



Dumfries and Galloway Council
Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing

Proposal Document: March 2025

Review of Education Provision
St Ninian's RC Primary School

Proposal for the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School

Summary Proposal

Dumfries and Galloway Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to discontinue education provision at St Ninian's RC Primary School which is currently mothballed and re-align its catchment area to St Joseph's RC Primary School.

It is proposed that education provision at St Ninian's RC Primary School be discontinued with effect from 1 December 2025.

Reasons for this proposal

This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are:

- St Ninian's RC Primary School has been formally mothballed for nineteen months (correct March 2025), with no pupils in attendance since August 2023. The school roll is not forecast to rise in the near future.
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
- Number of children aged 0-14 identifying as Roman Catholic in Dumfries and Galloway has fallen by 34% between the census' of 2011 and 2022.
- Challenges recruiting a Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) Headteacher and Principal Teacher for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment. The annual cost of mothballing the building is £7,039.28.

This document has been issued by Dumfries and Galloway Council Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. This document has been prepared by the Council's Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate with input from other Council Directorates.

Publication Information

The proposal paper will be available, free of charge, at:

- DG Customer Services, Newton Stewart
- Ryan Centre, Stranraer
- Dumfries and Galloway Council Headquarters

And published on Dumfries and Galloway Council's website:

www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations

Copies of this paper are also available on request from:

Statutory Consultation – St Ninian’s RC Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

E-mail: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

To request this information in a more accessible format or alternative language, please contact the postal or email address listed above.

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- a. The Parent Council of St Joseph’s RC Primary School;
- b. The Parents/carers of pupils within the current St Ninian’s RC Primary School catchment area;
- c. The Parents/carers of pupils attending St Joseph’s RC Primary School;
- d. The parents/carers of any children expected to attend St Ninian’s RC Primary School or St Joseph’s RC Primary School within two years of the date of publication;
- e. The pupils of St Joseph’s RC Primary School (considered to be of a suitable age and maturity to be able to communicate a view on the proposal);
- f. The staff (teaching and other) at St Joseph’s RC Primary School;
- g. Trade union representatives;
- h. Cairnryan Community Council, Kirkmaiden Community Council, Lochans Community Council, Stoneykirk Community Council, Stranraer, Ochtreure and Belmont Community Council, Castle Kennedy Community Council, Cree Valley Community Council, Isle of Whithorn Community Council, Kirkcowan Community Council, Kirkmabreck Community Council, New Luce Community Council, Old Luce Community Council, Port William and District Community Council and Royal Burgh of Wigtown and District Community Council;
- i. Parish Priest, Fr William R. McFadden
- j. Crichton Campus Leadership Group (Dumfries and Galloway Council, Dumfries and Galloway College, South of Scotland Enterprise, Scottish Funding Council, SRUC Barony College, University of West of Scotland, Glasgow University, Open University, NHS Dumfries and Galloway);
- k. Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland;
- l. Chief Executive, NHS Dumfries and Galloway;
- m. Area Commander Dumfries and Galloway, Fire Scotland.

1.0 Introduction

At Education and Learning Committee on 29 June 2023, Members were recommended to mothball St Ninian's RC Primary School from August 2023. This was following discussion with families with regard to the most appropriate education for their children. There were a number of contributing factors:

- The Headteacher position for St Joseph's RC and St Ninian's RC had been advertised on five occasions, with no applications received.
- The school roll for academic year 23/24 was anticipated to be eight.
- There were no suitable applications for the vacant Principal Teacher position

Agreement was reached with the parents that it would be appropriate to mothball St Ninian's RC from August 2023 with the pupils transitioning to other schools. Officers and Headteachers worked with families to ensure effective transition for all pupils and staff.

Education and Learning Committee – 29 June 2023 – Item 12 – Transformation Update – Partnerships and School Management Arrangements

<https://dumfriesgalloway.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=549&MId=5752&Ver=4>

Following engagement with the communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School, Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 10 December 2024 were presented with the preliminary requirement document satisfying the requirements of phase one of the Statutory Consultation timeline. There is no requirement for an authority that is formulating an urban school closure proposal to satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended before starting to prepare its proposal paper, this phase is for rural school closure only. However, Dumfries and Galloway Council feel the inclusion of this phase is important for all schools and the communities they serve, therefore it has been included in the process for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Members agreed to the commencement of the Statutory Consultation process for the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee – 10 December 2024 – Item 11 – Statutory Consultation – St Ninian's RC Primary School

<https://dumfriesgalloway.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=626&MId=6132>

The statutory process for the closure of a school is laid out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

In addition, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 sets out a right for community organisations to request the transfer of local assets into local community ownership/management. The community may wish to consider alternative uses for the building as part of this process.

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

The Council will improve education and learning opportunities to help all our children, young people and citizens fulfil their potential. This starts with pre-school, then school, before progressing into further or higher education or transition into work. We will work with our partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community.

Strategic Outcomes:

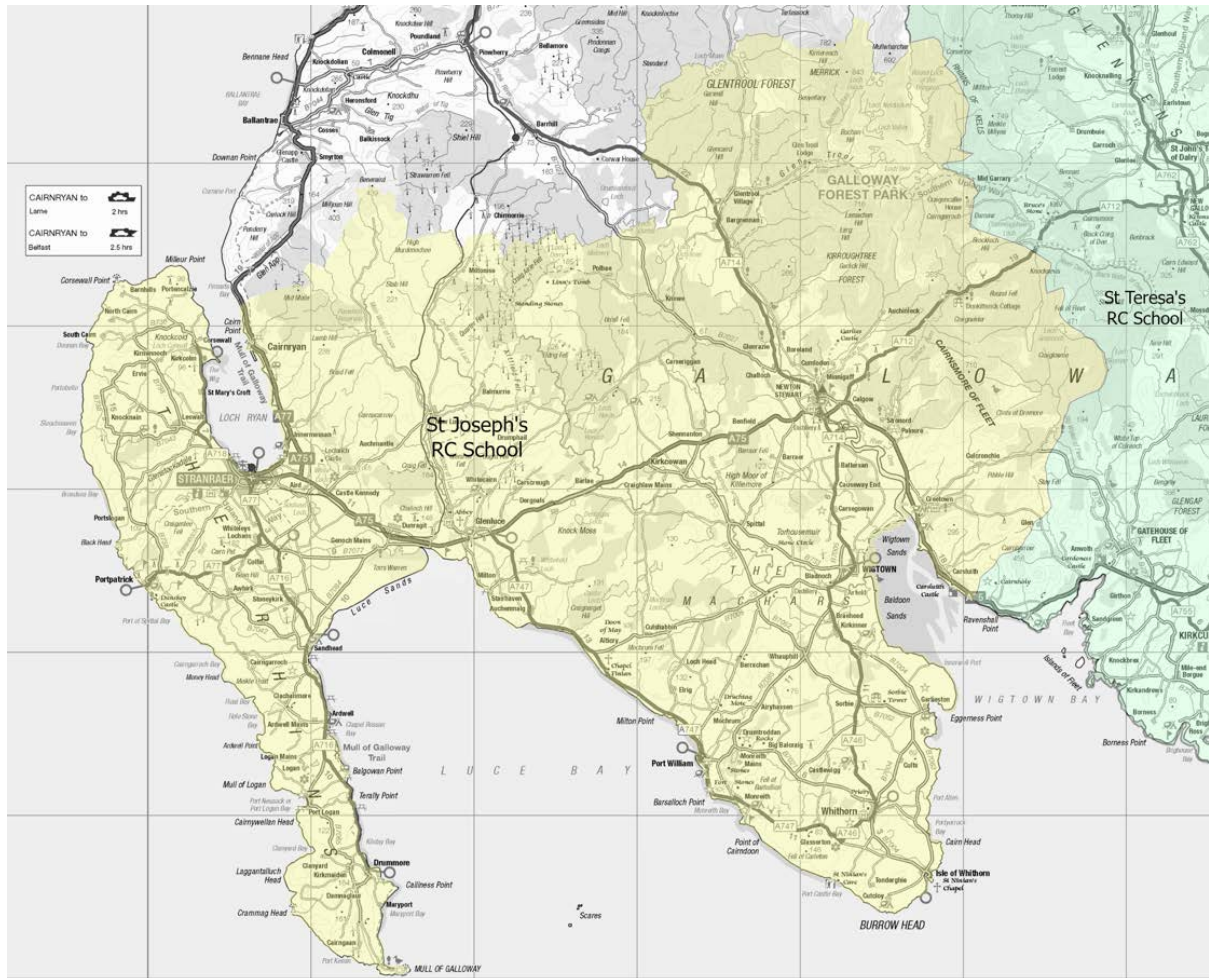
- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable and meet the needs of local communities
- We get it right for every child
- Children, young people and adults transition successfully through all life stages
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences
- Local people can build their skills and confidence

2.0 Proposal

It is proposed that education provision at St Ninian's RC Primary School be discontinued with effect from 1 December 2025 and re-align its catchment area to St Joseph's RC Primary School.

It is proposed that children living in the current St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area would be directed to St Joseph's RC Primary School depending on the outcome of the statutory consultation process. Maps illustrating the current and proposed catchment area are detailed below in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 2 – Proposed Realigned St Joseph’s RC Primary School Catchment Area



2.1 Reasons for this Proposal

This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are:

- St Ninian’s RC Primary School has been formally mothballed for nineteen months (correct March 2025), with no pupils in attendance since August 2023. The school roll is not forecast to rise in the near future.
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
- Number of children aged 0-14 identifying as Roman Catholic in Dumfries and Galloway has fallen by 34% between the census’ of 2011 and 2022.
- Challenges recruiting a Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) Headteacher and Principal Teacher for St Ninian’s RC

Primary School. Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.

- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment. The annual cost of mothballing the building is £7,039.28.

2.2 Additional Considerations

- The education benefits as set out in Section 7 to current and future primary aged children within the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area.
- Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to make arrangements to secure Best Value.
- On 10 December 2024, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles to be used as a basis for a sustainable School Estate. Applying these Principles will help ensure 'best-value' and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all our children and young people, whilst considering the needs and wishes of people and communities. These Principles are detailed in the Preliminary Requirements document at Appendix 3.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council currently has in excess of 4,546 (32%) spaces within its current primary school estate. It must be acknowledge that the costs-per-pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high and that underutilised schools are expensive to maintain and operate. The current condition, suitability and over capacity is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the school estate.

3.0 Preliminary Requirements

Dumfries and Galloway Council is required to consider the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School, as it has been mothballed for approximately nineteen months (correct March 2025). Dumfries and Galloway Council have considered the reasons for making this proposal, and have also considered other viable alternatives, the likely effect on the community and the likely effect of different travelling arrangements as a consequence of this proposal. Financial implications have also been considered.

Dumfries and Galloway Council considered how the implementation of this proposal would impact on the education of the children affected. The Council also considered the impact on the children who currently live in the catchment area but attend other schools, as well as children who may potentially live in the catchment area in the future.

The place of the school in the community was also considered, in terms of the impact this proposal would have on the sustainability of the community itself. Prior to the mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School, school lets focussed around the

adjacent Penninghame Primary School. There are a number of Council owned and community facilities across Newton Stewart which are not impacted by this proposal.

It is noted and acknowledged that the mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School has led to pupils not accessing a Roman Catholic education, however journey times for pupils have either remained the same or decreased with pupils attending their catchment non-denominational primary schools.

Three options were presented to the local community by the Council for consideration during the pre-consultation phase. Of the three options which were considered by the community and the Council; c is the option favoured by Dumfries and Galloway Council, as it is considered to most adequately address the reasons for the proposal. The three options were:

- a. Re-open St Ninian's RC Primary School
- b. Continued Mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School with the temporary catchment of St Joseph's RC Primary School
- c. Closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School and Realign the catchment area to St Joseph's RC Primary School, Stranraer (the proposal)

Splitting the catchment area was not considered as a reasonable alternative given the current size and scale of the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area, the distance to St Tereas's RC Primary School (Dumfries).

When considering the above options during the pre-liminary requirement phase, the following factors were key in arriving at option c. as the most appropriate responses to the underlying reasons behind consideration of this proposal:

- the positive educational benefits of attendance at an alternative school, whether this be St Joseph's RC Primary School or a non-denominational primary school;
- projected low pupil numbers at St Ninian's RC Primary School, and the associated impact on pupils' educational progress and social development;
- the challenges in recruiting and retaining Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) teaching staff;
- the lack of expressed local support for the re-opening or continuation of mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School and the need to make a decision regarding the future of the school.

Following the community engagement, the preliminary requirement document was presented to Dumfries and Galloway Council's Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 10 December 2024. As previously stated, there is no requirement for an authority that is formulating an urban school closure proposal to satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended before starting to prepare its proposal paper, this phase is for rural school closure only. However, the inclusion of this phase is important for all schools and the communities they serve, therefore it has been included in the process for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Members agreed to the commencement of the Statutory Consultation process for the closure

of St Ninian's RC Primary School in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

During the community engagement regarding the future options for St Ninian's RC Primary School, there were a range of viewpoints gathered from parents and members of the community.

The majority of responses 77% (20 respondents) to the survey were in favour of St Ninian's RC Primary School having an alternative use; closure was not specified; one respondent was in favour of closure. In order for the building to have an alternative use, whether that be for education purposes or community asset transfer (CAT), the school would need to go through the statutory consultation process in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. Nine parent/carers were supportive of the school building having an alternative use. A small number of respondents 12% (3 respondents) to the survey were in favour of St Ninian's RC Primary School reopening, a further 8% (2 respondents) wanted to see the school enter into a further period of mothballing.

