

Appendix 10: Letters Received

Email 1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in response to Falkirk Council's proposal for the closure of Blackness Primary School from the perspective of being resident in the catchment area and my partner's daughter attending as a P2 pupil at the school.

In summary, I strongly believe the school should remain open for the following reasons (summarised and then expanded below):

Personal perspective:

- My partner's daughter is thriving at Blackness Primary School
- The school provides a community culture impossible to replicate at The Grange
- The lower-density, more intimate environment suits her (and others) better than a higher-density school environment

Broader perspective:

- Parents carefully chose Blackness Primary School above other viable options
- Pupil achievement and attendance levels are generally better at Blackness
- Provision of Blackness Primary School is more in line with the principles of the GIRFEC model
- Assertions made in the proposal about "age and stage" advantages of The Grange are not supported by any cited evidence
- The Grange is approaching maximum occupancy in the next two years (Blackness has plenty of capacity, of course)
- Closure of Blackness Primary School will have a significant negative impact on the fabric of the village community

I have expanded on this summary below.

On my personal perspective ...

My partner's daughter is thriving at Blackness Primary School. The embedded 'family' culture, with a shared sense of responsibility, integrated across the ages and stages, is difficult (if not impossible) to replicate in a high-density school environment.

She has a growing **sense of pride for her community**. For example, the school facilitates beach clean-ups, tea and cake events for residents, and visits to the historic Blackness Castle. The school is an active participant in the fabric of the village.

She has a strong and **close-knit peer group** of friends with a shared experience of the Blackness 'family'.

Since class sizes are small, the **teachers know the children** personally and there are no barriers to the kids raising any worries or concerns directly with their teachers. Staff can also give parents an 'early warning' of any concerns they may have about children based on their careful observations. This is a key advantage of low-density schooling.

The school is situated a very short distance (**less than 10 minutes' walk** from the centre of the village by path). Any change in location imposed by the Council will have a significant impact on the daily work/life routine of parents.

On my broader perspective ...

Parental Choice: All parents with children at Blackness Primary School made a carefully considered, active choice to send their children to the school in the face of other viable options. The attempts to 'sell' the benefits of The Grange, seems to disrespect this choice as somehow misguided. The reality is simply that some children thrive in a rural, low-density school environment.

Achievement and attendance: The Council's own statistics show that pupil attainment in the past two years has been equal to, or significantly better than the average for Falkirk. Attendance levels have been significantly better than the Falkirk average for ever year in the proposal document. By contrast, The Grange is at best equal to, but mostly below the average achievement and attendance levels when compared to the Council averages. It is hard to argue that any move from Blackness will be better for pupils.

Age and stage issues: It is argued at several points in the proposal that a wider peer group is beneficial for all children and that The Grange will provide a smoother transition to secondary school for pupils. Without any evidence referenced in the document to support these claims, they are simply the opinion of the author. My *personal* school experience contradicts this opinion. The underlying assumption of the GIRFEC model in Scotland acknowledges that every child has unique needs. A low-density school environment is more suited to some children's needs.

Future school capacity/occupancy: The Council's projections show that The Grange is approaching full capacity (99% by 2026 and getting worse in future years). At recent consultation meetings I am unconvinced that the Council has sufficient plans to mitigate this increase. Furthermore, the Council admitted the uncertainty of their projections, and the impact of the rapid new housing developments on the requirements for primary school occupancy in the catchment area. By contrast, there is plenty of capacity at Blackness Primary School.

Community: Blackness village is a vibrant community; the school and Blackness Community Hall are active parts of it. The multi-purpose use of the hall ensures its upkeep and availability for the wider community. If this fabric is gradually dismantled, it is easy for communities like Blackness to slip into inert, commuter villages. In short, the school and hall are irreplaceable assets for the village.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you need more information about this response or I can clarify my views in any way.

Email 2

Dear Sir/ Madam

I am writing in response to the proposed closure of Blackness Primary School. As a parent of a child at the school I want to express my opposition to the closure and structure my letter in the format of counter arguments to your reasons for closure.

10) No significant house building proposed in Blackness

The current children of Blackness Primary School and all children that will either be born or move to the area will be sent to the Grange. The Grange School is at a significantly high level of capacity and has massive house building in its catchment currently ongoing. The 'Kinglass Meadows' development has not been finished and in addition there is 183 houses being built in the 'Kinglass Fields' development. There is also a possibility of a phase 5 extension to the Drum development that also sits within the Grange catchment. It would not make sense to burden the Grange further by extending its catchment area. As a parent I would be deeply upset that Falkirk Council would remove my parental choice to send my child to a small community school like Blackness and re-allocate her to a school that looks to be over subscribed in the near future.

10) The school is to be closed because of a reduction in the number of catchment children attending the school.

