



## Proposal to the Scottish Government

December 2016

### **Executive summary**

This document outlines the way in which Drumduan School is addressing the attainment gap and supporting young people to thrive in school, and to find their own positive destinations in life. Education Scotland has already recognized that the Drumduan curriculum closely aligns with the curriculum for excellence and has recommended that the school's practice should be shared more widely.

***“Education Scotland will work with the school to record and share more widely this innovative practice.”*** (Education Scotland, post registration inspection report, 2014)

At a time when the Government is re-examining ways of delivering education across Scotland, we believe that a unique opportunity exists to study and promote the Drumduan methodology as a close relative of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Whilst we acknowledge the success of educational systems such as the Finnish model, we feel that Drumduan School is already achieving similar positive results here in Scotland. This has been recognized by Education Scotland and is already being evidenced by the successful placement of our graduates in universities and colleges.

The need to charge fees at Drumduan creates a barrier to entry for low-income families, and prevents the school from being truly inclusive and fully representative of Scottish society. Our policy is to be as inclusive as possible and we therefore provide bursary assistance to many families. At this stage, however, we cannot meet the full requirements that this open-door policy demands. We tackle this problem and the overall running costs of the school with private patronage funding, but this is not a long-term sustainable model, nor one that is workable at a national level. We already receive Moray Council Early Years Funding for children attending our Kindergarten, however this stops when children reach the age of



five, often forcing families to withdraw their children from the school. We firmly believe that the efficacy of our educational model would justify this government funding being extended throughout the whole school.

We propose therefore that the Scottish Government funds Drumduan School for a period of three years at a level of £600,000 per year, to enable us to remove the current fee-paying system. The resultant model will be scalable across Scotland and will be as highly effective in closing the attainment gap nationally, as it has been for us locally.

### **Drumduan School – ethos and practice**

Based in the Scottish Highlands, the Drumduan School project was initiated in response to the need for a radically different solution to the question of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What began four years ago as a pioneering single class looking for a progressive secondary level curriculum has in a very short space of time become a whole school of pupils from age three to 18.

By providing a broad skills base through experiential learning, our students acquire a depth of knowledge and develop wide-ranging capabilities. These translate easily into high attainment within diverse areas of life and resonate with the current reassessment of educational models in Scotland.

Drumduan School's ethos is based on three core principles. That every student:

- graduates from our school having the balance of a high level of academic ability, practical hand skills and cultural, emotional and artistic intelligence;
- reaches their full potential as a citizen of the world, capable of compassion, courage and creative responses to the challenges of our times; and
- achieves a positive destination where they can draw on their resilience, flexibility and resourcefulness.



This ethos is demonstrated through a comprehensive curriculum that draws inspiration from many current themes in education worldwide. Drumduan School's position of independence allows us to constantly survey the horizon of educational development in the world and has enabled us to pilot many new ideas and practices in our teaching.

Drumduan Upper School first opened its doors in August 2013, putting into action its pioneering practices and immediately attracting positive attention and new students from across the globe. In January 2016, the team behind the project took over management of what was the Moray Steiner School to form Drumduan School, now providing an education for children from kindergarten through middle school and on to the upper school, which students complete age 18 years.

Drumduan School caters for both local children and international students. Often, families move to the area so that their children can experience what our education offers. Older students also choose to join later in their school journey as, for many different reasons, they find that Drumduan School meets their particular needs. We currently have students in our Upper School from New Zealand, Germany, Hong Kong and the USA.

In the past year, we have had over 40 employment applications from teachers from all over the world, as well as numerous visits from interested academics and educationalists.

The key features of Drumduan School's curriculum are:

- o BALANCE – in our experience, academic achievement is enhanced when education is **a balance between cognitive learning and practical and artistic activities**. Our curriculum and timetable reflect this.



- PROTECTING CHILDHOOD – A key feature of education in Finland and other European countries is a later start to literacy and numeracy which **facilitates the learning potential of each child**. At Drumduan, formal learning starts at age six. Our kindergarten curriculum for three to six year olds is designed to support the development of language and communication through outdoor play, crafts, art, storytelling and singing. This provides the foundations for reading, writing and maths learning. Moreover, homework is only gradually introduced from the age of twelve, allowing pupils space to pursue their own interests at the end of the school day. This **enhances and aids in the retention of what has been learned** at school.
  