Closing the school would have no impact on staff or pupil travel arrangements in place since mothballing. There would be little or no alteration to the current environmental impact. There would be a financial impact on Dumfries and Galloway Council with regard to school transport if pupils from the current St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area chose to attend St Joseph's RC Primary School, however to date no pupils have chosen to attend St Joseph's RC Primary School, instead they attend their non-denominational primary school and receive transport in line with Dumfries and Galloway Council's Schools Admissions Policy.

3.1 Alternatives to the Proposal

The community engagement process prior to the drafting of this Proposal considered the views of members of the community and also considered any other alternatives to the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School. Full details of the community engagement, and the findings from the preliminary requirements phase, are set out in Section 4.0 of the Preliminary Requirement document at Appendix 3.

After the community engagement, Dumfries and Galloway Council concluded that the proposal to close St Ninian's RC Primary School and realign its catchment area to St Joseph's RC Primary School is the most reasonable means to address the underlying reasons for considering the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School. Further detail is provided below in relation to educational benefits, travel, environmental impact, community impact and financial impact.

4.0 School Roll/Changing Demographics

Demographics and pupil numbers were considered as part of the Preliminary Requirement Document, Section 3.4 of Appendix 3.

The information in relation to school rolls as shown below in Figures 3 and 4 are drawn from the yearly pupil census which takes place in September each year. Past pupil numbers are historic data from past pupil censuses. Pupil projections are based on NHS data. School rolls by their nature may fluctuate slightly on an ongoing basis due to changes in pupil numbers as a result of pupils moving to and from the catchment area and parents/carers exercising their right to make placing requests.

4.1 Demographics of D&G

Dumfries and Galloway Council holds electronic records of school rolls back to academic year 1975/76. Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% fall in the 0-15 age group from 2018 to 2032. St Ninian’s RC Primary Schools roll has not mirrored that of Dumfries and Galloway as a region, however there has been a steady decline since the school roll peaked at 33 in academic year 2017/18. These historical school rolls are detailed in Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3

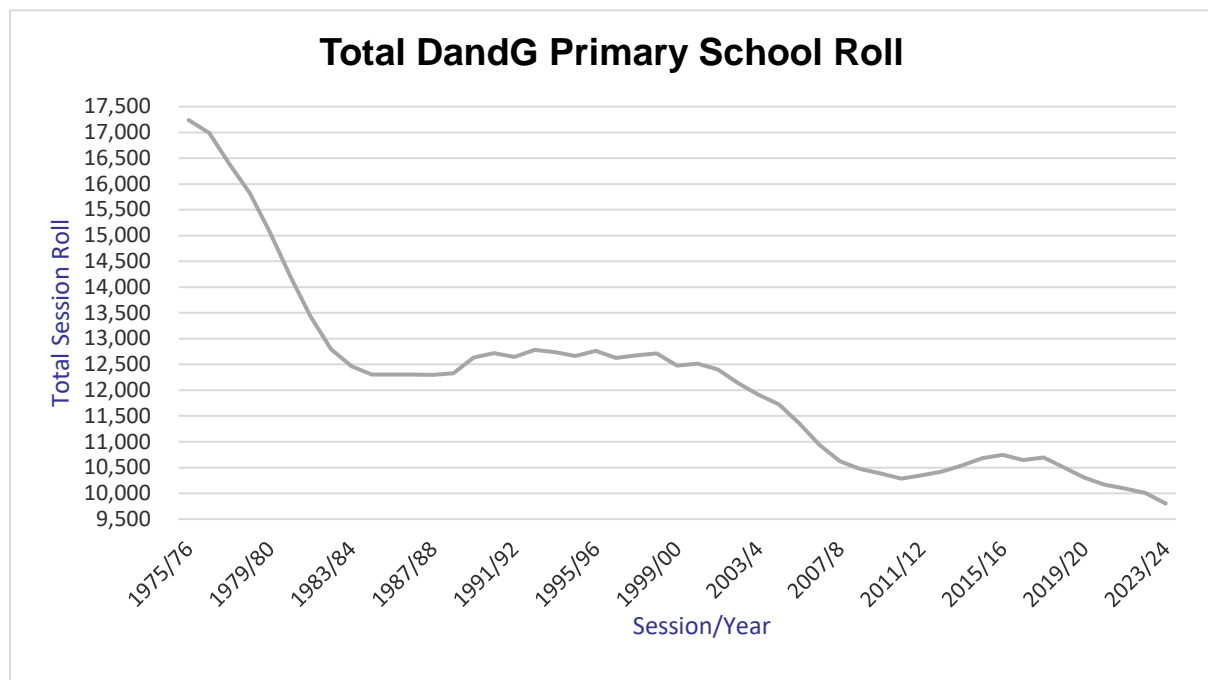
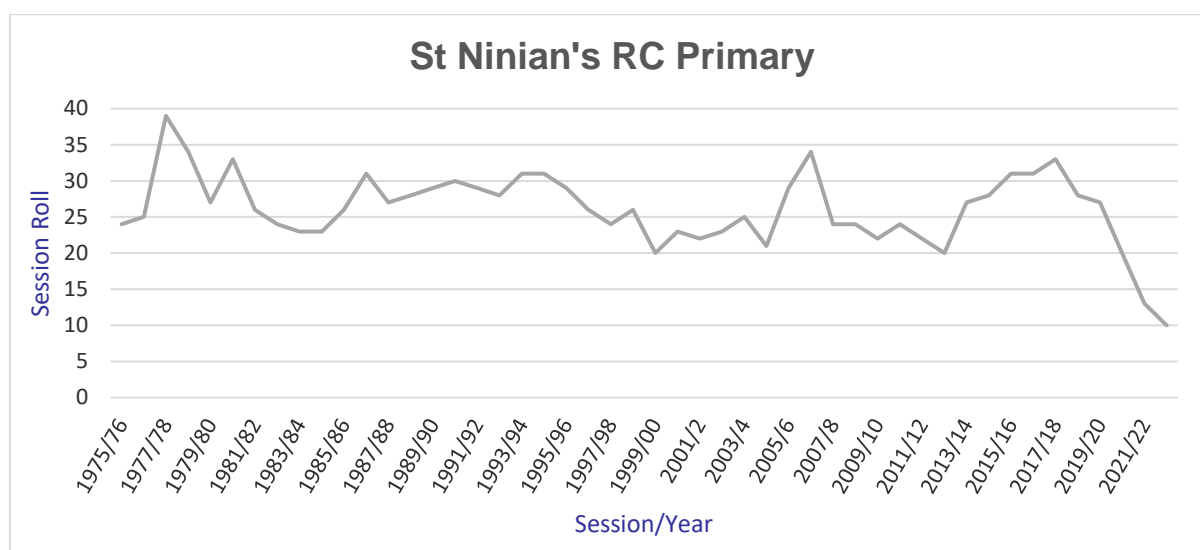


Figure 4



There are currently 15 children baptised in the Roman Catholic Church of P1-P7 age (academic year 2024/25) residing within the catchment area of St Ninian’s RC Primary School (data received from the baptismal records from the parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian). The catchment children are detailed in figure 5 below. These children of primary school age all attend other schools in the area, some through placement when the school was mothballed and others through parental choice.

Figure 5 – Children baptised in the Roman Catholic Church

Academic Year	Pre-nursery	N3	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
2024/25	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	3	3	3	3	15
2025/26					2	0	1	2	3	3	2	14
2026/27					2	2	0	1	2	3	3	13
2027/28					2	2	2	0	1	2	3	12
2028/29					2	2	2	2	0	1	2	11

4.3 Projected Roll

In January 2024, as part of the targeted press and social media campaign for Primary 1 enrolment, a press release was issued in the Wigtown Free Press and Dumfries and Galloway Standard. Emails were also sent to over 12,000 individuals; this informed all recipients that applications could be made for pupils to enrol (primary 1) or transfer (Primary 2 – Primary 7) to St Ninian’s RC Primary School for academic year 2024/25. Following this enrolment and transfer opportunity no enrolment or transfer forms to attend St Ninian’s RC Primary School were received.

In December 2024 and January 2025 all families residing within the catchment area for St Ninian’s RC Primary School along with ward officers, ward members and community councils were contacted via email to notify them of the enrolment (P1)

and transfer (P2-P7) opportunity for academic year 2025/26. The enrolment process for academic year 2025/26 had not completed at the point this Proposal Paper went to print but there were no parents/families that expressed an interest in enrolling or transferring their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School.

4.4 Housing Development

The current Local Development Plan (LDP2) for Dumfries and Galloway was published in 2019 it provides the planning framework and guides the future use and development of land in towns, villages and the rural area. It also indicates where development, including regeneration, should happen and where it should not.

LDP3 is currently in development and will be published in 2027.

Inset maps for Garlieston, Kirkcowan, Newton Stewart and Wigtown can be found at Appendix 4.

Within Newton Stewart planning permission has been granted for 70 houses at NST.H4, these properties are being developed by a registered social landlord, Wheatley Group. Work is expected to start on this site in 2025/26 with completion forecast for early 2027. Dumfries and Galloway Council will work closely with Wheatley Group as this development progresses.

In addition to those settlements with inset maps as detailed above, the LDP2 Housing Development in Villages (Supplementary Guidance – February 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/2bz94bpf> covers the villages of Bladnoch, Carsluith, Glentroll, Isle of Whithorn, Sorbie and Whauphill.

5.0 Teacher Numbers

Teacher numbers remain fairly consistent nationally, with a 0.5% decrease in the number of teachers nationally from 2021 to 2023. In Dumfries and Galloway there has been a 2% reduction in the FTE number of teachers from 2021 to 2024.

St Ninian's RC Primary School has been officially mothballed for approx. nineteen months (correct March 2025), during this period staff recruitment to many schools has continued to be a challenge. Schools within the area have struggled to recruit and retain staff, particularly in relation to Head Teachers and supply staff. Despite a sustained effort to secure staff, there is reason to think that staffing would continue to be a considerable challenge for St Ninian's RC Primary School as with all schools across Dumfries and Galloway.

At the current time, if the proposal was to be accepted, there would be no impact on staffing levels at St Joseph's RC Primary School.

6.0 Condition and Suitability of the Building

In September 2021 the condition of St Ninian's RC Primary School was graded a B performing adequately but showing minor deterioration. However, whilst the overall condition is B, there are some areas, roof, mechanical and electrical that were forecast to be graded as C, poor – showing major problems and not operating optimally over the forthcoming years. The suitability of St Ninian's RC Primary School was carried out in 2022, the school was graded as B. Full financial information is detailed in Section 8 and Appendix 1 of this Proposal Paper.

7.0 Educational Benefits Statement

Assessment of likely educational benefits for pupils as required by section 3 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

Should this proposal be implemented, the Council believes that there will be considerable educational benefits. These centre around:

- Learning and teaching;
- Educational Outcomes;
- Experiences and opportunities;
- The environment for learning.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Headteachers and their wider teams, supporting the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to adapt, think critically and flourish in an ever-changing global society. Individual Headteachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. In partnership with children, parents/carers, staff and the wider community each school works to develop a vision, values and aims unique to their setting and community.

St Ninian's RC Primary School and Penninghame Primary School share the same site within Newton Stewart. They are both accessible small-town schools (Scottish Government classification) and are within one mile of the local non-denominational secondary school, Douglas Ewart High School.

St Joseph's RC Primary School has a school roll of 29 children. Year groups within St Joseph's RC Primary School range from 3 pupils (Primaries 1, 2, 3 & 5) to 7 pupils (Primary 7). These larger numbers allow pupils to benefit from increased friendship groups and to develop their social skills through building relationships. These relationships help them to become Confident Individuals and Responsible Citizens supporting them to overcome the challenges and exercise responsibilities as a member of a larger social group, within a supportive educational environment. They are able to work as part of a team, take part in team activities, exercise their responsibilities and have their voice heard on a range of school-based committees.

The establishment of a larger friendship group can also support their transition to secondary school.

7.1 Learning and Teaching

The curriculum within St Joseph's RC Primary School includes a broad range of planned experiences that allow all children to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The vision of St Joseph's RC Primary School, which has been developed in partnership with all stakeholders reinforces 'In Christ we live, love and learn'. This vision is supported by the values of Wellbeing, Respect and Perseverance which are embedded across the school through assemblies, rewards and celebrations.

In St Joseph's RC Primary School children are encouraged to lead their learning and be active participants who are highly motivated, enthusiastic and engaged in their learning and the life of the school. The views of children are actively sought and acted upon. Pupils play a part in school improvement and change, leading a number of groups across the school including House Captains, Pupil Council, Eco Committee, Enterprise Group, Digital Leaders, STEM Leaders and Reading Champions.

Learning is planned across the four contexts of learning – curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of the school and opportunities for personal achievement. This supports children to achieve their full potential, whilst providing them with a wide range of experiences and opportunities. Curriculum overviews are in place for all curricular areas to ensure that there is coverage across the Curriculum for Excellence experiences, outcomes & benchmarks.

Within the school, children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships, develop resilience and skills for life, learning and work. They are able to collaborate with their peers in a variety of situations and learning activities, both within the classroom and around the school, which allow them to exercise responsibility and leadership. Children are provided with opportunities to work as part of a team and to represent their school at local, regional and national events including badminton, football, Creating Engineers Challenge, Maths Week Scotland and British Science Week.