We have chosen to send our daughter to Blackness despite being outside of our homes catchment area. The proposal to close based solely on the attendance of children in the catchment area is narrow minded. By closing Blackness PS the choice of which type of educational establishment (small rural school versus larger schools) Falkirk Council residents can send their children to is being removed. Parental choice in the extended area is severely impacted. We have chosen to send our daughter to Blackness because of our family circumstances knowing that we are providing her with the best opportunities to play, learn and grow that Falkirk can offer her. She is an only child with a limited extended family. Blackness PS has welcomed her. Despite being in Primary 1 she has already developed a strong sense of 'family' and belonging that a large school cannot offer her. As a family we feel that since our daughter joined Blackness we now belong to a community.

10) The cost of schooling a child at Blackness is significantly higher.

Could it be clarified why there would be the necessity for an additional teacher if there were 17 or more children at the school?

10) There would be an improved educational experience at the Grange PS. Children may not have peers the same age because of the small number of pupils.

Although most schools are arranged by convenience into year groups this however does not mean that these children are working at the same academic level. All teachers are required to differentiate their teaching and learning, recognising that children learn at different paces, in order to meet the needs of the child. Blackness however, by removing the 'age' label on children can provide opportunities to group them not by their biological age but by their academic abilities and social and emotional levels of maturity.

10) Limited opportunities to develop peer relationships

At Blackness our daughter has the opportunity to develop real relationships with children of a range of ages because they share the same class. This is a benefit to her as she is socially and emotionally mature for her age and enjoys the company of older children. She enjoys the chance to learn from older children. Opportunities to form close friendships with older children is limited at a larger school because they spend small amounts of time together which are often contrived by the teachers, such as buddy sessions.

10) Blackness Pupils are familiar with Grange Staff which will help in transitions. The closure of Blackness PS would mean the Head Teacher would be in 'one building at all times.'

Could it be clarified how much physical contact Blackness Pupils have over a year with Grange staff that evidences this belief? Would the closure of Blackness mean that the Head Teacher would always be on site (not attending meetings externally or other commitments) as stated in the proposal as a factor for why Blackness should be closed?

10) The school can design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community.

Blackness is defined as a semi rural school currently servicing a rural community. The Grange school is a town school with a very different catchment area. What percentage of teacher time will be given to the children of Blackness to ensure their differing life experiences and community needs are recognised, valued and met in relation to the 250 plus children who attend from the current Grange catchment? It will be incomparable when we consider how they are being currently supported.

10) Learners experiences will be more diverse at the Grange

The children at Blackness are visited by the same subject specialists (PE, Music and YMI) that visit the Grange. Children at the Grange primarily receive their education from one teacher (on occasion two as is the case at Blackness). Can it be clarified as to what additional teachers with additional skills the pupils at the Grange have access to in comparison to the children at Blackness? Extra-curricular activities that take children out with the school need the support of a strong group of parent helpers and a strong parent council. Reality is that because of the economic climate most parents are both working which has shown a significant trend in the reduction of parent helpers. Blackness PS has however bucked this trend because of the close relationship that is long established between the parents and the school.

10) The Grange School provides children with a broad range of opportunities to use their pupil voice and participate in the decision making.

At Blackness because of the smaller size of the school there is more opportunity for each child to be involved in a broader range of pupil leadership groups and community events as opposed to a larger school where these experiences are shared across the school population. Increased opportunities for involvement builds confident, successful and motivated children.

10) Environment for Learning

Falkirk council is under extreme pressure to reduce costs and therefore the budgets for replenishment of resources in schools are extremely tight. With the resources at Blackness being used by one to two classes and organised by one teacher the wear and tear on these

resources is miniscule compared to larger schools who share resources between 10 or more classes. There is therefore a greater range of resources available at the school.

Please consider the points raised when discussing the closure of Blackness PS.

Letter 1

Blackness Primary school Closure Consultation

Children's Services Suite IA Falkirk Community Stadium

4 Stadium Way

Falkirk

FK2 9EE

17th October 2024

To whom it may concern

GIRFEC

Occupancy

Proposal Page 28 " primary schools can effectively operate to 95% occupancy rates."

The tabulation on page 21 indicates that The Grange without the Blackness primary pupils or requested placements will be operating at 99% or over with effect from the academic year 2026/27.

Over the next few years, the Antonine Brae site plan shows 183 plots, affordable housing and two future developments.

Blackness outdoor space

Page 1 5: "The school currently uses all the available indoor and outdoor space even with the limited number of pupils....Removal of this space would detract from the education benefit of the small school experience so valued by the community."

Obviously if space is available, it will be used, but that does not imply that the current number of pupils need that space. On page 2, the capacity is stated to be 50 pupils.

Page 34 says that this consultation will take place. A vital piece of information missing from the proposal.

urban environment.

Page 22 Wider peer group.

For at least the 13 weeks a year that The Grange is closed, the children from the Blackness Area will not be in Bo'ness. They will be around the other children of their own and other age groups from the Blackness Area all of whom are familiar to them from their time together at Blackness Primary School.

There is also according to the report in Falkirk Herald on 1st October 2024.

