitment to larger schools in bigger settlements.
5.3 Teachers in small schools also face problems of having less scope for professional interaction and mutual support. The school is less likely to provide an extensive programme of wider school activities and will have a smaller range of teacher specialisms (e.g. music). The smaller numbers of children in each year group can sometimes result in significant gender imbalances within teaching groups. It can also limit the opportunities for working in groups alongside peers, social interaction and challenge, and participation in wider school activities including team-based experiences.

5.4 Historically, assumed benefits of small schools include:
- The school is the heart of the community
- High levels of parental involvement
- Teacher involvement in the community
- A community facility – meeting place, sports facility, social and cultural resource, delivery point for services, resource for community development
- Economic benefits for the community – local spending, employment

There is also a perception that small schools have a positive effect upon pupil achievement. While some published research has identified that small schools have had a positive impact on achievement, other research has identified very little, if any, impact of school size on pupil performance. In most cases differences that are found can be explained by other factors.

**Secondary Schools**

5.5 Small secondary schools can face a number of challenges:

i. the school has difficulty in ensuring the continuing availability of teachers who have sufficient specialist experience and qualifications to allow the school to provide effective teaching and assessment in all areas of the curriculum. There is also greater difficulty in covering absences as teachers engaged to do so should also be subject specialists;

ii. access to professional exchange and peer support related to specialisms can be more restricted;

iii. there may be increased staffing problems, in terms of recruiting
and retaining good staff as some teachers would not find working in small, or single teacher, departments attractive. There may also be fewer opportunities for school-based staff development;

iv. there is less scope for pupils to benefit from liaison with a broad peer group; and likely to be fewer opportunities for provision of a full programme of wider school activities; and

v. the quality of school buildings can impact on learning. The Scottish Government provides guidance on the condition and suitability of school buildings. Local authorities report on the condition and suitability of school buildings on an A – D scale where A is the highest rating. Experience in new school buildings has demonstrated that a new and flexible learning environment has inspired pupils and has a positive impact on the general health and wellbeing of learners, and increases aspirations, attainment, and achievement.

vi. management structures in secondary schools can also place significant pressures on schools’ financial positions.

5.6 A number of indicators for the quality of educational experience have been identified in this policy. These relate closely to recognised performance framework measures. They include measures on the quality of pupil attainment and wider achievement, the quality of the curriculum, the quality of learning and teaching and the ability of schools to meet pupils’ needs, including those with additional support needs.

6. SCHOOL ROLLS

6.1 Chapter 5 identified the challenges that small primary and secondary schools may face in providing a broad and balanced educational experience. This chapter describes the intake and school roll considerations for new and existing schools and thresholds for recurrent and capital funding for new schools.

6.2 Whilst recognising the wishes of parents for the education of their children,
the Moray Council must also ensure that the viability criteria, which schools must satisfy, are compatible with the statutory requirement to ensure adequate and efficient provision and adequate facilities, the provision of quality educational experiences and outcomes for learners, the Council's duty of care for its staff and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure.

6.3 Given that rolls may fall sharply over a relatively short period, trends over the past three years will provide an early indication that action may be needed.

6.4 The numbers of inward and outward placing requests to and from a school can give an indication of a school's standing in the community. Analysis of the reasons behind placing requests, and the impact such placing requests have on the school community, can provide an indication of a school's sustainability, although it should be borne in mind in using placing requests as an assessment tool that requests can also be made for a variety of reasons that have no bearing on a school's standing in the community.

6.5 The introduction of ASG planning will be important in establishing the provision which is needed to meet future requirements. There may be schools where it is decided that they are needed for the longer term though their rolls fall below recommended minimum enrolment thresholds. In such circumstances the schools would need to share and collaborate with others to ensure pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum.

Primary Schools

6.6 Primary schools with at least seven classes should be able to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. A roll of around 200 pupils would be an ideal, as distinct to minimal, level for primary schools. Whilst one teacher per primary year group is a good model, the strict application of this criterion may not be achievable in a significant number of communities.