St Joseph's RC Primary School has achieved the Silver Rights Respecting Schools Award and is now working towards Gold. The school is committed to a children's rights-based approach and engages with all stakeholders in planning what this will look like within their context. Supporting their Rights Respecting Schools work, St Joseph's RC Primary School has developed a Religious Observance Calendar. Local faith leaders support this Religious Observation Calendar, including the local parish priest from St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. The school has also been awarded the Promise Award which supports outcomes for care experienced children.

St Joseph's RC Primary School has worked to develop their learning & teaching approaches to include learning through play. They have engaged with Local

Authority Principal Teachers of Play Pedagogy to incorporate play as a tool to support their pupil's cognitive development and help them to gain a better understanding of concepts which enhance their wider development. This work is focused in both classrooms, where staff are working to refresh classroom environments, resources and approaches to learning & teaching.

The use of digital technologies has been a school improvement priority. Financial investment has taken place a wide range of digital devices including interactive panels, laptops and iPads to support learner's experiences. The school has been successful in gaining additional external funding to support further digital projects. All staff have engaged in professional learning, have an understanding of pedagogy and learning theories in relation to digital technology and digital skills. These practices will support learners to become digital literate and equipped to face the challenges of the 21st Century.

The Headteacher of St Joseph's RC Primary School is also Headteacher of Portpatrick Primary School, together this arrangement is known as West Rhins Partnership. The Headteacher supports her staff through an annual Professional Review and Development process. This in turn leads to professional development opportunities which support effective school improvement and pupil outcomes. The Headteacher is supported in her role by Principal Teachers in both St Joseph's RC and Portpatrick Primary Schools. Leadership capacity of other staff within the school is also being developed with other practitioners taking on leadership & development roles.

St Joseph's RC Primary School sits alongside eleven other primary schools within the Stranraer Academy Cluster and Penninghame Primary School sits alongside eight other primary schools within the Douglas Ewart High School cluster. All cluster Headteachers meet monthly to progress their Cluster Improvement Plan. Cluster working provides an opportunity for practitioners to plan and work together on improvement priorities with stage partners, across stages and indeed sectors. This supports effective moderation and positively impacts learning and teaching, effective transitions, pupil progression pathways and positive, sustained destinations.

In addition to these geographical clusters St Joseph's RC Primary School is also part of the Roman Catholic school network. This is an informal network of Headteachers from Roman Catholic schools. This network is facilitated by the Galloway Diocese and provides opportunities for Headteachers of Roman Catholic schools to meet and potentially work together on joint projects. From this network there is an annual opportunity for all Primary 7 learners to participate in a pilgrimage event to the Whithorn site.

7.2 Educational Outcomes

The National Improvement Framework for Scottish education sets out the expectation and priorities for the education system to raise attainment for all and to close the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged children. Schools must deliver this improvement within the principles and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence, a curriculum for Scotland.

Teachers within St Joseph's RC Primary School plan, regularly assess and track pupil progress in order to ensure that every child has the challenge, support and opportunity to reach their full potential. The Headteacher meets termly with all staff to discuss pupil progress and plan next steps. Professional discussions, classroom observations, peer collaboration, learning conversations, moderation and careful tracking of attainment progress as well as wellbeing and wider achievement ensures appropriate interventions and support can be harnessed when a child needs it.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a key priority for the whole staff team. The wellbeing indicators of Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Respected, responsible and Included are a key feature of the work of the school. Children requiring additional supports have a range of plans and interventions in place. The wider leadership team each have a role in supporting and monitoring these plans to ensure progress and impact. This level of support, alongside close working with parents and carers, helps to ensure the needs of every child are met.

St Joseph's RC Primary School has a strong picture of attainment. In June 2024 at Primary 1 in Listening and Talking, Reading, Writing and Numeracy, 100% of pupils were achieving Early level CfE. At Primary 4 in Listening and Talking, Reading, Writing and Numeracy between 100% of learners were achieving First level CfE. At Primary 7 in Listening and Talking, Reading, Writing and Numeracy, 60-100% of pupils were achieving the Second level CfE.

Raising Attainment; Embedding Inclusion, Wellbeing & Equality; and Skills Development are identified as the key areas of focus within St Joseph's RC Primary School's School Improvement Plan. Within the area of Raising Attainment the school are working to develop effective learning & teaching approaches in maths & numeracy. There is also a focus on reading, working with the Scottish Book Trust to refresh and restructure the library space. Within Embedding Inclusion, Wellbeing & Equality the school plan to further develop their Rights Respecting Schools activity. Within this area there is also a focus on inclusive practice and developing the wider school offer (which includes working across the West Rhins Partnership). Within Skills development the school are working to develop Metaskills. A rationale and skills progression have been created with the school now working to embed the vocabulary of skills across all aspects of their work.

7.3 Experiences – Broadening the Range of Opportunities

Children at St Joseph's RC Primary School are afforded a wide range of planned activities and experiences which allow them to develop their knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes. These in turn, support their physical, social and emotional wellbeing for both now and in the future. This, combined with strong family, Church and community links, allows children to develop skills for learning life and work and supports positive learning pathways.

Cluster working has afforded opportunities for clear transition planning and events, which in turn provides further opportunities for pupils to make new connections and to ensure appropriate support at each step of their educational journey.

Children are becoming successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. They are engaged in their learning and contribute well during lessons and wider school activities. Positive relationships at all levels are evident within the ethos of both schools. Children enjoy good relationships with their peers and feel supported when things are not going as well. Pupils feel that they are listened to and that they have an active voice that can enact change.

Children are provided with a variety of planned experiences both as part of the curriculum and as wider achievements. These are developing children's meta-skills of self-management, social intelligence and innovation skills. Wider achievement activities planned by St Joseph's RC Primary School include after-school clubs (netball, choir, wool crafts and homework club), residential trips for Primary 7, active school activity (badminton, golf, rugby) and West Rhins Partnership parties & event days. Staff and parent/carer body, alongside a number of community partners, gives St Joseph's RC Primary School an increased breadth of talent, interests and opportunities to harness and share within school.

7.4 Environment for Learning

St Joseph's RC Primary School is situated close to the centre of Stranraer. The current school building, from the 1940s, consists of four primary class bases (two currently in use as classrooms, one as a STEM zone and one as a library), a large gym hall/dining room and associated auxiliary space. The school has a large playground of both grass and tarmac areas.

Learners attending St Joseph's RC Primary School are also able to benefit from strong links with the local community. The Ryan Leisure Centre is located next to the school and both the Dumfries & Galloway College, Stranraer Campus and St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church are located directly across the road from the school. Stranraer Library and Stranraer Museum are located within walking distance of the school. The near town centre location also provides easy access to the local shops and businesses.

7.5 Educational benefits statement summary

To summarise, were the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School to be implemented, there would be a wide range of educational benefits for pupils, as identified in the paragraphs above. These benefits would range from the children receiving a more diverse curriculum and wider range of high-quality learning experiences, to the development of self-management, social intelligence and innovation skills. The learning environment of St Joseph's RC Primary School would also offer pupils the opportunity to experience the broader life of the school, through a wider range of pupil committees and community links, to be involved in project

based and interdisciplinary learning within and across stages, as well as wider opportunities for personal achievement and involvement.

As a consequence of this proposal, the catchment of St Ninian's RC Primary School would be linked with the catchment of St Joseph's RC Primary School. Should pupils select to attend St Joseph's RC Primary School they would have greater opportunities to participate in a wider range of educational experiences and activities which are of significant educational benefit. The broader, more diverse pupil body supports greater social and emotional development and opportunities to develop extended friendship groups and peer support networks.

8.0 Financial Impact

Assessment of the financial impact as required by section 4 (2A) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

The full breakdown of the financial analysis is detailed in Appendix 1. This information gives details on the estimated cost if St Ninian's RC Primary School were still an occupied and operational establishment, the figures are taken from financial year 2022/23 as this was the last full year the school was fully occupied. As St Ninian's RC Primary School is currently mothballed, the cost for the mothballing is at £7,039.28 per year. Should the school be reopened, occupied and operational, the running costs per year are estimated at £176,717 (based on 2022/23 costs), this equates to £17,671.65 per pupil per year based on the school roll of 10 (census roll academic year 2022/23).

Column 2 of Table 1 at Appendix 1 shows the projected annual running costs of St Ninian's RC Primary School whilst Column 3 shows the additional impact on St Joseph's RC Primary School as the receiving school. The annual recurring savings (or costs) are shown in Column 4.

Whilst St Joseph's RC Primary School is detailed as the receiving school, no pupils to date have transferred or enrolled from the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area.

Table 1, School Costs. There are no figures included for column 3 as the receiving school does not require additional staffing to accommodate the additional pupils from St Ninian's RC Primary School. Prior to the mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School, the Principal Teacher had accepted a new position at another school and new Headteacher management arrangements were due to be implemented from August 2023. All remaining support staff were redeployed as per Dumfries and Galloway Council's policies and included as part of the annual staffing exercise.

Table 1, Building Costs. There are no figures included for column 3 as the receiving school does not require additional requirement to accommodate the additional pupils from St Ninian's RC Primary School. Property insurance and rates are set at zero throughout the financial template as there is a rate relief applied and all Dumfries and Galloway Council properties are insured collectively, there is no single payment attributed to individual properties.

Table 1, School Operational Costs. There are no additional costs on the receiving school as no pupils transferred.

Table 1, Transport Costs. During academic year 2022/23, three pupils at St Ninian's RC Primary School were in receipt of school transport. There are no receiving school costs as no pupils transferred to St Joseph's RC Primary School.

Table 3 in Appendix 1 details the annual running costs during mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School and these are £7,039.28 per year, which would constitute an immediate saving on closure. If the school were to be formally closed, this would allow the Council to take steps towards finding an alternative use for the building.

Table 5 in Appendix 1 details the impact on Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE). The GAE is not impacted by this proposal as St Ninian's RC Primary School is not a rural primary school.

Implementation of the proposal would potentially see an increase in transport costs to Dumfries and Galloway Council assuming pupils attended St Joseph's RC Primary School, however these are offset by the costs of maintaining and operating St Ninian's RC Primary School for a small number of pupils.

9.0 Impact Assessment

Dumfries and Galloway Council will undertake an impact assess during the consultation process in respect of this proposal, to ensure that due regard is given to whether the decisions we make are likely to impact on different groups of people across the region. The result of the impact assessment should highlight any barriers or discrimination that might affect the communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School, ensuring we meet our statutory duties under the Equality Act.

10.0 Consultees

A summary of this document will be issued free of charge to all of the consultees listed at page 3 of this document and it will also be published on the Council's website: www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations

11.0 Consultation Period

As part of a consultation process, the Education Authority must publish the proposal paper, advertise it and notify Education Scotland and all of the relevant consultees as prescribed by Schedule 2 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, inviting them to make representations on the proposal. The consultation

period will be from 10 March 2025 until 5pm on Friday 9 May 2025, which includes at least 30 school days.

12.0 Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held on Tuesday 15 April 2025 at 6pm in Penninghame Primary School. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting and participate is welcome to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate and Officers will present reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions to be asked and comments to be made. A note will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered.

13.0 Responses to the Proposal

Representations may be made on the following;

- the proposal;
- alternatives to the proposal as listed above; and
- suggestions of other alternatives.

Dumfries and Galloway Council will consider all representations and these should be received no later than 5.00pm on Friday 9 May 2025 by one of the methods detailed below;

Online Survey: <https://forms.office.com/e/JQiuTy8cmY>



Letter to: Statutory Consultation – St Ninian’s RC Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

Email to: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Respondents are required to clearly state the capacity in which they are expressing their views and agree to their name and any statement/comments being published as part of the Statutory Consultation process and published in the final Consultation Report (all other personal information will be redacted).

All responses received will be redacted and shared with Education Scotland as required by section 8(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

14.0 Meetings with Pupils

Quality Improvement Officers alongside school staff will arrange to discuss proposals with pupils (who are considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken, and this will be published in the Consultation Report. Staff are welcome to respond through the consultation process.

15.0 Involvement of Education Scotland (HMle)

Following the close of the consultation, Dumfries and Galloway Council will provide Education Scotland with copies of the written representations submitted, a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting, and any other relevant documentation. This will allow Education Scotland to prepare a report on the proposal within a period of three weeks.

16.0 Consultation Report and Time for Further Consideration

After receiving Education Scotland's report, Dumfries and Galloway Council will then prepare and publish a Consultation Report in accordance with Sections 9, 10 and 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. Dumfries and Galloway Council Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 9 September 2025 will thereafter make its final decision on whether to implement the proposal. The decision will be made a minimum of three weeks after publication of the Consultation Report. If Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee makes a closure decision, Dumfries and Galloway Council shall notify the Scottish Ministers within six working days of that decision and publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified, and that representations can be made to them. The Education Authority would also be required to publish a notice on its website of the decision to implement the proposal and why it has been satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for formulating the proposal.

17.0 Explanation of Approach

The Proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient

provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).

18.0 Call-in of Closure Proposal and Determination of Case

The Scottish Ministers will have a maximum of eight weeks to call in any closure decision made by Dumfries and Galloway Council in certain circumstances. This eight-week timeframe would consist of an initial three weeks from the date of decision, during which representations can be made to the ministers, and a further five weeks for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether to issue a call in notice. During this period the Education Authority will not proceed to implement any closure decision.

If the Scottish Ministers call in a closure proposal, it is referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels. The Convener must constitute a School Closure Review Panel within seven days for determination. The Education Authority may not implement a closure decision in whole or in part until the Panel has made its determination. It will usually issue a decision within eight weeks of the Panel being constituted.

