

THIS IS A CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT



Falkirk Council
Children's Services

Proposal Paper

That, subject to the outcome of this proposal:

- **Provision of a school at Blackness Primary School be permanently discontinued with effect from 27 June 2025, or as soon as possible thereafter;**
- **That the pupils of Blackness Primary School catchment area permanently receive their education at Grange Primary School, from 30 June 2025 or as soon as possible thereafter;**
- **That the delineated catchment area of Grange Primary School be permanently extended to include the whole delineated catchment area of Blackness Primary School from 30 June 2025; and**
- **All non-catchment Placing Request pupils currently enrolled at Blackness Primary School will be automatically enrolled at their catchment primary school if they live in the Falkirk Council area. Pupils living out with the Falkirk Council area will require a placing request to transfer to another Falkirk Council school.**

This document has been issued by Falkirk Council for proposal in terms of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

1. REASONS FOR FORMULATING THIS PROPOSAL

Blackness Primary School is a single class primary school serving the village of Blackness and the surrounding area and is a feeder primary for Bo'ness Academy.

The Schools (Consultation) Scotland Act 2010 states that education authorities must identify the reasons for formulating a proposal to close a rural school. This proposal was formulated for the following reasons:

- i. The capacity of Blackness Primary School is 50 pupils. The Blackness Primary School roll in August 2024 is 16 pupils giving an occupancy of 32%. This included 10 pupils living within the catchment area for Blackness Primary School and the remaining 6 are placing requests from other Falkirk schools or outside of the Falkirk Council area.
- ii. The number of pupils living with the catchment area of Blackness Primary School has been 10 or less since 2018.
- iii. School roll projections have been developed using health board data on the number of pre-school children living in the Blackness Primary School catchment area.
- iv. Pupil projections indicate that catchment pupil numbers are expected to rise to 13 in 2027/28 and then start to decline.
- v. There are no house building proposals in the catchment area of Blackness Primary School that would affect current projections.

Where catchment numbers reach this low level of 10 or less pupils living in the catchment area of a primary school then a proposal for mothballing may be progressed. This approach was agreed by Education Executive on 4 September 2018. Further information is available from this report:

- [Mothballing of Primary Schools](#)

A report advising the Education, Children and Young People Executive that the Director of Children's Services will be progressing with an informal consultation exercise to consider the proposal to mothball Blackness Primary School was submitted to the Education, Children and Young People Executive 8 November 2022. Further information is available from this report:

- [Consultation on Proposed Mothballing of Blackness Primary School](#)

The outcome of this consultation was reported to the Education, Children and Young People Executive considered this on 31 January 2023. Further information is available from this report:

- [Consultation on the Proposed Mothballing of Blackness Primary School \(Education, Children & Young People Executive, 31 January 2023\)](#)

Information from responses received indicated the possibility that, from August 2024 onwards, the number of catchment children enrolling at the school could be 11, which exceeded the current threshold for school mothballing consideration.

In view of this, it was the opinion of Children's Services that the school remain open for the 2023/24 session, but that the position be reviewed again in March 2024, when the total number of catchment pupil enrolments for the 2024/25 session would be known.

The Education, Children and Young People Executive: -

1. noted the feedback on the consultation exercise undertaken in respect of Blackness Primary School.
2. agreed not to proceed with the proposal to mothball the school from August 2023, based on the recommendations made by the Director of Children's Services as stated in Section 5.10 of the report, and
3. instructed the Director of Children's Services to monitor the position and to update the Education, Children and Young People Executive on the outcome in 2024.

We can now confirm that 16 pupils are attending Blackness Primary School during school session 2024/25, of which 10 pupils live within the catchment area of Blackness Primary School and the remaining 6 are out of catchment placing requests. This remains within the mothballing threshold of 10 or less set for the number of catchment pupils.

Statutory guidance advises that mothballing is only appropriate for a temporary period and where there is significant opposition (as was evident in the mothballing consultation) the statutory consultation process is most appropriate. **Therefore, a decision has been taken to undertake a statutory consultation on a proposal to permanently close Blackness Primary School and extend the catchment area of Grange Primary School to include the existing catchment area of Blackness primary school.**

2. BLACKNESS AND THE LOCAL AREA

Blackness is a small village and harbour at Blackness Bay, an inlet of the Firth of Forth in Scotland. It lies 3 miles east-southeast of Bo'ness, 5 miles west-northwest of South Queensferry and 4 miles north-east of Linlithgow.

To the north is the River Forth and to the east and south it is the boundary of West Lothian Council. Bo'ness is approximately 3 miles to the west of Blackness and is the nearest settlement in the Falkirk Council area.

Settlement Profiles provide basic information for the towns and villages in the Falkirk Council area. The latest Settlement Profile for Blackness is available [here](#).

There is no significant house building proposed within or in close proximity of the Blackness Primary School catchment area.

Blackness Primary School is the only school in Blackness, currently serving the needs of 10 pupils residing in the catchment area. It is classed as "accessible rural" due to its proximity to Bo'ness and Linlithgow.

The school is adjacent to the Blackness Community Hall which is leased by the Council to be used for school lunches and other events requiring the space. The Management Committee of the Community Hall will be invited to comment on the proposal to ensure that the likely effect of the proposal (if implemented) on the sustainability of the local community and any other relevant factors is considered.

Blackness has its own Community Council who will be consulted.

3. BLACKNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL

[Blackness Primary School](#) is a non-denominational, rural school situated outside the village of Blackness. Blackness Primary School is approximately 3 miles from Grange Primary School. It provides education to primary 1 to primary 7 pupils and it is more than 110 years old.

Blackness Primary School Vision, Values and Aims

Our children, parents, staff and community partners will work together to promote a culture of respect, ambition and life-long learning within a physically, emotionally, morally, socially and nurturing environment to realise their full potential.

Blackness Primary School supports the values of:

- Respect regard for others' feelings, wishes or rights, both adults and children
- Integrity be honest and moral, listen to others
- Compassion to care and nurture others
- Kindness be friendly, generous and considerate to others

- We aim to provide a welcoming, secure, stimulating and healthy environment in which our children learn positive attitudes, self-esteem and become confident individuals.
- Staff and Community will create and provide a shared responsibility for the effective leadership of learning and teaching and school

improvement to stimulate children's imagination and intellectual development to become successful learners.

- Staff and Community will develop opportunities to contribute ideas and feelings and become effective contributors in all areas of the curriculum.
- Work co-operatively within the school cluster and wider community to share good practice and ensure smooth transitions from one establishment to the other.
- Enable all children to access an inclusive curriculum that provides the appropriate support and challenge to allow them to fully develop their skills and talents to become responsible citizens.

Catchment

The [catchment area](#) comprises the village itself and the surrounding farms and holdings. Bo'ness and Linlithgow are the nearest towns providing all facilities.

Presumption against closure of rural schools

The [Scottish Government Rural School List](#) classifies Blackness Primary School as an "accessible rural" school (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a drive time of less than 30 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more).

The [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) makes special arrangements in relation to rural schools and **establishes a presumption against closure of rural schools**. The result of this is education authorities must have special regard to several factors before formalising a proposal to close a rural school and in consulting on and reaching a decision whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

These duties are outlined in [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) and the accompanying [Statutory Guidance](#).

As Blackness Primary School is a rural school, when formulating this proposal, the Council is required to:

- i. Identify the reasons for formulating the proposal; and
- ii. Consider whether there are any reasonable alternatives to the proposal as a response to those reasons.

In addition, in the proposal the Council must also give special regard to:

- i. The likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), and
- ii. The likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented).

School management

Blackness Primary School currently has a shared management arrangement with Grange Primary School which means both schools are managed by a single Headteacher.

Class Composition

The school structure has one composite class across stages Primary 1 – 7. There are 16 pupils currently in this composite class.

Stage	2023/24	2024/25
P1	3	4
P2	2	4
P3	3	2
P4	3	3
P5	0	3
P6	0	0
P7	0	0
Total	11	16

School capacity and occupancy

Capacity measures the maximum number of pupils the school can accommodate. Occupancy is the actual number of pupils expressed as a percentage of the capacity.