6.7 As a minimum, it is recommended that a primary school should have 145 pupils, which would support a head teacher who is free from a teaching
commitment, enabling them to lead learning and curriculum development, model quality teaching and support staff, pupils and parents. The minimum roll for rural areas should be 90 in recognition of population levels in rural areas. This should ensure a minimum of four classes with normally no more than two stages within any one composite class. The criteria for investment in new primary schools should therefore be in line with the recommended minimum thresholds.

6.8 The education authority should review the position of a primary school when the school roll falls below 145 or 90 (whichever applies) or exceeds 90% of its physical capacity. Any decision on rezoning or an expansion, or replacement, of a school building would depend on the outcome of a review against the Schools for the Future criteria.

6.9 In primary schools, a roll able to support more than one senior member of staff, who is free from class teaching commitments for all or part of the time, and the possibility of teachers having ‘stage partners’ would be beneficial.

Secondary Schools

6.10 The Moray Council considers that a secondary school with a roll of 450 and above is viable. In view of the number of subjects to be taught at secondary schools, problems in curriculum coverage may arise if the roll falls below 450, an average of 80 per year in S1-S5 and 50 in S6. The Council will review secondary schools when the numbers fall below this level or exceed 90% of physical capacity. The average size of secondary schools in Moray may be significantly greater than the minimum sizes recommended.

6.11 Secondary schools are much more expensive to provide than primaries because of the need for specialist classrooms and other facilities. In addition to the financial implications, smaller secondaries can have the effect of narrowing the range of provision available to pupils within their schools. The larger the school, the more scope there is to recruit, develop and retain teachers, by being able to offer full-time posts and to offer a broad range of wider school activities and enrichment opportunities. While some larger
schools may be able to deliver the full curriculum, it is likely that some schools will need to collaborate with other schools or partner providers and, by being creative, they can offer a suitable range of courses. Also, the small size can be compensated for by the positive impact the schools can have in their community. In the context of Moray and with a collaborative culture between schools and between schools and their communities, a roll of 450 is justifiable.

6.12 There are a number of structural possibilities for providing pupils with access to the range of courses and choices for pupils, with schools having the option to collaborate with other schools, further education colleges and other providers to provide the required minimum access. However, children would still be expected to spend most of their time in the school in which they are registered. It is the objective of sustainable schools to have as much of the curriculum as possible delivered in-school. Therefore schools will need to be of sufficient size to provide the teaching and other resources from their budgets to achieve this. It is anticipated that, while a degree of flexibility will be required in the future as recommended by the Commission for Developing Scotland’s Young Workforce, pupils in S4-S6 should reasonably be expected to spend at least 80% of their time in their home school.

7. **FINANCIAL POSITION**

7.1 Scotland's local authorities receive a block grant, the General Revenue Grant, from the Scottish Government to fund education and other public services.

7.2 The bulk of funding allocations are made using a set of formulae known as Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE). The initial distribution of GAE for primary schools across all local authorities is on a per pupil basis. Part of that funding is then redistributed, so that authorities with a higher than average percentage of pupils in small schools get additional funding. This is offset by other authorities receiving decreased funding. Small schools are defined as schools
with a roll of fewer than 70. Thus, there is not a straight amount of funding per pupil in a small school, although the additional funding can be calculated. Moray’s percentage of pupils in small schools has been rising over the last few years. It should be noted that the calculation is on a per pupil basis and not on the number of small schools in an authority area and percentages of pupils in small schools in other authorities affects the redistribution of this element of grant funding. (Additional funding for Moray in 2015/16 equates to £1,624 per pupil in a small school.)

7.3 Under the Devolved School Management scheme, budgets and resources are allocated to schools from the Council by methods which are clearly stated both centrally and at establishment level. Pupil numbers are a major factor in determining budget allocations. Account will also be taken of individual circumstances which may not be capable of adequate determination by a simple roll-based formula. Detailed formulae for budget allocation are given in Part C of the Devolved School Management Scheme.