If the School Closure Review Panel refuses to consent to the closure decision, or following publication of the Consultation Report Dumfries and Galloway Council decides not to implement the closure proposal, a further closure proposal cannot be published in relation to the school for five years, unless there is a significant change in the school's circumstances.

19.0 Grounds for Call-In etc

The Scottish Ministers may issue a call-in notice where it appears to the Scottish Ministers that Dumfries and Galloway Council may have failed:

- (a) in a significant regard to comply with the requirements imposed on it by (or under) the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended so far as they are relevant in relation to the closure proposal, or
- (b) to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to its decision to implement the proposal.

20.0 Conclusion

It is proposed that education provision at St Ninian's RC Primary School be discontinued with effect from 1 December 2025. The catchment area of St Ninian's RC Primary School shall be re-aligned to St Joseph's RC Primary School.

It has been assessed that the proposal is the most appropriate means of addressing the underlying reasons for formulating it, which are:

- St Ninian's RC Primary School has been formally mothballed for nineteen months (correct March 2025), with no pupils in attendance since August 2023. The school roll is not forecast to rise in the near future.
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
- Number of children aged 0-14 identifying as Roman Catholic in Dumfries and Galloway has fallen by 34% between the census' of 2011 and 2022.
- Challenges recruiting a Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) Headteacher and principal teacher for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment. The annual cost of mothballing the building is £7,039.28.

Other Considerations

- The education benefits as set out in Section 7 to current and future primary aged children within the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area.
- Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to make arrangements to secure Best Value.
- On 10 December 2024, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles to be used as a basis for a sustainable School Estate. Applying these Principles will help ensure 'best-value' and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all our children and young people, whilst considering the needs and wishes of people and communities. These Principles are detailed in the Preliminary Requirements document at Appendix 3.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council currently has in excess of 4,546 (32%) spaces within its current primary school estate. It must be acknowledge that the costs-per-pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high and that underutilised schools are expensive to maintain and operate. The current condition, suitability and over capacity is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the school estate.

Financial Template

Table 1

Row 1	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
	Current revenue costs for school proposed for closure			
	Name of School	Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving school (enter name of school)	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Row 2	St Minian's RC Primary School			
Row 3	School costs			
Row 4	Employee costs - note 1	129,473	-	129,473
Row 5	teaching staff			
Row 6	support staff	10,733	-	10,733
Row 7	teaching staff training (CPD etc)	-	-	-
Row 8	support staff training	-	-	-
Row 9	Supply costs - note 2	-	-	-
Row 10				
Row 11	Building costs:			
Row 12	property insurance	-	-	-
Row 13	non domestic rates	5,690	-	4,199
Row 14	water & sewerage charges	2,300	-	124
Row 15	energy costs	7,645	-	4,804
Row 16	cleaning (contract or inhouse)	4,925	-	4,925
Row 17	building repair & maintenance	197	-	197
Row 18	grounds maintenance	1,062	-	531
Row 19	facilities management costs - note 6	3,585	-	3,585
Row 20	revenue costs arising from capital	-	-	-
Row 21	other - H&S items servicing and maintenance, waste	531	-	531
Row 22				
Row 23	School operational costs:			
Row 24	learning materials	870	-	870
Row 25	catering (contract or inhouse)	-	-	-
Row 26	SQA costs	-	-	-
Row 27	other school operational costs (e.g. licences)	909	-	909
Row 28				
Row 29	Transport costs: note 3			
Row 30	home to school	10,450	-	10,450
Row 31	other pupil transport costs	130	-	130
Row 32	staff travel	-	-	-
Row 33	SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	178,499	-	171,460
Row 34				
Row 35	Income:			
Row 36	Sale of meals	352	-	352
Row 37	Lets	-	-	-
Row 38	External care provider	-	-	-
Row 39	Other Free School Meals	1,431	-	1,431
Row 40	SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	1,783	-	1,783
Row 41				
Row 42	TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	176,717	-	169,677
Row 43				
Row 44	UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	17,671.65	-	-

Column 5

Column 6

Column 7

Table 2	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
Capital costs		School proposed for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost - note 7		-	-
Third party contributions to capital costs		-	-

Table 3

Table 3	Annual Property costs incurred (moth-halling) until disposal
property insurance	-
non domestic rates	1,491
water & sewerage charges	2,176
energy costs	2,841
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	-
security costs	-
building repair & maintenance	531
grounds maintenance	-
facilities management costs	-
other	-
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	7,039.28

Table 4

Table 4	Non-recurring revenue costs
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	-

Table 5

Table 5	Impact on GAE - note 5
GAE IMPACT	-

Notes

1. The total costs incurred for teaching staff (row 5) and support staff (row 6) are required to be included. Column 2 should include the current costs for a full financial year for the school proposed for closure, and column 3 should include the *additional* cost to the receiving school as a result of staff transferring.

For teaching staff, this should include regular teachers, itinerant teachers, learning support teaching staff and special education (ASN) staff.

Itinerant teaching staff includes central support services such as English as additional language support, hearing, visually impaired services, educational psychology services.

For support staff, this should include classroom assistants, administration staff and janitorial staff.

For all staff the costs entered should include salary, NI and pension costs.

If the school proposed for closure has less than 3 staff members, then the cumulative staff costs only should be given in row 5 (for both teaching and support staff), so as to avoid possible disclosure of individual salaries.

Training costs should be identified separately in rows 7 and 8.

2. Supply costs to cover teaching and support staff. This may be held in a central budget, be devolved or shared across the budgets.

3. 'Home to school' pupil transport costs should include those school transport costs incurred in accordance with Council policy. 'Other pupil transport costs' will cover costs incurred for the transport of pupils for activities such as swimming etc

4. Row 30 of column 3 should include the additional transport costs related to the increased home to school transport arrangements that are put in place in accordance with Council policy. This figure is therefore likely to be considerably higher than current costs.

5. This table is to capture the impact on the revenue support grant as a result of changes to GAE. Impact on GAE should consider the issues covered in the GAE section of the guidance document that accompany this template.

6. Facilities management costs will include costs related to caretaking, janitorial and security.

7. The capital costs for the receiving school should be taken across the life cycle of the school in line with the life expectancy of that school. The capital costs for the school proposed for closure should be taken across the same life cycle period.

Statutory Consultation – St Ninian’s RC
Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

10 March 2025

E-mail statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Dear Consultee,

Review of Education Provision Notice and Summary of Proposal for closing St Ninian’s RC Primary School, Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is consulting on the proposal to close St Ninian’s RC Primary School. This notice provides a summary of the proposal; it is a requirement for you to be notified of the consultation as a consultee, in accordance with Schedule 2 Section 1 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is conducting a public consultation from Monday 10 March to Friday 9th May 2025. This is the period in which you will be able to make representation to Dumfries and Galloway Council in respect of the proposal. It is important that everyone we are consulting with tells us about their thoughts on the proposal.

This summary provides further information on where a full copy of the proposal can be obtained and also advises as to how you can make representation.

The Proposal

Dumfries and Galloway Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to discontinue education provision at St Ninian’s RC Primary School which is currently mothballed and realign its catchment area to St Joseph’s RC Primary School.

It is proposed that education provision at St Ninian’s RC Primary School be discontinued with effect from 1 September 2025.

Reasons for this Proposal

This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are;

- St Ninian’s RC Primary School has been formally mothballed for sixteen months (correct December 2024), with no pupils in attendance since August 2023. The school roll is not forecast to rise in the near future.
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
- Number of children aged 0-14 identifying as Roman Catholic in Dumfries and Galloway has fallen by 34% between the census’ of 2011 and 2022.

- Challenges recruiting a Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) Headteacher and principal teacher for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment. The annual cost of mothballing the building is £7,039.28.

Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

The Council will improve education and learning opportunities to help all our children, young people and citizens fulfil their potential. This starts with pre-school, then school, before progressing into further or higher education or transition into work. We will work with our partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community.

Strategic Outcomes:

- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable and meet the needs of local communities
- We get it right for every child
- Children, young people and adults transition successfully through all life stages
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences
- Local people can build their skills and confidence

Alternatives to the Proposal (Including the Proposal)

The proposal and alternatives to the proposal were considered as part of the preliminary requirement and are detailed below;

- a. Re-open St Ninian's RC Primary School
- b. Continued mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School with the temporary catchment of St Joseph's RC Primary School
- c. Closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School and realign the catchment area to St Joseph's Primary School

Representations may be made on the following;

- the proposal;
- alternatives to the proposal as listed above; and
- suggestions of other alternatives.

What we will do –

We will consult by:

- Providing a notice of the consultation and a summary of the proposal to the relevant consultees **this is that notice and summary**
- Placing an advert in the local press
- Putting information on our website - www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations
- Holding a public meeting to explain the proposal
- Ask all consultees to tell us what they think of the proposal

What to do now –

- Please read the full proposal document
- Please attend the public meeting which will be held on Tuesday 15th April 2025 at 6pm in Penninghame Primary School
- Let us know what you think by 5pm on Friday 9th May 2025 by:

Online Survey: <https://forms.office.com/e/JQiuTy8cmY>



Letter to: Statutory Consultation – St Ninian’s RC Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

Email to: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Respondents are required to clearly state the capacity in which they are expressing their views and agree to their name and any statement/comments being published as part of the Statutory Consultation process and published in the final Consultation Report (all other personal information will be redacted).

What Next?

Dumfries and Galloway Council is seeking your views on the proposal during the consultation period, it does not assume that the proposal will go ahead. All points raised during the consultation period will be included in the final consultation paper before being presented to Elected Members at Education, Skills and Community

Wellbeing Committee on 9 September 2025 where a decision will be taken as to the outcome of this process.

If the proposal goes ahead, any children current and future from the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area wishing to attend a Roman Catholic primary school would be educated at St Joseph's RC Primary School.

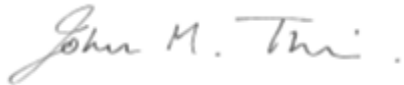
Please note that this summary document is for convenience only. Copies of the Proposal Paper can be obtained from:

- DG Customer Services Newton Stewart
- Ryan Centre Stranraer
- Dumfries and Galloway Council Headquarters

And published on Dumfries and Galloway Council website:

www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations

Yours faithfully



John Thin
Head of Education Resources

St Ninian's RC Primary School – Phase One – Preliminary Requirement

1.0 Introduction

Dumfries and Galloway Council are committed to giving all local children and young people an equal chance to fulfil their potential. Our ambition is to be a successful region, with a growing economy, based on fairness, opportunity and quality public services, where all citizens prosper. For our children and young people, raising attainment in schools is key to who they may become and how they will contribute to society. This will require a sustainable school estate that works for everyone and is able to secure 'best-value' to the public.

The Dumfries and Galloway Learning Estate Strategy was agreed by the Education and Learning Committee on 26 January 2023. The Learning Estate Strategy (LES) sets out a holistic, long-term view to ensure all schools are well designed, maintained and managed and most importantly that this view is shared between all stakeholders and decision makers.

On 10 November 2023, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles listed below to be used as a basis for a sustainable School Estate. Applying these Principles will help ensure 'best-value' and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all our children and young people, whilst considering the needs and wishes of people and communities.

To meet current and future demand, we must continue to transform services, reduce spend in unsustainable areas and be prepared to think differently about how services are delivered to make the most effective use of resources. The Principles are weighted, with the priority for review starting at the top of the list.

School Estate Principles

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Primary pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school.
3. Secondary pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 45 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school.
4. To enhance high quality social and educational experiences, primary schools should ordinarily support 3 classes and have composite classes of no greater than 3-year groups.
5. To enhance high quality social and educational experiences, secondary schools should ordinarily support a 2-form entry (2 registration classes in S1).
6. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising of at least 3 FTE members based at the same school.
7. Schools should have an occupancy rate where possible greater than 60% utilisation of the capacity of the school, and ideally should be operating at 80% utilisation.
8. All schools should be adaptable to children, staff, and visitors with disabilities.

9. All schools should support community use where required in the local context.
10. All schools should have key facilities including a hall, dining area, staff room, school office and grass playing fields as appropriate to the size and scale of the school.

Maintaining the engagement of stakeholders and keeping them informed is an important part of successful change. The co-operation of a variety of stakeholders will be needed, and we know that good consultation means better outcomes, and the benefits of engaging with, consulting and involving stakeholders at this early stage helps to highlight expectations and identify all the options.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended requires that educational benefits should be at the forefront of any proposal to make a significant change to schools. It specifies that the local authority must, for all consultations, prepare an Educational Benefits Statement and publish it within the proposal paper. Only through a close partnership with our schools and stakeholders can a proposal be produced that will benefit both current and future learners.

On 14 March 2024 the Education and Learning Committee agreed that Officers engage with local families and the wider community of St Ninian's RC Primary School to further consider future options for the school.

2.0 Reason for the Proposal

Dumfries and Galloway Council has identified the underlying reasons why the future of the School is being considered, which are as follows:

1. St Ninian's RC Primary School has been formally mothballed for sixteen months (correct December 2024), with no pupils in attendance since August 2023. The school roll is not forecast to rise in the near future.
2. Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
3. Number of children aged 0-14 identifying as Roman Catholic in DandG has fallen by 34% between the census' of 2011 and 2022.
4. Challenges recruiting a Roman Catholic (or approved through the Roman Catholic Church) Headteacher and principal teacher for St Ninian's RC Primary School. Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.
5. Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is therefore considering the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School. The various options are explored within this paper.