	Capacity	Occupancy (2023/24)	Occupancy (2024/25)
Blackness	50	22%	32%

Falkirk Council has 48 primary schools with an overall occupancy of 68% across all primary schools. The occupancy profile for these schools is:

Occupancy Level (2023/24)	Number of Schools	Percentage
More than 100% - Overcapacity	3	6%
91-100% - Very High Occupancies	4	8%
81-90% - High Occupancy	6	13%
61 -80% - Medium Occupancy	23	48%
41-60% - Low Occupancy	9	19%
Less than 40% - Very Low Occupancy	3	6%

Schools showing as overcapacity utilise modular accommodation to provide additional capacity.

The 3 schools with less than 40% occupancy in 2023/24 are:

- Blackness Primary School 22%
- Avonbridge Primary School 33%
- Drumbowie Primary School 38%

Teacher Staffing Resource

The teacher staffing in 2023/24 session is used for calculating the costs incurred in running the school as set out in Appendix 1. These are actual costs taken from the Council's ledger system.

Budgeted teacher staffing allocated to Blackness Primary School is shown below for the current and previous 2 school years.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Headteacher	0.2 FTE	0.2 FTE	0.2 FTE
Depute Headteacher	0.2 FTE	0.2 FTE	0.2 FTE
Principal Teacher	1.0 FTE	1.0 FTE	1.0 FTE
Teacher	1.0 FTE	0.8 FTE	0.6 FTE
Total teaching FTE	2.4 FTE	2.2 FTE	2.0 FTE

The reduction in teacher staffing over the 3 years is a consequence of funding reduction applied to all primary schools within Falkirk Council.

This teacher staffing provides resource for:

- Class teaching
- Non class contact time
- Management time
- Support for Learning & Inclusion
- School improvement

The headteacher decides how to deploy the teacher resource to meet the needs of the school. This teacher resource routinely contributes to Grange Primary School and vice versa because of the shared management arrangements.

The single composite class is timetabled to be taught by the Principal Teacher 4 days per week (Tuesday to Friday) with another teacher covering 1 day per week (Monday). Other teachers are timetabled to provide Support for Learning, PE/ Music, Health & Wellbeing and out with class, they contribute to the school improvement plan priorities of:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Literacy
- Learning and Teaching Pedagogy.

Should the number of pupils exceed 17 in any future year then a second, class teacher would be allocated to the school. An additional class teacher costs approximately £63,000 per year including employer contributions.

Cost per Pupil

The cost per pupil attending Blackness Primary School is £25,004 as set out in Appendix 1 using 2023/24 school and finance data. The costing is based on 2023/24 because other than the uplift for pay awards and inflation no

significant changes to the operating costs of the school are anticipated for the 2024/25 budget year.

The estimated cost per pupil in Blackness is expected be nearer £17,000 per pupil in 2024/25 due to increase in pupil numbers (16). This is still higher than the average cost of £6,576 for Falkirk primary schools.

Pupil Roll Projection Methodology

P1 projections are based on the Community Health Index (CHI) data, aggregated by school catchment and anticipated entry year, which provides up to date information on 0-5 year olds living in each catchment. This is then adjusted using a ratio comparing previous CHI actuals to births. This accounts for a range of factors including placing requests, migration, denominational/non-denominational split and deferred entry.

The report presented to Executive (Education) on 12 September 2024 was written prior to receipt of this year's CHI data from the Health Board, late August. This data has since been applied to update pupil roll projections throughout this proposal paper.

P2-P7 Projections (Year 1) - The first year of the projection is simply a reflection of the current year P1-P6 actuals, assuming 100% progression, plus new housing pupil yield figures. For example, Year 1's P5 projection is equal to the current year's actual P4 school roll plus the expected Year 1 pupil product from house building.

P2-P7 Projections (Year 2) - The second year onward are calculated by aggregating the previous year's projection and new housing pupil product figures. For example, Year 2's P3 figure is calculated by adding together Year 1's P2 projection and Year 2's new housing pupil product figures.

New Housing

Total Pupils - This represents the number of pupils expected from new housing for each of the next 10 years. It is calculated by aggregating the house building estimates for all sites in the primary school catchment for each year and multiplying these aggregate totals by the appropriate 'pupil-yield' ratio. The house building estimates are based on known commitments (planning permissions and Local Plan allocations), and phasing of sites based on best available information. The data is updated once a year. Known speculative sites with no current planning status are not included in the aggregate totals.

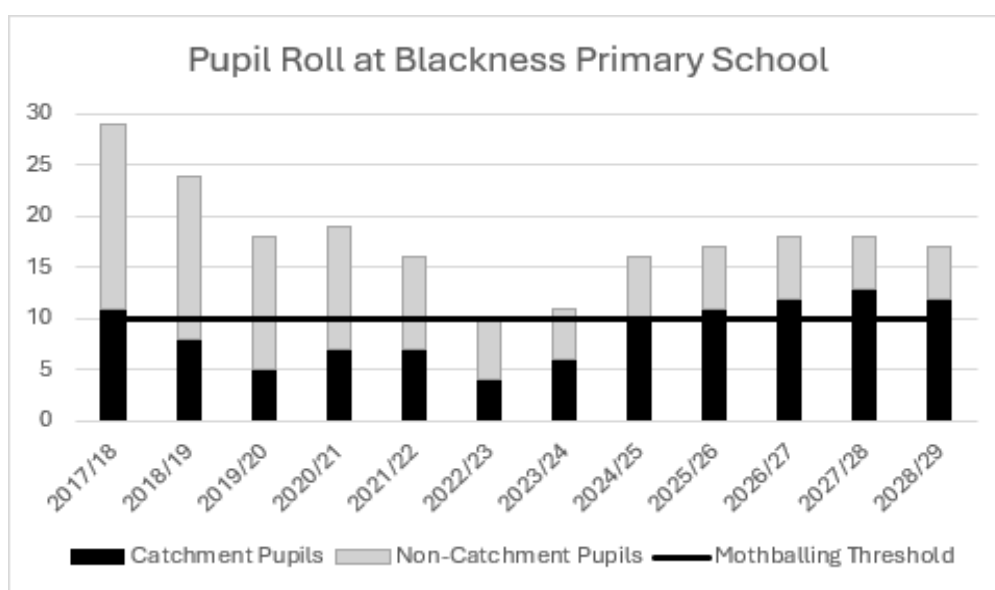
P1-P7 Estimates - The "Total" figure is spread across Primary 1 to 7. The total is divided by 7 and rounded down to whole numbers. Where not exactly divisible by 7, the remainder is added 1 at a time to each year group from P1 up. This creates a weighting of new pupils in the earlier years, which studies have shown reflects actual pupil yield for new housing developments.

Pupil-Yield Ratio - This is based on actual pupil yield experienced from the last 10 year's house building. The ratios are currently as follows:

Type of dwelling >>	House	Flat
Pupil Yield Ratio		
Non Denomination Primary School ratio	0.32	0.11
Roman Catholic Primary	0.06	0.01
Non Denomination Secondary	0.15	0.04
Roman Catholic Secondary	0.03	0.01
Nursery	0.10	0.03

Primary Roll Projections

The following graph and table illustrate the previous and projected pupil roll for Blackness Primary School.



School Year	Catchment Pupils	Non-Catchment Pupils	% Placing Requests	Total Pupils
2017/18	11	18	62%	29
2018/19	8	16	67%	24
2019/20	5	13	72%	18
2020/21	7	12	63%	19
2021/22	7	9	56%	16
2022/23	4	6	60%	10
2023/24	6	5	45%	11
2024/25	10	6	38%	16
2025/26	11	6	35%	17
2026/27	12	6	33%	18
2027/28	13	5	28%	18
2028/29	12	5	29%	17

Free School Meals Profile

The percentage award of free school meals to families that meet low income eligibility is an indicator of deprivation or low income within the school catchment.

- The free school meal average for Falkirk is 20%
- The percentage comparator for Blackness Primary School is:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Blackness	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Additional Support Needs Profile

Information available indicates 9% of pupils attending Blackness Primary School have an additional support need. This compares with 27.4% average for Falkirk primary schools.

Pupil attendance

The following table indicates the pupil attendance percentage for Blackness Primary School relative to the Falkirk average.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Blackness	97.8%	93.1%	98.1%	98.3%
Falkirk	95.0%	91.7%	92.6%	93.0%

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels

The following table shows the percentage of pupils (P1, 4 & 7) at expected CfE level.