7.4 Schools can use resources outwith the financial year for which they were initially allocated. Establishments may carry forward an underspend up to a maximum of 10% of the devolved budget. In addition, an overspend of up to 5% of the devolved budget can also be carried forward. (See Financial Regulations).

7.5 In some schools, particularly some with declining rolls, it has become a challenge to live within the budget allocation and in some cases schools may build up significant financial deficits. Deficits are not however necessarily a consequence of school size: financial management at the school can itself be a factor. The current school funding arrangements provide the flexibility for schools to have short-term surpluses or deficits but over time there is a requirement that the budgets remain broadly in balance, so that pupils are benefiting fully from the allocations made to the schools without having a detrimental impact on the resources available for the wider education sector.

7.6 As school size reduces, funding calculated on a per pupil basis rises sharply. Small schools require additional financial support if they are to make
appropriate curriculum provision for their pupils. This distribution uses a needs based model which provides more resources to areas with the highest needs, often due to deprivation or rural factors.

7.7 Average costs per pupil vary considerably across Moray schools. A benchmark figure of the cost per pupil being no more than 20% above the average cost per pupil is used as an indicator of the financial sustainability of a school as it is anticipated that the cost per pupil in most schools should be within this range.

7.8 The financial position of a school, in terms of cost per pupil, and the school’s financial trends indicating that it can continue to live within its annual devolved budget are therefore indicators of the sustainability of a school.

8. STAFF WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Teachers will also benefit from sustainable schools in terms of teaching and professional development, and the avoidance of undue pressures which can often arise in schools which are not educationally and financially viable. It is the responsibility of the senior management in a school to manage the demands on staff to ensure that, not only are the needs of the pupils met, but also that staff welfare is considered. To meet this obligation, a school should monitor the morale of its teaching staff on an ongoing basis.

9. SCHOOLS’ ACCESSIBILITY

9.1 The criteria recognise that there can be different issues facing primary and secondary schools. It is also recognised that there may be greater travel and transport issues for pupils living in rural communities which are relevant to consideration of rural provision. Schools are often at the heart of rural communities and provide valuable, often scarce, facilities. It is important that children in rural communities have access to a quality education in cost-effective provision. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, 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.

9.2 This policy also sets out a range of options to consider in rural areas including collaboration, confederation and federation which may be relevant to delivery in a local area, with guiding principles for provision in rural areas.

9.3 School travel times in Moray have been investigated and, as a result, school accessibility criteria have been included in this policy. These are: home to school transport travel times of less than 30 minutes for primary pupils (i.e. 1 hour per day in total) and 45 minutes for secondary pupils (i.e. 1.5 hours per day in total). This criterion will also apply if considering provision in neighbouring schools.

10. LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY

10.1 The school as the heart of the community assumes a strong, positive relationship between the school and the local district. However, research suggests that there is wide variation in the relationships that exists between schools and communities and that a strong, positive relationship may not be inherent in all schools, in some cases in small rural schools, and measures may be necessary to foster its development.

10.2 Well planned, meaningful parental involvement strengthens the role of a school in its community. Multifunctional use of school buildings and the provision of specialist facilities, for example a nursery or pre-school (now known as (early learning and childcare) provision, help consolidate a school’s position in its community.

10.3 Capacities in neighbouring schools will have to be considered when any review indicates that changes to provision in an area may be desirable.
11. DETERMINING SUSTAINABILITY

11.1 It is important to stress that the intention is not to have a mechanistic application of the criteria and indicators, but to provide a view of how effectively a school is functioning and of the range of factors affecting its performance. As such, the criteria cover both structural factors which cannot easily be addressed, such as school rolls and accessibility, and operational issues, such as quality of education and quality of leadership. It is clear that the criteria are inter-related and there is expected to be a significant correlation across sustainability factors, e.g. poor educational performance may lead to reduced school intake numbers, causing financial pressures, which may lead to staff demotivation leading to a spiral of increasing problems. Similarly, poor leadership may lead to local parents’ reluctance to send their children to the school, again leading to reduced intakes. It may also manifest itself in a failure to establish and maintain positive attitudes to learning amongst pupils and a resulting fall in educational performance. In such circumstances, unless the schools recover their positions and become sustainable, the quality of education to their pupils will suffer and they will face further decline.

