

Dalry Secondary School – Phase One – Preliminary Requirements

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 (now Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee) on 26 January 2023 (with a revised Strategy agreed by Elected Members on 11 November 2025). The Learning Estate Strategy 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 30 November 2023, Elected Members also approved the 10 School Model Principles listed below to be used as a basis for a sustainable School Model. 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 requires that educational benefits should be at the forefront if any proposal to make a significant change to schools is progressed to a statutory consultation. It specifies that the local authority must, for all statutory 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 11 November 2025, the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed that Officers engage with local families and the wider community of Dalry Secondary School to further consider future options for the school and explore alternatives to potential closure.

A link to that committee's agenda and minutes can be found below:

<https://dumfriesgalloway.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=626&MId=6232&Ver=4>

2.0 Reason for the Proposal

A local authority that is formulating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 before starting to prepare its proposal paper.

[12A Preliminary requirements in relation to rural school closure

(1) This section applies where an education authority is formulating a closure proposal as respects a rural school.

(2) The authority must -

(a) identify its reasons for formulating the proposal,

(b) consider whether there are any reasonable alternatives to the proposal as a response to those reasons,

(c) assess, for the proposal and each of the alternatives to the proposal identified under paragraph (b) (if any) -

(i) the likely educational benefits in consequence of the implementation of the proposal, or as the case may be, alternative,

(ii) the likely effect on the local community (assessed in accordance with section 12(4)) in consequence of such implementation,

(iii) the likely effect that would be caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required (assessed in accordance with section 12(5)) in consequence of such implementation.

(3) For the purposes of this section and section 13, reasonable alternatives to the proposal include (but are not limited to) steps which would not result in the school or a stage of education in the school (within the meaning of paragraph 12 of schedule 1) being discontinued.

(4) The authority may not publish a proposal paper in relation to the proposal unless, having complied with subsection (2), it considers that implementation of the closure proposal would be the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

(5) In this section and section 13, the references to the reasons for the proposal are references to the reasons identified by the education authority under subsection (2)(a).]

In particular, it must identify the underlying reasons why the future of the school is being considered, which are as follows:

- Dalry Secondary School's pupil roll for academic year 2025/26 was 13, resulting in increasing difficulty in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.
- The majority of pupils residing within the Dalry Secondary School catchment area choose to attend an alternative secondary school.
- There is no evidence that the number of catchment pupils will rise, with regional demographics showing a continuing decline and an expected 18% reduction in the 0–15 population over the next 10 years.
- Like many rural Councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council has been experiencing increasing challenges in recruiting staff, including at Dalry Secondary School.
- At the Full Council meeting on 28 March 2024, Members agreed that Dalry Secondary School should not be temporarily closed (formally known as mothballed) and that S1–S4 provision should continue until at least the end of 2025.

In considering the future of Dalry Secondary School, Dumfries and Galloway Council has taken a range of steps over a number of years to address the underlying challenges identified, particularly in relation to declining pupil numbers, curriculum delivery, staffing and long-term sustainability.

The current model of provision has been maintained on a year-by-year basis, including the continued availability of S1–S4 secondary education as well as the decision of Full Council in March 2024 not to mothball the school when pupil numbers were critically low. This has allowed pupils to continue to be educated within their local community and has supported continuity for families. However, with a pupil roll of 8 secondary pupils currently enrolled for 2026/27, increasingly complex and irregular arrangements have been required to sustain delivery.

Teaching arrangements at Dalry Secondary School have been adapted to reflect the very small cohort size, including the use of composite classes. While this approach allows continued delivery of education locally, it presents a number of recognised challenges in terms of curriculum breadth, appropriate groupings across stages and opportunities for peer interaction. In very small cohorts, it has not always been possible to achieve a full breadth of subjects or to avoid situations where pupils are working within extremely static groupings.

To support curriculum delivery, staffing models have been aligned closely to pupil numbers, with a reduced staffing complement to enable continued delivery at a local level. While this approach allows education provision to continue locally, it is not considered to represent a preferred or sustainable long-term model for delivering a full secondary curriculum, particularly within the Broad General Education. Delivering a Senior Phase curriculum (S4) also requires ongoing annual adjustment depending on pupil numbers, staffing availability and subject choice, which creates uncertainty and limits long-term planning and continuity.

The Council has also continued to support the school as part of a co-located campus model, with Dalry Nursery, Primary and Secondary operating on the same site. The primary and secondary stages are each led by their own specialist Head Teacher, reflecting the distinct leadership, curriculum and management requirements of each sector, with an additional Nursery Manager responsible for early learning and childcare provision. The co-located model allows for some sharing of staff expertise and promotes continuity across stages, including opportunities for secondary staff to contribute to primary learning where appropriate, and for primary staff to support aspects of the Broad General Education. It also supports smoother transition between stages and strengthens relationships across the campus. While this provides strong professional leadership, clear accountability and supports high-quality educational oversight across all stages, it also equates to high management costs for the local authority when considered alongside the small number of pupils on site.

In terms of access and inclusion, school transport has continued to be provided in line with Council policy, ensuring that eligible pupils are supported to attend Dalry Secondary School. However, the ongoing movement of pupils from the catchment area to other secondary schools indicates that the current model is not being widely taken up by families, further contributing to the challenges associated with sustaining viable provision at the school.

Financially, maintaining secondary provision for a very small number of pupils results in a significantly higher cost per pupil than in larger schools. While the Council remains committed to supporting rural education, this level of expenditure presents

challenges in terms of achieving best value and the equitable use of resources across the wider school estate.

It is recognised by both the Council and school stakeholders that these measures do not resolve the fundamental challenges associated with maintaining a viable and sustainable model of statutory secondary education at Dalry Secondary School.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is therefore considering the future of Dalry Secondary School. The various alternatives to closure and alternative proposals for the future of the school are explored in this paper.

3.0 Background

Dalry Secondary School is designated as a 'remote rural' school under the Scottish Government's Rural Schools List and is therefore subject to the enhanced procedural requirements set out in sections 12A and 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a result, the education authority must undertake a Preliminary Requirements phase before formulating any closure proposal, ensuring that statutory duties are met in relation to educational benefit, community impact, and travel arrangements.

On 11 November 2025, Elected Members of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee considered the position of Dalry Secondary School in light of the school's ongoing challenges. The school had been experiencing a very low pupil roll and increasing difficulty in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. The demographic trends underlying these challenges are widely recognised: Scotland's school-age population has been in long-term decline, with national pupil numbers having peaked for primary schools around 2017 and projections indicating that secondary rolls have already peaked. These declines are forecast to be more profound in remote and rural areas but not limited to.

Given these factors, Elected Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to commence Phase One – Preliminary Requirements under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 for Dalry Secondary School, to determine the most appropriate next steps in line with the statutory framework. This process ensures that any future consideration of options, including continuation of current arrangements, alternative models of provision, or potential closure, will be informed by a robust assessment of educational benefits, community effects, and travel implications, as required by Section 12A of the 2010 Act.

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 the 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.

The Strategic Outcomes of the Council are:

- 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 Dalry Secondary School

Dalry Secondary School is classified as being in a 'remote rural' area. The Scottish Government defines a remote rural area as one with a population of fewer than 3,000 people and a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than or equal to 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more. Dalry Secondary School is located in the village of St John's Town of Dalry, approximately 16 miles from the next nearest town centre, Castle Douglas.

The neighbouring secondary schools to Dalry Secondary School with Dumfries and Galloway are Castle Douglas High School, Kirkcudbright Academy, Sanquhar Academy, Douglas Ewart High School, and Wallace Hall Academy. The feeder primary schools are Dalry Primary School and Kells Primary School. To the north, Dalry Secondary catchment also borders Doon Academy and Robert Burns Academy in East Ayrshire.

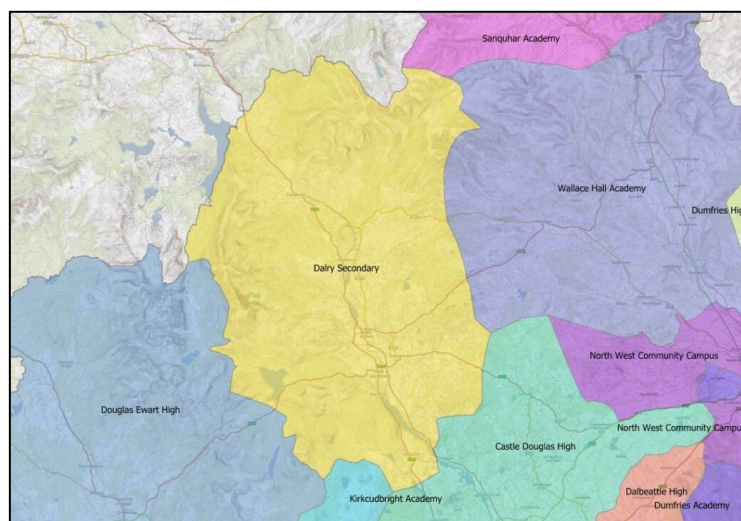


Figure 1: Dalry Secondary School Catchment Area and Neighbouring Secondary Schools

The distance between Dalry Secondary School and surrounding secondary schools as above (sourced from Google Maps) are listed below:

Castle Douglas High School	16.4 miles
Douglas Ewart High School	21.7 miles
Kirkcudbright Academy	24.0 miles
Sanquhar Academy	33.1 miles
Wallace Hall Academy	21.4 miles
Doon Academy	19.7 miles
Robert Burns Academy	34 miles

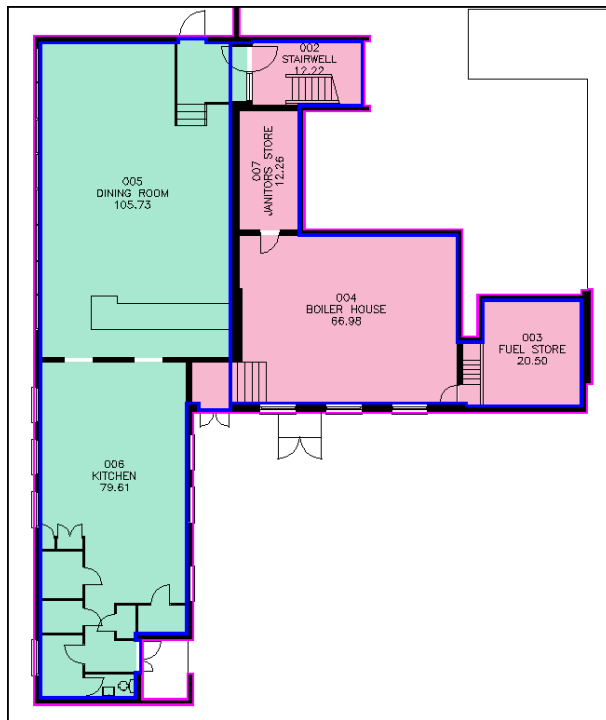
It is important to note that the geography of the catchment area means that travel distances/times will be different for all pupils, which is why the information listed above is from Dalry Secondary School to surrounding schools.

The Dalry Secondary School site and buildings are owned by Dumfries and Galloway Council. There are no records of the school, or any part of the building, being listed with Historic Scotland. The school has a capacity of 248 pupils, with only 8 pupils expected to be enrolled for August 2026 across S1 to S2, no pupils are expected in S3 and S4 but these year groups remain open. Dalry Primary School and Dalry Nursery (a Council-run nursery for children aged 3 to 5 years) are also located on the same site. Secondary pupils transfer to Castle Douglas High School for their education in S5 and S6 with school transport provided to all eligible pupils by Dumfries and Galloway Council.

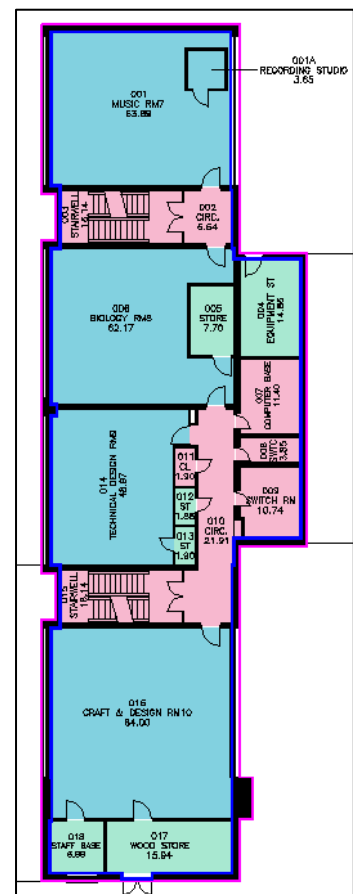
Dalry Secondary School is a four-level building. The lower ground floor (Level 1) contains the dining room (which is also shared with the Primary School) and production kitchen. The ground floor (Level 2) comprises various teaching spaces, including music, science and technical classrooms. Level 3 includes a general-purpose area, changing facilities, toilets, staff rooms, office spaces, and three additional classrooms along with the library. Level 4 accommodates a home economics room, an art room, and two further classrooms.

The school floorplans are shown on the following pages.

Level 1

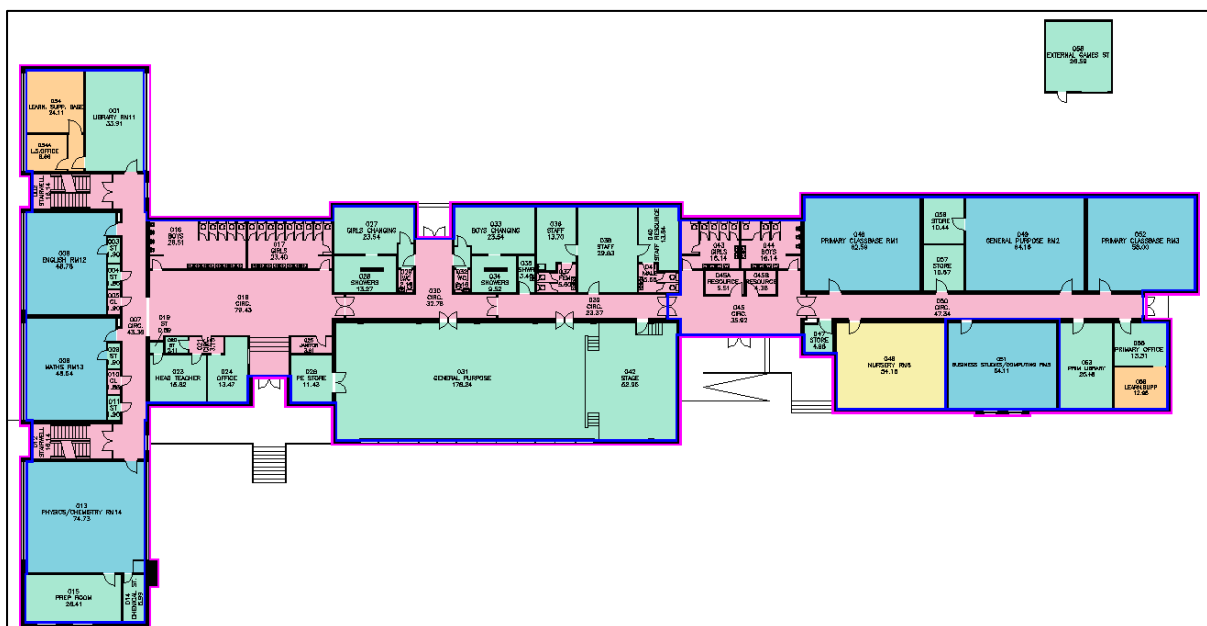


Level 2



Level 3

(Level 3 has provision for primary, secondary, learning centre and nursery, and includes shared facilities e.g., the general-purpose space.)



Level 4

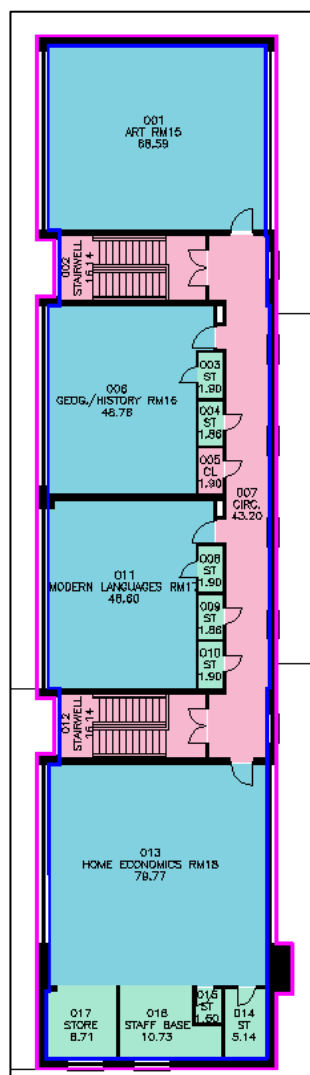


Figure 2: Dalry Secondary School Floor Plans

The school has a production kitchen (level 1) that supplies food to Dalry Secondary, Primary and Nursery as well as nearby Kells Primary School. The outside area that wraps round the school is predominately hard standing to the front and extensive playing fields to the rear.