	Literacy			Numeracy		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
Blackness	60%	100%	100%	80%	100%	83%
Falkirk	74%	76%	78%	81%	83%	83%

School building suitability and condition

Throughout Scotland, core facts are gathered and published on school buildings. The definition and assessment categorisations are set by the Scottish Government. The current condition and suitability ratings for Blackness Primary School are:

- Condition – **B**, Satisfactory - Performing adequately but showing minor deterioration.
- Suitability – **A**, Good - Performing well and operating effectively.

4. STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS THE REASONS FOR THIS PROPOSAL

The number of pupils living in the catchment area of Blackness Primary School has been 10 or less since August 2018. Time was provided for this position to change from 2019 prior to bringing the proposal to mothball the school which was considered in January 2023 following a non-statutory

consultation. This allowed a period of 4 years for the number of catchment pupils to increase above 10 pupils and this did not happen.

Following the non-statutory consultation with the local community in 2022, particularly those families directly affected, it was strongly suggested by residents that Council data was incomplete for pre-school age children living in the catchment area of Blackness Primary School. They were of the view there would be more demand for places in the coming years than had been projected. On this basis, the Education, Children and Young People Executive agreed not to mothball the school in August 2024 and instead reconsider this after the pupil numbers for 2024/25 were confirmed.

2 catchment enrolments were received for August 2024. This is lower than suggested by the consultation process.

5. REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In arriving at the proposal set out within this Proposal Paper, the Council has considered alternative options for the future of Blackness Primary School:

- Option 1 - Open nursery provision in Blackness Primary School.
- Option 2 - Increase occupancy through rezoning and extending the catchment area of Blackness Primary School.
- Option 3 - Reallocate available capacity in Blackness Primary School for other purposes.
- Option 4 - Mothball Blackness Primary School.
- Option 5 - Blackness Primary School remains open.

In considering the options below, account was taken of the fact there is a presumption against closure of a rural school. As part of the options appraisal, the “rural school factors” specified the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) have been given special regard.

These are the likely:

- Education benefits
- Effect on the local community.
- Effect on travel arrangements.

6. ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

• Option 1 - Open nursery provision in Blackness Primary School.

Summary - The low projected uptake, requirement for suitable adjustments to Blackness Primary School and availability of nearby alternative provision in Bo'ness means that the Education Services does not consider this to be a reasonable alternative option.

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL FACTORS

Effect on the local community

- Adding a nursery provision is unlikely to add to the sustainability of the community. In the previous consultation of the mothballing proposal, the community was not indicating that it is dependent on families with children for sustainability of the village. This matches the Council's assessment.
- The introduction of a nursery provision would have a neutral impact on the availability of the premises for use by the community.

Effect on travel arrangements

- There is no or very limited registered childcare provision currently located in Blackness. Pre-school age children in Blackness currently access provision in nearby Bo'ness or Linlithgow, the nearest larger communities.
- Bus services between Blackness and Bo'ness or Linlithgow are relatively infrequent. Most residents of Blackness generally use a car to commute.

Effect on education benefits

- The low catchment demand for primary places suggests that there would be insufficient numbers to initiate and sustain a nursery class. Blackness Primary School is not immediately suitable for pre-5 provision regarding indoor and outdoor facilities. The school would require appropriate toilet and nappy changing facilities to meet Care Inspectorate regulations. The school building does not have the appropriate facilities or space to develop these as well as function as a small school.
- The recent phase of early years expansion is now complete and all available funding was allocated to achieve this.

Nursery classes (term time)

- St Mary's RC Primary School
- Bo'ness Public Primary School
- Deanburn Primary School
- Grange Primary School
- Kinneil Primary School

Early Learning & Childcare Centre

- Borrowstoun ELCC

- **Option 2 - Increase occupancy through rezoning and extending the catchment area of Blackness Primary School.**

Summary – There are no viable options for increasing the catchment area of Blackness Primary School. Any proposal to do so would be disruptive to families living in Bo'ness and likely to face opposition. The Education Service does not consider this to be a reasonable alternative option.

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL FACTORS

Effect on the local community

- Increasing the catchment area is unlikely to add to the sustainability of the community. In the previous consultation of the mothballing proposal, the community did not indicate that it is dependent on families with children for sustainability of the village. This matches the Council's assessment.

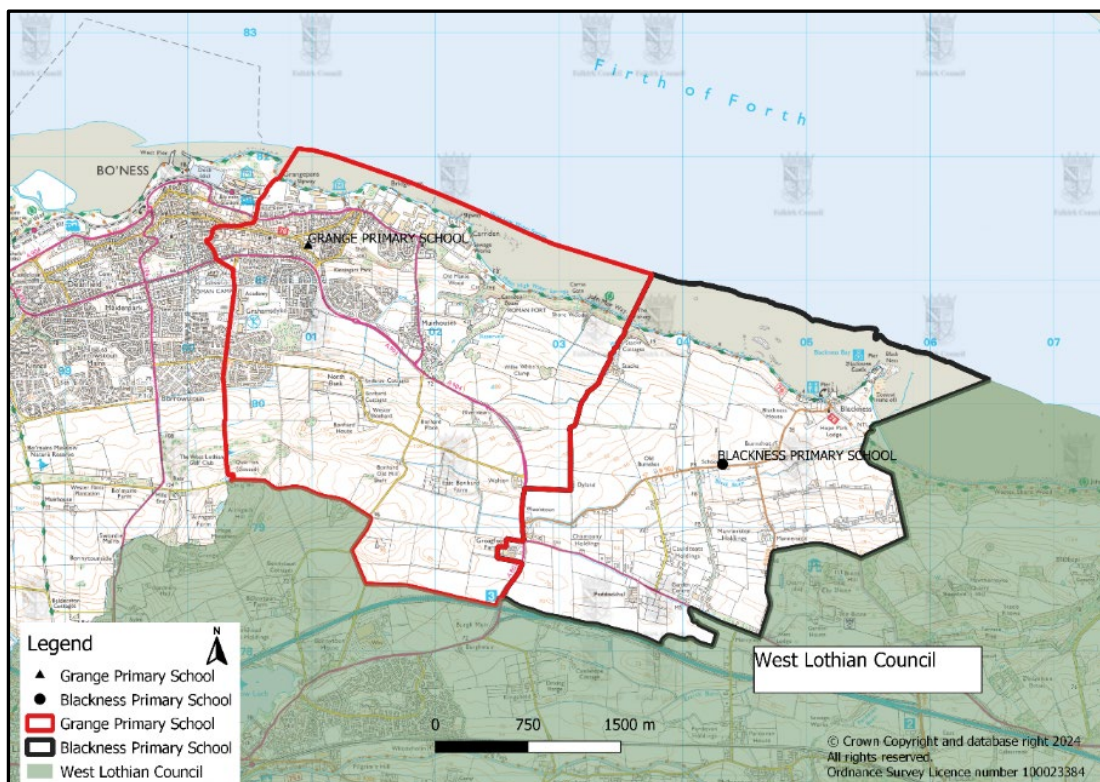
- The increase in capacity from a rezoning would have a neutral impact on the availability of the premises for use by the community.

Effect on travel arrangements

- Any pupils zoned to Blackness Primary School from this area would require school transport to be provided. The map below shows the geographical separation of Blackness from Bo'ness. It should be noted that a proposal to rezone school catchments would require a statutory consultation before any decision can be taken.

Effect on education benefits

- A catchment review can in principle be a reasonable option in some cases, to increase the sustainability of a school. An in-depth analysis in each case is required to ascertain if a sustainable increase in school roll could be achieved and a detrimental impact on neighbouring schools is not created as a result. The geographical location of Blackness means the only option for increasing the catchment is to extend the existing catchment area of Blackness Primary School to towards Bo'ness in the west. This would mean rezoning the nearest area of Bo'ness (Muirhouses/Carriden Brae) which is over 2 miles away from Blackness but within walking distance to Grange Primary School. There are currently only 11 primary aged pupils' living in these semi-rural localities, so any proposed rezoning would also need to consider the more densely populated areas even closer to Grange Primary School to have the necessary impact on the pupil roll at Blackness Primary School.



- **Option 3 Reallocate available capacity in Blackness Primary School for other purposes:**

Summary – The location of Blackness Primary School at the eastern extremity of the Falkirk Council area, the space availability within the school and the nearby community hub means the Education Service does not consider this to be a reasonable alternative option.