11.2 Schools must be considered on a case by case basis, as part of a review of provision across an ASG, taking into account various factors within and beyond the criteria such as social disadvantage, how the school compares to schools of similar characteristics, and any particular circumstances pertaining, e.g. a school may serve an isolated population of one community. The importance of the various factors may vary from case to case, e.g. accessibility is likely to assume a much greater importance for an isolated rural school than for a town school. It is entirely reasonable, indeed necessary, that the common goal of a high quality education for all children should not imply a strictly uniform application of the criteria regardless of circumstances.
11.3 The sustainability criteria and indicators are intended to provide an early warning of whether action may be required to address an emerging trend. In considering long-term viability, all available information will be used to project future rolls. Where a small school with roll under the threshold is deemed to be required, it will not normally be subject to further review on the basis of the enrolment level unless this continues to fall, or roll projections are not met. School roll is only one of the sustainability criteria and other considerations may also apply depending on individual circumstances. Not all schools which record a negative assessment against a criterion may have a cause for concern since there may be reasons of a temporary nature. However, the key issue must be to avoid a protracted period of decline due to financial, educational or other factors. The criteria and indicators are to assist the education authority and schools themselves in evaluating sustainability on a consistent basis, allowing for individual circumstances where appropriate. The application of the criteria may indicate that the future of a school should be reviewed and, in undertaking the review, there is an opportunity to examine the potential options for sharing, which could also deliver quality educational provision and improved community relations.

11.4 The key issue for the question of sustainability must be the quality of the education provided. Economic reasons should not be the only consideration determining sustainability. Where it is decided to maintain a small school support should be made available, if required, to ensure that the school is educationally sustainable.

Equality Considerations

11.5 At the heart of this policy is the aim of providing all children with a quality education, with access to the full curriculum in fit for purpose facilities. Children in schools, which do not meet the criteria, are unlikely to have access to the same quality and range of provision as those in other schools. They could therefore be deemed to be treated less favourably than others. The policy therefore aims to support the idea of equality of opportunity for all our learners in Moray.
11.6 This policy was subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and was found to have no adverse impact on any of the following groups:

- Age
- Sex
- Religion or belief
- Racial Group
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage or civil partnership

The Process of School Sustainability Review

11.7 ASG planning for Schools for the Future is an iterative process resulting from sustainability reviews. As part of an annual broad brush audit, the education authority will carry out detailed sustainability reviews across two ASGs each year. An initial step will be to look at the indicators for the criteria on Quality Educational Experience, School Roll, Financial Position for each school in an ASG along with the staffing position and if any fall below a threshold or give cause for concern, the Corporate Director (Education and Social Care) may initiate a more detailed school sustainability review against all six Sustainability Criteria and Indicators. This will be carried out by appropriately qualified and experienced officers.

11.8 The Review will assess the school against all of the indicators for the criteria listed in Annex A and sections 4 – 10. The officers conducting the review will provide a report for the Corporate Director (Education and Social Care) on the sustainability of the school and make appropriate recommendations regarding sustainability. All recommendations will inform ASG plans.

Addressing Sustainability Issues
11.9 The aim of this work is to identify emerging issues so that various options can be given time to impact and make a difference. There are various possible outcomes to a Sustainability Review which are likely to fall into one of the following categories:

1. The school is deemed to be sustainable
2. The school will be sustainable but some form of authority support (short, medium or long term) may be required.
3. The school may be sustainable through some form of cooperative arrangement.
4. The school is recommended for amalgamation
   Options 3 and 4 are explained further below
5. The school may be sustainable as a result of amending its catchment area, following formal consultation. Any approach taken following this outcome would have to be considered carefully as part of an ASG plan due to the potential impact on other schools.
6. The school is recommended for closure. This will only be recommended as a last resort once all possible alternatives to closure have been evaluated. Nevertheless there may be circumstances in which closure is the right and only course of action.