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 relates to the current state of the school building fabric, including safety and security. The assessment is carried out by a contractor independent of Dumfries and Galloway Council. Dalry Secondary School and Primary was assessed in April 2020, and the overall condition rating across the four main blocks was B, classified as 'Satisfactory' under the Core Facts guidance (performing adequately but showing minor deterioration), however there are some Condition C and D elements.

Suitability is a measure of whether a school building and its grounds are appropriate for delivering the education curriculum. A suitability assessment of Dalry Secondary School was carried out in March 2022 by Council Officers, and the school was graded as B (Satisfactory) under the Core Facts guidance, meaning it is performing well overall but with some minor issues.

3.3 The Communities of Dalry Secondary School

Dalry Secondary School serves a wide and geographically dispersed rural catchment within the Glenkens area of Dumfries and Galloway. The school's catchment encompasses a number of distinct rural communities, villages and settlements, each with established local governance and community representation.

These communities are represented by the following Community Councils:

- Balmaclellan Community Council
- Balmaghie Community Council
- Carsphairn Community Council
- Corsock and Kirkpatrick Durham Community Council
- Crossmichael and District Community Council
- Dalry Community Council
- Parton Community Council
- The Royal Burgh of New Galloway and Kells Parish Community Council

These Community Councils provide an established means for representing local views, priorities and concerns. They offer an important conduit between the Council and local residents, ensuring that the potential impacts of any future change to educational provision are understood within their wider community context and therefore will act as key stakeholders if the proposal was to proceed to a statutory consultation on any permanent changes to Dalry Secondary School.

In addition to Community Councils, the Council has had regard to other community-led organisations and place-based initiatives operating within the Glenkens area. These include bodies such as the Glenkens & District Trust, which has a strategic remit focused on community development, local resilience and sustainable regeneration across the Glenkens. The Trust and similar organisations reflect broader community ambitions around population retention, housing, service sustainability and economic activity, all of which form part of the wider context within which the future of Dalry Secondary School is being considered.

This identification of communities and representative structures forms part of Dumfries and Galloway Council's wider approach to ensuring that any future consideration of options for Dalry Secondary School is informed by a clear understanding of the school's role within its rural context, and that the likely effects on the local community are properly considered if any statutory proposal is brought forward.

3.4 Local Housing Development

Dumfries and Galloway Council's second Local Development Plan (LDP2) is the key planning document that sets out how land and property should be used across the region, guiding decisions on future development. It identifies where different types of development, including housing, businesses, community facilities and infrastructure, may take place and provides the policy framework against which all planning applications are assessed. Adopted in October 2019, LDP2 plays a central role in shaping long-term growth, protecting the environment and supporting sustainable communities.

The three main settlements within the Dalry Secondary School catchment are St John's Town of Dalry, Carsphairn and New Galloway, all of which are identified in LDP2 as Local Centres within the Stewartry. The plan identifies housing sites within each settlement and assigns an indicative capacity for future development. However, it is important to note that allocated sites do not represent houses that have already been built; they indicate only that residential development is supported in principle. As a result, actual housing growth is more accurately assessed using build-out rates, which show how many homes have been completed over time.

To inform this assessment, information on recent housing delivery within the Dalry Secondary School catchment has been drawn from Building Standards completion data up to 31 March 2025. Over the last five-year period, a total of five new housing units have been completed across the catchment. This includes one unit in 2021, three units in 2023 (two in St John's Town of Dalry and one in New Galloway), and one unit in 2025, with no completions recorded in 2022 or 2024. None of these completions have taken place on sites allocated for housing within LDP2. At present, site NGA.H2 in New Galloway is the only allocated site with planning permission, where consent has been granted for two units (planning reference 23/0609/FUL). This level of completed and committed housing development indicates limited recent growth within the catchment area.

The three main settlement Insert Maps are shown on the following pages.

St. John's Town of Dalry

- 1 x identified Housing Site in LDP 2.
- DLR.H2 South of Whinnymuir (25 units allocated up to 2029)

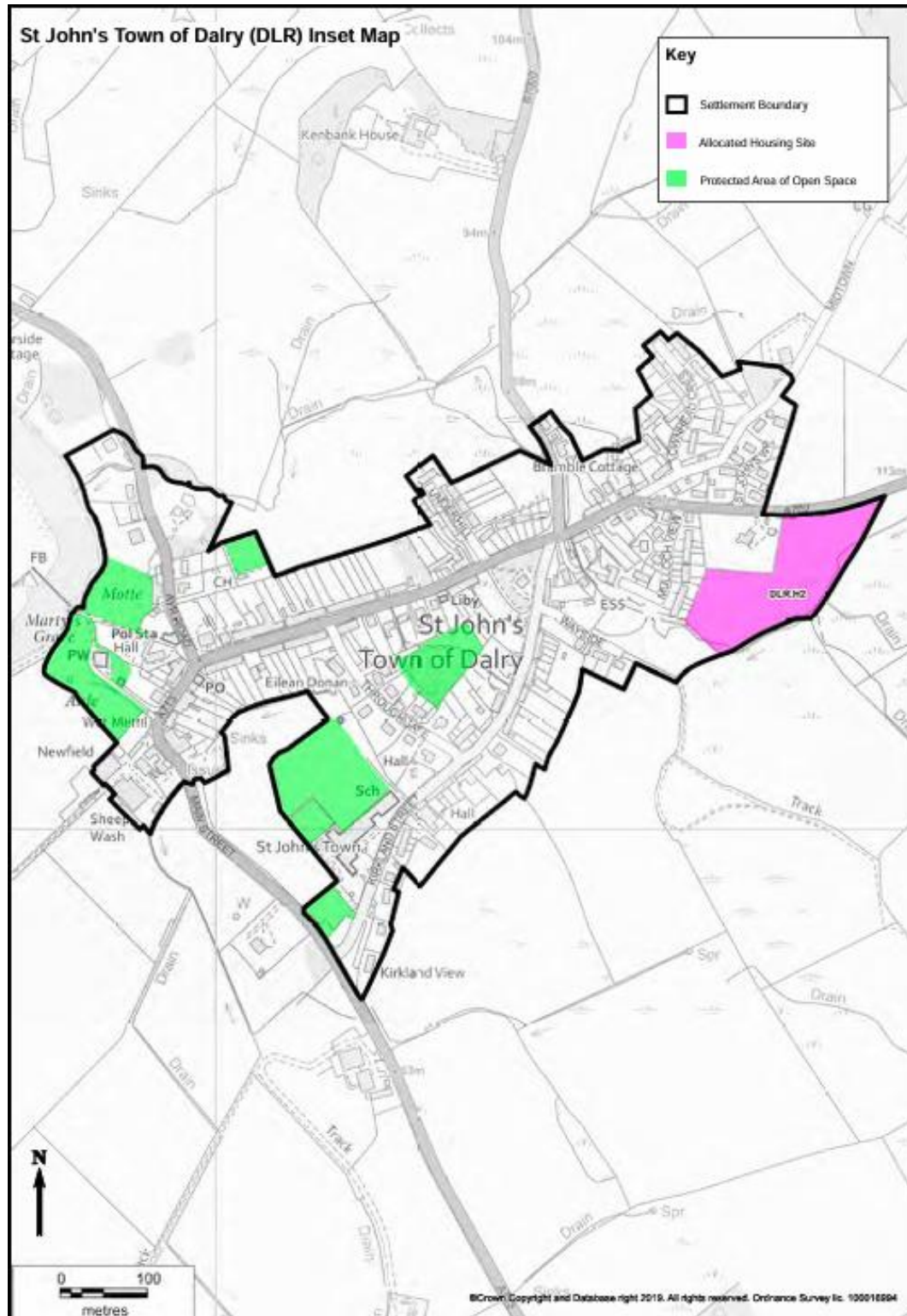


Figure 3: St John's Town of Dalry (DLR) Inset Map

Carsphairn

- No identified housing sites in LDP 2.

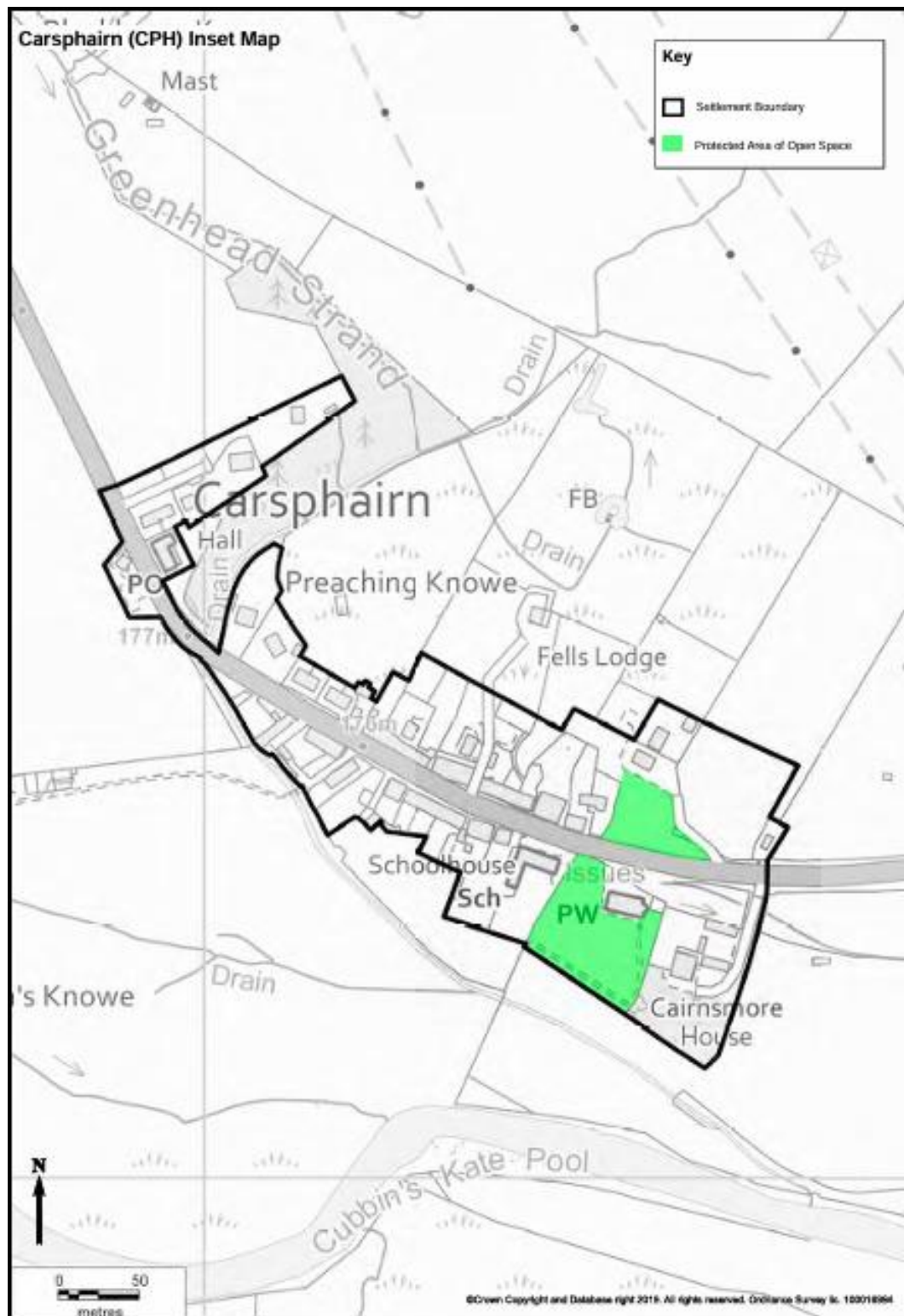


Figure 4: Carsphairn (CPH) Inset Map

New Galloway

- 2 x identified Housing Site in LDP 2.
- NGA.H1 West of Kirk Road (30 units allocated up to 2029)
- NGA.H2 West Port (5 units allocated up to 2029)

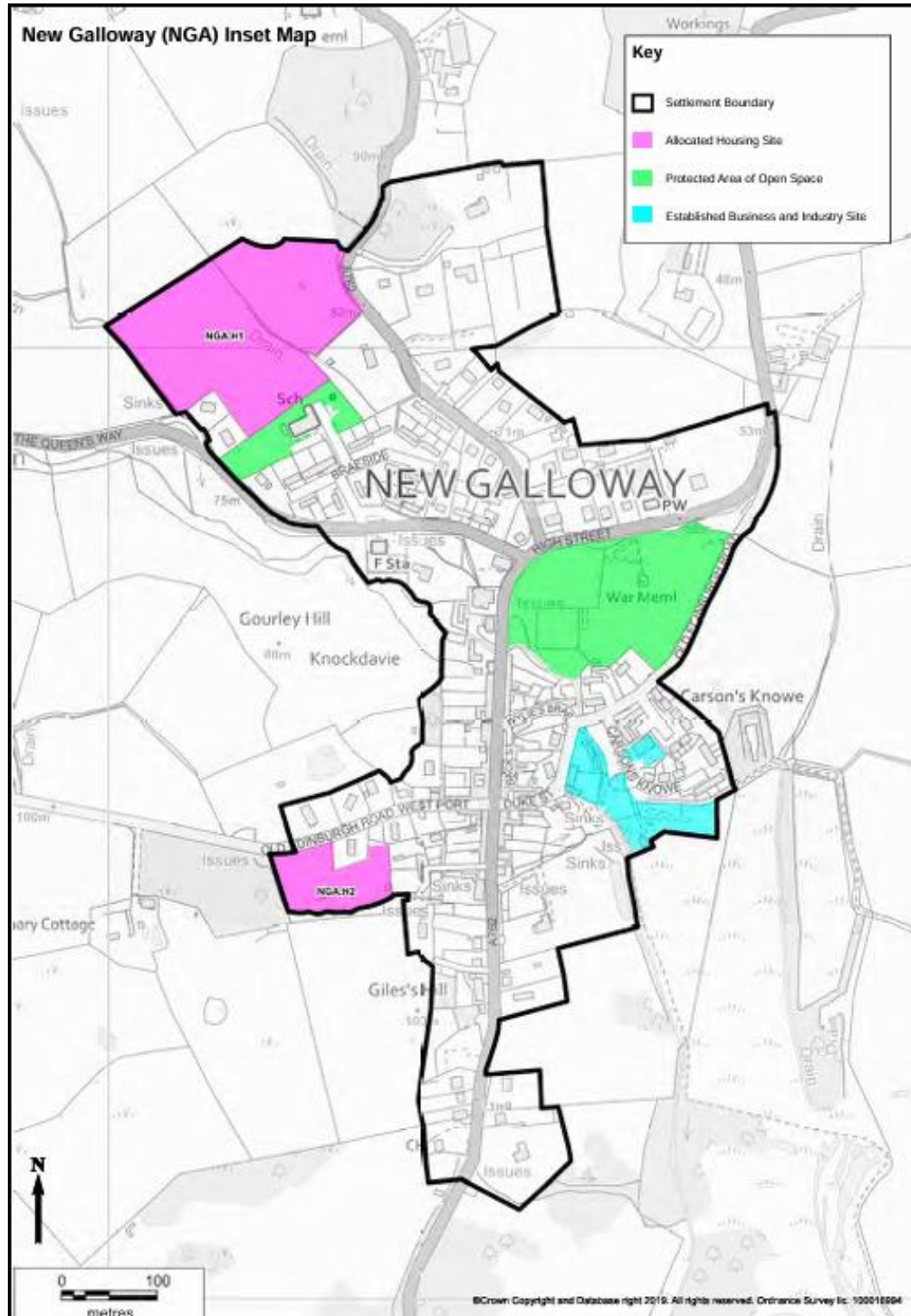


Figure 5: New Galloway (NGA) Inset Map

3.5 Demographics and Pupil Numbers

National Records of Scotland predict the number of children and young adults in Scotland aged 0 to 29 years will decrease between mid-2022 to mid-2047. Over this 25-year period it is predicted there will be -79.9k fewer children aged 0-15 and -57.4k fewer young adults aged 16-29. By 2047, children are predicted to make up only 14% of the population.

Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers. The Council holds electronic records of school rolls back to academic year 1975/76. The total Dumfries and Galloway Primary School Roll since 1975 is displayed on the graph below:

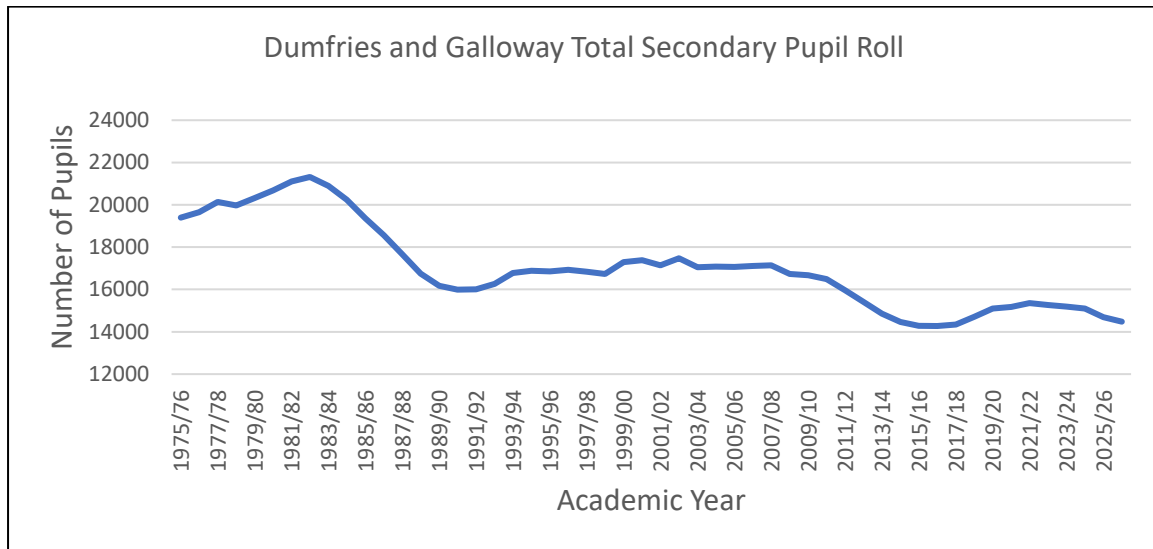


Figure 6: Dumfries and Galloway Total Secondary Pupil Roll

The historical school roll for Dalry Secondary School from 1975 to present is displayed in the graph below.

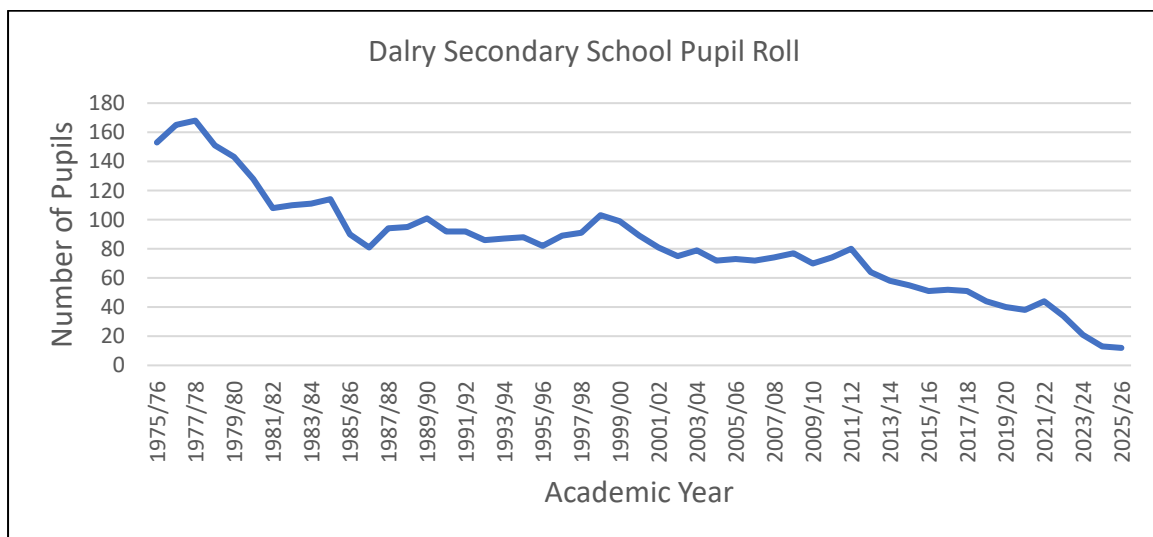


Figure 7: Dalry Secondary Historic Pupil Roll

The pupil roll of Dalry Secondary School for the last 5 years is displayed in the table below:

Academic Year	Total
2021/22	44
2022/23	34
2023/24	21
2024/25	13
2025/26	12

Figure 8: Dalry Secondary School Pupil Roll

With a current roll of 12 pupils (as of April 2026), the school is operating with a utilisation rate of 5% (school capacity = 248). If all current catchment pupils were to attend Dalry Secondary School, the utilisation of the school would be 18% (46 pupils in 2025/26).

Both these utilisation rates are significantly below the desired occupancy levels as described in School Model Principle 7 where 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%.

3.6 Pupil Enrolments

There are 8 children that are currently enrolled in Dalry Secondary School for the next school year 2026/27 (as of May 2026). The breakdown of pupils per year group is displayed in the table below:

Year	Total Pupils
S1	3
S2	5
S3	0*
S4	0*

Figure 9: Pupil Enrolments for 2026/27

** One pupil at S3 stage and one pupil at S4 stage have submitted transfer requests to alternative schools. Notwithstanding this, enrolment at both S3 and S4 stages remains open.*

Based on a total school capacity of 248 pupils, the projected enrolment for 2026/27 represents an operational utilisation rate of approximately 3% and posits Dalry Secondary School as the smallest secondary school in Scotland (Scottish Government School Estate Statistics 2025).

In considering pupil enrolments, the Council is required under section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education across its area. The current pattern of enrolment, including the absence of enrolled pupils in the S3 and S4 stages for the upcoming academic year, highlights

the challenges associated with maintaining efficient mainstream secondary education provision on the Dalry Secondary School site.

3.7 Catchment Pupils

The following table sets out the forecast number of secondary-aged pupils residing within the current Dalry catchment area over the period 2026/27 to 2032/33.

Academic Year	Secondary Aged Pupils Living In Dalry Catchment
2026/27	44
2027/28	44
2028/29	44
2029/30	45
2030/31	36
2031/32	36
2032/33	38

Figure 10: Catchment Pupil Forecast

4.0 Community and Pupil Engagement

Council Officers from the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate conducted the following engagements with the communities of Dalry Secondary School to keep them fully informed and to explore potential options for the future of Dalry Secondary School:

- Drop-in Meeting 1 - Balmaclellan Village Hall - Monday 26th January
- Drop-in Meeting 2 - Kells Primary School - Monday 26th January
- Drop-in Meeting 3 - Carsphairn Village Hall - Thursday 5th February
- Drop-in Meeting 4 - Dalry Secondary School - Thursday 5th February

During this community engagement process, Council Officers supported a series of public drop-in sessions as listed above to share information and assist members of the community and school stakeholders in understanding the context for the review of Dalry Secondary School and the processes required at this preliminary stage.

Officers provided attendees with general background information on the school and explained why a review was being undertaken. This included outlining Dalry Secondary School's status as a remote rural school and the enhanced statutory requirements that apply in such cases. Officers explained that legislation requires the Council to complete a preliminary requirements stage and to consider whether there are any reasonable and viable alternatives to closure before any further action can be proposed.

Information was shared on broad trends in school rolls and catchment participation to provide context for the review. Officers outlined historic changes in pupil numbers, current enrolment levels, and projections for secondary-aged children living within the catchment area over the coming years. This information was intended to support

understanding of the challenges associated with sustaining very small secondary schools, particularly in relation to curriculum delivery and long-term planning.

Officers also discussed general information about the school estate and operational context. This included high-level details on the condition, suitability and accessibility of the school building, as well as indicative information on staffing levels and overall school costs. The purpose of sharing this information was to help explain the types of factors that are routinely considered when assessing the sustainability of education provision.

As part of the engagement, Officers outlined a range of potential alternatives being considered at this preliminary stage. Attendees were encouraged to provide feedback on these alternatives, with particular reference to likely educational impact, community impact, and travel and transport considerations. Officers also invited attendees to propose any other reasonable and realistic alternatives to closure that they wished the Council to consider. It was emphasised throughout that no decisions had been made and that this stage of the process was intended to gather views and explore options.

Re-alignment of the catchment area could, in certain circumstances, represent a reasonable alternative to school closure under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. However, in the case of Dalry Secondary School, this option was determined not to be reasonable. Dalry's geographic relationship to neighbouring catchment areas was considered to significantly limit the feasibility of extending its boundary without adversely affecting other school communities. As of the September pupil census (2025), only two pupils attended Dalry Secondary School from out with its catchment, indicating minimal demand and suggesting that any extension would be unlikely address the reasons for the proposal.

It was also determined that any catchment expansion would require consequential changes to neighbouring secondary school catchments, with potential negative impacts on those schools' rolls and community wishes. A key issue underpinning the proposal was the low level of attendance by pupils within the existing catchment, and boundary changes were not considered likely to address this. In line with statutory guidance, this option was therefore discounted as an unreasonable alternative prior to consultation, and this rationale was subsequently communicated to stakeholders, including at public drop-in sessions.

All feedback from individual drop-in meetings can be found in **Appendix 1**.

To ensure wider participation, Officers also highlighted that an online public survey was available for the same purpose. This provided an opportunity for those unable to attend the drop-in sessions, or those who wished additional time to reflect on the information shared, to submit their feedback and suggest alternative options for consideration. This survey was made available following the in-person engagement meetings to allow reasonable alternative to closure generated by school stakeholders to be included in the wider survey for public comment.

All online survey (redacted) feedback can be found in **Appendix 2**.

In addition to wider community engagement, a dedicated pupil engagement exercise was carried out to ensure that children and young people in the catchment area had an opportunity to express their views. This work was led by Youth Work staff, rather than by Education Officers, to support a more informal and child-friendly approach and to help pupils feel comfortable sharing their opinions. This reflects the desire of the Parent Council for the pupil engagement not to be led by Education Officers.

Pupils were given age-appropriate background on the review, including why the Council is considering future arrangements for Dalry Secondary School and why it was important for pupils to contribute their views. The sessions were reported as well-engaged, with pupils demonstrating that they were well informed and able to ask constructive and appropriately challenging questions.

To capture views across the full catchment, pupil engagement took place within school settings already attended by catchment pupils, as familiar environments where pupils would be at ease namely Kells Primary School, Dalry Primary School, Dalry Secondary School, Kirkcudbright Academy and Castle Douglas High School. Engagement activity was designed to include both primary and secondary stages, and delivery approaches were tailored to be appropriate to the age and stage of the audience.

A total of 54 pupil survey responses were received across all school sessions, which represents a positive level of participation across both primary and secondary catchment pupils. All pupils were offered the option not to take part, and 2 pupils selected the option not to continue and did not complete the survey.

Pupil (redacted) feedback can be found in **Appendix 3**.

5.0 Reasonable Alternatives to the Proposal

In terms of section 12A(2) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, where an education authority is formulating a proposal to close a rural school, it must identify the reasons for the proposal and consider whether there are any reasonable alternatives to the proposal as a response to those reasons. This requires the authority to consider options which may address the underlying issues leading to the proposal and to assess whether such alternatives provide a viable and sustainable approach to delivering statutory education.

Five options were presented to school stakeholders by Council officers at the drop in meetings and through the online survey. A further six options were suggested by consultees, either during early engagement sessions or through the online survey, resulting in a total of eleven options for initial consideration. It is recognised that some of these were not framed as alternatives to closure, but instead as alternative approaches or arrangements for the school.

All options identified, both those which may represent alternatives to closure and those which would involve different arrangements for the school, are set out below, together with a brief description. Officers have sought to reflect stakeholder suggestions as accurately as possible; however, some options may have been

summarised and standardised to ensure clarity, consistency and alignment with the statutory considerations set out in the Act.

Stakeholder feedback also included a number of proposals relating to collaborative delivery models, post-16 and adult learning, vocational or land-based education, community ownership of the site, and support for alternative educational pathways. Officers consider these proposals to represent variations, refinements or combinations of the existing reasonable alternatives already identified, rather than distinct additional alternatives with minor differences. As such, where suggestions were similar, they have been grouped under the most relevant alternative set out below.

Reasonable alternatives to closure for Dalry Secondary School

- **Status Quo** – No change to the current school arrangements at Dalry Secondary School.
- **Temporary Closure (previously known as ‘Mothballing’)** – Dalry Secondary School is closed for up to three years, with the expectation that pupil numbers will increase sufficiently to allow the school to reopen.
- **Nursery to S4 Provision** – A single headteacher management structure responsible for Nursery, Primary and S1–S4 education at Dalry School.

Alternative proposals for Dalry Secondary School (not alternative proposals to closure of the school)

- **Nursery to S2 Provision** – A single headteacher management structure responsible for Nursery, Primary and S1–S2 at Dalry School. S3 and S4 provision would close, with catchment pupils attending Castle Douglas High School for those year groups and beyond.
- **Home Schooling Hub supported by Dumfries and Galloway Council (stakeholder generated)** – Hybrid between physical and virtual school.
- **Rural / Land Based Studies School (stakeholder generated)** – A regional secondary school or college specialising in land-based industries, forestry, renewable energy or vocational learning for young people across Dumfries and Galloway.
- **All through school (S2 or S4) including Post S6 education/vocational education/adult education (stakeholder generated)** – Off-shoot/spoke to the D&G College. Encourage investment by local big employers to invest in the building/facilities. Offer structured training to benefit the region and local young people.
- **Dedicated ASN Provision (stakeholder generated)** – A specialist Additional Support Needs facility/Special School based at Dalry, providing tailored

education for pupils with identified additional support needs from a wider catchment area.

- **Glenkens Education and Learning Hub (stakeholder generated)** – A new Glenkens education hub campus/building on the Dalry school grounds, working in partnership with the local communities to find innovative funding solutions through wind farm and other potential community funds. This campus would offer education from nursery through to college with the potential to encourage attendance of all catchment pupils age 0-18, as well as being exciting and innovative, so drawing in non-catchment pupils.
- **Nursery to S4 Provision including Kells Primary (stakeholder generated)** – Change in school management arrangements including statutory consultation on a proposal to close Kells Primary School and realign its catchment area with Dalry Primary School.

In accordance with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, which requires the authority to consider only reasonable and viable alternatives to closure, the following options have been discounted as either not representing reasonable alternatives or not constituting alternatives to closure. While these options may present certain opportunities to school stakeholders, they do not address the underlying challenges identified, nor do they provide a reasonable alternative to closure. As such, they have not been included in the assessment of reasonable alternatives later in this report.

Those options and the reasons for their exclusion for further appraisal are set out below:

5.1 Nursery to S2 Provision

The option of providing education at Dalry through a Nursery to S2 'all through' model has been considered in the context of Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duties and the requirement to identify reasonable alternatives to closure.

Under this model, education provision would be retained locally from early learning through to S2, with pupils transferring to Castle Douglas High School at the point of entry to S3 to complete their secondary education. This approach reflects a variation of existing provision and was identified by stakeholders as a potential compromise that retains an element of local secondary education.

However, this option would involve the permanent discontinuation of S3 and S4 provision at Dalry Secondary School. In terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the discontinuance of a stage of education constitutes a relevant proposal requiring statutory consultation in the same way as school closure. As such, this option would result in the partial closure of secondary education at Dalry and does not represent an alternative that maintains the full range of statutory secondary provision that exists at present.

From an educational perspective, while the model may provide continuity for pupils in the early stages of secondary education, it introduces an additional transition at S3

and reduces the extent of secondary education delivered locally. While this may provide opportunities for learning across the primary and early secondary stages, it does not offer a complete or continuous secondary pathway within the local community.

In considering the underlying reasons for the proposal, this option does not address some of the key challenges identified. It does not resolve the issue of low and declining pupil numbers, as cohort sizes would remain very small across S1 and S2. It does not provide a sustainable model for delivering a broad and balanced curriculum across the full secondary experience, particularly within the Senior Phase if pupil numbers were to remain critically low. There is no evidence to suggest that such a change would address the pattern of low uptake from the catchment area or mitigate the wider demographic trends affecting future enrolment. Challenges associated with staffing and curriculum delivery would therefore be expected to remain, albeit across a reduced number of year groups.

In addition, while some operational efficiencies may be achieved by reducing the scale of provision, the model would still require an appropriate level of leadership, staffing and curriculum planning across multiple stages, and would not fundamentally resolve the issues of long-term sustainability.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that reasonable alternatives to closure should address the reasons for the proposal and provide a viable and sustainable model of statutory education. As this option involves the discontinuation of part of the secondary school and does not address the underlying challenges identified, it is considered to be equivalent in effect to a partial closure rather than a viable alternative.

Officers therefore consider that this option does not represent a reasonable or viable alternative to closure in terms of the Act, and it has been excluded from further consideration.

5.2 Home Schooling Hub (Stakeholder Generated)

The option of establishing a Home Schooling Hub at Dalry Secondary School has been considered in light of Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duties in relation to the provision of school education and the educational benefits that would arise for children and young people.

