

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.

Highlands – Roy Bridge

FOI was a key element in the SRSN’s successful campaign to prevent the closure of Roy Bridge Primary School in Lochaber. Highland Council decided to close the 27-pupil school in December 2006, but the SRSN worked with local parents and campaigners to campaign against the closure, arguing that closure would have a substantial effect on the local community.

The SRSN used FOI to access and examine the business case for closure, which revealed that the council’s case had been based on flawed financial projections. As a result of information gathered through FOI, it was discovered that the closure - and the associated expansion of a school in a neighbouring village to accommodate the pupils - would, in fact, cost the council millions of pounds over a 20-year period. Following consideration of the information presented by campaigners, the Council decided to overturn its decision to close the school.

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