11.10 Sustainability issues may be addressed through increased co-operation and working with other schools particularly where the main issue is affecting a small school with declining rolls. This may also include sharing expertise to support pupils with additional support needs.

11.11 Collaboration, by its nature, will be most successful when entered into voluntarily and with a commitment to genuine and meaningful sharing on the part of the schools concerned. The converse is that, without such commitment, schools will not benefit fully from collaboration. Given the difficulty in assessing genuine commitment to collaboration and sharing, the criteria set out in sections 4 - 10 and Annex A below does not include an explicit indicator. Nevertheless, schools are expected to collaborate and, for schools under review, the opportunities offered though sharing may
enable them to provide the quality of education to which children are entitled and without which viability may be jeopardised.

11.12 There are various practical models including co-location or a shared campus, federation and confederation which could offer potential benefits. The following paragraphs cover the main forms of working together to address the need for sustainable schools:

**Collaboration** – where schools collaborate informally and share resources, development work and areas of expertise. Co-operation with neighbouring schools can help to overcome the relative isolation that small schools and their teachers face. Collaboration can take a wide variety of forms distinguished by the degree of co-operation:-
- informal and purposeful exchanges between teachers and head teachers in neighbouring schools;
- head teachers meeting to discuss management and organisational issues;
- joint planning and teaching of the curriculum;
- discussing and sharing effective practice; and
- use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to share resources and enrich learning experiences.

Such arrangements may help sustain provision in an area without a diminution of a school’s ethos. Indeed, such sharing could provide enhanced learning experiences for the pupils.

**Confederation** – where schools work in partnership, in a more formal arrangement, for example exchanging teachers, pupils or both, but each retains its own head teacher. Schools may share specialist facilities and/or administrative staff.

**Federation** - involving small schools combining to form a single management structure with one head teacher, one budget, to allow head teachers greater flexibility, but operating on two or more sites. A federation model may include a straightforward paired head teacher model (where two small schools are paired together) or an executive model (where a small school is paired with a
larger school). Each school in the federation would retain its own Parent Council.

Co-location (Shared Campus) – where the proximity of schools facilitates collaboration although each retains its particular ethos and identity. Schools retain autonomy but share infrastructure. Collaboration may be cross phase (primary and secondary).

Amalgamation - a new school is formed to replace two or more schools coming together and usually means a new name, uniform etc. (This differs from a closure where one school closes and pupils are able to transfer to another available school).

This list is not exhaustive and schools may enter into individual agreements on specific areas or sharing facilities to work together for the general good of their pupils.

11.13 Amalgamations may provide an effective means of addressing the educational and financial sustainability issues facing smaller schools. Access to enhanced premises and facilities, better spread of teacher expertise, and a greater opportunity for teachers to interact with their colleagues and pupils with their peers, can create the potential to provide enriched educational experiences for the children and stimulate higher standards of achievement.

11.14 While the educational needs of the immediate area must be a prime objective, there may also be financial implications for the whole school system. As well as savings, these options may involve additional cost, particularly at the outset. In each case, a thorough assessment of the available options for addressing sustainability should be carried out with all relevant costs and benefits examined before a decision is reached.

11.15 In rural areas where it is practical and possible to replace small schools with better facilities, this can be a key factor in retaining rural populations and encouraging rural development. At the core of the issue of sustainability, is the need to find the most effective way of providing high quality educational opportunities for children within the context of their local and wider
community. Amalgamation can provide a positive outcome for rural communities. Effective communication and collaboration, together with good leadership and management are central to achieving a positive outcome from a situation where amalgamation is determined to be the best option.

11.16 Any changes to school provision should not give rise to undue travel difficulties for pupils. In rural areas, it is also essential that the school can provide an effective and significant focus for the community which it serves. Transport implications are a significant factor in calculating the projected financial benefits of any proposed reorganisation in rural areas and the current arrangements already provide for transport assistance to the nearest suitable school, if there is no such school (or no place available at such a school) within statutory walking distance. This does not mean that the local schools should remain open whatever the number of pupils on the roll. However, it recognises that there may be relevant reasons to retain a particular small school when it may not be justified in other parts of the country.

