

Dunrossness Primary School – Update on Temporary Classroom and Refurbishment Works

Please find below an update on the planned demolition of the temporary classroom and the wider refurbishment of Dunrossness Primary School. This update has been prepared by the Learning Estates Liaison Group in conjunction with the Head Teacher. The Learning Estate Liaison Group is made up of Officers from Children’s Services, Assets, Commissioning and Procurement and Environment and Estate Operations.

What is the issue with the temporary classroom?

During excavation works structural issues were identified in the temporary classrooms. A specialist investigation was carried out in August 2023, and it was recommended that temporary propping was carried out to enable the classrooms to remain in use. A follow up investigation was carried out in May 2024, and after consultation with the Council’s Environment and Estate Operations and Health and Safety teams, the decision was made that the temporary classroom block must no longer be used from July 2024. During the 2024 summer holiday period, considerable work was undertaken to reconfigure the rest of the school to accommodate the loss of this space. Longer-term, decisions had to be made in relation to what would happen with the unusable classrooms.

The second temporary building, where the primary 2/3 and out of school club are currently located, has also been assessed and found to be in good condition.

What options were considered?

As part of the Business Justification Case, the following options were considered:

- Do nothing
This was considered to be a significant Health and Safety risk. The safety of the school community is the first priority and therefore to do nothing was not considered a viable option.
- Demolish the temporary buildings and make no changes to the remainder of the school
This option was considered to be able to work in part, but making no changes to the remainder of the school would not make best use of the all the available spaces including the former swimming pool area.
- Demolish the temporary buildings and replace with a classroom block
This would be a very expensive option, estimated to be in the region of £1.9m, and would provide space that is not required given the declining school roll.
- Make repairs to the existing building
Five contractors were approached for prices for this work. Three of these declined to price and of the remaining two, one withdrew after a site visit due to the scale of the works. The remaining contractor estimated a price of between £120,000 and £150,000.

Given the likely cost of the works, the long-term maintenance/heating of the 47-year-old temporary classrooms and the opportunity to utilise unused areas of the school, it was concluded that repair was not a viable option.

- Demolish the temporary buildings and make alterations to the rest of the school

This would provide improved facilities within the rest of the school building, which would be better suited to meet the needs of the existing pupil cohort and those in years to come.

These options were informed by cost estimates and involved engagement with local contractors which provided an indication of the likely market reaction to tendering which supported the decision-making process.

Who made the decision?

Through the Business Justification Case, Officers recommended the option of demolishing the temporary buildings and make improvements to the rest of the school. This recommendation was approved by Elected Members at the following meetings:

- Policy & Resources – 16 September 2024
- Shetland Islands Council – 25 September 2024
- Policy & Resources – 2 December 2024
- Shetland Islands Council – 10 February 2025
- Policy and Resources – 17 March 2025

The Business Justification Case was presented to members as an appendix to the Council's Asset Investment Plan. Parents and carers have expressed concern that some information relating to the Business Justification Case was not shared with Members. In line with standard Council practice, the appendices to the Business Justification Case were not attached. Members can request these appendices if they require the additional information to help inform their decision. These appendices were subsequently shared with some Members and the Parent Council chair when they were requested in March 2025.

Has the feedback from parents been listened to?

Officers were invited to the school on 23 June 2025, to hear directly from families in relation to their concerns around both the demolition of the temporary classrooms and the perceived impact on children attending the school. The Head Teacher was also in attendance. The views expressed at the meeting have helped shape the next steps.

Following the meeting, an independent officer from Corporate Services reviewed the work that has been carried out to date and established that officers have followed all relevant Shetland Islands Council policy and guidance correctly. They confirmed that the repair or rebuild options were explored but the costs indicated were well out with what would deliver Best Value for the Council. It is acknowledged that some parents and carers will be disappointed that repair/rebuild

are not viable options, but it is important to provide reassurance that these options were explored alongside workable alternatives.

Will there be enough space in the school?

Parents and carers have expressed concern that by not repairing or rebuilding the temporary classrooms, it will mean that there is not enough space in the school. Historically, Dunrossness Primary School had a capacity of 210 pupils. The school roll has declined by 41% over 25 years, with further decline projected. According to The Learning Estate Strategy, the optimal occupancy for a primary school is 80–85%, ensuring space is used effectively without overcrowding. This allows flexibility for enrolment changes and future growth. The table below sets out the school roll, capacity and occupancy over a five-year period. The capacity was reduced in 2024 when the temporary classrooms were taken out of use. The percentage occupancy of the school is set to decline over the next two years. The birth-rate across Scotland is at an all-time low and this is reflected in the Shetland birth-rate.

