

Sorn Parent Council

Date 18 January,2008

Mr Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational & Social Services
East Ayrshire Council
Council Headquarters
London Road, Kilmarnock
KA3 7BU

Dear Mr Short

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Please see attached our formal responses (**highlighted in blue**) to the points made in your "Consultative Document" outlining your thoughts for the future of Sorn School.

Having considered the document in detail and having taken advice we completely refute your claim that the pupils attending Sorn Primary School would be better served by attending school at either Mauchline or Catrine.

Our response is supported by the wider community of Sorn and we have included the names and addresses of those signatories as part of this document.

East Ayrshire Council (EAC) has annually capped the school roll at 75 which negates the building's physical capacity of 92 as quoted by you. EAC are refusing to acknowledge the capped capacity because of the 80% rule whereby the Minister for Education would have to be consulted before any decision regarding the future of the school could be made. We therefore demand that our case is referred to the Minister for consideration.

- **Sorn School is 93% full**

Our response clearly displays that the standard of education delivered at Sorn is excellent, well above the Authority average and better in terms of attainment than Catrine or Mauchline. The Executive's guidance on School closure (see copy attached at Appendix 3) states that proposals should illustrate "educational advantages for pupils directly affected" and "the nature and

scale of improvements the proposals are intended to deliver". Your proposal fails to clearly demonstrate either of these points. The Executive's guidance further states "if the judgement or decision is finely balanced, the quality of education provided to pupils locally and more widely now and in the future will normally be the overarching consideration."

HMIe's last report rated educational provision at Sorn as good or very good, no aspects were found to be unsatisfactory. As parents we require proof of the educational advantages to our children of these proposals

- **There is no evidence of any educational advantage**

The Executive's guidance also states that Authorities must consider "Rural Sustainability and Development" and that "there will always be a need for rural schools". **Your proposal fails to take any consideration of the impact on rural sustainability and development and therefore cannot be considered to have addressed all the relevant factors.** We demand that the Consultation Process be extended in order for EAC to properly research this aspect of their proposal and deliver the results for consultation. **By closing the School you are closing our village.** The School is the hub of our community. The Village Hall relies on the School for 70% of its income and the After School Club for 20% (source- Sorn Village Hall Committee). If the Village Hall closes there will be nowhere for the Toddler Group, Youth Group, WRI or Old Folks to meet, severely impacting on all sectors of our community. In addition our Post Office is to come under review for closure this year, further adding to the destruction of our community. The loss of after school care, which is not available at Mauchline or Catrine, will impact hugely on working parents and subsequently the economy of the area. The village will not be as attractive to new house builders or property developers without a school (source Hope Homes, JHP Developments and Orchard Homes (Scotland) Ltd).

- **Negative effect on rural sustainability and development**

We further refute your testament that the Sorn Primary School building is not fit for purpose. Had the building been properly maintained and upgraded over the years the children and staff today would be enjoying a far better teaching environment. Sorn School requires £420,000 of upgrading work after being in use for 150 years. By contrast Catrine school requires £1.2 million of upgrade after being in use for a mere 37 years.

- **Upgrade of Sorn Primary represents best value**

The sums spent on Sorn School over recent years barely reach £130 per pupil per year. We believe that you have failed in your fiduciary duty and have displayed a lack of duty of care in not spending the proper sums of money maintaining the building.

You claim that the pupil roll is declining and will continue to do so, yet current thinking is that the roll is in fact increasing due to unprecedented development in Sorn and the surrounding area. EAC's own figures in the document *East Ayrshire by Numbers* show the population of 0-15 year olds projected to drop by only 0.2% by 2024, and not the 42% by 2015 that your figures suggest.

One of your options is to move our children to Mauchline Primary. However you appear to have not considered the additional children requiring places at the school from the 555 homes scheduled to be built in the latest Local Plan. Mauchline School will then be at or over capacity requiring further massive investment. Catrine School faces the same issues an additional 162 new homes due to be constructed in their village. Common sense would suggest with development on this scale school populations must be set to rise. South Ayrshire Council have taken the view that the most up to date population figures for Scotland show an upwards trend for the first time in 10 years, and as such are planning their primary education infrastructure accordingly.

The statement that there is over capacity which needs addressed is untrue. EAC claims a working capacity of 14,932, however there are a total of 422 classes of which 125 are P1 – P3 and 80 are composite. Allowing the SNP manifesto commitment of P1 – P3 maximum class size of 18, composite class size of 25 and P4 – P7 class size of 33, the working capacity is, in fact, 11,411.

Worse still, factor in the Institute of Scotland maximum class sizes of 20 for P4 – P7 and 15 for composite and the capacity is only 7,790 compared with the current roll of 9,028. From an educational standards point of view, there is, in fact, under capacity - so any proposed reduction of the number of classrooms in East Ayrshire will be detrimental to the standard of education. The only true reason for the proposal is to save money, and EAC already has one of the lowest per pupil spends in Scotland. We would urge you to invest in the future and meet the necessary costs to educate our children properly.

- **No evidence of roll decline**

Your consultative document is incomplete and far from transparent when dealing with statistics. In our opinion your

conclusions are flawed and based on poor data, plus your strategic options fall far short of offering any real solution to the long term problems.

We believe that your figures have been collated to underpin your own agenda of cost cutting due to incorrect planning strategy over the last decade. We respectfully point out that seeking a quick fix by targeting the heart of rural communities is not the best way of addressing the situation.

The options outlined in your consultative document are wholly unacceptable to our community. They appear to be over simplistic and make no allowance for the needs of other community groups.

- **Closure proposals are unacceptable to parents, pupils and the community**

Conversely our response is thorough, well thought out and has been properly researched taking into account the need of all of the stakeholders. We have questioned the figures you have used on a number of occasions and would state that we believe them to be inaccurate and misleading.

“Under Section 28 of the 1980 Education Act authorities in exercising their powers and duties are required to have regard to the wishes of parents so far as is compatible with the provision of suitable education and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure” (source – Schools Closure Guide, Scottish Government Schools Directorate, October 2007). There is no economic case to support these proposals. It costs over £1000 more per head per annum to educate a child at Catrine or Mauchline (when PPP costs are included) (source – EAC, see table at Appendix 2) that, added to £39,500 per annum in additional transport costs and £64,000 in over staffing to support the change over, means **this proposal will cost at least £166,906 more per annum** than the current status quo.

- **No financial advantage**

The recent work at Mauchline represents an investment of £28,205 per pupil; the proposed refurbishment of Catrine will be an investment of £10,344 per pupil. The work required at Sorn represents an investment of only £6000 per child. Why is EAC so reluctant to invest in Sorn? We are voters and tax payers too; we demand that we receive the services to which we are entitled.

We ask that you should immediately invest in Sorn School and schedule work on the building so that it is able to cater for the

existing pupils and the new intake of children expected from the additional 41 houses under construction and planned for construction in the village.

We recommend you look at the wider needs of Sorn and its adjoining communities and give all parties time to reflect on the real needs for the immediate and long term future. In summary we look to you to maintain and improve Sorn School properly and in a professional manner and to help and support the community. Once Sorn School is retained the Parent Council have some suggestions as to possible solutions and would appreciate if we could meet to discuss this after the consultation process is complete.

Yours faithfully

Charles Shaw
Chair on behalf of Sorn School Parent Council