11.17 Such arrangements, as described above, may not however overcome real difficulties faced by small schools. Nor are they an alternative to reaching difficult decisions on eventual rationalisation. Any form of collaboration will require considerable preparation and commitment on the part of all concerned, to keep learners’ interests to the fore. There are a number of questions, neither exhaustive nor necessarily applicable in all circumstances, which may be used to help assess arrangements for collaboration and sharing.

Do the arrangements:

- Help to maintain local provision?
- Provide the pupils with access to a wider range of educational opportunity?
- Allow the pupils to have good learning experiences and to achieve high standards?
• Enable human and material resources to be used more effectively and efficiently?
• Support those pupils with additional support needs and other barriers to learning?
• Support the pastoral care arrangements for pupils?
• Reduce capital costs, recurrent costs or both?
• Entail additional costs, and are these justified by the benefits?
• Address the issue of over provision?
• Result in feasible solutions in which the benefits outweigh the costs, in terms of, for example, timetabling and travel?
• Involve significant, purposeful and regular engagement and interaction in learning by pupils, and teachers, from the partnership schools?
• Involve both intra-sector and cross-sector sharing and collaboration?
• Have the confidence and support of parents?

11.18 The paragraphs above have identified forms of working together. There may also be other forms worth examining depending on circumstances in an area. Where there is surplus capacity and falling rolls, it is important that opportunities for sharing are fully considered and evaluated, to improve current educational standards, to make better use of existing resources, and to serve even better the needs of all young people and those who teach them.

12. **ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES**

12.1 The application of the policy to a particular school may be defined simply in terms of four steps; sustainability indicators are assessed; Corporate Director (Education and Social Care) may request a detailed review; officers conduct the review and report the findings to Committee; the outcomes are implemented as part of an ASG plan.

12.2 Where a school is to be retained, following review, the education authority will ensure that adequate support and resources are made available to ensure that it provides a high quality education for its pupils.
12.3 If, following a sustainable schools review, and once all options have been evaluated and exhausted the recommendation is for co-location, amalgamation or closure of a school(s), the Moray Council will produce a proposal paper in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

13. LEGAL

13.1 This policy sets out criteria and indicators on which the Council will use to assess and monitor the viability of its schools to ensure it continues to provide adequate and efficient education and facilities as required by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. It also assists the Council in evaluating how it is continuing to secure improvements in the quality of school education as required by the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc Act 2000.

14. QUALITY IMPROVEMENT, MONITORING and EVALUATION

14.1 Responsibility for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing schools rests with officers of the authority. Responsibility for agreeing, reviewing and amending the policy on Schools for the Future rests with the Elected Members of the Moray Council.

15. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

15.1 There are no staff development implications arising directly from this policy.

16. CONCLUSIONS

16.1 This document sets out six criteria for helping to assess the important issue of the viability of schools. They cover the educational experience of children, school roll, financial position, staff wellbeing and development, accessibility, and strength of links to the community. Each of the criteria brings together a number of relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators.
16.2 The consideration of sustainability criteria and indicators does not mean that where problems are identified, closure or amalgamation needs to be pursued. However, difficulties with one or more factors should draw attention to the need for a more detailed review and evaluation. Otherwise, a school may gradually decline over a period of years at the expense of children’s education. It is important therefore, that the criteria are monitored closely. It is also recognised that local circumstances need to be considered in determining what action may be appropriate e.g. the remoteness of the area may be important. When considering options such as potential amalgamation or closure options, educational, economic and community issues will need to inform decision-making. There will therefore need to continue to be a case by case evaluation of the circumstances, to ensure that the children have access to the best educational experiences possible and attain the highest possible standards.