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL FACTORS

Effect on the local community

- There is no suggestion that implementing this option would add to the sustainability of the community. In the previous consultation of the mothballing proposal, the community was not indicating that it is dependent on families with children for sustainability of the village. This matches the Council's assessment.
- The reallocation of available capacity in the school would have a neutral impact on the availability of the premises for use by the community.
- The location of this rural school at the eastern edge of the Falkirk Council area, and some distance from population centres, make it difficult to consider for other purposes whether educational or otherwise. The Council already has a network of community advice and support hubs, located in the west, central and east of the Falkirk area. The nearest hub to Blackness is in Grangemouth, approximately 10 miles away. The hub provides a range of services, including expert advice and practical support i.e. accessing self-serve computers. The hubs are staffed by an experienced team who are there to listen, advise and help navigate through various situations such as:
 - Housing benefit/council tax reduction forms
 - Local Housing Allowance
 - Discretionary Housing Payments
 - Free School Meals and Clothing Grants
 - Scottish Welfare Fund
 - ArrearsHub staff can provide information or make a referral to one of the following dedicated teams who will give tailored advice, information and guidance to best suit an individual's needs:
 - Debt and budgeting advice
 - Welfare benefits
 - Housing options
 - Homelessness

Effect on travel arrangements

- This option presents no change to travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Blackness Primary School.

Effect on education benefits

- Blackness Primary School is a small school with a maximum capacity of 50 pupils. The school currently uses all the available indoor and outdoor space, even with the limited numbers of pupils. The school demonstrates its use of the available space in this "[Welcome Video](#)". Removal of this space would detract from the education benefit of the small school experience so valued by the community.

Option 4 - Mothball Blackness Primary School:

Summary – The previous proposal to mothball in 2022 was met with opposition by those who responded to the consultation. The Scottish Government Statutory Guidance advises that mothballing a school is only appropriate for a temporary period. If parents oppose this, they should not be denied access to consultation thus it would be appropriate to move to a statutory consultation process on closure. Mothballing the school in anticipation of increased pupil numbers is therefore not considered a reasonable alternative by the Education Service.

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL FACTORS

Effect on the local community

- There is no suggestion that implementing this option would detract from the sustainability of the community. In the previous consultation of the mothballing proposal, the community was not indicating that it is dependent on families with children for sustainability of the village. This matches the Council's expectations; however, formal consultation will be helpful to confirm the current feeling within the Blackness community.
- The mothballing would have a neutral impact on the availability of the premises for use by the community.

Effect on travel arrangements

- There are no suitable walking routes for pupils along many of the country roads leading to Blackness Primary School. Because of this, most pupils living in the catchment of Blackness Primary School are entitled to free school transport.
- The current home to school transport in the catchment area takes up to 15 minutes each way.
- If Blackness Primary School is mothballed, pupils living in the catchment would be eligible for free school transport to Grange Primary School. This would require a change in the home to school transport contract which is estimated to be an additional cost of £10,000 per year compared with current costs.
- The estimated time spent travelling from the Blackness catchment area to Grange Primary School will take up 15-25 minutes each way.

Effect on education benefits

- If Blackness Primary School was mothballed, pupils would be accommodated at Grange Primary School which is approximately 3 miles away and is the nearest school in Falkirk.
- If Blackness Primary School is mothballed, Falkirk Council would incur annual costs to maintain the building. Unoccupied buildings can deteriorate more rapidly than operational premises and can become a focus for vandalism whether the premises are in urban or rural areas.
- It is possible that if Blackness Primary School is mothballed, pending an increase in pupil numbers living in the catchment area, children will become settled at Grange Primary School and would not return to Blackness Primary School in the event of the school reopening later.
- It could be considered that mothballing creates continued uncertainty for parents and the community. In addition, there are no opportunities to progress alternative uses for the building, which may include community asset transfer, lease or sale of the building, all of which may benefit the wider community.

- **Option 5 - To keep Blackness Primary School open:**

Summary – This option will not affect the community, travel arrangements or current pupils of Blackness Primary School. It has not been possible to identify other steps which could increase the catchment roll, whilst maintaining the status quo in terms of the catchment area. The Education Services does not consider this to be a reasonable alternative option.

ASSESSMENT OF RURAL FACTORS

Effect on the local community

- There is no suggestion that implementing this option would increase the sustainability of the community. In the previous consultation of the mothballing proposal, the community was not indicating that it is dependent on families with children for sustainability of the village. This matches the Council's expectations.
- Keeping the school open would have a neutral impact on the availability of the premises for use by the community.
- The pupil roll projections do not suggest that the number of pupils living in the catch area of Blackness Primary School will significantly increase in future years. Low future pupil numbers are unlikely to lead to a sufficient increase to make the school roll sustainable. The financial implications of maintaining the "status quo" for the school are a continuation of the current running costs of £275,045 per annum based on 2023/24 costs, see Appendix 1.
- The comparative cost per pupil with other primary schools is relatively higher in Blackness Primary School. This is not the sole determining factor for progressing any proposal for closure, it is referenced for comparative purpose only.

	2022/23	2023/24
Blackness Primary School	£27,056 (10 Pupils)	£25,004 (11 pupils)
Grange Primary School	£4,984 (258 pupils)	£6,002 (256 pupils)
Falkirk Council average (Primary)	£5,815 (11,795 pupils)	£6,576 (11,594 pupils)

As stated in section 3, the cost per pupil attending Blackness Primary is expected to reduce in 2024/25 to be nearer £17,000 per pupil. This is mainly due to the pupil roll (divider) increasing from 11 to 16 pupils. This is still higher than the average cost of £6,576 for Falkirk primary schools.

Effect on travel arrangements

- This option presents no change to travel arrangements for pupils currently attending Blackness Primary School.

Effect on education benefits

- The reason for taking forward an options appraisal for Blackness Primary School was that the demand for places from pupils living in the school's catchment area has declined over recent years to very low levels, and the school has been operating with a single class across all year stages for the 3rd year from August 2024.
- The following table shows the school roll since 2017/18 (taken from the annual school census):

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Catchment Pupils	8	5	7	7	4	6	10
Placing Requests	16	13	12	9	6	5	6
Total No. Pupils	24	18	19	16	10	11	16
No. Classes	2	2	2	2	1	1	1

- Based on available data, catchment demand for places in the coming 3 years will remain at low levels as shown in the following table:

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Catchment Pupils	11	12	13	12
Placing Requests	6	6	5	5
Total No. Pupils	17	18	18	17
No. Classes	1	2	2	1

- Over the 3 years following school session 2028/29, 10 catchment pupils will leave as they progress to secondary school. This is based on the current (2024/25) number of number of pupils in P1 to P3 transitioning to secondary school. This suggests that the catchment pupil roll will decline beyond these projections but is still depending upon births and inward migration in the intervening period.

7. THE OPTION FOR CONSULTATION FROM THE OPTIONS ASSESSED

Assessment of the 5 options considered, taking special regard to the rural school considerations, demonstrates that the option for the permanent closure of Blackness Primary School, with the pupils instead attending Grange Primary School, is the only reasonable alternative in response to the unsustainable school roll and represents the best value for educational purposes. The following sections now consider that option in more depth.

8. GRANGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

[Grange Primary School](#) is located immediately west of the current catchment area for Blackness Primary School, approximately 3 miles between the two schools.

Grange Primary School provides non-denominational primary education to Primary 1 – 7 pupils.

The school has an Enhanced Provision setting accommodating 8 pupils.

There is a nursery provision at Grange Primary School which has a provision for a maximum of 56 children.

Grange Primary School Vision, Values and Aims

Our children, parents, staff and community partners will work together to promote a culture of respect, ambition and life-long learning within a physically, emotionally, morally, socially and nurturing environment to realise their full potential

Grange Primary School supports the values of:-

- Wisdom to learn and share with others
- Justice to be fair and reasonable
- Compassion to care and nurture others
- Integrity be honest and moral, listen to others
- Respect regard for others' feelings, wishes or rights, both adults and children
- Kindness be friendly, generous and considerate to others
- Commitment achieve your best, be ambitious and work hard

Be good people who will make a positive difference to their school and the world in which they live.

