



Right School, Right Place:

a Plain English Guide to the
Learning Estate Strategy

DRAFT



Purpose

This plain English guide explains the main principles of Dumfries and Galloway Council's Learning Estate Strategy, "Right School, Right Place".

It brings together key information, facts and illustrative examples to make the council's overall approach to planning and investing in its learning estate easier to understand.

The guide does not replace the full Learning Estate Strategy or cover every aspect of it. Detailed information will be provided when specific proposals affecting individual schools are considered. These will follow the appropriate decision-making and, where required, consultation process.

The strategy was informed by surveys and workshops held across Dumfries and Galloway in 2023/24.



Key principles of the strategy

1. Right School, Right Place: ensuring every child has the right school in the right location

What this means: the strategy aims to ensure communities are served by schools that are the right size, in the right place, in good condition and equipped with modern, high-quality facilities.

Illustrative example: The Dalbeattie Learning Campus brought nursery, primary, secondary and community facilities onto one site, replacing separate buildings and creating a hub for the town. Similarly, Wallace Hall Academy in Thornhill offers a high-quality, future-ready campus with flexible spaces, strong digital infrastructure and facilities designed to support education and wider community use. These projects illustrate how “Right School, Right Place” can deliver better facilities and community benefits.

2. Learners at the centre: decisions put children first

What this means: the educational interests of children and young people are central to learning estate decisions. Potential changes, such as merging schools or altering catchment areas, are considered in terms of their educational impact and benefits.

Illustrative example: Creating The Bridge, a post-15 learning centre, allows young people from all Dumfries schools to access specialist courses such as hospitality or engineering without duplicating facilities. This gives pupils more options and ensures resources are focussed where they have most impact.

3. Modern, sustainable and climate-resilient schools: fewer buildings but better quality

What this means: many school buildings are dated or under-used. The strategy supports investment in new and refurbished schools that are energy-efficient, climate-resilient and digitally enabled. It seeks to create a sustainable estate, with fewer but better-quality buildings and modern learning spaces.

Illustrative example: over the last decade the council has delivered Dalbeattie High School, North West Community Campus, St Joseph’s College and a brand-new Dumfries High School. These new campuses often integrate early years through senior-phase learning, offer flexible learning spaces and meet high environmental standards, illustrating the fewer but better principle.

Key principles of the strategy (cont'd)

4. Supporting rural schools and communities

What this means: schools are at the heart of many communities. The council's Rural School Estate Strategy supports viable two-class schools in remote rural areas and avoids creating one-teacher schools.

Illustrative example: by maintaining at least two teachers, rural pupils benefit from peer interaction and teachers have collegial support. Low pupil numbers alone do not determine a rural school's future. Any proposal to close a rural school must show clear educational benefit and follow the required community consultation process.

5. Two-teacher minimum: ending single-teacher schools

What this means: single-teacher schools can limit curriculum breadth and leave staff isolated. The strategy aims for at least two teachers in small schools. One-teacher schools will only continue in exceptional cases.

Illustrative example: in practice, this may mean combining classes or catchments so children attend a school with two teachers. This gives pupils a richer learning environment and ensures teachers have colleagues to collaborate with.

6. Safe transport and reasonable travel times

What this means: when school changes mean longer journeys, the council provides free transport. Travel times are kept reasonable, typically around 30 minutes for primary pupils and 45 minutes for secondary pupils. This protects children from being disadvantaged by distance.

Illustrative example: in proposals to merge small schools, transport plans are part of the consultation. Transport arrangements are considered as part of relevant proposals, including journey times, safety and children's wellbeing.

7. Clear communication and appropriate engagement

What this means: the council will provide clear information about proposed changes and the process that applies. Where formal consultation is required, communities will be able to have their say through the process set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. Rural-school closure proposals have additional safeguards.

What this means in practice: for proposals requiring consultation, the council shares the relevant information and provides opportunities for people to give their views.

Key principles of the strategy (cont'd)

For other decisions, the council will explain what is changing, why and who will be involved. Clear communication helps people understand the process and how they can take part.

The process depends on the decision being considered. For example, a temporary closure, sometimes called mothballing, follows a different process from a proposal to close a school permanently.

8. Digital solutions: connecting learners and staff

What this means: technology can overcome isolation for small or rural schools. Well-established digital platforms such as Glow can connect pupils and teachers, allowing rural learners to join lessons delivered in other schools and giving teachers access to professional networks.

Illustrative example: an S5 pupil can study a subject taught at another school by joining lessons online through DG Schools Connect. This gives young people access to specialist teachers and a wider choice of subjects.



Our learning estate: facts and context

These figures provide context about the scale, geography and future planning of Dumfries and Galloway's learning estate:

Statistic	Figure or detail
Number of pupils	Around 18,000 children and young people attend Dumfries and Galloway schools.
Number of schools	111 schools in total: 94 primary, 16 secondary and 1 specialist school.
Value of school estate	Approximately £1.4 billion.
Geography	The region covers 2481 square miles, making it Scotland's third-largest local authority area.
Rural schools	67 rural schools, including 40 'Accessible Rural' and 27 'Remote Rural' schools, make up roughly 60% of the estate.
Population trend	The number of children aged under 15 is projected to decline by 23% by 2043.
Key investments	Major strategic projects delivered in the last decade include Dalbeattie High School, North West Community Campus, The Bridge, St Joseph's College and the new £53 million Dumfries High School. Significant improvements have also been delivered across the region, including major refurbishments at Castle Douglas High School, Park Primary, Beattock Primary, Rephad Primary, Locharbriggs Primary, Annan Academy, New Abbey Primary, Castle Kennedy Primary, Elmvale Primary, Gatehouse Primary, Newington Primary, Laurieknowe Primary, Leswalt Primary, Noblehill Primary, St Michael's Primary and Douglas Ewart High School.

Further information

Topic	Why it matters	What the strategy says
Planning for fewer pupils	Anticipate population decline and adjust the estate gradually.	The strategy takes account of the projected reduction in the number of children aged under 15 and supports long-term planning for the learning estate. This is intended to allow changes to be considered in a planned way rather than only when individual buildings or schools become unsustainable.
Schools as community hubs	More than just classrooms.	Schools can provide facilities and services for the wider community as well as learning spaces. New or refurbished schools may support community events, adult learning, co-located services, regeneration and local economic development.
Clear criteria for decisions	Clear and fair.	The strategy provides a framework for considering factors including building condition, pupil numbers, geography, travel and cost. The relevant evidence and circumstances will be considered when individual proposals are developed.
Annual review and accountability	Ongoing review.	The Learning Estate Management Plan supports ongoing review of the estate, including information about building condition and investment. This helps the council monitor the strategy and provides updated information about the learning estate.

About this guide

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It does not replace the full Learning Estate Strategy or cover every aspect of it. Any specific proposal affecting an individual school will be supported by detailed information and will follow the appropriate decision-making and, where required, consultation process.

The guide will be reviewed and updated when relevant information, policies or decisions change.





Photo: Dumfries High School