1.7 CONSULTATIONS

17.1 The following have or will be consulted in the development of this policy: Moray Council Corporate Management Team; Senior Officers in Education and Social Care; Legal and Democratic Services; Equal Opportunities Officer; Head Teachers; Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT); appropriate Trades Unions; Parent Councils.
A Policy for Sustainable Schools

Annex A Criteria and Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1 Quality Educational Experience | 1.1 Attainment levels of pupils. School has raised attainment or maintained high standards. Pupils make very good progress from prior levels of attainment. Attainment trends compare well with similar schools and national levels of attainment (e.g. national examinations).  
1.2 The range of curricular and wider school activities available for children to enable them to achieve in a range of activities for personal and wider achievement (e.g. physical education, music, art, drama).  
1.3 The ability of the school to cater for children with Additional Support Needs.  
1.4 The school’s ability to provide access to a suitably broad and balanced curriculum and, where appropriate, linkages with other schools, other providers and, for secondary schools, the FE sector.  
1.5 The standards and the quality of learning and teaching at the school.  
1.6 The quality of the physical environment for learning and teaching  
   Condition – minimum standard B  
   Suitability – minimum standard B  
1.7 The quality of, and arrangements for, pastoral care including the active promotion of the principles of social justice in all areas of the formal and informal curriculum.  
1.8 Pupil behaviour, exclusions and non-attendance as well as positive behaviours such as involvement in school management (e.g. buddying and mentoring schemes). |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 School Rolls</strong></td>
<td>2.1 The school roll in the past three years and projected demand in the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 Numbers of inward placing requests.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 Numbers of outward placing requests.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4 The school roll does not exceed 90% of physical capacity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Primary:</strong></td>
<td>2.5 No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.6 A minimum of four teachers at a primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.7 Ideally a primary school should have at least seven classrooms (one for each year group). The minimum (not optimal) roll for newly established schools or existing schools should be 145 or 90 in rural areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary:</strong></td>
<td>2.8 The minimum (not optimal) roll for newly established schools or existing schools should be 450 pupils for a secondary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.9 Collaborative curricular arrangements enable pupils to spend 80% or more of their time in their home school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Financial Position</strong></td>
<td>3.1 Budgeted running cost per pupil is not more than 20% above the Moray average cost.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 The school’s annual finances and financial trends indicate that it can live within its devolved budget.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 The school’s three year financial plans, based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that where there is a deficit this can be substantially reduced or recovered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Indicator</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Staff Wellbeing and Development</td>
<td>4.1 Availability of teachers (staff attendance and absence, levels and nature of staff turnover and unfilled staff vacancies).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 Ensuring that the resource allocated is available so that the head teacher has at least 2.46 days per week to attend to leadership and management duties.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 Leadership capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.4 Staff development and leadership of improvement and change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Schools’ Accessibility</td>
<td>5.1 Home to school transport travel times of less than 30 minutes for primary pupils (i.e. 1 hour per day in total) and 45 minutes for secondary pupils (i.e. 1.5 hours per day in total).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Distance to another suitable school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Existing co-operative arrangements with other schools and further education colleges/ training organisations - max travel time 30 minutes for a single journey and total of 2 hours per week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Strong links with the Community</td>
<td>6.1 Parents’ views on the school based on quantitative and qualitative evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 Degree and quality of parental involvement (schools will be asked to provide evidence on this).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Contribution of the school to the community (schools will be asked to provide evidence on this).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.4 Presence of other features of provision, e.g. nursery or specialist unit.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.5 Current, or potential for, multi-functional use of buildings outside formal education, for example, for sport, voluntary and community use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.6 Capacity in nearest schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Schools for the Future:
## A Policy for Sustainable Schools

### Annex B Moray Rural Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberlour Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alves Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botriphnie Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burghead Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craigellachie Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cullen Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyke Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findochty Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenlivet Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopeman Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inveravon Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinloss Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knockando Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lhanbryde Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logie Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milne's High School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milne's Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortlach Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosstodloch Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosstowie Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newmill Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portgordon Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portknockie Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rothes Primary School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rothiemay Primary School</td>
<td>Remote rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speyside High School</td>
<td>Accessible rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomintoul Primary School</td>
<td>Very remote rural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>