- ENCOUNTER – after daily singing and movement, the **students engage more fully with their work**. Similarly, weekly outdoor pursuits encourage an active and enthusiastic interaction with the environment and can provide pupils with the opportunity to cross their own personal thresholds.
  
- COHESIVE TOPICS – lessons are taught in **immersive four-week blocks** where specialist subject teachers contribute to the students' interdisciplinary experience of a theme.
  
- INTERACTIVE - we provide **a semi-permeable education**. For younger pupils, working and learning in nature provides many educational opportunities. Older students encounter the world through work experience, volunteering, and fortnightly visits to the school by inspirational speakers. **Regular sessions of personal and social education** provide a forum for debate, discussion and the development of emotional maturity.
  
- VERTICAL LEARNING - knowledge is truly embodied when it can be taught by the pupils themselves. Our young people have regular opportunities to **consolidate their learning** during specifically designed, mixed age group projects.



- SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING - in a world of digital information, it is important that young people are given **the skills to navigate their own learning**. We enable this through **regular independent student projects** based on their own personal questions and research.
- ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION - the **students' personal motivation is enhanced by our non-exam based model** in which outcomes are evaluated through self-assessment and teacher input.

Replacing qualifications with high quality portfolios does not affect the ability of our **students to move into further education**. Indeed, out of our first graduating year, a significant number of our students are progressing onto university and college without exams. It is important for parents to understand that universities and colleges already accept mature students and overseas students on the basis of interview and onsite assessments, and more and more these institutions are recognising that the calibre of the student can often be a more reliable guide to long-term success than a set of paper qualifications.



Testimonials for Drumduan School include the following:

- *"I would like to use this opportunity to thank the staff of the Drumduan Upper School for the fabulous year [REDACTED] I have the impression, that he loved the school and was very sad to leave. I am sure that in the next [REDACTED] he would often like to swap schools instantly with a magic wand. I believe, you made him into a carefree, open and content person, something we could not accomplish in [REDACTED] thank you for that!"*

[REDACTED]

who spent a year at Drumduan School in 2015/16

- *[REDACTED] his unconditional offer from [REDACTED] in writing. We do feel this is quite an achievement as, of course, they were looking for certain exam results and they have accepted [REDACTED] to the higher of the two courses on offer. His confidence to attempt all this is very much due to the round experience of finding himself within the curriculum at Drumduan and we will be eternally grateful for that opportunity for him and can only thank the school for all the help and support that [REDACTED] been fortunate to receive.*

*We do feel that [REDACTED] learned more about [REDACTED] that mini portfolio than any exam could have furnished her with and it was a vehicle to prompt more in depth discussion at the interview with regards to what makes him tick."*

[REDACTED]

- *"The Registrar of Independent Schools has read the report which states that the overall quality of provision is very good. She is delighted to note a number of strengths of the school including approaches to personalised learning which provides a stimulating, creative and supportive ethos for learning. As a result Education Scotland will work with the school to record and share more widely this innovative practice."*

Education Scotland, post registration inspection report, 2014



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Mr. Richard Lochhead MSP  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

February 2017

Thank you for passing me the proposals from Drumduan School in Forres, seeking financial support from the Scottish Government to become a publicly-funded school, and for facilitating a meeting with them as part of my visit to Moray on 14 February.

While I am looking forward to meeting the representatives from the school, I wanted to be clear that I will not be in a position to make any funding offer to them at this time. As you know, we have been undertaking a review of the governance of education in Scotland and, at the moment, I am still considering my response to the recent consultation. I have received a small number of other, similar proposals for state-funded schools. They have all been informed that a decision will be taken in light of the outcome of the governance review. I will be taking the same line with Drumduan, and I think it is important that we manage their expectations.

I look forward to visiting your constituency with you next week.