Scottish Government Home Education Guidance (January 2025) confirms that parents and carers may choose to provide home education as an alternative to school education. Children and young people have a right to an education and the right to have their views heard in relation to decisions about their education. Home education is a lawful choice, provided that parents or carers deliver an education that is efficient and suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child.

Where a parent or carer elects to home educate, full responsibility for the educational provision transfers to them, including decisions about curriculum, learning approaches, accreditation and qualifications. Authorities are not legally obliged to provide resources, teaching staff, accommodation or facilities for home

educated children once consent to withdraw from the school roll has been given. Educational benefits for home educated pupils therefore rest primarily with parental provision, rather than with education authority delivery.

The guidance also makes clear that there is no legal requirement for home educated learners to follow Curriculum for Excellence or to study towards specific qualifications such as National Qualifications. Any decision to pursue qualifications, and the associated arrangements and costs, sit with parents and carers. As such, educational outcomes for home educated pupils may vary significantly depending on individual circumstances, capacity and resources.

In this context, while the establishment of a Home Schooling Hub could be perceived as offering additional support for families who choose home education, it would not constitute statutory school education and would not transfer responsibility for educational outcomes back to the Council. The provision of part-time or hybrid teaching would risk blurring statutory responsibilities, creating inequity between home educated learners, and generating governance and funding challenges that sit out with Dumfries and Galloway Council's legal remit.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that reasonable alternatives to closure relate to the authority's duty to secure adequate and efficient school education for pupils of school age. A Home Schooling Hub would not address the sustainability of Dalry Secondary School as a mainstream secondary school, nor would it provide a statutory education model capable of delivering consistent educational benefit at scale.

As there is no obligation on Dumfries and Galloway Council to make provision for a Home Schooling Hub, and as the educational benefits associated with home education arise from parental responsibility rather than Council delivery, Officers consider that this option does not represent a reasonable or viable alternative to closure in terms of the Act. It has therefore been discounted from further consideration.

5.3 Rural / Land Based Studies School (Stakeholder Generated)

The proposal to establish a regional Rural or Land-Based Studies School specialising in forestry, renewable energy, or vocational learning has been assessed against Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory responsibilities. While the Council has a duty to provide secondary education that is adequate and efficient, there is no statutory requirement to establish specialist regional secondary schools or to deliver highly specialised vocational curricula outside the national framework.

Such a model would represent a fundamental change to the nature and purpose of Dalry Secondary School, extending beyond the provision of general education for children in the local catchment area. Delivering a specialist regional school would require significant curriculum redesign, specialist staffing, capital investment, and confirmed pupil demand from across Dumfries and Galloway. These factors sit outside the scope of a reasonable alternative intended to address the sustainability of an existing local authority secondary school.

From an educational perspective, the core benefits associated with elements of the proposed Rural or Land Based Studies School model, such as access to vocational learning, applied subjects and post 16 opportunities, are already available to pupils within the existing secondary education framework. Partnerships with Dumfries and Galloway College, national initiatives such as College Academy, Foundation Apprenticeships, and curriculum flexibility within the Senior Phase enable pupils to access a wide range of vocational, technical and land-based learning opportunities while remaining within statutory school education. As such, the educational benefits envisaged through this proposal do not represent additional or unique advantages for pupils that are not already deliverable within current secondary school arrangements at Castle Douglas High School where pupils currently complete their Senior Phase.

In accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, reasonable alternatives must be realistic, deliverable, and capable of addressing the issues identified. Officers consider that this option represents an aspirational development proposal rather than a viable alternative to school closure within Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory education functions. It has therefore been discounted from further consideration.

5.4 All through school (S2 or S4) including Post S6 education/vocational education/adult education (Stakeholder Generated)

The option of establishing a satellite campus of Dumfries and Galloway College, or a similar institution, at the Dalry Secondary School site has been considered within the context of Dumfries and Galloway Council's legal duties. Further education and adult learning provision fall out with Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory responsibility for school education and are the responsibility of regional colleges and national agencies.

From an educational perspective, and similar to the reasons outlined above in Option 9, the key benefits associated with a proposed college satellite or post-16 provision, such as access to vocational learning, qualifications and adult education opportunities, are already available to secondary pupils through existing partnerships and Senior Phase pathways. Secondary schools in Dumfries and Galloway work with Dumfries and Galloway College and other providers to enable pupils to access College Academy courses, Foundation Apprenticeships and a range of virtual and in person learning opportunities while remaining within statutory school education. As such, the educational benefits envisaged through a college satellite arrangement do not represent additional or distinct benefits for school age pupils beyond those that can already be accessed through established secondary education provision.

While partnership working with further education institutions can provide positive opportunities, the establishment of a college satellite campus would not constitute school education and would not meet Dumfries and Galloway Council's obligation to secure adequate and efficient secondary education for pupils of school age within the Dalry catchment area. Furthermore, the delivery of such provision would be dependent on decisions by external bodies and funding streams beyond Dumfries and Galloway Council's control.

As this option would not directly address the educational issues underpinning the review of Dalry Secondary School, and because it lies outside Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory remit under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Officers consider it to be an unreasonable alternative to closure at this stage, and it has therefore been excluded from further consideration.

5.5 Dedicated ASN Provision (Stakeholder Generated)

The option of repurposing Dalry Secondary School as a dedicated Additional Support Needs (ASN) provision (or Special School) has been considered in the context of Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duties and the requirement to identify reasonable alternatives to closure.

Under this option, the existing mainstream secondary school would be replaced with a specialist ASN setting, potentially serving a wider geographical area. The provision would focus on supporting pupils with identified additional support needs through smaller class sizes, enhanced staffing ratios and specialist resources. Dalry Nursery and Dalry Primary School would continue to operate as normal.

However, this option would involve a fundamental change to the nature of education provision on the site, discontinuing mainstream secondary education for pupils within the Dalry catchment area. In terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, this would require a statutory consultation to close the existing secondary school and to establish a new specialist school in its place.

From an educational perspective, while stakeholder feedback highlights potential benefits associated with smaller or more specialist environments, these benefits must be considered within the wider context of national policy and existing provision. The presumption of mainstreaming places a duty on the Council to provide education within mainstream settings wherever appropriate, supported by a staged intervention framework. Specialist ASN provision is therefore planned and delivered on a strategic, area wide basis rather than within each local catchment.

In considering the underlying reasons for the proposal, this option does not address the key challenges identified. It does not respond to low and declining pupil numbers within the Dalry catchment, as pupil numbers for a specialist setting would not be linked to local demand. It does not provide a solution to the sustainability of mainstream secondary education provision, nor does it address patterns of low uptake from the catchment area. It also does not resolve the challenges associated with staffing and curriculum delivery within a mainstream secondary context.

Evidence presented through the Council's ongoing ASN review indicates that there is limited local demand within the Dalry catchment for a dedicated specialist provision, and that significant investment is already being directed towards enhanced ASN facilities at Castle Douglas High School to support the wider Stewartry area. Establishing a separate Special School at Dalry would therefore risk duplication of provision, create additional financial and staffing pressures, and may not align with the strategic direction of ASN services across the region.

While this option may provide an alternative use for the school site and reflect stakeholder interest in inclusive and specialist education, it does not provide a model for sustaining mainstream secondary education within the Dalry catchment and would require the closure of the existing provision.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that reasonable alternatives to closure should address the reasons for the proposal and provide a viable and sustainable model of statutory education. As this option would involve the closure of the current secondary school and its replacement with a fundamentally different type of provision, and does not address the underlying challenges identified, it is not considered to represent a reasonable or viable alternative to closure.

Officers therefore consider that this option should be excluded from further consideration.

5.6 Glenkens Education and Learning Hub (Stakeholder Generated)

The option of developing a Glenkens Education and Learning Hub on the Dalry Secondary School site has been considered in the context of Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duties and the requirement to identify reasonable alternatives to closure.

This model reflects a proposal generated through stakeholder engagement and centres on the creation of an education and community campus, potentially offering learning from nursery through to post-16 or college level. It is envisaged that such a model could be supported through partnership working with the local community and alternative funding streams, including community benefit funding, and may provide opportunities for wider community use of the site.

While elements of a learning hub model may offer potential opportunities for community or non-statutory learning, the detail of the proposal does not clearly demonstrate how it would address the underlying issues identified or provide a viable and sustainable model of Council-delivered secondary education. In particular, it introduces a degree of uncertainty and potential overlap between community-led provision and the Council's statutory responsibilities. As such, this option does not represent an alternative that maintains statutory secondary education provision on the site. In practice, this would be likely to result in Council-provided statutory secondary education no longer being delivered on the Dalry Secondary School site, with pupils instead attending an alternative secondary school, such as Castle Douglas High School, to access that provision.

From an educational perspective, while stakeholders have identified potential benefits associated with an innovative and community-focused model, any provision delivered through a community or third sector approach would not form part of the Council's statutory responsibilities for school education. The delivery of a full and accredited secondary curriculum would require appropriate staffing, governance and regulatory arrangements, as well as sustainable long-term funding. These elements remain uncertain and would be dependent on external organisations beyond the direct control of the Council.

In considering the underlying reasons for the proposal, this option does not address the key challenges identified. There is no evidence to suggest that such a model would address the pattern of low uptake from the catchment area or mitigate the wider demographic trends affecting future enrolment. It does not provide a clear or deliverable model for sustaining a broad and balanced statutory secondary curriculum, nor does it resolve the challenges associated with staffing and long-term sustainability within the Council's education provision.

While the concept may offer opportunities for community use of the site and reflects stakeholder aspiration for a wider learning hub, these benefits relate primarily to the use of the building rather than to the delivery of statutory school education. The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that reasonable alternatives to closure must address the reasons for the proposal and provide a viable and sustainable model of statutory education.

As this option would involve the removal of statutory secondary education from the Dalry Secondary School site, it is considered to be equivalent in effect to closure in educational terms and does not represent a reasonable or viable alternative.

5.7 Nursery to S4 Provision including Kells Primary (Stakeholder Generated)

Under this model, education provision would be consolidated onto the Dalry School site, with nursery, primary and S1 to S4 stages delivered in a single location. This would involve the closure of Kells Primary School and the permanent realignment of its catchment to Dalry Primary School. Pupils would continue their education at Castle Douglas High School for the Senior Phase from S5 onwards.

While this option seeks to strengthen the viability of an all-through model by increasing pupil numbers and cohort sizes, it would require a separate statutory consultation to close Kells Primary School. In terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, this represents a proposal to close a school and therefore does not constitute an alternative that avoids school closure. Instead, it transfers the impact of closure from one establishment to another.

From an educational perspective, the proposal may offer some benefits associated with larger cohorts and enhanced continuity across stages. However, these benefits must be considered alongside the impact on pupils, families and communities currently served by Kells Primary School, and the requirement to ensure equitable access to high quality education across both catchment areas.

In considering the underlying reasons for the proposal, this option does not fully address the key challenges identified. While combining catchments may increase overall pupil numbers at Dalry, it may not directly address the pattern of low uptake from the Dalry Secondary School catchment where a significant number of catchment pupils are choosing to attend a different secondary school. It does not resolve the wider demographic decline affecting the area, nor does it provide certainty around long term sustainability. Challenges associated with staffing, curriculum delivery and maintaining a broad and balanced secondary experience would remain, particularly given the small scale of current and projected cohorts.

In addition, this option introduces significant complexity and impact in its own right, including the closure of Kells Primary School, changes to travel patterns for primary aged pupils, and potential effects on community cohesion and local confidence. These impacts would require separate and full consideration through a statutory consultation process.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that reasonable alternatives to closure should address the reasons for the proposal without creating equivalent or additional closure proposals elsewhere. As this option involves the closure of Kells Primary School and does not provide a standalone solution to the challenges affecting Dalry Secondary School, it is not considered to represent a reasonable alternative. Officers therefore consider that this option should be excluded from further consideration.

The three remaining proposals are therefore considered to be reasonable alternatives to closure and are set out below and numbered for clarity. In addition, the option of closure has been appraised, alongside the reasonable alternatives, in terms of educational benefits and the potential impacts on the community and travel arrangements, to enable comparison.

They are:

1. Status Quo
2. Temporary Closure
3. Nursery to S4 Provision
4. School closure and re-align catchment to Castle Douglas High School

6.0 Option 1: Status Quo

Under this option, Dalry Secondary School would continue to operate with its existing structure, leadership, catchment arrangements and stage provision unchanged. Pupils would continue to attend Dalry Secondary for their S1 to S4 secondary education as they do at present.

This option would maintain continuity for pupils currently attending the school and would avoid any immediate change to travel arrangements or schooling arrangements. It would continue to provide local access to secondary education within the Glenkens area and would retain the current school community and identity.

In statutory terms, the status quo would continue to meet Dumfries and Galloway Council's duty to provide school education for secondary aged children and young people living in the catchment area. However, it would not address the underlying factors that have given rise to the review, including very low pupil numbers, challenges associated with sustaining a broad curriculum within small cohorts, and longer-term concerns about the efficient and effective use of resources. While this option maintains stability in the short term and avoids disruption, it does not introduce changes aimed at improving educational capacity, addressing sustainability concerns, or responding to declining enrolment trends. These considerations, alongside pupil experience, educational benefit and longer-term

planning, are important factors and are explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

6.1 Community Feedback

Feedback on the status quo option reflected a wide range of views across both the drop-in meetings and the online survey. Stakeholders identified perceived benefits associated with continuity, local provision and small school settings, while others expressed strong concerns about educational viability, confidence in current arrangements and long-term sustainability. Overall, views were mixed, with both support for retaining the current model and clear recognition that the status quo is not working for all stakeholders.

Educational benefits

Feedback from the drop-in meetings frequently highlighted the perceived educational benefits of small cohorts. Stakeholders referred to “more one-to-one teaching”, a “calmer learning environment”, and stronger relationships between staff and pupils, with teachers “knowing pupils well”. Some described pupils being more relaxed, experiencing reduced stress, and benefiting from continuity and local education. Several stakeholders expressed the view that small classes can lead to better educational outcomes, particularly where there is stable leadership and continuity of teaching.

Survey feedback echoed some of these views, with a number of respondents describing the status quo as “the best option” for children who may have additional support needs or anxiety about larger schools, and emphasising wellbeing, choice and the importance of maintaining a local school. However, survey responses were more strongly polarised, with many respondents stating that the status quo is “not working”, “not viable”, or “not sustainable”. Common concerns included limited subject choice, difficulties in delivering Curriculum for Excellence entitlements, and perceptions that pupils cannot reach their full academic potential in the current model. Several respondents highlighted high costs per pupil and questioned whether resources could be justified when outcomes were perceived as weak.

Effect on the local community

At the drop-in meetings, stakeholders strongly emphasised the role of Dalry Secondary School as a central part of community life. The school was described as a “core part” or “beating heart” of the community, supporting cohesion across generations and helping to sustain local identity. Stakeholders expressed concern that closure would deter families from moving to the area, reduce community vibrancy and negatively affect local businesses. The presence of a local school was seen as important for attracting and retaining families.

Alongside this, meeting feedback also reflected frustration and reduced confidence in the current model. Stakeholders referred to insecurity, declining trust, and a perception that Council decisions had contributed to falling rolls, with some feeling that pupils were being “encouraged to leave” rather than supported to stay. Concerns

were raised about leadership, communication and the lack of a clear long-term commitment.

Survey feedback reinforced both perspectives. Some respondents argued that without a school, “no families are going to want to move into the area”, while others felt that continuing with the status quo placed an unreasonable burden on public resources and that change was “inevitable”. A number of responses expressed anger or mistrust, referencing long-term under-investment, uncertainty, and a belief that the current situation has already undermined confidence in the school and the wider community.

Effect of any different travel arrangements

Stakeholders at the drop-in meetings consistently noted that the status quo would result in no change to travel arrangements. This was widely viewed as a benefit, particularly for younger pupils and those with additional support needs. Stakeholders emphasised the advantages of short journeys or walking to school, reduced travel stress, greater participation in after-school activities, and lower environmental impact. Concerns were also raised that bus journeys often take “far longer than they appear on paper”, reinforcing the value of local provision.

Survey respondents similarly recognised that the status quo avoids increased travel, with some highlighting the importance of minimising travel time for wellbeing and family life. However, for respondents opposed to the status quo, travel considerations were often outweighed by concerns about educational quality, sustainability and cost, with several indicating that travel to Castle Douglas High School was already taking place or would be preferable if it resulted in improved educational outcomes.

All stakeholder feedback at both the Drop-in meetings and to the Online Survey can be found in their entirety in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

6.2 Pupil Feedback

Across all pupil responses, views on Dalry Secondary staying open were mixed but leaned supportive. 48% of pupils indicated they support/strongly support Dalry staying open, 29% were not sure/no strong view, and 23% do not support/strongly do not support.