3.0 Background

At Education and Learning Committee on 29 June 2023, members were recommended to mothball St Ninian's RC Primary School from August 2023 this was following discussion with families with regard to the most appropriate education for their children. There were a number of contributing factors;

- The Headteacher position for St Joseph's RC and St Ninian's RC had been advertised on five occasions, with no applications received.
- The school roll for academic year 23/24 was anticipated to be eight.
- No suitable applications for the vacant Principal Teacher position

Agreement was reached with the parents that it would be appropriate to mothball St Ninian's RC from August 2023 with the pupils transitioning to other schools. Officers and Headteachers are worked with families to ensure effective transition for all pupils and staff.

The term 'mothballing' is used, according to Scottish Government guidance, where the school roll has fallen to very low pupil numbers, and in some cases zero. Mothballing, rather than closing a school, gives the opportunity for it to reopen should circumstances change. There is no legal process for mothballing.

Families were given the opportunity during the Primary 1 enrolment process for academic year 2024/25 to enrol or transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School, a press release in the Wigtown Free Press informed families of the opportunity along with a Dumfries and Galloway Council email targeting 12,000 individuals. There were no enrolments or transfers received for academic session 2024/25. At Education and Learning Committee officers recommended a further academic year of mothballing for St Ninian's RC Primary School for session 2024/25 which was agreed by members on 14 March 2024 due to there being no children in attendance.

The delineated catchment area for St Ninian's RC Primary School is currently temporarily re-aligned to St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer).

3.1 Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

The Council will improve education and learning opportunities to help all our children, young people and citizens fulfil their potential. This starts with pre-school, then school, before progressing into further or higher education or transition into work. We will work with our partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community.

Strategic Outcomes:

- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable and meet the needs of local communities
- We get it right for every child
- Children, young people and adults transition successfully through all life stages
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences
- Local people can build their skills and confidence

3.2 St Ninian's RC Primary School

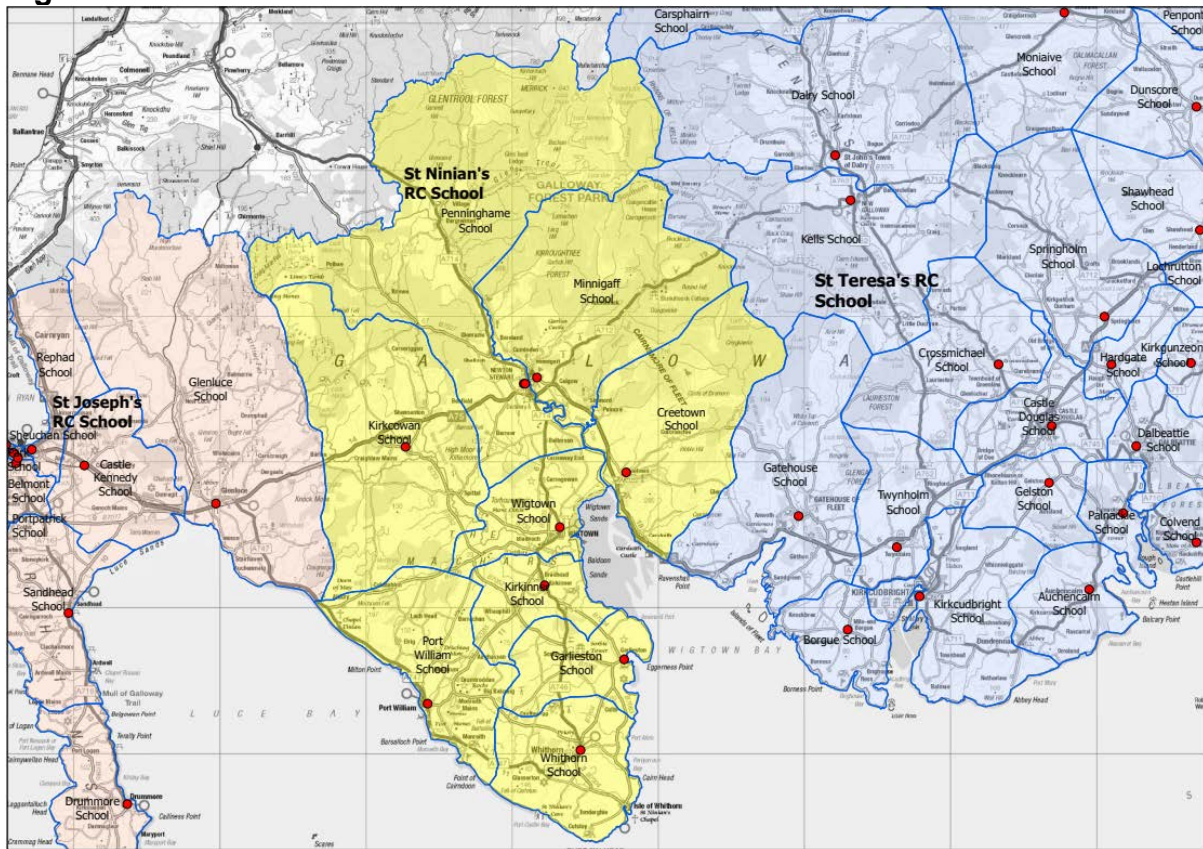
St Ninian's RC Primary School is a denominational primary school and is classified as a being urban under the Scottish Government classification and it is located in the remote small town of Newton Stewart. St Ninian's RC Primary School is located on the same site as Penninghame Primary School.

St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area is made up the catchment areas of the following non-denominational schools; Creetown Primary School, Garlieston Primary School, Kirkcowan Primary School, Kirkinner Primary School, Minnigaff Primary School, Penninghame Primary School, Port William Primary School, Whithorn Primary School and Wigtown Primary School.

The catchment area of St Ninian's RC Primary School borders the catchment areas of St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) to the West, St Teresa's RC Primary School (Dumfries) to the East with the neighbouring authority of the South Ayrshire to the North.

The school catchment area is detailed in yellow in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1



The pink area in Figure 1 is the partial catchment area of St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) and the catchment area of St Teresa's Primary School (Dumfries) is detailed in blue.

Distance between St Ninian's RC Primary School and surrounding denominational primary schools are listed below;

St Joseph's RC Primary School	25.1 miles
St Teresa's RC Primary School	48.3 miles

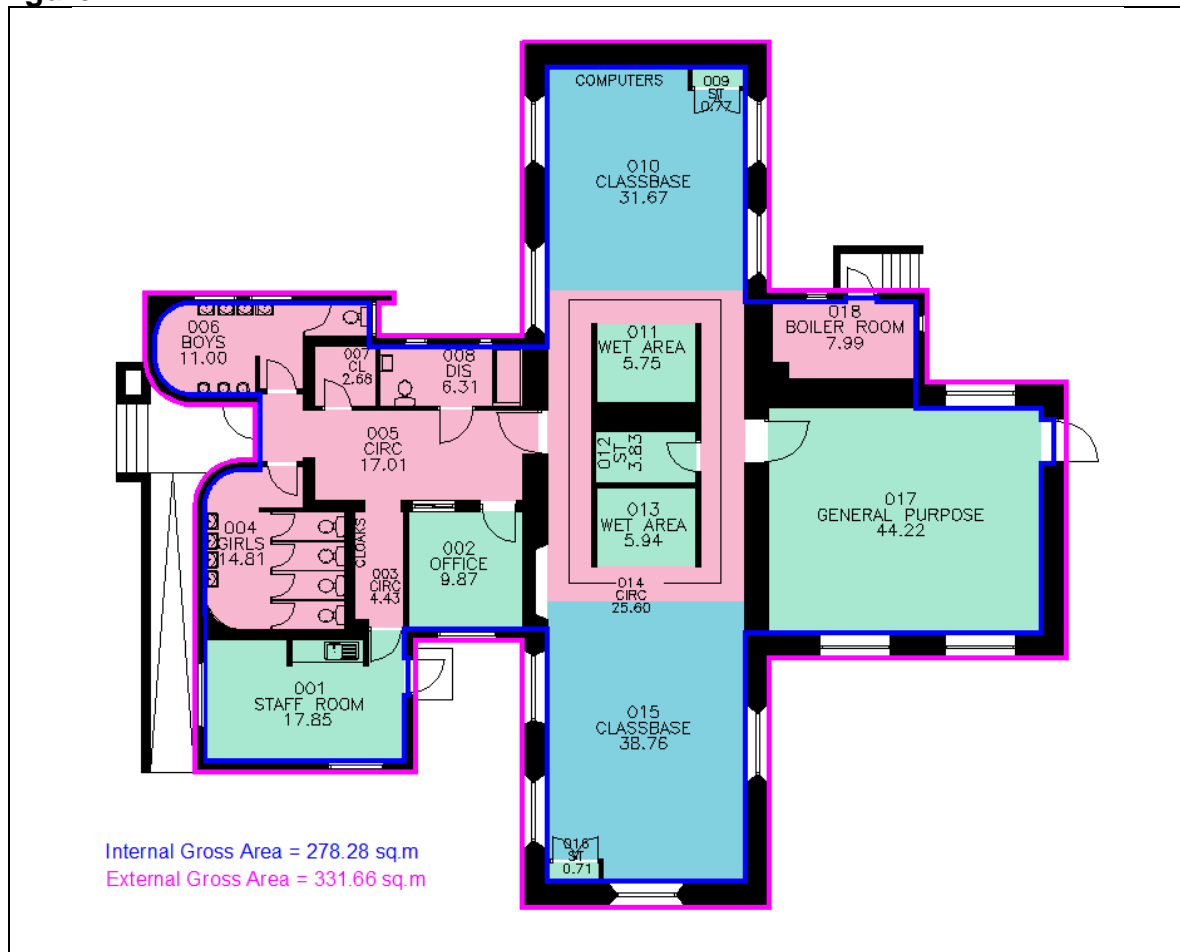
It is important to note that the geography of the catchment area means that travel distances/times will be different for all pupils, which is why the information listed above is from St Ninian's RC Primary School to other Roman Catholic schools in Dumfries and Galloway. As detailed there are nine non-denominational primary schools in the area which if the preference of families can be reached with a reduced travel distance and time.

St Ninian's RC Primary School site and school building are owned by Dumfries and Galloway Council. There is no record of the building, or any part of the building being listed with Historic Environment Scotland, however the school is located within the defined conservation area within Newton Stewart.

The school has a capacity of 42 pupils. It is a single-storey building. The accommodation comprises of entrance/circulation area, office, staffroom, two partially open plan classrooms with wet areas, staffroom, general purpose room, pupil toilets and an accessible toilet. Facilities at Penninghame Primary School were utilised for dining and PE. Externally the facilities are shared with Penninghame Primary School with tarmac, grass and developed areas.

The school floorplan is detailed in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2



At the point St Ninian's RC Primary School was mothballed it shared a partner Headteacher with the adjacent Penninghame Primary School. This partnership arrangement had been planned to change as part of Dumfries and Galloways management arrangements for schools, the position of Head Teacher of St Ninian's RC Primary School and St Josephe's RC Primary School (Stranraer) had been advertised five times with no applicants.

St Ninian's RC Primary School delivered primary education from P1 to P7. There is a nursery on site at Penninghame Primary School, local children attended this nursery or at other nearby schools or partner provider nurseries in the wider area. Pupils at St Ninian's RC Primary School shared the dining and PE facilities at Penninghame Primary School.

Information relating to the Extent, Condition, Sufficiency and Suitability of the school estate is reported by Dumfries and Galloway Council to the Scottish Government on an annual basis, this is known as the Core Facts Return.

Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security, it is undertaken by external surveyors impartial to Dumfries and Galloway Council and follows scoring methodology defined by Scottish Government for all schools. St Ninian's RC Primary School was assessed in September 2021 and the overall condition rating for the property was B, satisfactory – performing adequately but showing minor deterioration. However, whilst the overall condition is B, there are some areas, for example the roof, mechanical and electrical were graded as C, poor – showing major problems and not operating optimally or D, bad – economic life expired and/or risk of failure.

Suitability is a measure of whether a school building and its grounds are fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum. The suitability of St Ninian's RC Primary School was carried out in 2022, the school was graded as B.

The school has been operating as a single teacher school since academic year 2021/22. The threshold for a second teacher in Dumfries and Galloway is 19 pupils or above.

3.3 Local Development

The current Local Development Plan (LDP2) for Dumfries and Galloway was published in 2019 it provides the planning framework and guides the future use and development of land in towns, villages and the rural area. It also indicates where development, including regeneration, should happen and where it should not. LDP3 is currently in development and will be published in 2027.

Inset maps for Garlieston, Kirkcowan, Newton Stewart and Wigtown can be found at Appendix 4.

Within Newton Stewart planning permission has been granted for 70 houses at NST.H4, these properties are being developed by a registered social landlord, Wheatley Group. Work is expected to start on this site in 2025/26 with completion forecast for early 2027. Dumfries and Galloway Council will work closely with Wheatley Group as this development progresses.

In addition to those settlements with inset maps as detailed above, the LDP2 Housing Development in Villages (Supplementary Guidance – February 2020) <https://tinyurl.com/2bz94bpf> covers the villages of Bladnoch, Carsluith, Glentroll, Isle of Whithorn, Sorbie and Wauphill.