- We aim to provide a welcoming, secure and stimulating and healthy environment in which our children learn positive attitudes, self- esteem and become Confident Individuals.
- Staff and Community will create and provide a shared responsibility for the effective leadership of learning and teaching and school improvement to stimulate children’s imagination and intellectual development to become Successful Learners.
- Staff and Community will develop opportunities to contribute ideas and feelings and become Effective Contributors in all areas of the curriculum.
- Work co-operatively within the school cluster and wider community to share good practice and ensure smooth transitions from one establishment to the other.
- Enable all children to access an inclusive curriculum that provides the appropriate support and challenge to allow them to fully develop their skills and talents to become Responsible Citizens.

School management

Grange Primary School currently has a shared management arrangement with Blackness Primary School which means both schools are managed by a single Headteacher.

Catchment

The [catchment area](#) for Grange Primary School adjoins the catchment areas for Blackness Primary School, Bo’ness Public Primary School and Kinneil Primary School.

The map included in the assessment of option 2 above shows the Grange Primary School catchment area.

Class Composition

The school structure currently operates with 10 primary classes.

Stage	2023/24	2024/25
P1	38	24
P2	33	39
P3	43	33
P4	37	42
P5	34	36
P6	38	33
P7	33	39
Total	256	246

Teacher Staffing Resource

Budgeted teacher staffing allocated to Grange Primary School is shown below for the current and previous 2 school years.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Headteacher	0.8 FTE	0.8 FTE	0.8 FTE
Depute Headteacher	0.8 FTE	0.8 FTE	0.8 FTE
Principal Teacher	1.0 FTE	1.0 FTE	1.0 FTE
Teacher	11.2 FTE	11.7 FTE	11.4 FTE
Total teaching FTE	13.8 FTE	14.3 FTE	14.0 FTE

The reduction in teacher staffing over the 3 years is a consequence of funding reduction applied to all primary schools within Falkirk Council.

This teacher staffing provides resource for:

- Class teaching
- Non class contact time
- Management time
- Support for Learning & Inclusion
- School improvement

Cost per Pupil

The cost per pupil attending Grange Primary School is £6,002 using 2023/24 school data.

School capacity and occupancy

Capacity measures the maximum number of pupils the school can accommodate. Occupancy is the actual number of pupils expressed as a percentage of the capacity.

	Capacity	Occupancy (2023/24)	Occupancy (2024/25)
Grange	287	89%	86%

Grange: Future School Capacity & Occupancy (without housing)

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Grange Projected Roll without housing	235	233	233	227	217
Occupancy Rate	82%	81%	81%	79%	76%

Grange: Future School Capacity & Occupancy (WITH housing)

	Actual School Roll	<i>Projected School Roll</i>				
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Grange Roll	246	253	283	315	322	310
Capacity *	287	287	287	287	287	287
Occupancy Rate	86%	88%	99%	110%	112%	108%
Estimated Pupil Numbers from New House Building		18	34	38	25	14

This is based on all the pupils from new housing turning up at the school.

Free School Meal Profile

The percentage award of free school meals to families that meet low income eligibility is an indicator of deprivation or low income within the school catchment.

- The free school meal average for Falkirk is 20%.
- The percentage comparator for Grange Primary School is:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Grange	18.6%	18.6%	17.1%	16.7%

Additional Support Needs Profile

Information available indicates 13% of pupils attending Grange Primary School have an additional support need. This compares with 27.4% average for Falkirk primary schools.

Pupil attendance

The following table indicates the pupil attendance percentage for Blackness Primary School relative to the Falkirk average.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Grange	94.5%	90.7%	92.7%	93.1%
Falkirk	95.0%	91.7%	92.6%	93.0%

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels

The following tables shows the percentage of pupils (P1, 4 & 7) at expected CfE level.

	Literacy			Numeracy		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
Grange	64%	73%	74%	68%	82%	84%
Falkirk	74%	76%	78%	81%	83%	83%

School building suitability and condition

Throughout Scotland, core facts are gathered and published on school buildings. The definition and assessment categorisations are set by the Scottish Government. The current condition and suitability ratings for Grange Primary School are:

- Condition – **B**, Satisfactory - Performing adequately but showing minor deterioration.
- Suitability – **B**, Satisfactory - Performing well but with minor problems.

9. EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

This educational benefits statement is written from the perspective of benefits, should the preferred option outlined in section 7 be implemented. This statement is focussed on the educational benefits for pupil attending Grange Primary School.

Assessment of likely educational benefits on pupils

If this proposal is implemented, the Council believes that there will be considerable educational benefits arising from this. These centre around:

- Learning and teaching.
- Meeting learners needs.
- Broadening the range of opportunities; and
- the environment for learning including curriculum.

The Council recognises the high quality of education provision offered at Blackness Primary School. However, it considers that the very small number of children attending the school would benefit more from the wider range and breadth of learning experiences available to them within other learning environments and within a wider peer group at their age and stage. Blackness Primary School is in its third year as a single-class school from August 2024. This means that all pupils from Primary 1 through to Primary 7 are taught by a single teacher. Occasionally pupils do not have peers at the same year stage, and this can remain the case for their entire primary education which means these pupils do not benefit from learning in collaborative and cooperative situations with peers and age and stage appropriate groups. At Grange Primary School children would benefit more from working with a wider range of their peer group. This would allow them to build and develop stronger and wider peer relationships with the group of children they would transition to the local secondary school with. The school would ensure that a smooth transition from Blackness to Grange Primary Schools ensures all learners feel confident and prepared for their new school.

Blackness Primary School has operated under a shared headship arrangement with Grange Primary School. Therefore, children are familiar with the staff team at Grange Primary School. Pupils from Blackness would also receive an induction to Grange Primary School to provide opportunity for meeting their new teachers and classmates and getting to know the school in

advance of any transfer. The Headteacher of Grange Primary School would now be dedicated to the school, in one building at all times.

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of them adapting their approach to ensure effective teaching practice relevant to the needs of children (within the associated guidance). This means that schools can design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. This along with the current shared Headship means that there is already a knowledge of the children from Blackness Primary School and their needs within Grange Primary School. There is currently a range of opportunities for shared working with both staff and children to support the design and delivery of the curriculum. Therefore, attendance of pupils at Grange Primary School allows children to continue to experience a curriculum which is matched to their needs.

Notably, the educational benefits arising from the proposal for pupils transferring from a smaller school such as Blackness Primary School to a larger school such as Grange Primary School are assessed by the Education team to include:

Learning and Teaching

The curriculum includes a broad range of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, to help every child and young person to develop knowledge, skills and attributes for success in learning, life and work. In Grange Primary School, children encouraged to be eager and active participants who are engaged, resilient and highly motivated during their learning. Children know that their views are sought, valued and acted upon. Although this can be said for Blackness Primary school as well, due to the greater number of staff and pupils in Grange Primary School, the learners' experiences would be more diverse, and they would have access to wider range of skillsets and areas of expertise.

The learning environment encourages high level of achievement, providing a wide range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential within the four contexts of learning. In Grange Primary School children may be taught in classes composed of children from one or more year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They can interact and socialise with groups of children, take part in team activities and move with a wide range of peers to secondary school.

At Grange Primary School, staff are challenged and supported through a range of continuous professional development and review opportunities gained by working and learning with a range of colleagues. Staff at Grange Primary School already work with the staff team at Blackness Primary School and have developed an understanding of the needs of the children through joint collegiate activities. Colleagues within Grange Primary School are able to

support and challenge each other daily. The whole staff are able to bring a range of talents and skills to benefit outcomes for all children.

Grange Primary School's ethos and environment is positive and nurturing. Their work is based on the UNCRC principles of the Rights of the Child, embedded school values and the principles of a nurturing school where every effort is made to ensure barriers to learning are removed to ensure all pupils have the best learning experiences.

Across Grange Primary School, children agree to embrace school values and regularly participate in Achievement, Values and Class Assemblies which create a sense of community and belonging and recognise the achievements of all pupils. This allows all pupils to showcase their learning in and out with school. Pupil choice ensures opportunities for children are developed across the curriculum. As a result, children are increasingly motivated to learn, are happy in school, strive to do well and live the values.

Children are involved in leading and organising a range of family and community events linked to their learning experiences:

- Learning for Sustainability groups
- Digital learners – show children how to use the apps etc.
- House groups – House Captains – lead activities and fundraising events
- Pupil Council Reps – gather children's opinions on School Improvement Plan
- Language Ambassadors – promote 1+2 languages around the school.
- Buddies and Playground leaders – leading games
- STEM events – supporting the organisation of these.
- Remembrance Day
- Fair Day.

