

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Lothian Council to close Prestonpans Infant and Nursery School and Prestonpans Primary School and establish a new non-denominational primary school structure and its associated catchment area for Prestonpans.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010 \("the 2010 Act"\)](#). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Lothian Council's proposal to close Prestonpans Infant and Nursery School and Prestonpans Primary School and establish a new non-denominational primary school structure and its associated catchment area for Prestonpans. 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 statutory 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools and children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper;
- 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 26 September 2018 at Preston Lodge High School 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 Prestonpans Infant and Nursery School, Prestonpans Early Learning and Childcare Centre and Prestonpans Primary 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](#).

2.2 An advertisement was placed in the local newspaper on 23 August 2018 and 13 September 2018. A pre-announcement was also made on the council's website and social media posts on the 16 August 2018. The consultation period ran from 20 August 2018 until 2 October 2018. A public meeting was held at Preston Lodge High School on 26 September 2018 which was attended by 35 members of the public. Responses could be made electronically through the online consultation questionnaire on East Lothian Council's Consultation Hub or in writing, either placed in a consultation box in one of the affected schools or posted to the council headquarters. There were 135 responses to the consultation. Of those who expressed a preference, 45 were in agreement with the proposal and 81 disagreed with the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council believes that this proposal will improve the continuity and progression in learning across all curriculum areas and stages of learning from Early Level through to Second Level in the Prestonpans catchment area. The council feels that a new single primary school structure will have a positive impact on the children in both current schools by further developing and enhancing a shared ethos, vision, values and aims from the nursery class through to P7. There is a clear educational benefit from the current schools developing a shared ethos, which will be facilitated by having a single headteacher with responsibility for a single school.

3.2 The council believes that establishing a new non-denominational primary school covering nursery through to P7 under a single management structure will secure best value, providing more equitable education provision across the school estate where almost all schools operate as nursery to P7 settings. Whilst this approach will reflect common practice, it will be more complex to implement a single management structure across a split-site school. The authority, working with the new headteacher, needs to bring its knowledge and experience gained from managing other similar settings to ensure that the progressive achievement of learners is well led. The proposal paper notes that it will be for the new headteacher to determine how the management will be organised in discussion with staff in the school in order to meet the needs of learners across the two campuses. There is potential educational benefit in this arrangement.

3.3 The council believes that a single school structure would enable staff to build relationships from nursery and to sustain those relationships through to P7, especially for those pupils who require enhanced support, and help improve children's social, emotional and mental wellbeing. The council further believes that, while the proposed new school would be operating over two campuses, there would be more opportunities within the curriculum under a single school structure to work on common projects, for example, across different stages and the two campuses at Prestonpans Infant and Nursery School and Prestonpans Primary School. These two campuses are 0.5 miles apart. HM Inspectors walked this route in approximately 10 minutes, but staff report that walking between them with children can take up to 20 minutes. Very careful planning would need to take place to allow children to work collaboratively across these campuses. This is a potential educational benefit, which is dependent upon well-planned learning experiences.

3.4 The council also feels that the single school structure, split campus, arrangement will continue to provide opportunities for P3 children to act as role models within their campus, whilst offering more opportunities for buddying and peer learning between the two campuses. Again, very careful planning would need to take place to allow children to collaboratively work across these campuses. This is also a potential educational benefit, which is dependent upon well-planned learning experiences.

3.5 Children who attend Prestonpans Infant School are generally happy with the proposal and see this as a chance for everyone to feel part of the same school. However, although it is raised in the consultation paper, children still have justifiable concerns that a new school uniform could involve significant extra expense for parents. They are also worried that the new headteacher role, covering three establishments, will be very demanding. Children who attend Prestonpans Primary School are positive about the improvements in transition which the proposal could bring and would welcome greater opportunities to see friends and relatives who are being educated in the other campus. They would like to be more involved in buddying of younger children.

3.6 Parents of children who attend Prestonpans Infant School are generally in favour of the proposal, feeling that there are more advantages than disadvantages. They note the difference in ethos between their school and Prestonpans Primary School and see the proposal as a way of addressing this. They have valid concerns about the start and finish times for each part of the school being different to facilitate dropping off and picking up children. Parents of children who attend Prestonpans Primary School feel that other options, such as two separate primary schools or a new school on a single site, would work better than the current proposal. They have understandable concerns that the projected roll figures published in the proposal do not include children who attend the nursery or the Early Learning and Childcare Centre, which would take the overall pupil roll to more than 1,000.

3.7 Staff of Prestonpans Infant School can see a number of advantages to the proposal, but feel that some of the educational benefits could be achieved without changing the management structure across the three establishments. They have justifiable concerns that the answers to many of their practical queries will only be resolved once a new headteacher is appointed, for example, the staffing structure,

the start and finish times associated with the school day, travel between the two establishments and how effective joint working and transition planning will be managed. Staff of Prestonpans Primary School feel that other options, such as two separate primary schools or a new school on a single site, would work better than the current proposal. They agree that a single school should bring more consistency. However, they are concerned at the overall size and complexity of the proposed school and feel that the numbers involved would be overwhelming for the new headteacher. They would appreciate more information about the research findings which are referred to in the proposal document.

4. Summary

Overall, there are potential educational benefits to the proposal, despite the practical complexities outlined in this report. Closing Prestonpans Infant School and Prestonpans Primary School and establishing a new primary school provides an opportunity to improve learning and teaching and to further raise attainment for all children in the catchment area. The establishment of a single staff team working together to ensure continuity and progression from P1 to P7 should bring greater curricular coherence, improved consistency of expectations and increased moderation of standards. Children should benefit from improved progression planning to better meet their needs. Removing the need for an additional transition to a different school at the end of P3 is likely to reduce any possible risk of a slowing down of progress as children progress through the first level of Curriculum for Excellence. The proposal is in line with the aims and aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence.

Parents and staff across the two schools and the Early Learning and Childcare Centre hold significantly different views about the educational benefits of the proposal. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and to address their concerns. In taking its proposal forward, an effective communication strategy and an action plan based on the needs of the establishments affected will be essential for the council to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged. The council should include details of these in its final report.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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