# Scottish Borders Council to merge nurseries amid parental backlash over poor communication



In a decision that encapsulated the ongoing debate over early years education in rural Scotland, Scottish Borders Council culminated its months-long consultation process with plans to implement composite classes at three nurseries: Channelkirk, Ednam, and Cockburnspath. Initially proposed for temporary mothballing, these facilities were instead slated to merge early learning and childcare (ELC) with primary education, a move greeted with mixed feelings from parents. The push for such a change came after a wave of community concern, as parents intensified their calls for transparency and meaningful engagement from the council.

Many parents feel disillusioned by the process termed a “sham” by one vocal participant. Frustrations boiled over when they learned that headteachers had already been briefed on operational changes, a full two days before families were informed of the council’s intentions. Paul Fulton, a parent involved with Channelkirk Nursery, expressed relief that a compromise had been reached but raised significant concerns about the council's communication efforts. “All along we have been advocating for open communication, transparency, and working together,” he noted, lamenting the persistent lack of clarity surrounding the council's intentions.

This scenario has echoes in a broader context, as other councils across Scotland have grappled with similar challenges. In nearby Dumfries and Galloway, a vigorous parental outcry successfully reversed nursery closures back in May 2025. This incident highlighted the critical role that local nurseries play in community cohesion and accessibility to early education. It begs the question of sustainability and the different models which local councils must explore to ensure that early learning services can meet the diverse needs of their communities.

The council’s recent decision has sparked questions about its strategic direction. Since announcing the possibility of composite classes, the council has not released reports detailing the educational and social implications of such a model. A spokesperson did assert, albeit without evidence, that the composite model had been successfully implemented in the past. This assurance has not satisfied parents, who demand data supporting the viability and benefits of the new structure.

Concerns about the consultation process have also been shared by parents from other areas, with patterns emerging about the council's approach to change. For instance, following announcements about closures in Westruther and Fountainhall, local MSP Rachael Hamilton responded with calls for a public meeting to address parental grievances, signalling a growing frustration with perceived governmental inaction across rural communities. Such disputes reflect a wider tension regarding the accessibility of childcare services, particularly in less densely populated regions, where travel distances to alternative childcare can become a significant burden.

As the Scottish Borders Council pivots towards the implementation of composite classes in the coming months, many parents remain cautiously optimistic, hoping for positive outcomes from this novel approach. Erin, a parent from Ednam, articulated a sense of hope mixed with trepidation, recognizing potential shared advantages for ELC and primary pupils. However, doubts persist regarding financial efficiencies promised by the council. With unresolved concerns about how this restructuring will impact families and whether it will lead to renewed attempts at service cuts, the community’s engagement in the forthcoming working group dedicated to establishing a mothballing policy appears essential.

“Having been so heavily involved in this flawed process… we feel we can offer some real insight and experience that can help,” remarked Fulton, emphasising the importance of parental involvement in shaping future educational strategies. As the Scottish Borders Council has yet to respond substantively to the growing concerns, the path forward raises critical questions about governance, community engagement, and the future landscape of early years education in rural Scotland.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204433.nursery-parents-frustrated-misleading-information/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2025-05-09/five-nurseries-saved-from-closure-following-outcry-from-parents)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204433.nursery-parents-frustrated-misleading-information/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c99z08zx024o), [[4]](https://www.scottishbordersconservatives.org.uk/news/local-msp-seeks-public-meeting-prevent-westruther-nursery-closure)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.newshub.co.uk/automotive/news-automotive/2025/04/02/communities-rally-against-nursery-closures-in-aberdeenshire/), [[6]](https://news.stv.tv/scotland/aberdeeshire-parents-in-limbo-after-council-announces-four-rural-nurseries-to-be-mothballed)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.itv.com/news/border/2025-05-09/five-nurseries-saved-from-closure-following-outcry-from-parents)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204433.nursery-parents-frustrated-misleading-information/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://www.colinsmythmsp.com/latest-news/2025/04/14/borders-council-plans-to-mothball-nurseries-a-devastating-blow-to-communities-affected-says-msp/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204433.nursery-parents-frustrated-misleading-information/?ref=rss)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204433.nursery-parents-frustrated-misleading-information/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.itv.com/news/border/2025-05-09/five-nurseries-saved-from-closure-following-outcry-from-parents> - In May 2025, Scottish Borders Council reversed its decision to close five nurseries—Cockburnspath, Ednam, Oxton, Yetholm, and Walkerburn—after significant parental protests. The council acknowledged the need to explore alternative solutions to maintain early years education accessibility across the region. This decision followed a series of consultations and community feedback highlighting the importance of these nurseries to local families. The council committed to considering various models to ensure the sustainability of early learning services in these communities.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c99z08zx024o> - In April 2024, Scottish Borders Council announced the closure of early years centres in Westruther and Fountainhall due to declining enrolment numbers. Parents expressed frustration over the lack of consultation, with some facing increased travel distances for alternative childcare. Local MSP Rachael Hamilton called for a public meeting to discuss the closures, emphasizing the impact on rural communities and the need for accessible childcare services. The closures sparked debates about the council's decision-making process and its effects on local families.
4. <https://www.scottishbordersconservatives.org.uk/news/local-msp-seeks-public-meeting-prevent-westruther-nursery-closure> - In May 2024, MSP Rachael Hamilton sought a public meeting to prevent the closure of Westruther nursery. After engaging with concerned parents, Hamilton initiated a campaign to stop the nursery from shutting down post-summer. She criticized the council's decision-making process, highlighting the lack of consultation with local residents. Hamilton urged the community to join the campaign and attend the proposed public meeting to discuss the nursery's future, emphasizing the importance of local childcare services for families.
5. <https://www.newshub.co.uk/automotive/news-automotive/2025/04/02/communities-rally-against-nursery-closures-in-aberdeenshire/> - In April 2025, Aberdeenshire Council's decision to close several rural nurseries sparked protests from parents and community members. The closures affected nurseries such as Glass, Crossroads, and Ballogie, leading to concerns about the future of early childhood education in these areas. Parents expressed frustration over the council's rushed decision-making process and lack of transparency. Petitions emerged to save the nurseries, with hundreds of signatures collected in days, highlighting the community's commitment to preserving local educational resources.
6. <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/aberdeeshire-parents-in-limbo-after-council-announces-four-rural-nurseries-to-be-mothballed> - In April 2025, Aberdeenshire Council announced the mothballing of four rural nurseries—Glass, Ballogie, Crossroads, and Sandhaven—leaving parents in uncertainty. The decision, communicated just before the Easter holidays, was met with shock and frustration from the community. Parents criticized the council for the abrupt announcement and lack of consultation, expressing concerns about the impact on their children's education and the viability of alternative childcare options. The council stated the decision was part of a savings plan but acknowledged the shock to parents.
7. <https://www.colinsmythmsp.com/latest-news/2025/04/14/borders-council-plans-to-mothball-nurseries-a-devastating-blow-to-communities-affected-says-msp/> - In April 2025, South Scotland Labour MSP Colin Smyth criticized Scottish Borders Council's plans to 'mothball' nurseries, describing it as a 'devastating blow' to affected communities. The council proposed a short consultation period before registering nurseries as 'inactive' with the Care Inspectorate, allowing temporary closure without cancellation of registration. Smyth questioned the council's adherence to proper consultation processes and emphasized the potential long-term impact on rural communities, urging the council to reconsider its approach and engage more thoroughly with local residents.