This allows pupils to demonstrate the four capacities and to develop skills for life. Grange Primary School is aspirational for the children and proud that they are friendly, happy and open to all opportunities which allow them to 'Believe to Achieve'.

Meeting learners needs

Through the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) practice model, meeting the needs of every child continues to be a priority. Teachers carefully plan and assess to ensure each child has the opportunity to reach their potential. Careful tracking and monitoring procedures are in place to evidence pupil progress. This includes professional dialogue with teachers, learning discussions with children, classroom observations, assessment and looking at pupil work.

Children's views are important and are sought and valued to identify our priorities. Wellbeing indicator reflections are reviewed termly for positive Health and Wellbeing choices and supports are in place to address needs where identified.

Grange Primary School also has planned meetings and discussions with parents. These discussions between home and school improve parental engagement whilst focussing on next steps for learning. Where appropriate, interventions are put in place, while working effectively with other agencies and parents to ensure the needs of each child are met. Across the school, attainment has improved over the last three years with most children achieving expected levels in reading, writing, listening and talking and numeracy at P1, P4 and P7. The school level trend data shows this compares well with the Neighbourhood Group and Authority measures.

The staff, parent body and partner groups also bring opportunities for increased collaborative working. This applies both in terms of the wider curriculum and within aspects of the curriculum that may be enhanced by staff individual expertise e.g. PE, languages, STEM, expressive arts teaching.

Health and Wellbeing continues to develop within the Emotion Works programme which supports positive behaviours and relationship within the school. A 'Respect Me' policy is built into class lessons and permeates the whole school ethos through assemblies and class work on rights and responsibilities. The school has achieved the Digital Schools Award with the recommendation of being a mentor school and also the Silver Rights Respecting Schools Award.

Broadening the range of opportunities

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) helps children gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. The development of skills is integral to supporting children to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (the four capacities). The range of skills and attributes that children develop should provide them with a sound basis for their development as lifelong learners in their adult, social and working lives, enabling them to reach their full potential.

These skills should be developed across all curriculum areas and are embedded into the Curriculum for Excellence Experiences and Outcomes, requiring teachers to plan opportunities to develop them in a variety of ways, including engagement in active learning, interdisciplinary tasks and to experience learning in practical contexts. A critical part of all of this is learning in collaborative and cooperative situations with peers and age and stage appropriate groups.

Children at Grange Primary School are offered a range of active, planned experiences which help them develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing both now and in the future. This is in line with their entitlement to a broad general education.

There is also a strong transition planning process between Grange Primary School and Bo'ness Academy, which involves increased opportunities for

children to participate and to make new connections within a wider peer group. Children at Blackness Primary School would benefit from a variety of experiences to develop their sense of responsibility, independence, confidence and enterprising attitude, as well as teamwork experiences, which are provided at Grange Primary School through work with larger cohorts of children of the same age and stage and working at the same level.

Across Grange Primary School children engage well with learning and contribute effectively to age and stage appropriate lessons. Staff promote positive relationships at all levels, the impact of this being that children enjoy good relationships with their peers. They also have opportunities to support each other in their learning through cooperative and collaborative peer experiences.

Environment for learning including curriculum

Grange Primary School is suitably equipped and well supported, situated within 3.1 miles of Blackness Primary School. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the children. The school building is large enough to provide a full range of facilities, including Early Years provision and has facilities for pupils and visitors with additional access needs.

In summary, there are a range of educational benefits for pupils if this proposal was to be implemented, as summarised in the paragraphs above.

There are benefits for the development of social and emotional skills, as well as the educational benefits resultant from access to a more diverse curriculum. The learning environment in Grange Primary School also offers children the opportunity to participate in a wider range of experiences to support their wider achievement.

Assessment of likely educational benefits on any children who would (in the future but for implementation) be likely to become pupils of the school.

Existing and future pupils

Children who may live in this catchment area in the future will benefit from the broad range of educational opportunities which are presented through this proposal, as detailed above.

There would be positive educational benefits associated with this proposal. The management arrangements of the school would be strengthened and there would be opportunities for increasing the range of the curriculum and increasing the use of active pedagogies.

The proposal would extend the peer group for all pupils, present and future. Pupils who would otherwise have attended Blackness Primary School, would benefit from daily interaction in a larger peer group and from improved

educational arrangements as described above. Pupils in the combined school will have more shared experiences and opportunity for friendships. This will enhance their confidence and make the transition to secondary easier. Larger year groups make the provision of specialist services more viable and provide enhanced opportunities for school trips.

Assessment of likely educational benefits on the pupils of any other schools in the Council area

The cost per pupil of operating Blackness Primary School is relatively high compared with other Falkirk Primary Schools due to the low number of pupils attending. The reduction in school operating costs which would be achieved by the closure of Blackness Primary School means that this is a saving to the council. There are no other significant impacts from this proposal on other pupils in the authority or who attend other schools, in either a positive or a negative way.

Consideration of how to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the implementation of this proposal

The main adverse effect from this proposal would be the length of the journey to school for children who live in the Blackness Primary School catchment area. Funded school transport would be provided for pupils should this proposal be implemented. However, this extended journey time is still within reasonable journey time for home to school transport.

Summary of educational benefits statement

Educational benefits of this proposal, such as the ability for children to participate in a broad range of experiences, the development of the strategic leadership of the Headteacher in taking forward improvements in learning and teaching across one campus, and the ability to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of the children are significant benefits to this proposal.

10. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSAL

This section provides a more detailed assessment of the proposal which is considered to be the only reasonable response to the unsustainable school roll. It considers the “rural school factors” of community impact and impact on travel arrangements, as well as the Educational Benefits Statement above.

SPECIAL REGARD TO THE LIKELY EFFECT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Community Impact – Loss of the school

The number of catchment pupils attending Blackness Primary School is low. Most catchment pupils are currently entitled to free school transport to Blackness Primary School.

The informal consultation on the mothballing proposal in 2022 highlighted opposition to the proposal with those opposing the proposal noting. This opposition remains to be the case as exemplified in parental deputation to the Executive (Education) on 12 September 2024:

- The importance of the school's involvement in the local community.
- Its role in bonding the community for getting together and fundraising.
- Concern for the future of the building if the school closes.
- A village school will never be a "big" school, it serves the community in the same way other schools serve their communities, and no two are the same.
- It is a small school but the one-to-one education they receive is next to none.
- The opportunity my daughter gets from being a pupil in the school is outstanding and she would not get this in a class of 30+.
- Potential capacity issues at Grange Primary School.
- Concern for the future of staff at the school.
- Lack of links with Grange Primary School.

The concerns of children moving to larger classes at Grange Primary School are understood. Children would be supported to prepare for and transition to larger classes. The move to larger classes and a much larger school already exists, as children transition to secondary school. The proposals, if implemented, will provide the children a greater opportunity to form relationships and friendships with a wider group of children, ahead of their transition to secondary school.

Concerns over the potential capacity at Grange Primary School are understood. However, primary schools can effectively operate to 95% occupancy rates and the current capacity at Grange Primary School can cope with the transfer of the Blackness catchment pupils and new housing. If necessary, capacity will be increased.

The Council believes that the sustainability of the Blackness village community will not be affected. Pupils will attend a school only 3 miles away from their existing school.

Blackness Primary School and Grange Primary School have been jointly managed for several years allowing a strong integration of the educational approach in both schools. As such, pupils at Blackness are already part of a larger, sustainable school community through the leadership team already shared with Grange Primary School. Blackness pupils also transition to Bo'ness Academy and there are no indications that this has affected the sustainability of the village community.

These concerns are to be expected when a change like this is proposed. Pupils and staff will be fully supported to prepare for the transition to Grange Primary School if it is agreed.

Finally, the wider Falkirk community of which Blackness village is a part, will benefit from the development of a more sustainable school estate, with a reduction in revenue costs due to under-occupancy and maintenance of a council asset. The longevity of the remaining schools will be improved, providing stability to the area. There is no anticipated impact on the use of shops, services and facilities in this wider community by residents of the Blackness community because of the closure of Blackness Primary School.

Community Impact – Use of the Building

Blackness Primary School is the only Council Service currently situated in Blackness except for the public conveniences located in the village centre.