Views differed markedly depending on whether pupils currently attend Dalry schools or not. Pupils currently attending Dalry schools were much more likely to support Dalry staying open (87% support, 13% not sure, 0% do not support). Pupils attending other schools were more likely to be uncertain or opposed (14% support, 43% not sure, 43% do not support). Pupils attending Dalry schools were also more likely to select benefits linked to feeling safe and comfortable and friendships, and more likely to select concerns linked to friendships and travel. Pupils attending other schools were more likely to indicate that closure would present no concern or challenge to them.

In the free-text “alternatives” question, approximately 11% of pupils explicitly suggested keeping things broadly as they are (e.g. “leave it how it is”, “keep it the same”).

Pupil comments on this option included:

“Keep it the same as is it is, the school shouldn’t be closed or have anything done to it as it is fine the way it is.”

“leave it how it is”

A full list of pupil feedback can be found in **Appendix 3**.

6.3 Pupil Numbers

Under this option, pupil numbers at Dalry Secondary School would be expected to follow the same trajectory as current and forecast rolls.

While Dalry Secondary School continues to operate with a very small pupil cohort, and wider demographic data demonstrates a sustained decline in school aged population across Dumfries and Galloway. This pattern is reflected within the local context, where projections do not indicate a significant increase in the number of children of school age residing within the catchment area over the medium to long term.

Maintaining the status quo does not provide a mechanism to address a falling number of enrolments, nor does it mitigate the risk of future imbalance between staffing, accommodation capacity, and pupil demand. Should numbers decline further, the school may face increasing challenges in relation to class configuration, staffing resilience, and the delivery of a broad and balanced educational experience.

As of last Pupil Census in September 2025, there were 44 secondary aged children living in the catchment area, with 13 attending Dalry Secondary. This included 2 extra-territorial pupils attending from a different catchment area.

The pupil roll forecast for Dalry Secondary School based on enrolment data as of April 2026 therefore is as follows (included an adjusted figure based on current for catchment uptake):

Dalry	Year	S1	S2	S3	S4	Total	Adjusted roll
	2025/26	5	1	1	5	12	
	2026/27	3	5	0	0	8	
	2027/28	11	3	5	0	19	9
	2028/29	8	11	3	5	27	13

Figure 11: Dalry Secondary Pupil Roll Forecast

6.4 Financial Information

Maintaining the status quo would result in the continuation of current revenue and operational costs associated with Dalry Secondary School, with no immediate financial savings realised by the education authority.

As pupil numbers fluctuate, the cost per pupil may increase, particularly if rolls continue to fall. This can place pressure on education budgets, as core staffing, property maintenance, utilities and support services remain largely fixed costs regardless of pupil roll.

In the context of ongoing financial constraints and Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duty to secure best value, this option does not provide an opportunity to reduce expenditure in unsustainable areas or to reinvest resources more effectively across the wider school estate. Any future decline in enrolment would therefore exacerbate existing financial pressures without necessarily delivering corresponding educational benefits.

The total net financial cost of operating Dalry Secondary School in 2024/25 was approximately £480,000.

6.5. Assessment of Rural Factors

6.5.1 Community Impact

Maintaining the current arrangements would result in no immediate change to the impact on the local community. Dalry Secondary School would continue to operate as a focal point for education within the area, contributing to community identity and supporting daily interaction between families, staff and local services.

However, retaining the status quo does not actively respond to the longer-term challenges facing the school or the wider community. If pupil numbers continue to decline, this may lead to increased uncertainty for families and staff, and an ongoing erosion of confidence in the sustainability of local provision.

Continued operation under existing arrangements may also limit opportunities to explore alternative or enhanced community uses of the building, should surplus accommodation or under-utilisation arise in the future.

6.5.1 Travel arrangements

Under this option, there would be no change to existing travel arrangements for pupils attending Dalry Secondary School. Pupils would continue to access education in line with current catchment boundaries and transport eligibility criteria.

The Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

and

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

As no changes to provision or catchment boundaries are proposed under this option, there would be no additional transport costs incurred and no alteration to the environmental impact associated with school travel. Existing arrangements are well-established and understood by families.

6.6 Educational Benefits

All schools in Scotland follow Curriculum for Excellence, which describes the education children and young people are entitled to whilst at school. It is important for pupils to be taught in groupings that allow for the development of the four capacities, across the four contexts for learning.



Figure 12: The Four Capacities (Education Scotland)

Secondary schooling is split into two phases – the Broad General Education from S1 to part way through S3, followed by the Senior Phase, which begins at the end of S3 and develops throughout S4 to S6, when pupils build their portfolio of qualifications.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) recognise these distinct phases in secondary school education. The framework that schools work to, that is particularly relevant for Dalry Secondary School, includes the following stipulations:

- It is a legal requirement for people employed as teachers in Scottish schools to be registered with GTC Scotland. In 2020, the Court of Session clarified

GTC Scotland's long held position that a teacher must be employed in a role that aligns with their registration category.

- Registered teachers in secondary education are qualified to teach their subject and 'responsibility of all' curricular areas (literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing) in S1 to S6 age groups.
- Registered Secondary teachers may also be in a position to teach their subject with younger learners if an employer assesses the individual as being suitable for those teaching duties.
- In non-practical subjects (for example English, Modern Studies and French), the maximum class size in S1 and S2 is 33 pupils. In S3 – S6 the maximum class size is 30 pupils.
- In practical subjects (for example Biology, Design and Manufacture and Art), the maximum class size is 20 pupils in S1-S6.
- Note that there is no stipulation regarding composite classes in secondary schools, but in P4-P7 where the maximum class size is 33 pupils, the maximum composite class size is 25. It should therefore be assumed that a composite S1, S2 non-practical class should not exceed 25 pupils.

At Dalry Secondary School there are currently 5 pupils in S1, 1 pupil in S2, 1 pupil in S3 and 5 pupils in S4. This currently forms two classes – a composite S1/S2 class of 6 pupils, and, following pupil and parental requests, an S3/S4 class of 6 pupils. It is not considered educationally appropriate to teach the Broad General Education in the same class as the Senior Phase, although allowances are made on an individual basis if a strong rationale combined with high educational attainment can be provided. Therefore, a standard approach to maintain the status quo for very small numbers of pupils would be as follows:

Up to and including 20 pupils in S1-S3	One composite non-practical and practical S1-S3 class, plus senior phase classes depending on numbers
Up to and including 20 pupils in S1-S2	One composite non-practical and practical S1-S2 class, plus other S3 and S4 classes depending on numbers

Figure 13: Composite Class Arrangements

It is not considered appropriate or desirable to routinely teach classes of a single pupil. Even very small classes present challenges for teachers and pupils. The diversity of ideas and opportunities for rich discussion and alternative viewpoints may be limited, and young people and adults may feel isolated. An overly teacher centred environment, where pupils lack social interaction, may significantly reduce opportunities for critical thinking and developing problem solving skills through group work. The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health published an article on 9 June 2025 which noted that loneliness and social isolation are increasingly recognised as a priority public health issue for adolescents [From Isolation to Intervention: Loneliness and Youth Mental Health - ACAMH](#). It is important that in our very small schools, groupings are encouraged that support our young people to develop positive social relationships.

There are challenges when considering appropriate senior phase provision (the end of S3 and S4). Any senior phase curriculum would need to be negotiated year on

year, depending on pupil numbers, the availability of specialist GTCS registered teachers, and the aspirations of the young people.

To maintain the status quo, pupils at Dalry Secondary School need to be taught in a class group by a range of qualified, GTCS registered teachers. Due to the practical and logistical issues of needing to provide high quality, subject specific teaching, this may mean that pupils receive a blend of in-person teaching, and supervised virtual input for specific subject areas. Whilst we would not routinely recommend virtual teaching input for pupils in the BGE and would endeavour to maintain as much in person class teaching as possible, this may be a reasonable approach for specific subject specialist input. Young people in the BGE would always be supervised by an adult present in the room. Dalry Secondary School will endeavour to ensure that the curriculum meets the entitlements set out in Curriculum for Excellence wherever possible.

In summary, the educational benefit to pupils of maintaining the status quo is as follows:

- Pupils remain in their community, maintaining strong links to their families and the Glenkens community. This promotes a strong sense of personal belonging, which enables young people to be:
 - Effective contributors
 - Responsible citizens
- Pupils experience high-quality learning and teaching, delivered in innovative and bespoke ways, enabling young people to experience:
 - A range of curriculum areas and subjects
 - Interdisciplinary learning delivered across year groups
 - The ethos of life of the school as part of a Glenkens community
- Pupils in the Dalry catchment experience a maximum travelling distance of approximately 15 miles north along the A713, 6 miles east along the A702, 7 miles south along the A713 or 10 miles west along the A712. This supports the health and well-being of pupils by maintaining a reasonable travel time and allows young people of secondary age to travel with siblings and extended family and friendship groups across the primary and secondary age range.

6.7 Summary

Option 1 would maintain current arrangements at Dalry Secondary School, providing continuity of provision, preserving local access to education, and avoiding immediate disruption for pupils and families. It retains the school's role as a focal point of community life and reflects strong stakeholder support, particularly from pupils and families who value small class sizes, close relationships, a sense of belonging, and reduced travel time.

However, the evidence highlights significant challenges. Very low and declining pupil numbers constrain the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum, particularly in S3 and S4, and require ongoing use of composite classes and partnership arrangements. While small classes can support individual attention, very small

cohorts limit opportunities for peer interaction, collaborative learning and wider educational experience.

Financially, high per pupil costs would continue, with limited scope to improve efficiency. In rural terms, while this option preserves local provision in the short term, it does not address longer term sustainability challenges or provide a clear strategic pathway for secondary education.

Overall, the status quo supports stability and continuity but does not address the underlying issues that led to the review, raising questions about its ability to deliver a sustainable, high-quality education offer over time.

7.0 Option 2: Temporary Closure

Under this option, Dalry Secondary School would close on a temporary basis (previously referred to as ‘mothballing’) for a period of up to three years. During this period, pupils living within the Dalry Secondary School catchment area would attend Castle Douglas High School for their secondary education. Dalry Nursery and Dalry Primary School would continue to operate as normal.

Temporary closure is intended to preserve the school building while allowing time for circumstances to change. The underlying assumption is that pupil enrolment could increase sufficiently over time to enable Dalry Secondary School to reopen. This avoids immediate permanent closure, while recognising that current pupil numbers are very low. However, this flexibility must not undermine the purpose of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. If the majority of parents oppose a temporary closure, it would be appropriate to move quickly to a statutory consultation on permanent closure to ensure full consultation, with the school remaining operational where feasible during this period.

For pupils and families, this option would involve similar educational and travel arrangements to those associated with permanent closure for the duration of the temporary closure period. Pupils would experience a change in school environment and daily travel, while also facing potential further change if the school were to reopen at a later stage.

From a planning perspective, this option would require the Council to maintain the school building in a wind and watertight condition, while also reviewing the viability of the school on an annual basis during the temporary closure period. Temporary closure is not intended as a long-term solution and would need to be supported by clear evidence of realistic and sustainable improvement in pupil numbers to justify reopening.

While this option may be viewed as offering additional time and flexibility, it does not in itself address the immediate challenges associated with the sustainability of secondary education provision at Dalry. The educational impact on pupils, the uncertainty associated with future provision, the effect on the local community, and the ongoing costs of maintaining a temporarily closed school are therefore important considerations and are explored in the sections below.

7.1 Community Feedback

Feedback on the temporary closure option was predominantly cautious or negative across both the drop-in meetings and the online survey, with many stakeholders describing it as “effectively the same as closure” or “closure by stealth”. A small number of comments recognised that a temporary period could provide time to reassess viability, but this was often conditional on a clear plan and investment. A strong and consistent theme was concern that a mothballed [temporarily closed] school is unlikely to re-open and that this option could leave the community in “limbo”, with uncertainty for families and pupils.

Educational benefits

Feedback from the drop-in meetings included limited support for educational benefits under this option. Several stakeholders stated there were “none”, or that it would be “the same as closure”. Concerns were raised that the loss of local secondary provision, even temporarily, would be “detrimental to the Glenkens”, with particular emphasis on the impact of longer travel and the removal of local education. Some stakeholders expressed the view that rural pupils were being “discriminated against” if they could not be educated locally. One more positive comment suggested it could provide the opportunity for younger pupils to “try Castle Douglas High School”.

Survey feedback broadly reinforced these themes. Many respondents rejected temporary closure on the basis that it would not improve educational experiences and would not support pupils’ needs, describing it as “not an acceptable solution” and questioning what would realistically change within three years to enable re-opening. A small number of survey responses suggested temporary closure could be a short-term measure if it was linked to a “positive plan” and meaningful support to improve the situation, but even where this view was expressed it was commonly framed as conditional and uncertain.

Effect on the local community

At the drop-in meetings, stakeholders frequently described the community impact as negative and comparable to full closure. Common concerns included the visible impact of an “abandoned” or empty building, potential “development blight”, and a loss of confidence that would reduce the likelihood of families moving into or staying in the area. Several stakeholders expressed the view that, once mothballed [temporarily closed], the school would “never re-open”, and that this would be “disastrous” for the community, affecting local businesses, employment and community sustainability. Some stakeholders also noted that uncertainty over whether the school might return could add “stress” and prolong decision-making without offering a clear direction.

Survey feedback echoed this strongly, with many respondents describing temporary closure as a pathway to closure and arguing it would prolong uncertainty for the community. Some comments described the option as leaving the community in “limbo” or being a “cop out” and raised concerns about the ongoing cost of maintaining an under-used or unused building. Respondents also referred to previous local experience of mothballing [temporary closure] as reinforcing the

perception that temporary closure is unlikely to be reversed. A small number of responses viewed temporary closure as potentially preferable to immediate closure if it created space for improvement, but this was not the dominant position.

Effect of any different travel arrangements

Meeting feedback reflected the view that travel impacts under temporary closure would be similar to those associated with closure, as pupils would attend another secondary school during the temporary period. While a small number of stakeholders recorded “none” under this heading, the wider discussion focused on the effect of increased travel, including concerns about “too much time travelling”, long rural routes and a longer school day. Stakeholders highlighted that travel to Castle Douglas could feel particularly significant for more remote parts of the catchment and for pupils who do not live directly on a bus route, with some expressing concern that changes would disadvantage local pupils.

Survey feedback similarly focused on increased travel time and reduced access to wider school opportunities. Respondents raised concerns about long bus journeys, the length of the school day, and the practical impact on participation in after-school activities where families may not be able to provide additional transport. A recurring theme was that temporary travel arrangements could become difficult to reverse, reinforcing the view that temporary closure would operate “in practice” like closure, but with added uncertainty.

Overall, stakeholders tended to view temporary closure as offering limited educational or community benefit unless accompanied by a clear, credible plan for improvement and re-opening. The prevailing concern across both meeting and survey feedback was that mothballing [temporary closure] would create uncertainty while producing impacts similar to closure on pupils, families and the wider community.

All stakeholder feedback at both the Drop-in meetings and to the Online Survey can be found in their entirety in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

7.2 Pupil Feedback

Temporary closure was rarely suggested directly by pupils. In the free-text “alternatives” question, approximately 4% of pupils explicitly wrote temporary closure or similar. Where pupil feedback is most relevant to this option, it reflects the practical impacts pupils associate with attending a different school during the closure period, particularly travel time and the knock-on effect on daily routines. 23% selected travel time and daily journey as a concern if Dalry were to (temporary) close, and 11% selected concerns relating to time outside school (homework time, hobbies, family time).

Views again differed depending on whether pupils currently attend Dalry schools or not. Pupils currently attending Dalry schools were more likely to highlight travel and friendship impacts, while pupils attending other schools were more likely to report that closure would present no concern or challenge for them.

Pupil comments on this option included:

“Dalry secondary school is closer to some people than others and it takes longer to get to castle Douglas secondary school it would take me about 1 hour to get to castle Douglas.”

“Mothballing (as an alternative to closure)”

A full list of pupil feedback can be found in **Appendix 3**.

7.3 Pupil Numbers

Under this option, Dalry Secondary School would have no attending pupil roll for the duration of the temporary closure, with all attending catchment pupils relocating to Castle Douglas High School (or another school of their choosing).

The pupil data indicates that current pupil numbers are low and are forecast to remain limited over the medium term. A temporary closure would therefore consolidate pupils into schools with higher rolls.

However, experience across Dumfries and Galloway demonstrates that temporary closures can become prolonged where population recovery does not materialise. In such circumstances, pupils and families may become embedded within new school communities, reducing the likelihood that rolls would recover sufficiently to justify re-opening at a later date.

The pupil roll forecast for Dalry Secondary School based on enrolment data as of April 2026 therefore is as follows (included an adjusted figure based on current for catchment uptake):

Dalry	Year	S1	S2	S3	S4	Total	Adjusted roll
	2025/26	5	1	1	5	12	
	2026/27	3	5	0	0	8	
	2027/28	11	3	5	0	19	9
	2028/29	8	11	3	5	27	13

Figure 14: Dalry Secondary Pupil Roll Forecast

7.4 Financial Information

Temporary closure would result in a reduction in day-to-day revenue costs associated with staffing, utilities, and consumables at Dalry Secondary School. These savings to the Council would be partially offset by additional costs associated with pupil transport and the need to accommodate pupils within receiving schools and the requirement to maintain the building in a ‘wind and watertight’ condition.

