

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Lothian Council to establish a new primary school for Blindwells and alter the catchment area of Preston Lodge High School to include the Blindwells new settlement.

1. Introduction

This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Lothian Council's proposal to establish a new primary school for Blindwells and alter the catchment area of Preston Lodge High School to include the Blindwells new settlement. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of neighbouring schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 29 November 2016 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related

consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the site of the proposed new school, Cockenzie Primary School, St Gabriel's RC Primary School, Prestonpans Primary School and Preston Lodge High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Lothian Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The council consulted on the overarching proposal and also on the following associated elements:

- a new primary school with early learning and childcare provision will be established for the Blindwells primary school catchment area;
- the new primary school will be established initially at Cockenzie Primary School through a 'hosting' arrangement until the new primary school building is complete when the new school will transfer to its final site;
- the Preston Lodge High School catchment area will be extended to include the Blindwells new settlement and replace the Blindwells secondary catchment area established in 2010; and
- the St Gabriel's RC Primary School catchment area will be extended to include the Blindwells new settlement in alignment with the proposed revised Preston Lodge High School catchment area.

2.3 The consultation process ran from 8 November 2016 to 20 December 2016. During this period the council held a public meeting at Prestonpans Community Centre which was attended by two parents or other members of the public. Statutory consultees, including Parent Councils of the schools directly involved and the three Community Councils of Longniddry, Cockenzie and Port Seton and Prestonpans, were informed of the consultation in writing. Consultation documentation was published on the East Lothian Council website and copies were available for public consultation at several venues during the consultation period, including the schools concerned. A proforma questionnaire and an email address were made available for responses. The council received 81 responses. Of the responses which provided an overall view about the council's proposal, almost all expressed support. There were considerable differences in responses to the detailed elements in the proposal. The element relating to hosting the new school in Cockenzie Primary School was supported by just less than half of those who responded. The element to extend the catchment area of Preston Lodge High School was supported by just under half of the respondents. The element to extend the catchment area of St Gabriel's RC Primary School was supported by just over a quarter of all respondents. Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors felt that the

council had provided good opportunities for being consulted and for giving their views.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 This proposal involves a change to the existing St Gabriel's RC Primary School catchment area, Preston Lodge High School catchment area and Blindwells secondary catchment area. A new primary school will also be established for the Blindwells area. This school has still to be built but will serve planned new housing developments in the Blindwells area on the edge of Prestonpans. The affected area of land currently contains no residential properties. The new primary school will be established initially at Cockenzie Primary School through a 'hosting' arrangement for up to 36 months until the new Blindwells primary school building is complete. Upon completion, the new primary school will relocate to its permanent site.

3.2 The planned new Blindwells primary school will accommodate the projected school roll arising from the proposal. It has the potential to provide children who will attend the new school with a purpose-built learning environment well-suited to their learning needs. East Lothian Council has successfully developed new schools in a number of its communities.

3.3 Almost all parents, pupils and staff who met with HM Inspectors support the proposal. Given that the new housing development has not yet commenced, there were many areas relating to the practicalities of hosting the new Blindwells primary pupils within Cockenzie Primary School and the pressure on the capacity of St Gabriel's RC Primary School to meet an increase in requests to attend a denominational school that were unclear at this time. There is still further detail to be supplied on the timeline for extensions to both Preston Lodge High School and St Gabriel's RC Primary School as the proposal shows that both schools will be significantly over capacity as a result of the proposed extension of their catchment areas. East Lothian Council should continue to liaise and communicate with staff, parents, young people and other stakeholders.

3.4 In taking forward its proposal, the council should continue to work with stakeholders and the Headteachers, Parent and Pupil Councils of the Preston Lodge High School cluster and the Prestonpans, Port Seton and Gosford Area Partnership. The council should ensure that interim transition arrangements apply to children living in the new Blindwells housing development who will be initially 'hosted' at Cockenzie Primary School and children who attend Cockenzie Primary School. During the interim 'hosting' period the council should provide both groups of children with a high quality education. These transition arrangements relate to class arrangements and use of existing classroom space as the first groups of children from the new Blindwells catchment begin to attend Cockenzie Primary School. Parents, children and staff from all schools visited by HM Inspectors also wished to continue to be consulted about staffing, safe routes to school, enrolment in the Cockenzie Primary School nursery and access to popular and well attended after school and school holiday programmes. East Lothian Council should continue to do this. The council should ensure that all arrangements are well planned and clearly communicated to all stakeholders to meet the needs of all children who attend

Cockenzie Primary School, St Gabriel's RC Primary School, Preston Lodge High School and the new Blindwells school.

4. Summary

East Lothian Council's proposal to establish a new primary school for Blindwells and alter the catchment area of Preston Lodge High School and St Gabriel's RC Primary School to include the Blindwells new settlement has clear educational benefits. The proposal has the potential to provide children who will reside in the Blindwells housing development with modern, purpose-built accommodation designed to meet the needs of its learners. The new school will provide a range of leisure and learning facilities which will potentially benefit the wider community. Changing the secondary catchment area of the current Blindwells secondary catchment into Preston Lodge High School catchment, ensures secondary pupils from the Blindwells area will attend a school offering access to a broad curriculum which already has very well established community links. Similarly, changing the denominational catchment of Blindwells to St Gabriel's ensures the denominational pupils from Blindwells will be attending a school aligned to the same cluster community and secondary school as their non-denominational peers.

Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors support the proposal. In taking its proposal forward, the council should continue to engage with all stakeholders.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2017**