The Blackness Community Hall is leased from the committee by Blackness Primary School to be used for school events and school meals. Education Services pay the committee £5,280 per year for the use of the Community Hall. When the school is not using the hall, it is regularly used for other community activities.

The Blackness community has made no real use of the school building for community activities. There is currently no community demand for out of hours/lets at this school. Therefore, if the proposal is accepted, no impact is anticipated that would adversely affect the sustainability of the Blackness village community. All children would continue to live in the Blackness village community and will attend a school only 3 miles away.

The Blackness community does however rely on the Blackness Community Hall and is concerned the closure of the school would have a significant impact on the hall and risk its viability. The Council previously noted it is prepared to discuss a transitional arrangement with the Hall Committee. Such an arrangement could involve a period of continued payment while the committee transitions out of any dependency on the school use.

The Blackness community requires to travel to access most services due to a lack of amenities with the village. Travel by car is convenient but public transport is more limited.

What will happen to the school building?

Once the building becomes empty, it would be deemed surplus to Children's Services operational requirements and the Council's Asset Management Team would then consider what future options there are for the property, which could include potential sale. However, it is important that all community views are considered prior to this happening, and we would welcome your views on possible future uses for this building, should the school close permanently.

11. LIKELY EFFECT CAUSED BY DIFFERENT TRAVELLING ARRANGEMENTS

As Blackness Primary School is a rural school, special regard is paid to the rural school factors. These were considered throughout the assessment of the options in section 6.

The travel distance from Blackness Primary School to Grange Primary Schools is approximately 3 miles with an approximate travel time of 10 minutes by car. Currently, most of the catchment pupils attending Blackness Primary School receive free school transport as there are no suitable walking routes for pupils along many of the country roads leading to Blackness Primary School. This is a journey by school bus of up to 15 minutes per day each way.

Grange Primary School is only 3 miles away and pupils from Blackness will receive free school transport to and from Grange Primary School should the proposal be accepted. If Blackness Primary School was permanently closed, all children living in the Blackness catchment area would be transported by the Council to Grange Primary School. This would take up to 25 minutes by school bus each way. This duration of journey is not uncommon for pupils travelling on school transport and taking this proposal forward would not adversely affect the current pupils concerned or future pupils.

Travelling for primary school education is not uncommon in Falkirk because of the geography of the area.

The current Blackness school bus service is part of larger contract that also includes the school service from Blackness to Bo'ness Academy. There will be some additional mileage and an additional estimated cost of £10,000 per annum compared to current cost if this service serves Grange Primary School instead of Blackness Primary School.

Staff working in Falkirk schools regularly travel throughout the area to and from work. The distance of 3 miles is a relatively short distance to travel. It is therefore considered that there is very limited impact on staff travelling arrangements. There is unlikely to be any environmental impact arising from the arrangements staff make to get to school.

Other users of the school premises or facilities will not be affected in relation to transport arrangements. The Community Hall is adjacent to the school and there are no other regular users of the school and therefore there is no effect on transport.

The community already requires travelling to access other services such a GP and Dental Surgeries, larger shops and Post Offices in Bo'ness or Linlithgow.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Falkirk Council does not consider that there will be any significant adverse environmental effects because of this proposal. There will be a small environmental impact of transporting all the Blackness pupils together to Grange Primary School and extending their daily travel to school by 3 miles each way.

If the proposal is approved, it will have a positive impact on the Council's energy and climate change ambitions, as less energy will be required across the learning estate.

The community already requires travelling to access other services such as GP and Dental Surgeries, larger shops and Post Offices.

13. EFFECTS ON STAFF AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Where necessary, any aspect of the implementation of this proposal that impacts on staff will result in consultation with the relevant trade unions and the individuals concerned.

14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The annual operating costs for the school for 2023/24 was £275,045 which represented £25,004 per pupil. It is estimated this will reduce to nearer £17,000 per pupil in 2024/25 due to the increased pupil roll.

This cost per pupil is higher than the Falkirk Council average cost per primary pupil, which was £6,576 in 2023/24, and reflects the disproportionately higher level of cost per pupil that schools with small rolls have.

The permanent closure of Blackness Primary School would result in a net annual saving to the Council of £203,460 based on 2023/24 costs. This saving will be approximately £13,000 less in 2024/25 due to a 0.2 FTE reduction in teacher staffing.

In addition, the necessary planned maintenance and lifecycle replacement costs for Blackness Primary School over the next 3 years have been estimated at £108,250. Following closure, any costs associated with the upkeep and associated on-going maintenance of this building, would no longer need to be met. This would allow the Council to use these funds to invest in the wider school estate where it can benefit a larger number of pupils.

The financial calculations are shown in Appendix 1.

Any savings arising from the proposed option to close Blackness Primary School will be allocated towards bridging the Council's budget gap as set out in the Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Financial Strategy. Further information is available from this report:

- [Revenue Budget 2024/25 and Financial Strategy](#)

The annual revenue budget is built reflecting cost drivers such as the number of schools, buildings, staff and pupils. Therefore, if Blackness Primary School were to be closed then future years' budgets would not contain any allowance for staffing Blackness Primary School and there would be reduced property costs (and possibly no costs should the building be declared surplus to the Council's requirements). Any per capita budgets relating to individual pupils would continue to be budgeted against the school that these pupils would attend following the closure of Blackness Primary School.

It is envisaged that the existing Blackness Primary School would be declared surplus to the requirements of Falkirk Council. This would minimise the financial risks associated with vacant buildings.

A capital receipt would be forthcoming if the building was sold, or income could be generated through a lease.

Combining pupils from both catchment areas in one school maximises use of the learning estate and represents good asset management.

15. CONCLUSION

It is proposed that a statutory consultation exercise takes place on a proposal to close Blackness Primary School. As a result, pupils would be zoned to Grange Primary School and the catchment area of Blackness Primary School would be rezoned to Grange Primary School.

The projected number of pupils living in the catchment area of Blackness Primary School has been 10 pupils or less since 2018 and while projected to increase to 13 in 2027/28 will reduce again to 12 in 2028/29 and is at risk of declining in the following 3 years as a further 10 pupils progress to high school and may not be replaced like for like numbers in lower age groups.

There is no house building proposed in the Blackness Primary School catchment area that would be likely to affect pupil numbers.

Grange Primary School can accommodate all projected and potential pupils from the combined catchment areas. A higher occupancy level maximises the use of the learning estate and represents good asset management.

Travel distance from Blackness to Grange Primary School is not excessive and is less distance than pupils travel when they transition from Blackness Primary School to Bo'ness Academy.

Members of the Blackness community are already travelling to access other services such as GP and Dental Surgeries, shops and Post Offices and so it appears to be an accepted part of life within the village community.

The option which is considered to be a reasonable response to address the issue of the low school roll and occupancy is to consider closing Blackness Primary School. **Special regard has been given to the rural school factors and the assessment of these are considered in section 6 and throughout this proposal paper.**

It is therefore recommended that the most appropriate response to the issues identified in relation to the low roll at Blackness Primary School is that a statutory consultation exercise takes place on the proposal to close the school. If the proposal is agreed, pupils would be transferred to Grange Primary School. The delineated catchment area of Grange Primary School would be extended to include the current Blackness Primary School catchment.

16. RESPONDING TO THE PROPOSAL

This Proposal Paper has been issued as a result of a decision on 12 September 2024 of the Executive (Education) of Falkirk Council. This is to seek views on the proposals and alternatives set out in this paper.

A formal consultation in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 is required for any proposal to permanently close a school. This consultation is fully in accordance with the requirements of this legislation.

A copy of this Proposal Paper is available on the Falkirk Council website: <https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/consultations-surveys/>

A copy of this document will be provided to:

- Parents and carers of all primary and nursery age pupils living in the catchment areas of Blackness and Grange Primary Schools
- Blackness and Grange Primary School Parent Councils
- School staff and trade unions at both schools
- Blackness and Bo'ness Community Councils
- Blackness Community Hall Management Committee
- All other households in the Blackness Primary School catchment area
- Elected Members of Falkirk Council
- MSPs for the area
- The constituency MP
- West Lothian Council
- The Community Planning Partnership

A copy of this document is also available on request, free of charge, from:

- Children's Services, Suite 1A, Falkirk Community Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk, FK2 9EE
- Blackness Primary School, Blackness Road, Blackness, Linlithgow EH49 7NP

- Grange Primary School, Grange Loan, Bo'ness EH51 9DX

This document is available in alternative formats or in translated form for readers whose first language is not English. Please apply to Children's Services, Suite 1A, Falkirk Community Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk, FK2 9EE by telephone on 01324 506600 or by email

educ.consultation@falkirk.gov.uk

LENGTH OF CONSULTATION PERIOD

The consultation will take place between Monday 16 September and Friday 8 November 2024.