The proposal — which would save Falkirk Council 26 million over five years — would mean no classes on Friday afternoons, taking primary pupils' hours from 25 hours to 22.5 hours; and secondary pupils from 26 hours 40 minutes to 24 hours 45 minutes.

The SNP group, which is a minority administration, is now proposing that the final decision be delayed until the financial picture for the council is clearer.

The Scottish Government has also confirmed that if the changes mean a reduction in teacher numbers they will seek to legislate the number of hours pupils must be in school. Holyrood Ministers have also said they will withhold funding of 24.5 million if teacher numbers are cut.

Larger Year Groups

Not necessary to achieve the four capacities — a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor.

Travel time

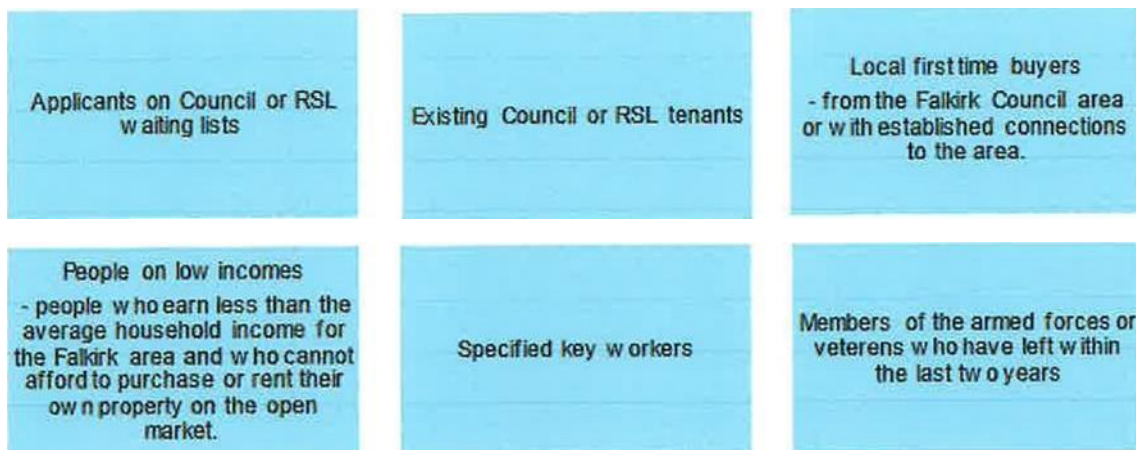
Page 15: "The estimated time spent travelling from Blackness catchment area to Grange Primary School will take up 15-25 minutes each way. That is a lot of time for the youngest children.

Early Years

There is no mention of any required additional early years provision (rooms and other facilities) at The Grange for the children from the new development. There may also be some 2-year-olds from the affordable housing shown on the site map.

<https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/planning-building/planning-policy/supplementary->

Figure 5. Priority Groups for Affordable Housing



The Community Hall (adjacent to Blackness School),

I understand that the ground was donated by the Braes of Burnshot and that Hall belongs to the Village.

Page 29: "Education Services pay the committee 25,280 per year for the use of the Community Hall."

"The Council previously noted it is prepared to discuss a transitional arrangement".

However, this figure is included in Appendix 1 Table 1 Column 4 as an annual recurring saving and not in Table 3 as a recurring cost until disposal.

If the Hall Committee could make another E5,280 it would be already.

Financial Information

Many questions have been raised about the information shown in the Proposal. Other people will comment on that.

Alternative Suggestions

Keep Blackness School open for at least the next five years instead of using modular buildings and increasing the pressure on the Grange facilities.

Re-zone the catchment area to offer choices to the parent/carers with particular reference to children with additional needs requiring a more open environment.

Re-name Blackness School. The Grange School at Blackness. Would this allow the Developers Contributions to be used at both schools?

Break with traditional practice and liaise with West Lothian Council to fill any spare spaces.

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In addition to being a school, a 50- place out of school club for school holidays.

There is the matter of how parents/carers find 13 weeks and now potentially Friday afternoon child care. (Also, sports days, assemblies, plays etc.)

Given that "Almost all people classed as workers are legally entitled to 5.6 weeks' paid holiday a year." <https://www.gov.uk>

For grandparents and older relatives, the State Pension age is 66 years old.



Plot Information

Cardinal	See Page 10
Palms	See Page 14
Hazelwood	See Page 9
Riverwood	See Page 10
Maplewood	See Page 11
Landscape	See Page 12
Oakwood	See Page 13
Hartwood	See Page 14
Maplewood	See Page 15
Centralwood	See Page 16
Hickory	See Page 17
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Antwaire Brax - Miller Homes - Site Plan
 B1205

The project is subject to the following conditions of approval:
 1. The project must be completed within 12 months of the date of approval.
 2. The project must be completed in accordance with the approved plans.
 3. The project must be completed in accordance with the approved specifications.
 4. The project must be completed in accordance with the approved schedule.