



## **ARSN Statement Endorsed by McGrigor, Rice and Russell**

Argyll Rural Schools Network is delighted to have received support from three of the Argyll and Bute candidates for the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary elections. As part of the VOTE ARSN campaign, all candidates were asked whether they could sign up to the following statement:

"I support the call by ARSN for the withdrawal of the consultation list of possible school closures and the opening of dialogue between Argyll and Bute Council, ARSN, SRSN, political parties and other appropriate bodies with a view to drawing up a new vision of rural education in Argyll & Bute. I believe there should be a presumption against rural school closure and that the Council should adopt such a presumption as a foundation policy for education in the area."

Mick Rice, Mike Russell and Jamie McGrigor gave their immediate and unequivocal support. Alison Hay responded saying she could not endorse the ARSN statement. There was no response from the Liberal or Green candidates who were asked. Candidates were also asked for a brief statement of their own and these are now on the ARSN website at <http://arsn.org>.

ARSN believes that schools are an important part of the infrastructure that supports economic health and development across Argyll and Bute. School closures have a much wider impact than just in the affected community. All of us, from those small communities to shopkeepers in our towns will suffer the long reaching and long term effects. Electing a candidate who understands this is absolutely essential to the future of Argyll and Bute. Mike Russell, Jamie McGrigor and Mick Rice have demonstrated that understanding.

---END---

26 April 2011

For information: candidates were also invited to provide a short statement, 100 words or fewer, of their own. These are copied below, in the same order in which they were received.

### **Mick Rice, Labour candidate**

"With regard to educational policy, it is clear that the Council believes that "bigger is better". It is for this reason that it wished to "merge" schools in Lorne into the Benderloch campus and merge North Bute into the Rothesay Campus. It also has ongoing plans to merge the Dunoon Primaries into one new school.

It is clear that there is no education benefit from bigger schools per se and that the Scottish Rural Schools Network has cited research to that effect.

Keep up the fight!"

**Mike Russell, SNP candidate**

"In the last twenty years Argyll & Bute Council has closed a quarter of its schools. That self defeating policy has to stop. Rural schools are not only good schools they are a key part of the infrastructure which attracts and retains a viable population. We need a new vision for our area which is about growth - in houses, jobs and population - and retaining rural schools has to be at the heart of such a vision."

**Jamie McGrigor, Conservative candidate**

"Rural primary schools are a focal point of the disparate communities which make up the socio economic mosaic of counties like Argyll & Bute. These schools inspire pride in and recognition of each community. There is also indisputable evidence that individual attainment levels of the pupils in rural primaries are high compared to larger schools. This in itself should point to the small rural primary as a role model of excellence. Politicians continually encourage small class sizes. Rural primaries DO have small classes. I support a presumption against closure of rural schools."

**Alison Hay, Liberal Democrat candidate**

Thank you for your email. I will start by saying that I agree with much of what ARSN stands for but rather than sign your statement which you must know I cannot, I would rather give you a statement from me which I would like you to publish.

My views on Rural Education are as follows;

The aim of our schools must be to maximise the abilities of all our 5,800+ pupils. The service also needs to ensure the resources the public give the council via the Scottish Government are wisely, fairly and efficiently spent for the benefit of all our school children and their communities.

We must ensure that all our children get the best education possible, particularly at the early stages as they are vitally important to successful learning in later years. We must also ensure that all aspects of our educational service are fit for purpose, back room, Quality Improvement officers, teachers, managers at all levels need to be performing to their best, if not then the children are the ones who suffer and their future careers threatened, and finally.

We must be able to deliver a high quality service across the whole of Argyll and Bute regardless of the geographical difficulties. It is vitally important that children in remote or island locations are given the same educational opportunities as pupils in more heavily populated areas.

The council has been criticised by both Audit Scotland and by HMIE for wasting resources on half empty schools which is why we embarked on the current review of the school estate. The quality of education of all Argyll and Bute's children is the most important theme of the review and the preconsultation will allow us to consider all aspects that contribute to our pupils' educational experience.

I hope you understand my position and accept this view on Argyll and Bute's rural school service.

#### NOTES FOR EDITORS

ARSN is a network open to all schools in Argyll and Bute. The Network originally formed as a response to Argyll and Bute Council's 2010 proposals to close 26 primary schools (one third of all primary schools in the area). The Network successfully campaigned to persuade Argyll and Bute Council to abandon the original proposals.

ARSN provides a forum for schools to support each other. The current focus is to fight closure proposals, but the Network also wants to support the long term sustainability of rural communities. ARSN believes that communities are only truly sustainable if there is easy access to primary education so that families can feel confident when they choose to move to rural villages and settlements.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

E-mail: [arsnmedia@gmail.com](mailto:arsnmedia@gmail.com)

Or phone:

Tim McIntyre – 01631 720498 / 07842 520186

Brian Barker – 07708 461081 / 01546 886273