3.4 Demographics and Pupil Numbers

Dumfries and Galloway Council holds electronic records of school rolls back to academic year 1975/76. Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next ten years. St

Ninian's RC Primary Schools roll has not mirrored that of Dumfries and Galloway as a region, there has however been a steady decline since academic year 2014/15. These historical school rolls are detailed in figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3

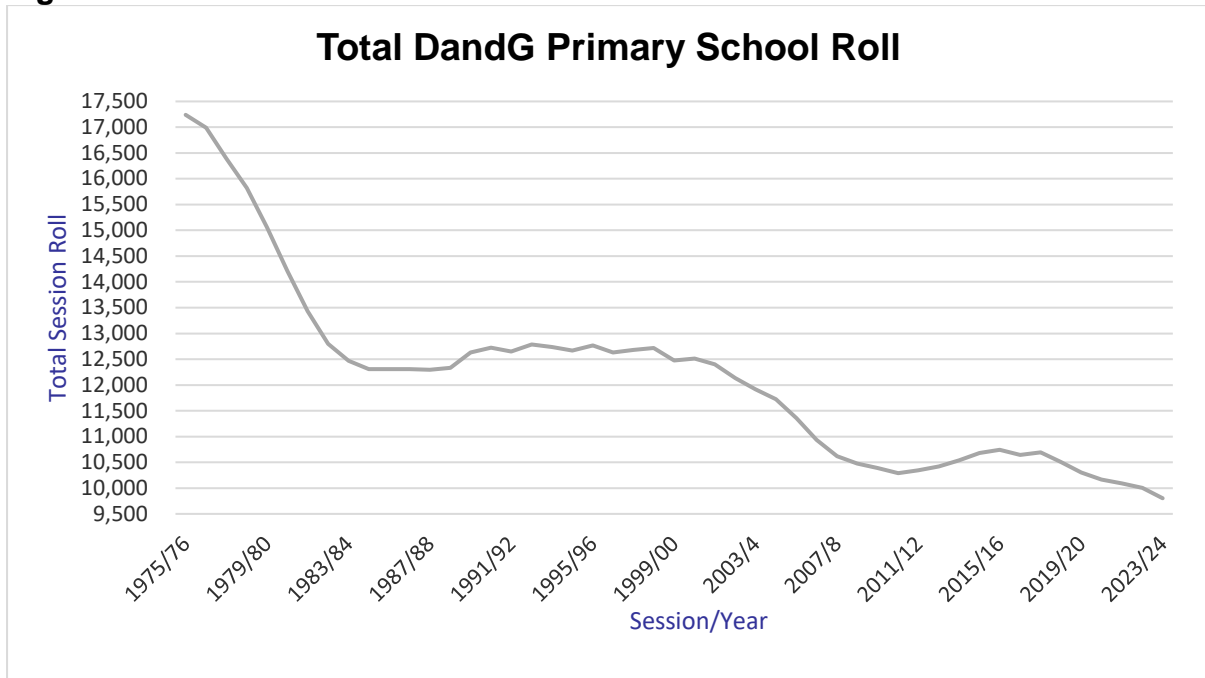
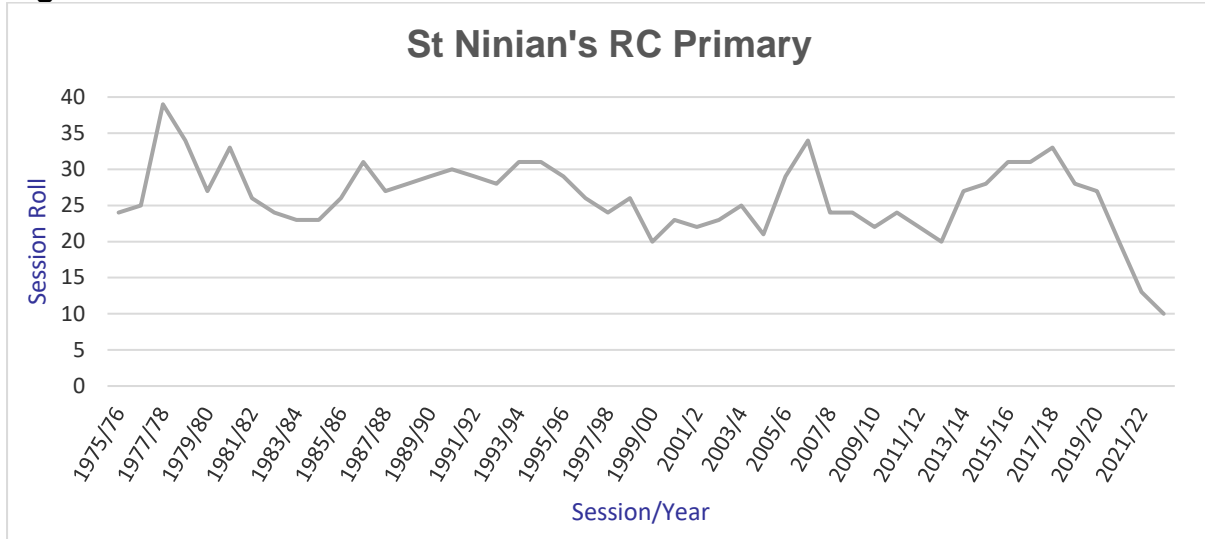


Figure 4



There are currently 15 children baptised in the Roman Catholic Church of P1-P7 age (academic year 2024/25) residing within the catchment area of St Ninian's RC Primary School (data received from the baptismal records from the parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian). The catchment children are detailed in figure 5 below. These children of primary school age all attend other schools in the area, some through placement when the school was mothballed and others through parental choice.

Figure 5 – Children baptised in the Roman Catholic Church

Academic Year	Pre-nursery	N3	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
2024/25	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	3	3	3	3	15
2025/26					2	0	1	2	3	3	2	14
2026/27					2	2	0	1	2	3	3	13
2027/28					2	2	2	0	1	2	3	12
2028/29					2	2	2	2	0	1	2	11

The expected school roll for St Ninian’s RC Primary School for academic year 2023/24 was 8 pupils. Assuming that the children that were in attendance when the school mothballed and applying those figures alongside the catchment pupils, this outturns the projected school roll as detailed in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6

Academic Year	Pre-nursery	N3	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
2024/25	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
2025/26					2	0	0	1	0	1	1	5
2026/27					2	2	0	0	1	0	1	6
2027/28					2	2	2	0	0	1	0	7
2028/29					2	2	2	2	0	0	1	9

A school roll of 9 children in a school with a capacity of 42 would result in an occupancy level of 21%. Such a low occupancy level is unsustainable. This is also dependant on all catchment children attending the school and whilst historic trends show that St Ninian’s RC Primary School has gained more children than it has lost through placing requests, the numbers have fallen sharply over recent years.

In addition to the numbers listed above there were 2 non-catchment children that attended St Ninian’s RC Primary School prior to mothballing, these children are included in Figure 6 above.

From data received from the baptismal records from the parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian. we know that there are (for academic year 2024/25), four nursery aged children and four children pre-nursery living within the catchment.

3.5 Pupil Enrolments

In January 2024 as part of the targeted press and social media campaign for Primary 1 enrolment, a press release was issued in the Wigtown Free Press and Dumfries and Galloway Standard. Emails were also sent to over 12,000 individuals; this informed all recipients that applications could be made for pupils to enrol (primary 1) or transfer (Primary 2 – Primary 7) to St Ninian’s RC Primary School for academic year 2024/25.

Following this enrolment and transfer opportunity no enrolment or transfer forms to attend St Ninian’s RC Primary School were received.

4.0 Community Engagement

Council Officers from the Education and Learning Directorate conducted the following engagements with the communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School to keep them fully informed and to explore potential options for the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School.

- 17 September 2024 – Public meeting at Penninghame Primary School 6pm. A presentation was given by officers explaining the national and regional context, there was the opportunity for those present to ask questions and an online survey gathering the thoughts of the community was shared. A summary of the meeting is appended to this report (Appendix 1)
- September/October 2024 – An online survey was made available from 4 September until 11 October 2024 paper copies were also made available as well as the option to write to the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate, contact information was made available and circulated at the public meeting.
The survey questions and a summary of submitted feedback is appended to this report (Appendix 2)
- 29 October 2024 – Public meeting at Penninghame Primary School 6pm. Opportunity to discuss the findings of the survey/feedback received and discuss the next steps. Those present were made aware that officers will be taking a recommendation Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 10 December 2024 for members to agree the commencement of the statutory consultation process for the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. A summary of the meeting is appended to this report (Appendix 3)

5.0 The Proposal and Reasonable Alternatives to the Proposal

There have been no children in attendance at St Ninian's RC Primary School since August 2023, members of Education and Learning Committee on 29 June 2023 agreed to mothball St Ninian's RC Primary School for academic year 2023/24. There were a number of contributing factors including the school roll for academic year 2023/24 was anticipated to be eight. The Headteacher position for St Joseph's RC and St Ninian's RC had been advertised on five occasions, with no applications received. No suitable applications for the vacant Principal Teacher position. In agreement with families it was felt that the most appropriate course of action was to mothball the school.

Whilst the building is mothballed it continues to deteriorate, the community and Dumfries and Galloway Council would like to find a resolution to the current mothballing arrangement.

Dumfries and Galloway Council along with several other rural authorities is facing increasing challenges recruiting staff. Alongside this the pupil roll across the region continues to fall, with less primary age year on year as detailed in Figure 3.

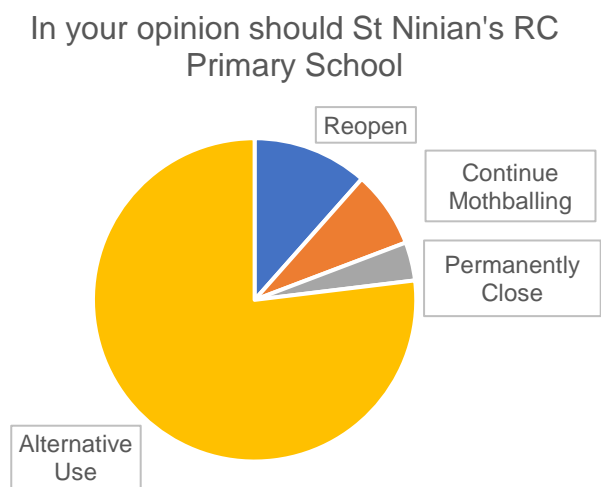
Dumfries and Galloway Council has considered the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School. The following options are explored further within this paper:

- a. Re-open St Ninian's RC Primary School
- b. Continued Mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School with the temporary catchment of St Joseph's RC Primary School
- c. Closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School and Realign the Catchment Area to St Joseph's Primary School

Following the community engagement and as part of the online survey, consideration was given the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School, the communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School were asked "In your opinion should St Ninian's RC Primary School?" the responses are as below –

Figure 7

- **4%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **permanently close**
- **12%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **reopen**
- **8%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **continue mothballing**
- **77%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to have an **alternative use**



An alternative use of the building, whether that be for a different education purpose or for community or business use, cannot be progressed until such time that St Ninian's RC Primary School has gone through the statutory consultation process in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

6.0 Option A: Re-open St Ninian's RC Primary School

The Statutory Guidance for the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, in relation to mothballing states "the maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote."

St Ninian's RC Primary School was officially mothballed from August 2023 approximately sixteen months (correct December 2024).

6.1 Community Feedback

A small number of respondents 12% (3 respondents) to the survey were in favour of St Ninian's RC Primary School reopening. The families of thirteen primary and nursery aged children responded to the survey none of which expressed an interest in the school reopening, the reasons given were as follows:

"Children are happy in their current school, no need to change"

"I do not think it necessary to have two separate schools on one campus"

"We are not religious"

6.2 Pupil Numbers

Families of St Ninian's RC Primary School were given the opportunity during the P1 enrolment process (29 January – 2 February 2024) for academic year 2024/25 to enrol or transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School. All families living within the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area were contacted via email, as well as a press release in the Wigtown Free Press and Dumfries and Galloway Standard to inform families of the opportunity. Following this enrolment and transfer opportunity no enrolment or transfer forms were received.

Families will have the opportunity to enrol/transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School in January 2025. However, there is no indication at this stage that there is any demand for reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School in August 2025.

6.3 Financial Information

The total recurring annual revenue cost to reopen St Ninian's RC Primary School would amount to £186,698.85. This figure is based on the last full financial year the school was operational and includes increased salary costs.

The total transport costs for the last full academic year St Ninian's RC Primary School was operation was £10,450.00. It is not possible to predict the costs of transport if the school was to reopen as no one has to date expressed a desire to enrol or transfer their child(ren) to the school.

6.4 Community Impact

The reopening of St Ninian's RC Primary School would enable the premises to be used by the community however there are facilities across the wider community. There are no records of schools lets taking place at St Ninian's RC Primary School for a number of years, activities tend to be focussed towards Penninghame Primary School where there is a large general-purpose hall with stage area. Whilst the presence of a school may make the area a more attractive place to live, there is Penninghame Primary School on the same site and Minnigaff Primary School approx. 1 mile away.

6.5 Travel arrangements

The travel distance from St Ninian's RC Primary School to St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) is 24.7 miles via the A75. Travel time is approximately 32 minutes (Source: Google Maps). At the point St Ninian's RC Primary School was closed no pupils were transferred to St Joseph's RC Primary School, their preference was to attend their local non-denominational school. Reopening of the school would minimise the travel distance for those pupils wishing to attend a Roman Catholic primary school.

6.6 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Headteachers and their wider staff teams supporting the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to in an ever-changing global society. Individual Headteachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. In partnership with children, parents/carers, staff and the wider community each school works to develop a vision, values and aims unique to their setting and community.

