

# 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.

## **Scottish Borders – Channelkirk Primary**

In December 2005, a consultation was held on the proposed closure of Channelkirk Primary School, in the village of Oxtan, Lauder. During the consultation, SRSN made an FOI request to Scottish Borders Council for the financial analysis which had been undertaken to inform the consultation process. The information received as a result of the FOI request enabled SRSN to challenge the Council’s financial analysis and produce their own financial report using an independent specialist in merger accountancy. Presented with both versions of the financial case, Scottish Borders Council members were persuaded by the SRSN analysis. Sandy Longmuir said *“Before FOI there would have been no obligation on the Council to reveal how they had come up with their figures”*.

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