As the Council would also remain responsible for the school building throughout the closure period, including ongoing property maintenance, security, and statutory compliance. As such, while some financial efficiencies may be realised in the short

term, this option does not remove all costs associated with the co-location of a nursery, primary and secondary.

Given the uncertain duration of any temporary closure, this option presents financial risk. Extended closure without re-opening could limit opportunities for long-term savings or reinvestment and may increase overall costs if the building deteriorates or requires significant remedial works prior to any potential re-opening.

The total net financial cost of operating Dalry Secondary School in 2024/25 was approximately £480,000.

7.5. Assessment of Rural Factors

7.5.1 Community Impact

A temporary closure would represent a significant change for the Dalry community. While the option retains the theoretical possibility of future re-opening, the absence of a functioning secondary school during the closure period may reduce daily activity and weaken the school's role as a focal point for community life (although the Nursery and Primary School would remain).

Evidence from other rural communities suggests that uncertainty associated with temporary closure can impact community confidence and future decision-making by families, including choices around housing and school enrolment. This may, in turn, undermine the very conditions required to support re-opening.

The temporary nature of this option may limit opportunities for alternative community use of the building, as long-term planning and investment are often constrained where future educational use remains under consideration.

7.5.2 Travel arrangements

Under this option, secondary pupils living in the Dalry catchment would be required to travel to Castle Douglas High School for the duration of the temporary closure (or an alternative school of their choice).

Travel arrangements would be provided in accordance with the Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023, which states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

and

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

Free school transport would be provided from designated pick-up points where pupils meet the eligibility criteria.

While transport would be arranged in line with policy, this option may result in longer daily travel times for pupils, increased reliance on vehicular transport, and a reduced ability for pupils to walk or cycle to school. These factors may also affect participation in after-school activities and wider community engagement.

7.6 Educational Benefits

The advantage for pupils of a temporary closure rather than consultation on statutory closure, is that they could begin to experience the benefits more quickly, and if numbers increase, the school can re-open. The disadvantage is one of uncertainty and the potential risk that this may pose to the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

At census (September 2025) the rolls for each year group at Castle Douglas High School were as follows:

Year Group	Roll
S1	76
S2	94
S3	114
S4	94
S5	84
S6	44
Total	506

Figure 15: Castle Douglas Pupil Roll (Census 2025)

These numbers enable flexible class groupings and support the delivery of all curriculum areas and subjects, as well as developing the four capacities within the four contexts for learning.

Pupils from Dalry Secondary School who join Castle Douglas High School, their partnership school, in S5 or, by parental choice, at any point from S1, are benefitting from learning with and alongside a greater number of peers of the same age and stage as themselves. 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' by allowing them to overcome challenges and exercise responsibilities as a member of a larger social group, within a supportive educational environment. They can 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.

Teachers at Castle Douglas High School plan, assess and track pupil progress to ensure that every child has the challenge, support and opportunity to reach their full potential. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a key priority for the whole staff team. 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. This support, alongside close working with parents and carers, helps to ensure the needs of every young person are met.

Schools annually report on attainment in reading, writing, listening and talking, and numeracy at the end of S3. Nationally, around 90% of pupils achieve level 3 at the end of S3, with between 61% and 69% of pupils achieving level 4.

Pupils at Castle Douglas High School are supported through high-quality learning and teaching to develop their understanding and skills in all curriculum areas. Currently, performance at level 3 is above the national average. Attainment at level 4 is increasing year on year, becoming in line with national averages.

Rights Respecting Schools, the school culture and ethos and nurture principles are a key focus for Castle Douglas High School. This focused approach has supported the development of positive relationships across the whole school community. The larger number of staff and parent/carer body, alongside a greater number of community partners, naturally gives the school an increased breadth of talent, interests and opportunities to harness and share. This applies across the school in terms of the wider curriculum opportunities afforded to young people, as well as the enhancement by staff individual expertise, such as Physical Education opportunities, Expressive Arts and STEM (Science, technology, engineering and maths).

In S4, pupils at Castle Douglas High School are benefiting from an increased curriculum offer, which includes a range of National Qualifications, college opportunities and Foundation Apprenticeships. Following recent improvements to the senior phase curriculum offer at Castle Douglas High School, pupils now have over one hundred options to choose from. Pupils are supported to make high-quality decisions about the blend of qualifications and subjects they wish to take, matched to their aspirations. High-quality tracking throughout the BGE supports teachers, young people and families to identify the best and most appropriate range of qualifications.

In summary, the educational benefit of temporary closure is as follows:

- Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their social skills, belong to a wide range of friendship groups, and overcome challenges and exercise responsibilities as a member of a larger social group, within a supportive educational environment. Pupils can participate in a wide range of opportunities within the wider school curriculum. This enables them to be:
 - Effective contributors
 - Responsible citizens
 - Confident individuals

- Pupils experience high-quality learning and teaching to develop their understanding and skills in all curriculum areas. They are taught in single stage classes and experience a wider diversity of ideas, opportunities for rich discussion and alternative viewpoints. Pupils experience opportunities for critical thinking and developing problem solving skills through group work. This means that they can:
 - Develop as Successful Learners
 - Experience the complete range of curriculum areas and subjects
 - Be involved in interdisciplinary learning
 - Have a sense of belonging in the ethos of life of the school as part of a wider Castle Douglas and Glenkens community
 - Be involved in opportunities for personal development
- Pupils benefit from teachers and support staff who are part of whole school and wider regional and national networks. Staff work together collaboratively to continuously improve learning and teaching, share good practice and engage in professional learning.
- Pupils with Additional Support Needs benefit from carefully considered and bespoke plans that meet their needs. Support is available from resources within school and from other agencies that work in partnership with the school, the pupils and families. The school has a dedicated support hub, and investment in a dedicated Learning Centre provision is due to commence in August 2026.

7.7 Summary

Option 2 would involve the temporary closure of Dalry Secondary School, with pupils attending Castle Douglas High School during this period (or another Secondary School of their choice). While it avoids immediate permanent closure and retains the possibility of reopening, it results in similar impacts to closure in terms of transition, travel and loss of local provision.

Stakeholder feedback indicates limited support, with many viewing this option as creating uncertainty without offering a clear long-term solution. Concerns focus on increased travel, disruption to pupils, and reduced confidence within the community, alongside the risk that closure becomes permanent in practice.

From an educational perspective, pupils would benefit from access to a larger school with a broader curriculum and peer group. However, this is balanced by the impact of transition and uncertainty about future provision.

Financially, some savings may be achieved, but costs associated with maintaining the building and transporting pupils would remain. In rural terms, this option does not address underlying sustainability challenges and may weaken community confidence over time.

Overall, temporary closure provides short term flexibility but does not resolve the core issues identified, and its success depends on future roll growth, for which there is currently limited evidence.

8.0 Option 3: Nursery to S4 Provision

This option would retain education provision on the Dalry Secondary School site through an integrated Nursery to S4 ‘all-through’ model. A single headteacher would have overall responsibility for nursery, primary and lower-secondary education at Dalry, in addition to Kells Primary School as part of the wider school cluster. Pupils would transfer to Castle Douglas High School for their senior phase education in S5 and S6.

Under this model, pupils would continue to receive their early learning, primary education and Broad General Education (up to the end of S3), as well as S4 provision, within the Dalry school community. This approach would aim to promote continuity of learning and relationships, particularly for younger learners, while reducing the scale of secondary provision required on site.

From a curricular perspective, this option would need to ensure that pupils continue to receive a Broad General Education in line with national curriculum expectations and have access to a suitable range of learning opportunities appropriate to their stage. The transition to Castle Douglas High School for S5 and S6 would continue to be carefully managed to support continuity and progression into the senior phase, including access to qualifications and wider subject choice.

This option would involve a change to the current structure of secondary education provision at Dalry but would retain a statutory education presence on the site and maintain local access to education for most compulsory years. It may help address some of the challenges associated with very small senior cohorts while still supporting community sustainability and local identity.

However, this option requires careful consideration of leadership capacity, staffing arrangements, curriculum delivery across multiple stages, and the educational experience of pupils within small year groups. Transition arrangements, transport implications for senior pupils, and the impact on families and the wider school community are also important considerations and are explored in the sections below.

8.1 Community Feedback

Feedback on the Nursery to S4 ‘all-through’ option was generally positive across the drop-in meetings and the online survey, with many stakeholders describing it as a “preferred choice” or a model that “previously worked well” for the Glenkens. Support was frequently linked to continuity, stability and the perceived benefits of a small, familiar school environment. However, both meeting and survey feedback also included important reservations, particularly around leadership capacity, resourcing, and whether the breadth of curriculum and subject choice expected at secondary stages (especially S3–S4 and preparation for the Senior Phase) could be delivered consistently and sustainably.

Educational benefits

Feedback from the drop-in meetings often focused on the value of an all-through model providing “continuity”, “confidence” and “stability”, with pupils feeling less “uprooted” and having time to prepare for later transitions. Stakeholders described benefits linked to small class sizes, including more “one-to-one” teaching, a “small,

focussed” education tailored to pupils, and a familiar, “safe known environment” which can reduce stress and support learning. Several stakeholders emphasised that the model “previously worked”, and some suggested that shared management with Castle Douglas High School had been “detrimental” to Dalry, with a strong view that “shared headship does not work” and that “better leadership on site” is needed.

Survey feedback reflected similar support, with many respondents favouring a single headteacher and describing the option as a “great solution” because children could remain in the same setting through to S4. However, survey comments also raised concerns about practicality and delivery. A recurring point was that retaining S3 and S4 would only be workable “if a full range of subjects” and a “reasonable range of National 5s” could be offered, alongside appropriately qualified staff. Some respondents questioned whether an all-through management structure would resolve existing challenges around staffing and curriculum breadth, and others expressed concern that one headteacher covering multiple stages could be “not ideal”. A smaller number of responses raised issues around the timing of transition at S5, with some describing the move at that point as “stressful” and potentially limiting course choices, while others felt that secondary education should be accessed in a larger setting for social and curricular reasons.

Effect on the local community

Across the drop-in meetings, this option was commonly described as positive for community stability. Stakeholders referred to the school remaining a “hub for the community”, helping to “keep families in the area” and “attract new families”. Several comments linked a thriving all-through school to community pride, sense of belonging, and the idea that families are more likely to stay, or move into the area, when there is confidence in long-term local provision. Some stakeholders described this as a “wonderful return” to a through-school model and felt it would strengthen local identity and support.

Survey feedback broadly echoed these points, with many respondents describing the option as “best” or “ideal” for the Glenkens, particularly if it demonstrates a clear commitment to the area and supports families to remain or relocate. However, survey comments also reflected caution: some respondents questioned whether, given current roll trends and past experiences, this option may be “too little too late” unless investment and improvement are visible. Others expressed concern about viability and the wider impacts if the model resulted in very small secondary cohorts over time. A minority of comments raised worries about social experience, suggesting that very small cohorts could limit peer interaction and development of social skills.

Effect of any different travel arrangements

Meeting feedback highlighted travel-related benefits for younger pupils, with shorter travel distances and reduced stress seen as important, particularly in winter weather or when pupils are unwell. Stakeholders also noted practical benefits for families, including easier arrangements for working parents and quicker responses in emergencies. Some stakeholders felt this option was “the best option transport wise”

for compulsory years, while still recognising that travel to Castle Douglas would remain for S5 and S6.

Survey feedback also recognised that keeping provision locally through S4 would reduce travel demands for younger pupils and support those for whom daily travel to an alternative secondary would be excessive, particularly at the northern end of the catchment. Alongside this, some comments raised issues of fairness and choice in relation to transport, noting that travel support arrangements can influence which school families feel able to access. Others raised wider practical implications of longer travel for senior pupils, such as reduced ability to participate in after-school activities without additional transport.

Overall, stakeholders frequently viewed Nursery to S4 as offering continuity and stability for children and families and supporting the role of the school as a community hub. At the same time, feedback consistently indicated that its viability would depend on leadership capacity, sufficient resourcing, and the ability to deliver an appropriate curriculum and subject range across S1–S4.

All stakeholder feedback at both the Drop-in meetings and to the Online Survey can be found in their entirety in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

8.2 Pupil Feedback

Nursery to S4 was referenced directly by a small number of pupils in the free-text “alternatives” question. Where pupils mentioned this option, they tended to link it to continuity and confidence, alongside the view that the overall school experience needs to be strong and supported.

The broader pupil feedback aligns with the rationale for remaining in a smaller, familiar setting for longer. Pupils frequently selected factors relating to feeling safe and comfortable, friendships/social life, and travel time as benefits of Dalry remaining open.

As with other options, there was a clear difference between pupils currently attending Dalry schools and those attending other schools: pupils currently attending Dalry schools were much more likely to support keeping local provision and to emphasise safety, wellbeing and relationships; pupils attending other schools were more likely to be uncertain or opposed, often reflecting the fact they are already settled elsewhere.

Pupil comments on this option included:

“My preference to the closure would be nursery to s4.”

“I quite like the idea of the Nursery to S4 provision but the school is small and getting smaller what we really need is someone who really cares about the pupils and the school in general if we had that they might be able to make the school more like a school people would really want to go to school.”

A full list of pupil feedback can be found in **Appendix 3**.

8.3 Pupil Numbers

Under this option, educational provision at Dalry would be restructured to include nursery through to S4 under a single head teacher, resulting in a wider age range of pupils being educated on a single site.

Available pupil data indicates that current pupil numbers within the Dalry catchment are relatively small and that future projections show limited variation over the medium term. Consolidating provision across primary and early secondary stages has the potential to increase overall enrolment by retaining pupils locally for longer if such an arrangement is perceived to be more sustainable by local families. However, the extent to which this would translate into sustainable pupil numbers across all stages would be influenced by demographic patterns, parental choice and wider settlement trends, all of which are harder to define.

Very small cohort sizes at each individual stage would require careful consideration in relation to class organisation, curriculum delivery and opportunities for peer interaction across different levels of education.

The pupil roll forecast for Dalry Secondary School and Dalry Primary School based on enrolment data as of April 2026 therefore is as follows (included an adjusted figure based on current for catchment uptake):

Dalry	Year	S1	S2	S3	S4	Total	Adjusted roll
	2025/26	5	1	1	5	12	
	2026/27	3	5	0	0	8	
	2027/28	11	3	5	0	19	9
	2028/29	8	11	3	5	27	13

Figure 16: Dalry Secondary Pupil Roll Forecast

Dalry	Year	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total
	2025/26	6	10	4	9	5	7	2	6	6	39
	2026/27			8	4	9	5	7	2	6	41
	2027/28			6	8	4	9	5	7	2	41

Figure 17: Dalry Primary Pupil Roll Forecast

8.4 Financial Information

While increased use of the site could offer some efficiencies, the overall financial implications would depend on pupil numbers, staffing models and the level of investment required to meet curriculum and regulatory requirements. Costs would need to be considered in the context of affordability, long-term sustainability and alignment with Dumfries and Galloway Council's broader Learning Estate Strategy.

At a minimum, there would be significant changes to leadership and management structures across both Dalry School and Castle Douglas High School. This would likely include a reduction in promoted post entitlement at Castle Douglas High

School, reflecting a smaller secondary pupil and staffing roll with the removal of Dalry Secondary School, alongside a corresponding increase in leadership capacity required at a Dalry ‘all-through’ School.

The headteacher role at Dalry ‘all-through’ would significantly increase in scope and complexity, encompassing full responsibility for an all-through establishment spanning early years, primary and secondary stages (nursery to S4), with associated responsibilities for curriculum continuity, quality assurance, safeguarding, child protection and staff management across distinct and complex sectors. Consideration would also need to be given to the provision of an appropriate senior leadership team, to ensure effective operational management, subject leadership, and pastoral care across both primary and secondary phases.

8.5 Assessment of Rural Factors

8.5.1 Community Impact

Providing nursery to S4 education locally could support community continuity by enabling children and young people to remain within their local area for a longer period of their educational journey. This has the potential to strengthen relationships between families, the school and the wider community.

As with any significant change in provision, the long-term impact on the community would depend on pupil uptake, the range of educational opportunities available based on school roll, and confidence in the sustainability of the model. Engagement with families and the wider community would be important in understanding local needs, expectations and aspirations.

This option aligns well with the principles set out in A Review of Rural Education in the Glenkens (2024), recognising that rural education is central to community sustainability, population retention, and local economic development. Maintaining Nursery to S4 provision supports place-based education by retaining a local secondary presence and enabling learning that is connected to community life, rather than reinforcing a “learning to leave” dynamic. The review highlights clear evidence that loss of local schools can contribute to rural depopulation and weaken community cohesion over time.