**JOHN SWINNEY**

**From:** [REDACTED – 38(1)(b)]  
**Sent:** 15 February 2017 11:54  
**To:** [REDACTED – 38(1)(b)]  
**Subject:** RE: Drumduan

Hi

DFM met Drumduan yesterday as planned. Funding was not discussed beyond Drumduan saying “we are a fee paying school but do not want to be” but DFM was not pressed to provide funding or on figures and DFM did not make any comments in this regard. Discussion focussed on the Drumduan curriculum, how that aligns with Curriculum for Excellence, the importance of mental health and the challenges of getting students with no exam results into university. Interesting conversations.

Tilda Swinton asked DFM to visit Drumduan School at some point but again no commitments were made.

Regards,  
[REDACTED – 38(1)(b)]

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Richard Lochhead MSP

By email: [Richard.Lochhead.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:Richard.Lochhead.msp@parliament.scot)

15 June 2017

Dear Mr Lochhead,

Thank you for giving me the proposal, last December, from Drumduan School for Government funding for the school, and for facilitating my meeting in February with representatives from the school.

As you will recall, I indicated at the time that I would need to take a decision on this request in the context of the Governance Review. It was one of several proposals that the Government received seeking funding to become a state funded autonomous school. It was important that these proposals received careful consideration, and that this analysis took into account the wider issues that were part of the Governance Review, and its conclusions. Today I have published *Education Governance: Next Steps – Empowering Our Teachers, Parents and Communities to Deliver Excellence and Equity for Our Children*, setting out our response to the Governance Review consultation and our vision for Scotland's schools.

A full version of the Next Steps paper and accompanying reports can be found here:  
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/thegovernancereview>

The Governance Review raised a series of questions around the direction of education in Scotland, including how to empower parents and communities to play a greater role in our schools. It has considered carefully how that empowerment should best be delivered. One way of doing this might have been to support a new series of autonomous, state funded schools, and consideration of this option was assisted by studying the four proposals that the Government received. However, the Governance Review consultation responses made it clear that parents generally do not have an appetite to take on the management of their local school nor was there a view that this would help deliver our priorities of excellence and equity. The defining mission of this Government is to improve the education and life chances of all our children and young people, and everything we do will support that aim.

I believe that what must be consistent across Scotland are excellent school leaders and teachers, strong curriculum and improvement support, more transparent measures of progress, and engaged parents and communities. We need a system that supports as well

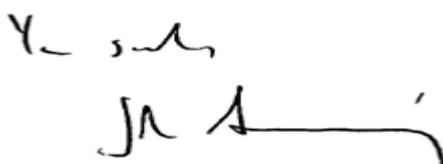
as empowers those teachers, and that means building a strong, collaborative, joined up system where schools work and improve together. There needs to be clear accountability from schools to government, at whatever level. Looking at the proposal from Drumduan, and those from the other schools, I am not persuaded that providing direct funding to these schools would help deliver the improvement we need to achieve.

Instead, we will significantly increase the autonomy of all our schools and the parental involvement in them. Crucially, however, our reforms deliver this within a clear national and local framework of policy and support. That collaborative and collective approach is a key strength of the Scottish system and critical to improving attainment and closing the attainment gap.

In reaching this conclusion, I have taken advice from Education Scotland on each of the four proposals to directly fund schools and whether these offer educational benefits. Education Scotland noted the innovative approach that Drumduan takes, and the success the school has had in developing its leadership and in meeting the needs of the children and young people attending. However, it would be a very significant change for Government to step in and fund the school, and there was no detail in Drumduan's proposal to suggest how this public funding would interact with local authority provision in the area, and why this was appropriate for this school and not other independent schools.

I know that Drumduan School and its young people are studying an innovative and interesting curriculum, and am delighted that some pupils are succeeding in the school who have struggled in other settings. Where the school has developed new approaches to meeting particular needs, I hope that it may be able to work with Education Scotland and the other schools in the area to showcase and spread good practice. However, it is necessary that we invest our limited public resources in local authority schools.

I am sorry I cannot be more helpful on this. Please feel free to share this letter with Drumduan School.



**JOHN SWINNEY**