There are specific educational benefits to reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School in relation to the learning and teaching outcomes as detailed in Curriculum for Excellence for religious education. As detailed in Curriculum for Excellence: religious and moral education;

"All Roman Catholic schools are expected by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland to follow guidelines established by the Catholic Education Commission on the provision of adequate time for religious education within the school curriculum."

"The role of the wider parish community plays an important part in the delivery of religious education."

There are no specific educational benefits across the wider curriculum as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of the children.

There would be issues with respect to the current suitability as mentioned in section 3.4 of this report, which would negatively impact on learning and teaching.

6.7 Summary

Whilst a small number of respondents indicated their preference for the school to be reopened, If the school were to reopen for academic year 2025/26 the school roll

would be zero based on the latest data gathered through the opportunity for families to enrol or transfer.

There are financial implications if the school is to be reopened, these values are detailed in section 6.3 of this report.

The travel distance from St Ninian's RC Primary School to St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) is 24.7 miles via the A75. Travel time is approximately 32 minutes (Source: Google Maps). No alternative travel arrangements were implemented at the point at which the school was mothballed as pupils either moved onto secondary school or enrolled at their local non-denominational school. Should the school reopen, there may be a positive environmental impact assuming pupils enrolled at St Ninian's RC Primary School instead of St Joseph's RC Primary School.

When considering the above alongside the expected school roll of zero, the challenges in recruiting staff and the preference of families to remain or chose other schools in the area, reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School is not a reasonable option.

7.0 Option B: Continued Mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School with the temporary catchment of St Joseph's RC Primary School

The Statutory Guidance for the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, in relation to mothballing states "the maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote."

St Ninian's RC Primary School was officially mothballed from August 2023 approximately sixteen months (correct December 2024).

7.1 Community Feedback

A very small number of respondents 8% (2 respondents) to the survey were in favour of the continued mothballing of St Ninian's RC Primary School. There were no parent/carers who were in favour of the continuation of mothballing.

Whilst the school remains mothballed Dumfries and Galloway Council will ensure that all families are notified of the opportunity to enrol or transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School for the following academic year.

Those present at the public meeting were keen to ensure that the St Ninian's RC Primary School building was repurposed and not left to deteriorate. The building is located within the conservation area in Newton Stewart. The continuation of mothballing will not bring certainty or a purpose for the building which is what the school community of Penninghame Primary School and the wider community are looking for.

7.2 Pupil Numbers

Families of St Ninian's RC Primary School were given the opportunity during the P1 enrolment process (29 January – 2 February 2024) for academic year 2024/25 to enrol or transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School. All families living within the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area were contacted via email, as well as a press release in the Wigtown Free Press and Dumfries and Galloway Standard to inform families of the opportunity. Following this enrolment and transfer opportunity no enrolment or transfer forms were received.

Families will have the opportunity to enrol/transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School in January 2025. However, there is no indication at this stage that there is any demand for reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School in August 2025.

Pupil numbers are not projected to rise over the next 4 years as detailed in Figures 5 and 6 above. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 – Statutory Guidance clearly states in section 63 (Mothballing);

“When a school roll falls very low, the authority and/or community may consider that the school is not presently viable but do not wish to close it immediately because there is a reasonable prospect that the number of pupils in the area will increase such that it should be re-opened in the future.”

From the engagement conducted to date there is little evidence to support that there is a reasonable prospect that the numbers of families for whom their preference is a Roman Catholic education for their children will increase.

7.3 Financial Information

The current annual revenue cost (2023/24) to Dumfries and Galloway Council of the mothballed St Ninian's RC Primary School is £7,039.28. This includes water and sewerage charges, energy costs, repairs and maintenance and waste.

The total transport costs for the last full academic year St Ninian's RC Primary School was operational was £10,450.00.

7.4 Community Impact

Since the start of the 2024/25 academic year Dumfries and Galloway Council received three expression's of interest (EOI's) from community groups under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 with a view to a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) coming forward for consideration.

Following advice from Dumfries and Galloway Council's Legal Service, community groups were informed that EOI's could not be accepted at this stage. The CAT process cannot commence until the statutory process regarding St Ninian's RC Primary School has been completed and a further determination is made regarding future use of the school.

The continuation of mothballing would not allow for the St Ninian's RC Primary School building to be repurposed, nor for the CAT process to commence or reach a conclusion.

7.5 Travel arrangements

The travel distance from St Ninian's RC Primary School to St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) is 24.7 miles via the A75. Travel time is approximately 32 minutes (Source: Google Maps). At the point St Ninian's RC Primary School was closed no pupils were transferred to St Joseph's RC Primary School, their preference was to attend their local non-denominational school.

7.6 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Headteachers and their wider staff teams supporting the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to in an ever-changing global society. Individual Headteachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. In partnership with children, parents/carers, staff and the wider community each school works to develop a vision, values and aims unique to their setting and community.

Penninghame Primary School and St Ninian's RC Primary School share the same site within Newton Stewart. They are both accessible small town schools (Scottish Government classification) and are within one mile of their local non-denominational secondary school, Douglas Ewart High School. Children from St Ninian's RC Primary School transfer to Douglas Ewart Secondary School, there is a denominational secondary school in Dumfries (St Joseph's College) that pupils are welcome to attend. In July 2024, it was predicated that St Ninian's Primary School would have a roll of 8 children from August 2024. Following the decision to mothball the school, 6 of these children transferred to Penninghame Primary School, and 2 children transferred to Port William Primary School (their catchment primary school). No children selected to attend the closest Roman Catholic Primary School, St Joseph's RC Primary, which is located 24.7 miles away in Stranraer.

Children from St Ninians' RC Primary, attending Penninghame Primary, continue to benefit from a curriculum design which supports their location and the skills and attributes to meet their individual needs context. Penninghame Primary School has a school roll of 242 children. The main building consists of nine primary classes, a large gym hall and dining room and associated auxiliary space. On site, and led by the same management team, Penninghame Primary School also include an Early Learning and Childcare setting, currently with roll of 58 children and an Additional Support for Learning, Learning Centre.

Across Penninghame Primary School the children benefit from a social context where they can build relationships, develop social skills, exercise responsibilities, meet challenges and develop resilience as members of a wider social group. Children have the opportunity to influence the direction of the school and their learning experiences through a range of leadership groups and pupil committees. Year groups within Penninghame Primary School range from 22 to 42 children. As a

result, children are able to build relationships with peers which in turn can support their transition into secondary education.

7.7 Summary

The members of the communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School that completed the survey were clear that there was little support for the continuity of mothballing. Those present at the pupil meetings were keen to find a new purpose for the school building and ensure its purpose within the community.

The number of children identified through the Roman Catholic Church do not indicate a rise that would support the continuation of mothballing.

On the basis that pupil numbers are not expected to increase, and the schools mothballing is not of benefit to the community or Dumfries and Galloway Council, therefore continued mothballing is not viewed as a reasonable option.

8.0 Option C: Closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School and Realign the Catchment Area to St Joseph's RC Primary School

Pupil numbers are not projected to rise over the next 4 years as detailed in Figures 5 and 6 above. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 – Statutory Guidance clearly states in section 63 (Mothballing);

“The maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote”

St Ninian's RC Primary School was officially mothballed from August 2023 approximately sixteen months (correct December 2024).

8.1 Community Feedback

One respondent (4%) to the survey was in favour of St Ninian's RC Primary School closing, a further twenty respondents (77%) did not specify they were in favour of closure however their preference was that St Ninian's RC Primary School should have an alternative use. In order for the building to have an alternative use, whether that be for education purposes or CAT, the school would need to go through the statutory consultation process in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. Nine parent/carers were supportive of the school building having an alternative use.

8.2 Pupil Numbers

Families of St Ninian's RC Primary School were given the opportunity during the P1 enrolment process (29 January – 2 February 2024) for academic year 2024/25 to enrol or transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School. All families living within the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment area were contacted via email, as well as a press release in the Wigtown Free Press and Dumfries and Galloway

Standard to inform families of the opportunity. Following this enrolment and transfer opportunity no enrolment or transfer forms were received.

Families will have the opportunity to enrol/transfer their children to St Ninian's RC Primary School in January 2025. However, there is no indication at this stage that there is any demand for reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School in August 2025.

Pupil numbers are not projected to rise over the next four years as detailed in Figures 5 and 6 above.

From the engagement conducted to date there is little evidence to support that there is a reasonable prospect that the numbers of families for whom their preference is a Roman Catholic education for their children will increase.

8.3 Financial Information

The total recurring revenue savings from the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School would amount to £176,716.52, based on actual figures last full financial year the school was operational.

8.4 Community Impact

The potential closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School would remove the option for Roman Catholic education in the parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian but as highlighted in Figures 5 and 6, there are very few children living within the catchment area that are baptized in the Roman Catholic Church.

There are no records of schools lets taking place at St Ninian's RC Primary School for a number of years, activities tend to be focussed towards Penninghame Primary School where there is a large general-purpose hall with stage area. Whilst the presence of a Roman Catholic primary school may make the area a more attractive place to live, there is Penninghame Primary School on the same site and Minnigaff Primary School approx. 1 mile away.

8.5 Travel arrangements

The travel distance from St Ninian's RC Primary School to St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) is 24.7 miles via the A75. Travel time is approximately 32 minutes (Source: Google Maps). At the point St Ninian's RC Primary School was closed no pupils were transferred to St Joseph's RC Primary School, their preference was to attend their local non-denominational school.

8.6 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Headteachers and their wider staff teams supporting the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to in an ever-changing global society. Individual Headteachers and schools are empowered to design and

provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. In partnership with children, parents/carers, staff and the wider community each school works to develop a vision, values and aims unique to their setting and community.

Penninghame Primary School and St Ninian's RC Primary School share the same site within Newton Stewart. They are both accessible small town schools (Scottish Government classification) and are within one mile of their local non-denominational secondary school, Douglas Ewart High School. Children from St Ninian's RC Primary School transfer to Douglas Ewart Secondary School, there is a denominational secondary school in Dumfries (St Joseph's College) that pupils are welcome to attend. In July 2024, it was predicated that St Ninian's Primary School would have a roll of eight children from August 2024. Following the decision to mothball the school, six of these children transferred to Penninghame Primary School, and two children transferred to Port William Primary School (their catchment primary school). No children selected to attend the closest Roman Catholic Primary School, St Joseph's RC Primary, which is located 24.7 miles away in Stranraer.

Children from St Ninians' RC Primary, attending Penninghame Primary, continue to benefit from a curriculum design which supports their location and the skills and attributes to meet their individual needs context. Penninghame Primary School has a school roll of 242 children. The main building consists of nine primary classes, a large gym hall and dining room and associated auxiliary space. On site, and led by the same management team, Penninghame Primary School also include an Early Learning and Childcare setting, currently with roll of 58 children and an Additional Support for Learning, Learning Centre.

Across Penninghame Primary School the children benefit from a social context where they can build relationships, develop social skills, exercise responsibilities, meet challenges and develop resilience as members of a wider social group. Children have the opportunity to influence the direction of the school and their learning experiences through a range of leadership groups and pupil committees. Year groups within Penninghame Primary School range from 22 to 42 children. As a result, children are able to build relationships with peers which in turn can support their transition into secondary education.

8.7 Summary

The community had differing opinions on the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School. A small number would like the school to reopen or the continuation of mothballing however the majority were in favour of the school having a new purpose. In order for the building to have an alternative use the school would need to go through the statutory consultation process in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. There were no families in favour of reopening St Ninian's RC Primary School.

The potential closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School would remove the option for Roman Catholic education in the parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian but as highlighted in Figures 5 and 6, there are very few

children living within the catchment area that are baptised in the Roman Catholic Church.

The travel distance from St Ninian's RC Primary School to St Joseph's RC Primary School is 24.7 miles via the A75. Travel time is approximately 32 minutes (Source: Google Maps). The school roll of St Joseph's RC Primary School is not expected to rise and therefore has the capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers from St Ninian's RC Primary Schools catchment area. There are however nine non-denominational primary schools in the area that offer much shorter travel distances if families chose to take that option.

Those present at the public meetings highlighted the investment in new social housing in the area. This increase in housing may result in more children of all ages moving into the catchment area, Dumfries and Galloway Council will work with Wheatley Homes South to understand this demand and consider the impact across the schools in Newton Stewart.

There was a general consensus that given the locality on the same site as Penninghame Primary School and being located within a conservation area, it is important that to allow consideration of a new purpose for the building. Since the start of the 2024/25 academic year Dumfries and Galloway Council received three expression's of interest (EOI's) from community groups under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 with a view to a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) coming forward for consideration.

Following advice from Dumfries and Galloway Council's Legal Service, community groups were informed that EOI's could not be accepted at this stage. The CAT process cannot commence until the statutory process regarding St Ninian's RC Primary School has been completed and a further determination is made regarding future use of the school.

This has been identified as a reasonable option for further consideration.

9.0 Conclusion

Three alternative options have been reviewed in considering the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School. For each option, information was collated, and consideration given to:

- Community feedback;
- Pupil numbers;
- Financial Information;
- Assessment community impact, and travel arrangements, and
- Educational benefits.

There is no requirement for an authority that is formulating an urban school closure proposal to satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended before starting to prepare its proposal paper, this phase is for rural school closure only. However, the inclusion of this phase is important for all schools and the communities they serve, therefore it has been included in the process for St Ninian's RC Primary School.