A Nursery to S4 model also supports more flexible and collaborative curriculum delivery, including vocational pathways and shared provision, in line with evidence that small rural schools can broaden subject choice through partnership and digital learning.

Overall, this option presents an alternative approach to rural education delivery which, if developed further, would require careful planning and ongoing review to ensure it meets both educational and community objectives.

8.5.2 Travel arrangements

Under this option, nursery, primary and S1–S4 pupils would attend school on the same site at Dalry. As a result, pupils living within the local catchment area would be

able to access education locally across all stages, with no requirement for routine travel to Castle Douglas High School.

The Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.
and

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

Free school transport would be provided from designated pick-up points where pupils meet the eligibility criteria.

By providing education across nursery, primary and early secondary stages on a single site, this option has the potential to reduce travel requirements for some pupils and families. The overall impact on travel would depend on individual circumstances and enrolment patterns. Any transport arrangements would be planned to ensure they remain safe, proportionate and consistent with Council policy.

8.6 Educational Benefits

The campus structure of a co-located ELC, primary and secondary school under a single management structure has a proven track record of success in some, often more rural, areas.

There can be advantages to combining smaller schools under one management structure. The slightly larger number of staff, parent/carers body and partners naturally gives the 'all-through' school an increased breadth of talent, interests and opportunities to harness and share. This applies across the 'all-through' school in terms of the wider curriculum opportunities afforded to children and young people, as well as the enhancement by staff individual expertise, such as Physical Education opportunities, Expressive Arts and STEM (Science, technology, engineering and maths).

All schools and ELCs in Scotland follow Curriculum for Excellence, which describes the education children and young people are entitled to whilst at school. It is important for pupils to be taught in groupings that allow for the development of the four capacities, across the four contexts for learning.



Figure 18: The Four Capacities (Education Scotland)

Under this model, the arrangements for ELC and primary schooling would remain the same, although there may be opportunities for specialist secondary teachers to teach their subject to primary pupils, if this is considered to be appropriate. There may also be opportunities for primary teachers to teach S1–S3 pupils in the ‘responsibility of all’ curricular areas of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

Secondary schooling is split into two phases – the Broad General Education from S1 to part way through S3, followed by the Senior Phase, which begins at the end of S3 and develops throughout S4 to S6, when pupils build their portfolio of qualifications. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) recognise these distinct phases in secondary school education. The framework that schools work to, that is particularly relevant for an ‘all-through’ model, includes the following stipulations:

- It is a legal requirement for people employed as teachers in Scottish schools to be registered with GTC Scotland. In 2020, the Court of Session clarified GTC Scotland’s long held position that a teacher must be employed in a role that aligns with their registration category.
- Registered teachers in secondary education are qualified to teach their subject and ‘responsibility of all’ curricular areas (literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing) in S1 to S6 age groups.
- Registered Secondary teachers may also be in a position to teach their subject with younger learners if an employer assesses the individual as being suitable for those teaching duties.
- Registered teachers in Primary Education are qualified to teach all age groups in all curricular areas from early learning and childcare to primary 7. Registered Primary Education teachers may also be in a position to teach literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing across the spectrum of the Broad General Education if an employer assesses the individual as being suitable for those teaching duties.

- In non-practical subjects (for example English, Modern Studies and French), the maximum class size in S1 and S2 is 33 pupils. In S3 – S6 the maximum class size is 30 pupils.
- In practical subjects (for example Biology, Design and Manufacture and Art), the maximum class size is 20 pupils in S1-S6.
- Note that there is no stipulation regarding composite classes in secondary schools, but in P4-P7 where the maximum class size is 33 pupils, the maximum composite class size is 25. It should therefore be assumed that a composite S1, S2 non-practical class should not exceed 25 pupils.

At Dalry Secondary School there are currently 5 pupils in S1, 1 pupil in S2, 1 pupil in S3 and 5 pupils in S4. This currently forms two classes – a composite S1/S2 class of 6 pupils, and, following pupil and parental requests, an S3/S4 class of 6 pupils.

Current pupil numbers in Dalry Primary School:

Stage	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Number of Pupils	4	9	5	7	2	6	6

Figure 19: Dalry Primary School Pupil Numbers

Both primary schools currently have two composite classes.

It is not considered educationally appropriate to teach the Broad General Education in the same class as the Senior Phase, although allowances are made on an individual basis if a strong rationale combined with high educational attainment can be provided. Therefore, a standard approach to maintain the status quo for very small numbers of pupils in the secondary school would be as follows:

Up to and including 20 pupils in S1-S3	One composite non-practical and practical S1-S3 class, plus senior phase classes depending on numbers
Up to and including 20 pupils in S1-S2	One composite non-practical and practical S1-S2 class, plus other S3 and S4 classes depending on numbers

Figure 20: Composite Class Arrangements

It is not considered appropriate or desirable to routinely teach classes of a single pupil. Even very small classes present challenges for teachers and pupils. The diversity of ideas and opportunities for rich discussion and alternative viewpoints may be limited, and young people and adults may feel isolated. An overly teacher centred environment, where pupils lack social interaction, may significantly reduce opportunities for critical thinking and developing problem solving skills through group work. The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health published an article on 9 June 2025 which noted that loneliness and social isolation are increasingly recognised as a priority public health issue for adolescents [From Isolation to Intervention: Loneliness and Youth Mental Health - ACAMH](#). It is important that in our very small schools, groupings are encouraged that support our young people to develop positive social relationships.

Pupils attending Dalry Secondary School need to be taught in a class group by a range of qualified, GTCS-registered teachers. Due to the practical and logistical issues of needing to provide high-quality, subject-specific teaching, this may mean that pupils receive a blend of in-person teaching and supervised virtual input for specific subject areas. Whilst we would not routinely recommend virtual teaching input for pupils in the Broad General Education and would endeavour to maintain as much in-person class teaching as possible, this may be a reasonable approach for specific subject specialist input. Young people in the Broad General Education would always be supervised by an adult present in the room. Dalry Secondary School will endeavour to ensure that the curriculum meets the entitlements set out in Curriculum for Excellence wherever possible.

There are challenges when considering appropriate senior phase provision (S4). Any senior phase curriculum would need to be negotiated year on year, depending on pupil numbers, the availability of specialist GTCS-registered teachers, and the aspirations of the young people.

In summary, the educational benefit to pupils of a nursery to S4 'all-through' school is as follows:

- Pupils remain in their community, maintaining strong links to their families and the Glenkens community. This promotes a strong sense of personal belonging, which enables young people to be:
 - Effective contributors
 - Responsible citizens
- Pupils experience high-quality learning and teaching, delivered in innovative and bespoke ways, enabling young people to experience:
 - A range of curriculum areas and subjects
 - Interdisciplinary learning delivered across year groups and possibly across sectors
 - The ethos of life of the school as part of a Glenkens community
- Pupils in the Dalry catchment experience a maximum travelling distance of approximately 15 miles north along the A713, 6 miles east along the A702, 7 miles south along the A713 or 10 miles west along the A712. This supports the health and well-being of pupils by maintaining a reasonable travel time and allows young people of secondary age to travel with siblings and extended family and friendship groups across the primary and secondary age range.
- Pupils experience the enhanced transition opportunities that come with being part of an 'all-through' school. There are increased opportunities to develop the wider school curriculum and a bespoke Glenkens curriculum.

8.7 Summary

Option 3 would retain education at Dalry through a Nursery to S4 'all-through' model, maintaining local provision for all compulsory stages and supporting continuity of learning and relationships. It reflects strong stakeholder support, particularly around stability, community identity, reduced travel, and the benefits of a small, familiar learning environment.

However, feedback and evidence highlight ongoing challenges. Very small cohort sizes would continue to constrain curriculum breadth, particularly at S3 and S4, and require reliance on composite classes and flexible staffing arrangements. Delivery of a full and sustainable secondary curriculum would remain dependent on staffing availability, leadership capacity and sufficient enrolment.

Financially, costs associated with maintaining a very small secondary cohort would continue, with limited scope for efficiency or maintaining a broad curriculum. In rural terms, while this option supports community sustainability and local access in the short term, its long-term viability depends on stabilising or increasing pupil numbers.

Overall, this option supports continuity and local provision but only partially addresses the underlying sustainability challenges identified, with its success dependent on enrolment, staffing and deliverability over time.

9. Option 4 - School closure and re-align catchment to Castle Douglas High School

Under this option, Dalry Secondary School would close permanently, with its secondary catchment area being realigned to Castle Douglas High School. Dalry Nursery and Dalry Primary School would continue to operate as normal.

This option reflects the current and projected low pupil numbers at Dalry Secondary School, which present significant challenges in sustaining a viable and comprehensive secondary education offer. By consolidating secondary provision at Castle Douglas High School, this option seeks to provide pupils with access to a broader curriculum, a wider range of subject choices, and enhanced opportunities for learning, social interaction, and progression.

For pupils and families, this option would involve a permanent transition to a new school, including changes to daily travel arrangements and integration into a larger school community. While this may represent a significant change, it would provide greater stability and certainty in educational provision compared to options that retain an element of future change or uncertainty.

The permanent closure of Dalry Secondary School would have implications for the school building, staff, and the wider community. These include changes to staffing arrangements, the future use of the Dalry Secondary School site, and the potential impact on community identity and local access to services. These factors, alongside the educational, financial and transport implications, are explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

9.1 Community Feedback

Feedback on the closure option was mixed and often polarised across both the drop-in meetings and the online survey. A substantial number of stakeholders supported closure on the basis of improving educational experiences, while others strongly opposed it due to concerns about rural access, travel and community sustainability. Across both strands of engagement, there was broad agreement that the current

situation is not working; however, there was significant disagreement about whether closure represents a solution or creates further challenges.

Educational benefits

Feedback from the drop-in meetings was largely unsupportive of the educational benefits of closure, with several stakeholders stating there were “none” and expressing concern that removing local provision would require pupils to leave their community for education. Some participants emphasised that small school environments can provide positive educational outcomes through smaller class sizes and more individual attention, although it was acknowledged that social opportunities may be more limited in very small cohorts. There was also a view that perceived limitations in the current model were linked to reduced subject provision and lack of investment, rather than the principle of local secondary education itself.

Survey feedback presented a more divided position. A significant number of respondents supported closure on the basis that it would allow pupils to access a broader curriculum, greater subject choice and wider social opportunities, particularly at Castle Douglas High School. These respondents highlighted concerns about current limitations in subject availability, specialist teaching and the ability to deliver the full Curriculum for Excellence.

However, a similarly strong body of responses opposed closure, arguing that it would remove an important form of provision for pupils who benefit from smaller settings, including those with additional support needs, anxiety or wellbeing challenges. Many of these responses framed closure as reducing choice rather than improving it, particularly for families who prefer a smaller or local school environment.

Overall, stakeholders tended to agree that educational experiences must improve but differed fundamentally on whether this should be achieved through closure or through investment and reform of local provision.

Effect on the local community

At the drop-in meetings, stakeholders consistently described closure as having a significant negative impact on the local community. The school was frequently characterised as a central community asset or “beating heart” of the area, supporting cohesion, local identity and attracting families to live in rural communities. Closure was seen as conflicting with wider policy aims around rural regeneration and was described as likely to discourage families from moving to, or remaining in, the Glenkens. Concerns were also raised about the potential impact on local employment, including teaching and support staff roles, and the wider economic contribution associated with having a school in the area.

Survey feedback strongly reinforced these themes. Many respondents argued that closure would contribute to depopulation, ageing demographics and reduced economic activity, with some describing it as a “slow death” for the community or expressing concern that the area could become less attractive to younger families. The link between education provision and long-term community sustainability was a

recurring theme, with respondents emphasising that access to local schooling is a key factor in decisions about where families choose to live and work.

However, a number of survey responses took an alternative view, suggesting that resources currently used to maintain a small school could be reallocated to strengthen provision elsewhere, and that the viability of the local community should not be dependent on maintaining a secondary school with very low roll numbers. Despite this, the predominant community-focused feedback emphasised the risk of long-term decline in the area if the school were to close.

Effect of any different travel arrangements

Meeting feedback highlighted significant concerns about the travel implications of closure, particularly given the rural nature of the catchment. Stakeholders emphasised long distances to alternative schools, including journeys of over 30 miles, and suggested that travel times could be excessive, in some cases approaching two hours each way. These were described as unreasonable and potentially detrimental to pupils' wellbeing, reducing time available for homework, extracurricular activities and social interaction. Travel was also seen as a factor that could deter families from living in more remote parts of the catchment.

Survey feedback similarly identified travel as a key area of concern, with respondents highlighting long bus journeys, extended school days and reduced participation in after-school activities. Practical issues such as reliance on school transport, limited flexibility and the impact on family routines were frequently referenced. Some respondents also raised concerns about equality of access, particularly for pupils living in more remote areas or those with additional needs. Conversely, other survey responses suggested that travel to a larger secondary school is a common feature of rural education and is justified by access to a wider range of learning opportunities, facilities and peer groups. For these stakeholders, the benefits of a larger school environment were seen as outweighing the disadvantages associated with travel.

Overall, stakeholder feedback on closure reflects a clear tension between educational breadth and local accessibility. While many stakeholders recognise the challenges associated with sustaining a small secondary school, there is no consensus that closure provides a balanced solution. Support for closure is primarily driven by a desire to improve educational opportunities, whereas opposition is strongly linked to concerns about travel, loss of local provision and the longer-term sustainability of the Glenkens community.

All stakeholder feedback at both the Drop-in meetings and to the Online Survey can be found in their entirety in **Appendices 1 and 2**.

9.2 Pupil Feedback

Pupil responses to the option of permanent closure show an overall trend of support for the school remaining open, particularly among those currently attending Dalry schools, where the majority selected "support" or "strongly support".

Where feedback is most relevant to this option, it reflects the practical impacts of attending an alternative school. Approximately a third of respondents (30–35%) identified travel time and daily journey as a concern, including longer journeys and increased tiredness. A smaller proportion (around 10 to 15%) highlighted impacts on time outside school, including homework, hobbies and family time. Pupils also raised concerns about friendships and adjusting to a new environment.

Views differed depending on pupil context. Pupils currently attending Dalry Primary and Secondary schools were more likely to highlight travel, wellbeing and friendship impacts, while pupils attending other schools were more likely to report that closure would present no concern or challenge to them, with several also noting potential benefits such as wider subject choice and opportunities.

Pupil comments on this option included:

“dont shut the school its making communities dead and is a school i have been in and never been in another school

“i dont know i think it should just close.”

A full list of pupil feedback can be found in **Appendix 3**.

9.3 Pupil Numbers

Under this option, Dalry Secondary School would close, and there would be no attending pupil roll. All catchment pupils would relocate to Castle Douglas High School (or another school of their choosing).

The pupil data indicates that current pupil numbers are low and are forecast to remain limited over the medium term. Closure and catchment realignment would therefore consolidate pupils into a school with a higher roll, allowing for more stable class groupings, increased peer interaction, and greater staffing resilience.

The pupil roll forecast for Dalry Secondary School based on enrolment data as of April 2026 therefore is as follows (included an adjusted figure based on current for catchment uptake):

Dalry	Year	S1	S2	S3	S4	Total	Adjusted roll
	2025/26	5	1	1	5	12	
	2026/27	3	5	0	0	8	
	2027/28	11	3	5	0	19	9
	2028/29	8	11	3	5	27	13

Figure 21: Dalry Secondary Pupil Roll Forecast

These figures demonstrate the ongoing challenge of sustaining a viable secondary roll at Dalry Secondary School within current demographic trends.

9.4 Financial Information

Closure would result in a reduction in day-to-day revenue costs associated with staffing, utilities, and consumables at Dalry Secondary School. These savings would be partially offset by additional costs associated with pupil transport and accommodating pupils within receiving schools.

Following closure, the Dumfries and Galloway Council would still require determining the future use of the building, with potential ongoing costs for maintenance, security and statutory compliance depending on the approach taken.

While this option removes the ongoing cost of operating a very small secondary school, it introduces transitional and transport costs which would require to be managed. Overall, it offers greater potential for long term financial efficiency compared to maintaining provision.

The total net financial cost of operating Dalry Secondary School in 2024/25 was approximately £480,000.

9.5 Assessment of Rural Factors

9.5.1 Community Impact

Closure would represent a significant change for the Dalry community. The loss of a functioning secondary school would reduce daily activity and remove an important focal point for community life (although Dalry Primary School and Nursery would remain).

Evidence from other rural communities suggests that loss of local school provision can impact community confidence and future decision making by families, including choices around housing and school enrolment.

However, this option provides clarity and a definitive outcome, enabling Dumfries and Galloway Council and community to plan for future use of the building and wider provision without the prolonged uncertainty associated with temporary arrangements.

