

# Case study



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Campaigner uses FOI Act to fight against closure of rural schools in Scotland.

Sandy Longmuir is the founder and Chair of the Scottish Rural Schools Network (SRSN), which was set up in 2005 at a time when around 75 rural schools were threatened with closure, and had been closing at a rate of eight per year over the previous decade. The SRSN campaigns on behalf of individual schools which undergo threat of closure, and lobbies parliament for changes in legislation. Mr Longmuir has used FOI laws extensively in order to examine the real facts behind school closure consultations and has experience of its use in several local authority areas.

Sandy says *“We started using FOI because some of the information provided during consultations was either scant or seemed very dubious. In several cases, FOI releases have helped bring a degree of clarity to the process.”*

The SRSN has campaigned to prevent the closure of over 60 rural schools, and has been successful in every case to date - FOI has helped them establish where there has been a strong case against closure. Mr Longmuir is in no doubt about the role that FOI has played in this success. *“We may not be ‘changing the world’ but we are changing the future for some sparse corners of Scotland. I am not sure how else we could have obtained some of the results we have.”*

Mr Longmuir also believes that use of FOI has enabled the SRSN to present *“incontrovertible evidence”* to the Scottish Government which helped make the case for the new Schools Closure Bill, introduced on 2 March 2009. The Bill aims to strengthen local authorities’ consultation process on school closures.

## **East Ayrshire – Crossroads School**

In late 2007, East Ayrshire Council issued a consultation document on the closure of Crossroads School in Kilmarnock, which included projected financial savings which would be achieved as a result of the closure. SRSN used FOI to obtain details on how that savings figured had been calculated, which raised some concerns for them. Sandy Longmuir used the information obtained as a result of FOI requests to compile a range of questions for discussion with the Council. A week after the meeting between SRSN and the Council to discuss the situation, Crossroads School plus three others were reprieved from closure.

**For more information contact the Policy & Information team on 01334 464610**