PUBLIC MEETING

There will be a public meeting held at Blackness School/Community Hall on Tuesday 1 October 2024 at 6.30pm. This meeting will be an opportunity for interest parties to:

- Hear about the proposal.
- Ask question about the proposal.
- Have their views recorded so that they can be taken into account as part of the consultation process.

A note will be taken at the meeting of questions and views. This note will be published in the consultation report which will be available on the Council website.

An online meeting will also be held for anyone who wants to attend on Thursday 10 October 2024 at 6.30pm. The link to join the meeting online will be published on <https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/council-democracy/consultations-surveys/>

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE PROPOSAL

Interested parties are invited to respond on the proposals:

- Online: <https://participateplus.falkirk.gov.uk>
- By email: educ.consultation@falkirk.gov.uk
- In writing: Blackness Primary School Closure Consultation, Children's Services, Suite 1A, Falkirk Community Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk, FK2 9EE

All responses must be received by close of business on Friday 8 November 2024.

CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Pupils will be consulted about the proposal in school and further information about this will be provided to parent/ carers.

- Primary pupils will be consulted via their Headteacher.
- Pupils at Bo'ness Academy and St Mungo's High School will be consulted via their Headteachers.
- Young people over the age of 12 can submit their own response should they wish.

FOLLOWING THE CONSULTATION

Education Scotland – When the proposal document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Education Authority. Education Scotland will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations received by the Authority from any person during the consultation period or, if Education Scotland agree, a summary of them. Education Scotland will further receive a summary of any oral representations made to the Local Authority at the public meeting which will be held and, as available (and so far, as otherwise practicable), a copy of any other relevant documentation.

Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 3 weeks after the Authority has sent them all representations and documents mentioned above. For the avoidance of doubt, the 3-week period will not start until after the consultation period has ended. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may enter the affected schools and make such reasonable enquiries of such people they consider appropriate and may make such reasonable enquiries as they consider appropriate.

Falkirk Council – the Education Authority will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a consultation report. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats. It will be available from the Council website and from Children's Services, Suite 1A, Falkirk Community Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk, FK2 9EE free of charge. Anyone who made written representations to the Authority during the consultation period will also be informed about the report.

The report will include:

- A record of the total number of written representations made to the Authority during the consultation period.
- A summary of the written representations.
- A summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting.
- The Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report as well as any written or oral representations it has received, together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information, including detail of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled; and
- A statement explaining how the Authority complied with the requirement to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations (both written and oral) that it received.

The consultation report will be published and available for further consideration for a period of at least 3 weeks.

This report together with any other relevant documentation, will be considered by the Executive (Education) of Falkirk Council, who will come to a decision about whether to implement the proposal.

NOTE ON CORRECTIONS

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this proposal document, either by the Council or any person, the Council must investigate and decide what, if any, action is required.

If relevant information has been omitted or there has been an inaccuracy, the Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction notice, the publishing of a corrected Proposal Paper or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised. The Authority must inform the person who made the allegation and what action it has taken.

SCOTTISH MINISTERS CALL IN

If the Education Authority makes a final decision to implement the closure proposal, it will require to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and the consultation report. This must be done within 6 working days of that decision.

The Education Authority must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and of the period during which consultees can make representation to Ministers. For rural schools, the Education Authority must also give notice of the reasons why the Council is satisfied that the closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for bringing forward the proposal. The Scottish Ministers have an 8-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first 3 weeks of that 8-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the 8-week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal.

If Scottish Ministers decide to call in a closure proposal, they must refer it to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels for determination by a School Closure Review Panel. The Authority may not implement the proposal (wholly or partly) unless the Panel has granted consent to it (with or without conditions) and either the period for making an appeal to the sheriff has expired or, if an appeal has been made, it has either been abandoned or the sheriff has confirmed the Panel's decision.

The School Closure Review Panel may refuse to consent to the proposal, refuse consent and remit the proposal back to the Authority or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally.

- Ministers have a power to call in a closure decision, but only where it appears to Ministers that the Council has failed in a significant regard to comply with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act's requirements or, in coming to its decision, has failed to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the proposal. Ministers have up to 8 weeks from the date of the Council's decision to decide whether or not to issue a call-in notice.
- During the first 3 weeks of this period, anyone is able to make representations to Ministers on whether the decision should be called in.
- During the call-in period, the Council may not proceed further, in whole or part, with the proposed closure. Ministers may come to a decision sooner than 8 weeks (but not before the 3 weeks for representations to be made to them has elapsed).
- The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels the right to call on advice from Education Scotland in relation to a proposal at the call-in or determination stage.

This consultation is being conducted having regard to the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

16 September 2024

Kenneth McNeill
Children's Services Resources Manager

APPENDIX 1 - FINANCIAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED CLOSURE

TABLE 1
Current
Revenue
Costs

All Costs shown in Tables 1-6 are based on Financial Year 2023/2024

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Expenditure Category	Costs for full financial year (actuals)	Additional financial impact on receiving school [Grange PS]	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)

COSTS

<i>Employee Costs:</i>			
Teaching staff	£ 165,956	£ 14,500	£ 151,456
Support staff	£ 40,024	£ -	£ 40,024
Teaching staff training	£ 689	£ 689	£ -
Support staff training	£ -	£ -	£ -
Supply costs	£ -	£ -	£ -
<i>Building Costs:</i>			
Property insurance	£ 2,596	£ -	£ 2,596
Non-domestic rates	£ 6,076	£ -	£ 6,076
Water & sewerage	£ 1,094	£ 219	£ 875
Energy costs	£ 19,000	£ -	£ 19,000
Cleaning	£ 12,161	£ -	£ 12,161
Repairs & maintenance	£ 505	£ 101	£ 404
Grounds maintenance	£ 159	£ -	£ 159
Facilities management	£ 320		£ 320
Community Hall rental	£ 5,280		£ 5,280
<i>Operational costs:</i>			
Learning materials	£ 3,281	£ 3,281	£ -
Catering	£ 5,931	£ 5,931	£ -
Other (inc. licences)	£ 728	£ 728	£ -
<i>Transport costs:</i>			
Home to school	£ 11,190	£ 21,190	-£ 10,000
Staff travel	£ 90	£ 90	£ -
COSTS SUB-TOTAL	£ 275,080	£ 46,729	£ 228,351

INCOME

Sale of meals	-£ 35	-£ 35	£ -
Lets	£ -	£ -	£ -
Other	£ -	£ -	£ -
INCOME SUB-TOTAL	-£ 35	-£ 35	£ -

TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	£ 275,045	£ 46,694	£ 228,351
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UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	£ 25,004	£ 4,245	£ 20,759
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(11 pupils in 2023/24)

**TABLE 2
Capital
Costs**

	School proposed for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost (3 years from 2024/25 to 2026/27)	£ 108,250	£ 107,500
Third party contributions to capital costs	£ -	£ -

**TABLE 3
Annual
Property
costs
incurred
until
disposal.**

Property insurance	£ 2,596
Non-domestic rates	£ 6,076
Water & sewerage charges	£ 1,094
Energy costs	£ 4,750
Cleaning	£ -
Security costs	£ -
Repairs & maintenance	£ -
Grounds maintenance	£ -
Facilities management	£ 320
Other	£ -
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	£ 14,836

If the school is closed, this table shows the annual running cost that can be expected prior to disposal.

**TABLE 4
Non-
recurring
Revenue
costs**

TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	£ 228,351
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See Table 1 for how this is calculated

**TABLE 5
Impact on
GAE**

GAE IMPACT	£ 24,891
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GAE is the Grant Aided Expenditure for small schools covered by Scottish Government funding that would be lost if the school is closed.

**TABLE 6
Non-
recurring
Revenue
costs
minus the
impact of
GAE**

NET REVENUE COSTS (INC. IMPACT ON GAE)	£ 203,460
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This is the net annual saving that would be expected if the school is closed.