9.5.2 Travel arrangements

Under this option, secondary pupils living in the Dalry Secondary School catchment area would be required to travel to Castle Douglas High School (or an alternative school of their choice).

Travel arrangements would be provided in accordance with the Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023, which states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

and

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

Free school transport would be provided from designated pick-up points where pupils meet the eligibility criteria.

While transport would be arranged in line with policy, this option would result in longer daily travel times for pupils, increased reliance on vehicular transport, and a reduced ability for pupils to walk or cycle to school. These factors may disproportionately impact younger children and could affect participation in after-school activities and wider community engagement.

9.6 Educational Benefits

Since 2016, Dalry Secondary School has had a shared management arrangement with Castle Douglas High School. The Headteacher and 3FTE (full time equivalent) Depute Headteachers lead and manage across both schools, with one Depute Headteacher designated as the lead for Dalry Secondary School. S4 pupils who wish to continue their post 16 education routinely transfer to Castle Douglas High School, their partnership school.

At census (September 2025) the rolls for each year group at Castle Douglas High School were as follows:

Year Group	Roll
S1	76
S2	94
S3	114
S4	94
S5	84
S6	44
Total	506

Figure 22: Castle Douglas Pupil Roll (Census 2025)

These numbers enable flexible class groupings and support the delivery of all curriculum areas and subjects, as well as developing the four capacities within the four contexts for learning.

Pupils from Dalry Secondary School who join Castle Douglas High School, their partnership school, in S5 or, by parental choice, at any point after P7, are benefitting from learning with and alongside a greater number of peers of the same age and stage as themselves. 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' by allowing them to overcome challenges and exercise responsibilities as a member of a larger social group, within a supportive educational environment. They can 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.

Teachers at Castle Douglas High School plan, assess and track pupil progress to ensure that every child has the challenge, support and opportunity to reach their full potential. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a key priority for the whole staff team. 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. This support, alongside close working with parents and carers, helps to ensure the needs of every young person are met.

Schools annually report on attainment in reading, writing, listening and talking, and numeracy at the end of S3. Nationally, around 90% of pupils achieve level 3 at the end of S3, with between 61% and 69% of pupils achieving level 4.

Pupils at Castle Douglas High School are supported through high quality learning and teaching to develop their understanding and skills in all curriculum areas. Currently, performance at level 3 is above the national average. Attainment at level 4 is increasing year on year, becoming in line with national averages.

Rights Respecting Schools, the school culture and ethos and nurture principles are a key focus for Castle Douglas High School. This focused approach has supported the development of positive relationships across the whole school community. The larger number of staff and parent/carer body, alongside a greater number of community partners, naturally gives the school an increased breadth of talent, interests and opportunities to harness and share. This applies across the school in terms of the wider curriculum opportunities afforded to young people, as well as the enhancement by staff individual expertise, such as Physical Education opportunities, Expressive Arts and STEM (Science, technology, engineering and maths).

In S4, pupils at Castle Douglas High School are benefiting from an increased curriculum offer, which includes a range of National Qualifications, college opportunities and Foundation Apprenticeships. The revised curriculum at Castle Douglas High School now offers over one hundred option choices for pupils. Pupils are supported to make high-quality decisions about the blend of qualifications and subjects they wish to take, matched to their aspirations. High-quality tracking throughout the BGE supports teachers, young people and families to identify the best and most appropriate range of qualifications.

In summary, the educational benefit of statutory consultation on a proposal to close Dalry Secondary School and re-align the catchment area with Castle Douglas High School is as follows:

- Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their social skills, belong to a wide range of friendship groups, and overcome challenges and exercise responsibilities as a member of a larger social group, within a supportive educational environment. Pupils can participate in a wide range of opportunities within the wider school curriculum. This enables them to be:
 - Effective contributors
 - Responsible citizens
 - Confident individuals
- Pupils experience high quality learning and teaching to develop their understanding and skills in all curriculum areas. They are taught in single stage classes and experience a wider diversity of ideas, opportunities for rich discussion and alternative viewpoints. Pupils experience opportunities for critical thinking and developing problem solving skills through group work. This means that they can:
 - Develop as Successful Learners
 - Experience the complete range of curriculum areas and subjects
 - Be involved in interdisciplinary learning
 - Have a sense of belonging in the ethos of life of the school as part of a wider Castle Douglas and Glenkens community
 - Be involved in opportunities for personal development
- Pupils benefit from teachers and support staff who are part of whole school and wider regional and national networks. Staff work together collaboratively to continuously improve learning and teaching, share good practice and engage in professional learning.
- Pupils with Additional Support Needs benefit from carefully considered and bespoke plans that meet their needs. Support is available from resources within school and from other agencies that work in partnership with the school, the pupils and families. The school has a dedicated support hub, and investment in a dedicated Learning Centre provision is due to commence in August 2026.

9.7 Summary

This option would involve the permanent closure of Dalry Secondary School, with pupils attending Castle Douglas High School. It would provide access to a broader curriculum, a wider range of subject choices and increased opportunities for social interaction and progression within a larger, more sustainable school setting. However, stakeholder feedback on this option is highly divided. While some support closure due to limitations in the current provision, many raise concerns about the impact of increased travel, reduced local access to education and the loss of a community asset.

In rural terms, this option would significantly increase travel distances and reliance on transport, with potential impacts on pupil wellbeing, participation and equality of access, particularly for those in more remote areas.

Overall, this option addresses issues of educational breadth and long-term sustainability but raises concerns regarding accessibility and the wider impact on the Glenkens community.

10. Summary of Appraisals

This Preliminary Requirements report has been prepared to meet the enhanced statutory duties that apply to a remote rural school. In particular, it sets out Dumfries and Galloway Council's reasons for considering a closure proposal and identifies and considers reasonable alternatives with regard to likely educational benefits, likely effects on the local community and likely effects of any different travel arrangements. The Council must also continue to meet its wider statutory duty to secure adequate and efficient school education across its area and to ensure that educational benefit is central to any significant change affecting school provision.

The reasons for the proposal are clear and inter-related: a very low and declining school roll, increasing difficulty sustaining a broad and balanced curriculum within very small cohorts, low numbers of catchment pupils, low catchment attendance with the majority of catchment pupils choosing other schools, continuing regional pupil number decline, and ongoing recruitment and staffing challenges. These factors create increasing difficulty in planning sustainable secondary provision on the Dalry Secondary School site, particularly when set against the wider context of delivering a high standard of education, Dumfries and Galloway Council's Learning Estate Strategy to have the right schools in the right places, and the statutory requirement to adequately plan for current and future demand across the region.

In considering the reasonable alternatives identified through four in-person engagement meetings and the online survey, officers have assessed at a high level, the extent to which each option can respond to the reasons for the proposal while safeguarding pupil experience and entitlement. For convenience each option has been summarised below.

Option 1 (Status Quo) would retain continuity of provision at Dalry Secondary School, avoiding immediate disruption and maintaining local access to S1–S4 education within the Dalry and Glenkens area. As set out in the Educational Benefits section, this option supports pupils to remain within their local community, maintaining strong relationships with peers, families and staff, minimising travel time, and promoting a strong sense of belonging. Stakeholder and pupil feedback highlights perceived benefits associated with small class sizes, personalised and bespoke learning approaches, familiarity, and reduced anxiety for pupils who value a stable and local school environment.

However, the Educational Benefits section also identifies significant educational challenges associated with operating very small secondary cohorts. Extremely low current and forecast pupil numbers necessitate composite class arrangements and, in some cases, blended or supervised virtual teaching in order to meet Curriculum for Excellence entitlements and subject specialist requirements. Very small group sizes limit opportunities for peer interaction, rich discussion and collaborative learning, and create challenges in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, particularly within the Senior Phase. S4 provision is inherently constrained by pupil numbers, the availability of secondary qualified teachers, and the need to renegotiate the curriculum offer year-on-year.

In relation to the reasons for the proposal, maintaining the status quo does not introduce solutions to address extremely low pupil numbers, limited catchment uptake, curriculum breadth constraints or longer-term staffing resilience. Ongoing reliance on a very small number of staff, combined with potential professional isolation and recruitment challenges, continues to present risks to sustainability. Financial pressures associated with high and increasing cost per pupil would also remain unresolved. While this option aligns closely with stakeholder and pupil preferences for stability, continuity and local provision, it does not in itself address the underlying capacity, sustainability and efficiency concerns that have led to the Preliminary Requirements process.

Option 2 (Temporary Closure) would allow time for further consideration without an immediate permanent decision, and, during the closure period, pupils would access secondary education at alternative schools, principally Castle Douglas High School. From an educational perspective, this offers pupils the opportunity to learn within larger cohorts, benefitting from broader curriculum choice, single-stage classes, greater staffing capacity and enhanced opportunities for peer interaction for a temporary period of time. As set out in the Educational Benefits section, this environment supports the development of the four capacities, enables access to a wider range of subjects, qualifications and wider achievement opportunities, and provides strengthened support structures, including established GIRFEC processes and enhanced Additional Support Needs provision.

However, for pupils and families, the practical impact of temporary closure would be equivalent to permanent closure for the duration of the arrangement, particularly in relation to transition, increased daily travel, loss of local provision, and disruption to established relationships and sense of belonging within the Glenkens community. The Educational Benefits section also recognises that temporary closure sustains uncertainty on the future of the school, which may pose risks to pupil wellbeing and mental health, particularly for those who value familiarity and stability.

In relation to the reasons for the proposal, while this option enables pupils to access a high-quality and comprehensive educational offer elsewhere, it does not in itself address the underlying issues at Dalry Secondary School, including extremely low pupil numbers, limited catchment uptake, curriculum breadth constraints and longer-term staffing resilience. National statutory consultation guidance indicates that temporary closure is intended to be used where there is credible evidence that circumstances, such as pupil numbers, are likely to improve within a defined period.

Based on current and forecast enrolment data, there is no evidence at present to indicate that pupil numbers are expected to increase significantly in future years to the contrary, numbers of catchment pupils are set to fall. In the absence of a clear and realistic pathway to roll growth, the ability of this option to resolve the underlying sustainability challenges that have led to the Preliminary Requirements process remains limited. Dalry Nursery and Dalry Primary School would continue to operate as normal.

Option 3 (Nursery to S4 'all-through' provision) retains education within the Dalry school community for all compulsory stages up to and including S4, with senior phase (S5 and S6) only provision continuing at Castle Douglas High School. As set

out in the Educational Benefits section, this model supports continuity of learning and relationships across stages, promotes a strong sense of belonging, and reflects stakeholder views on the benefits of small class sizes, personalised learning and a familiar environment. It may also strengthen community confidence and support local sustainability by maintaining the school as a central focus for education.

However, the Educational Benefits section also identifies ongoing challenges associated with delivering a Broad General Education and S4 curriculum within very small cohorts. Current and forecast pupil numbers would continue to require composite classes and, in some cases, blended or supported virtual teaching to meet subject entitlement. Very small class sizes limit opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative learning, and constrain the breadth and consistency of curriculum offer, particularly at key pathway stages in S3 and S4. Delivery would remain dependent on the availability of suitably qualified staff and the capacity to sustain a viable staffing model within an 'all-through' structure.

In relation to the reasons for the proposal, this option may partially address issues of confidence, continuity and catchment uptake by reinforcing local provision. However, it does not fully address the core challenges of very low pupil numbers, curriculum breadth, and long-term staffing resilience. Financial pressures associated with operating a small secondary cohort would also remain. While this option aligns with stakeholder preferences for local access and continuity, its ability to resolve the underlying sustainability concerns depends on leadership capacity, staffing and curriculum deliverability, and whether pupil numbers can be stabilised or increased in practice.

Option 4 (Closure and catchment re-alignment to Castle Douglas High School)

would address many of the challenges associated with sustaining secondary provision at Dalry Secondary School. Pupils would access education within a larger school environment at Castle Douglas High School, benefiting from broader curriculum choice, greater subject availability, single stage classes, enhanced staffing capacity and wider opportunities for social interaction and progression. As outlined in the Educational Benefits section, this setting supports the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence, the development of the four capacities, and access to additional opportunities including extracurricular activities, college links and supported pathways into further education and employment.

However, for pupils and families, this option represents a significant and permanent change, particularly in relation to increased daily travel, loss of local secondary provision and transition into a larger school environment. Stakeholder feedback highlights concerns about the impact of longer journeys, reduced time for family life and activities, and the potential effect on wellbeing and inclusion, particularly for those living in more remote areas or who may benefit from smaller educational settings. The Educational Benefits section also recognises that, while larger settings provide wider opportunities, they may not meet the preferences or needs of all learners.

Permanent closure also carries wider implications beyond education provision. Stakeholder feedback consistently highlights concerns regarding the impact on the Glenkens community, including the potential effect on population retention, local

identity and future viability of the area. While this option offers clarity and certainty, it does not seek to retain secondary education within the community and therefore raises important considerations in relation to rural sustainability and accessibility.

Overall, Option 4 offers a sustainable solution to the current educational challenges, but introduces significant impacts for pupils, families and the wider community. The balance between improved educational breadth and the loss of local provision, alongside increased travel requirements, represents the key consideration in assessing this option. Dalry Nursery and Dalry Primary School would continue to operate as normal.

11. Impact Assessment Screening

Impact Assessment Screening Documents have been completed for each of the 4 options appraised to provide a consistent and structured evaluation of potential impacts across a range of areas, including protected characteristics, children's rights, health and wellbeing, poverty, environmental sustainability and, critically, economic and social sustainability.

The assessments identify whether impacts are positive, negative or neutral and provide supporting rationale, ensuring all effects are transparently considered.

Particular focus is given to the role of Dalry Secondary School within the Glenkens as both an educational establishment and a key community asset, assessing how each option may influence local employment, economic activity, population retention and the viability of other services, alongside its contribution to community cohesion, identity and social wellbeing.

This includes recognising the school's function as a hub for community life and the potential implications of change for rural sustainability, ensuring that decisions are informed not only by educational factors but also by the potential wider economic and social impact on the local community.

The Summary Impact Assessments can be found in **Appendix 4**.

12. Addressing Depopulation Study

A significant body of recent research on depopulation in Dumfries and Galloway, including the Council-commissioned Addressing Depopulation study, highlights that population change is influenced by a complex combination of factors including access to education, housing, employment, transport, health services and social connections. These factors are interdependent and shape whether individuals and families choose to remain in, leave or move to rural communities, with locally available services identified as critical in sustaining population levels.

In this context, each option for Dalry Secondary School has been evaluated in the impact assessment with regard to its potential impact on the local community, recognising the school's role as one element within this wider ecosystem. Community engagement undertaken through drop-in sessions, stakeholder discussions and the online survey has provided a clear and consistent range of local

views, ensuring that lived experience informs this assessment. Within this feedback, depopulation has been frequently referenced as an underlying concern, with stakeholders identifying links between the availability of local services, including education provision, and the longer-term sustainability and attractiveness of the Glenkens as a place to live.

13. Most Appropriate Response

Having identified the reasons for the proposal, considered the reasonable alternatives to closure, and assessed the likely educational benefits, community impacts and travel impacts of both the proposal and the alternatives, Dumfries and Galloway Council considers that school closure and catchment realignment to Castle Douglas High School represents the most appropriate response.

The underlying issues affecting Dalry Secondary School include a sustained and significant decline in pupil numbers, resulting in very small cohort sizes, limited opportunities for peer interaction, and increasing challenges in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum across both the Broad General Education and Senior Phase. These factors impact on the educational experience of young people, including subject choice, social development and access to a wider range of learning and extra-curricular opportunities. In addition, the high cost per pupil, together with the ongoing requirement to maintain staffing and facilities for very low numbers of pupils, raises concerns about the efficient and sustainable use of resources.

A range of potential alternatives has been identified and considered, including maintaining the current model, temporary closure, variations of an all-through school model, and stakeholder-generated proposals such as a Glenkens Education and Learning Hub. While these options offer some potential benefits, not all were considered to represent reasonable alternatives in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as they do not address the underlying reasons for the proposal or provide a viable and sustainable model of statutory education.

The assessment of these options has taken into account the likely impacts on the community, travel arrangements and educational benefits. It is recognised that any change, particularly closure of the secondary school, would have a significant impact on the local community and on pupils and families, including increased travel and the loss of local provision. At the same time, the very small roll and resulting staffing and curriculum constraints present ongoing challenges in delivering a consistently high quality and sustainable secondary education on the Dalry site.

While closure would require pupils to attend an alternative secondary school, it would provide access to a wider curriculum, larger peer groups and more sustainable staffing structures. These factors are considered important in supporting positive educational outcomes and ensuring that young people are able to fully access their entitlements under Curriculum for Excellence.

On balance, and having considered the available evidence, the Council considers that closure represents the most appropriate response to the identified challenges. It provides a sustainable solution for delivering high quality statutory secondary education, while ensuring that resources are used effectively and in a way that best

supports the long-term educational interests of pupils in both the Glenkens and across Dumfries and Galloway.