After consideration of the options and having regard to the specific reasons identified in this report closing St Ninian's RC Primary School and realigning its catchment area is the most reasonable option in order to address the reasons for the possible proposal.

Members are asked to:

- Note the community engagement undertaken.
- Agree to the commencement of the Statutory Consultation process for the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School.

These recommendations will go to Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 10 December 2024.

Appendix 1

Public Meeting 1: Summary

On 17th September 2024, a public meeting was held at Penninghame Primary School.

The meeting was an open meeting with catchment families, community councils and elected members directly contacted to advise them in advance of the meeting.

The meeting was facilitated by 3 Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate officers and attended by 10 community members, including 7 parents, 1 elected member, 1 community council representatives and the head teacher of Penninghame Primary School.

Following introductions a presentation was given covering the following areas:

- Outline of Engagement
- Background Information
 - National and regional context
 - Demographics
- St Ninian's RC Primary School
 - Catchment Area
 - Pupil Projections
- Survey Questions
 - Demographics
 - The future of St Ninian's RC Primary School

Discussions and questions were facilitated by Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate officers.

The key themes were –

- Community Asset Transfer process
- Statutory Consultation process
- Access to the current Penninghame Primary School site

The meeting was brought to a close.

Appendix 2**Online Survey Summary**

All responses have been represented. In questions where comments were made, any identifying information has been removed.

Demographics

- 26 responses total, 24 living in the catchment area
 - 9 parent/carers with 13 school/nursery age children
 - 1 Community Council representative
 - 1 Roman Catholic Church representative

- 2 respondents identified their current religion as Roman Catholic

Parent/carers with school/pre school age children

- 9 parent/carers responded, representing 13 school/nursery children
- No families expressed a desire to enroll their children at St Ninian's RC Primary School.
- It is recognised that this response does not represent all families living in the catchment area. The Diocese of Galloway was contacted to understand the current and future demand for St Ninian's RC Primary School. The parishes of Sacred Heart, St Martin and St Ninian and Our Lady and St Ninian are all within the catchment area for St Ninian's RC Primary School.
- The numbers detailed below include all children in the catchment area that have been baptised in the Roman Catholic Church (figures do not take account of pupils who previously attended St Ninian's RC Primary School that were not baptised in the Roman Catholic Church)

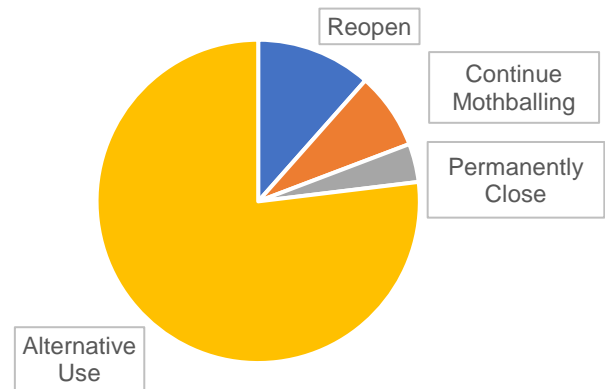
	Pre-nursery	N3	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
2024/25	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	3	3	3	3	15
2025/26					2	0	1	2	3	3	3	14
2026/27					2	2	0	1	2	3	3	13
2027/28					2	2	2	0	1	2	3	12
2028/29					2	2	2	2	0	1	2	11

Stakeholder Views on the Future of St Ninian's RC Primary School

Question: In your opinion should St Ninian's RC Primary School?

- **4%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **permanently close**
- **12%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **reopen**
- **8%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to **continue mothballing**
- **77%** want St Ninian's RC Primary School to have an **alternative use**

In your opinion should St Ninian's RC Primary School



Question: Is there anything you think Dumfries and Galloway Council could do to encourage families to enroll at St Ninian's RC Primary School and help the school to reopen?

There were a range of comments to this question, which are listed below –

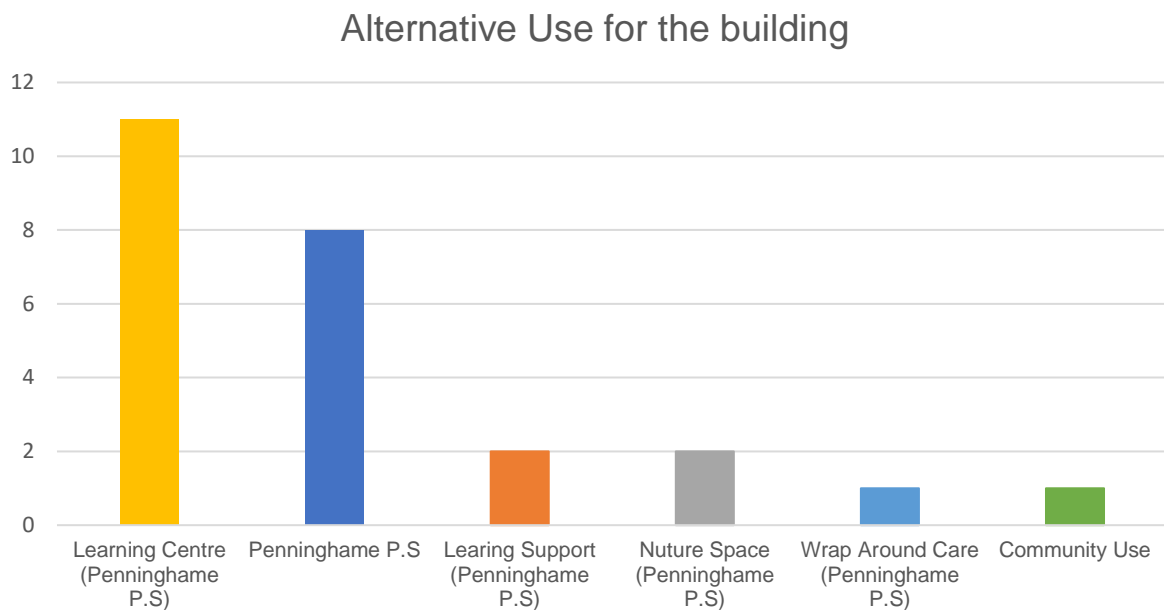
- "Every family enrolling in the Catchment area should be aware of the provision for Catholic Education so that Catholic families are aware of their choices. Realistically however the numbers in this group are very small."
- Openly advertise the school, many people are unaware of its existence
- "Promote the school's religious beliefs. Have much more interaction with St Joseph's RC primary school Stranraer. Continuing to advertise for necessary RC teachers. Do not surrender to "peer" pressure to try & make St Ninians like every other primary! St Ninians & St Josephs are crucial in our community. Children & families of catholic religion Must have the the facilities to learn & be taught & grow within schools & Chapels alike. "
- More widely spread information on what different curriculum it offers etc - I wasn't given any information on this with my two children so unclear how well this was understood by other parents.
- It should be used as a special needs school for all the children in our area who so desperately need it.
- Parents of children at the Learning Centre won't need encouragement to reopen St Ninians as the new learning centre
- I think that this school should be used to support children from Penninghame primary school ie used for learning centre or to support children who struggle in school
- Integrate it with Penninghame primary school

Question: If a decision was taken to close St Ninian's RC Primary School, where should the St Ninian's RC Primary School catchment be realigned to?

- Most (69%) respondents indicated a catchment realignment for St Joseph's RC Primary School (Stranraer) would be their preference.
- Five respondents suggested Penninghame Primary School. The catchment area for St Ninian's RC Primary School is made up of nine non-denominational catchment areas. Penninghame Primary School already has it's own defined catchment area, a realigned denominational catchment area would need to be identified.

Question: If a decision was taken to close St Ninian's RC Primary School, do you have any suggestions on the future of St Ninian's RC Primary School, including potential alternative uses for the building?

The respondents to this question, suggested a range of alternative uses as can be seen below –



Question: Please detail below any other significant factors impacting the local communities of St Ninian's RC Primary School that Dumfries and Galloway Council should be made aware of.

Responses to this question were as follows –

- There should always be the option for RC education, it appears there may discrimination if it closes completely.
- This building needs to be retained within the school campus also for access to the school as two of the entrances are on St Ninian's site. Closure of the school and sealing off of those entrances to the campus would be hugely detrimental to the school and the community. The only access would be via Auchendoon Road which is a one way street and is already extremely busy at

school pick ups and drop off, often with significant congestion. Access to the other properties in particular Cornwall Park, a residential home would be compromised. This could lead to significant issues with access for emergency vehicles. Closure of the other entrances would increase the distance families would need to travel, again likely resulting in increase vehicular use of Auchendoon Road as families may choose to drive rather than walk.

- Even simple but very safe journeys would be compromised, such as nursery pupils are able to walk through the school grounds and out the bottom exit to reach the library where they attend events such as Book bugs, Penninghame school pupils accessing Penninghame church for their various services at Christmas etc.
- Loss of the St Ninians building and grounds would also impact on the relationship with local church which is nearly adjacent to the school. Penninghame school has been kind to allow the church to use the green space during various children's church events. Closing of the exit at the library would hinder this from happening as logistically much more difficult.
- The continued mothballing or closure of the building will result in further deterioration of the fabric of the building (which thanks to the councils insistence to turn off the heating and water has already started to occur) which will mean it is quickly unsafe to use. This will result in not only an eye sore for the school community but also become a health and safety issue. This also leads to more opportunity/attraction for vandalism.
- It is imperative that the council takes action quickly to preserve this school building and its grounds and it should be preserved for the forthcoming young generations of Newton Stewart.
- If the school isn't going to be used, make use of it for learning support children. Would really help them
- If it was to close. There would be no access for penninghame school other than auchendokn road which is bedlam at the best of times. The other 2 entrances relieves some pressure on the traffic and parking.
- The access to Penninghame Primary and St Ninians is currently via 3 main gates: at the library; off Princes Ave and Auchendoon Road. This provides ease of access to library, The Hut and Penninghame St John's church from library entrance and Princes Ave allows all parents on west side of Newton Stewart access to the school. Auchendoon Road is a one way system, over crowded and with no parking:drop off facility and is dangerous for pick up/drop off. Should St Ninians be closed permanently, I would be concerned about future of access routes and right of way. I'm aware the condition of the building is not great and that is a concern. Particularly for future use and viability of community ownership. The most sensible approach would be for St Ninians to become part of Penninghame school estate and secure the future of safe access rights and outdoor space for children. Whilst also providing a dedicated music, arts, creativity, mindfulness space to enhance pupils wellbeing and social interactions with after school clubs.

- By selling this asset privately we would be closing off 2 access points to the school, meaning safely walking to school for many children wouldn't be possible.
- Penninghame primary school is more or less full this would give them a great opportunity to grow even more the school is one of the best that can accommodate children with not only disabilities but those who struggle
- The Council is financially broke. There is a declining demand for education services due to falling school rolls. Hence, the Education department should be delivering most of the financial savings which the Council needs to make so that departments with growing demand for their services, such as Social Services, can be protected and other departments which have been financially hit over many years to "protect Education" can get a bit of a break. Any decision which keeps St Ninians school open, or the option to reopen it in the future, should lead to an immediate transfer of the total budget for the building out of Education to Council reserves to be spent on non Education related budget pressures so that the full financial effect of the decision is felt within Education and other services in the Council do not suffer further.
- All Catholic pupils have a statutory right to a Catholic Education including (but not only) Sacramental preparation. What steps have been taken to provide this for the pupils who moved from St Ninian's and those in the future? I would like this aspect clarified in order that the Catholic community is not disadvantaged.
- Penninghame primary school currently has three entrance's. If the building is disposed of this will leave one entrance to Penninghame primary.
- This will treble the number of pupils entering the school via auchendoon road. A road that already struggles with the volume of traffic, has no cycle lane and goes in the face of safe routes to school.
- It has been indicated that sale of the area would cut off access points to Penninghame Primary School meaning traffic and pedestrian numbers on Auchendoon Road would be in excess of what that street can handle and that the "safe route to school" would be removed for many children. This should be taken into consideration when looking long term.
- Two access points to penninghame primary school are located close to St. Ninian's. Were these to be removed it would dramatically increase traffic at school pick up and drop off times on an already congested road as well as, obviously, increasing the volume of people. Both factors would drastically increase the likelihood of incident. Local residents who do not have children would also suffer as a result of the increased traffic in that area. There are also children with additional needs who would struggle with the increased footfall if all children were coming from the same side of the school.
- Reducing numbers in Minnigaff Primary. Inclusion Base may benefit from moving to St Ninian's as they have limited space in a portacabin at Minnigaff.

Appendix 3

Public Meeting 2: Summary

On 29 October 2023, a public meeting was held at Penninghame Primary School.

The meeting was an open meeting with catchment families, community councils and elected members directly contacted to advise them of the meeting.

The meeting was facilitated by 2 Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Council Officers and attended by 14 community members, including 6 parents. 2 elected members were also in attendance.

Following introductions, a presentation was given detailing the engagement to date and the responses received to the survey.

Next Step – Officers proposed:

- Statutory Consultation on closure

Those present were made aware that officers will be taking a recommendation Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 10 December 2024 for members to agree the commencement of the statutory consultation process for the closure of St Ninian's RC Primary School in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. Officers explained the process and the steps Dumfries and Galloway Council must take in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Discussions and questions were facilitated by Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate officers.

The key themes were –

- Community Asset Transfer process
- Statutory Consultation process
- Future use of St Ninian's RC Primary School building

Information was shared regarding the Scottish Government guide for families and communities in relation to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended and paper copies distributed.

The meeting was brought to a close.