Year	Roll	Capacity	Occupancy %
2023	85	210	40%
2024	89	120	74%
2025	101	120	84%
2026	94*	120	78%
2027	81*	120	68%

**Projected rolls*

What are the plans for the internal refurbishment?

Building on the reconfiguration work that has already been undertaken when the temporary classrooms were put out of use in July 2024, a central focus for the internal refurbishment will be around making better use of the former swimming pool area. Investigation works are to be carried out to determine the condition of this space and consideration will be given for any additional acoustic works. Following this, detailed plans for the refurbishment will be drawn up.

The Head Teacher will work closely with the Parent Council to gather views as these detailed plans are developed. The Parent Council has already expressed they would like to see further focus on the learning environment and the creation of more quiet spaces for small groups and individuals. This will be built into the design brief.

Are there adequate toilet facilities?

Concerns were raised by parents and carers in relation to toilet provision. Whilst the school currently has sufficient toilets in terms of the maximum capacity of the school, it is recognised that alternative toilet facilities should be considered. The inclusion of additional toilets and an accessible toilet with changing space has been included in the brief.

What are the benefits?

While the internal space will be smaller than before due to the loss of the temporary classrooms, the internal refurbishment will improve the quality and flexibility of the spaces within the school. This will provide the Head Teacher and staff with options to use the spaces in a way that meets the needs of all learners now and those in years to come. Staff will continue to plan carefully for children who require individual space, larger spaces to accommodate specialist equipment or quiet spaces, ensuring their needs are met throughout.

The demolition will provide the opportunity to further develop the work that has started outdoors with the inclusion of a traversing wall and swing, designed with input from the children. It will create an outdoor learning space that the children want to use and will benefit from, both socially and educationally. The smaller school footprint will make it easier to maintain, heat and supervise as well as reduce the carbon footprint.

This work reflects key principles from Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy, including:

- Making best use of resources
- Creating sustainable, inclusive environments
- Supporting outdoor learning
- Improving outcomes for all learners

What has been the impact of the changes that have already been introduced?

The Head Teacher has conducted two pupil surveys to gather feedback on recent changes to the school environment and collaborative spaces. In September 2024, following the move from the huts to the main building, most children felt classrooms were spacious, displays supported learning, and breakout areas were accessible. Lighting and temperature were generally suitable, though improvements were needed in the art and music spaces. In March 2025, feedback shifted slightly, with more responses rated as "OK" and "Good" rather than "Very Good." This suggests a need for ongoing evaluation and enhancement. The Head Teacher is planning further consultation to explore what children would like in future learning spaces and how current areas can better support their needs.

A Suitability Assessment which was carried out on 4 September 2025 showed improvements in the school since March 2023, with the score rising from 62.94% to 68.60%. Highlights include:

- Improved acoustics in the dining/PE hall
- A new library space
- Breakout areas with varied activities
- A large multi-use space with quiet zones
- New climbing equipment
- Heightened and painted fence in playground

Project timeline

Given it is the decision of the Council to progress with the proposed works, it is important that this is carried out in a timely manner to ensure that the children attending Dunrossness Primary School benefit from the refurbishment works as quickly as possible. The contract notice for the demolition work has now been advertised on Public Contract Scotland and tenders are expected by 22 September 2025.

The project timeline, subject to change, is:

Phase	Target Start Date
Demolition Works:	Easter Holidays 2026
Internal Refurbishment:	Summer Holidays 2026
Improvements to Outdoor Learning and Play:	October Holidays 2026

Minimising disruption during works

We are committed to minimising disruption during this period of time. A meeting between Officers and the Head Teacher has taken place to agree that there will be a child-centred timetable for the works. This will be flexible and responsive to pupils' needs and will make best use of holiday periods.

Staying in Touch

This update is part of a series to keep stakeholders informed. The next update will be shared once dates for demolition or internal works are confirmed. Parents and carers will be kept up to date by the Head Teacher at Parent Council meetings and through usual communication channels. Members will be updated on the progress of the project through the Asset Investment Plan Progress Report through Policy and Resources Committee.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of this information, please contact Neil Beattie, Acting Executive Manager - Learning Estates, at neil.beattie@shetland.gov.uk or contact the Head Teacher directly.

Learning Estates Liaison Group Shetland Islands Council
September 2025