

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Lothian Council to close Haddington Infant School and King's Meadow Primary School and establish a new primary school with an associated catchment area for Haddington.

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* 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 close Haddington Infant School and King's Meadow Primary School and establish a new primary school with an associated catchment area for Haddington. 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of Haddington Infant School and King's Meadow Primary School; 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.

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

- 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;

- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Haddington Infant School, St Mary's RC Primary School and King's Meadow Primary School including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

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

2.2 East Lothian Council formally consulted stakeholders between 8 January and 26 February 2018. A public meeting was held at Knox Academy on 7 February 2018 and was attended by 29 members of the public. The consultation was advertised in the local newspaper and copies of the consultation document were made available at Haddington Cluster Primary Schools and a wide range of other locations. Public drop-in sessions were held at both schools and meetings were held with staff and pupils at Haddington Infant School and King's Meadow Primary School. Additional informal meetings to discuss any queries or concerns they may have on the proposal were held with staff in both schools. Information on the 'Protocol for School Merger' was shared with staff at these meetings and a copy of the protocol was made available to staff via the headteacher of King's Meadow Primary School and interim headteacher of Haddington Infant School. Further additional opportunities to engage with HR staff regarding the protocol were also offered to staff at their discretion. A letter informing parents of the consultation was also issued to children attending these schools. All stakeholders were offered the opportunity to share their views through an online survey.

2.3 The majority of parents associated with Haddington Infant School who completed the council's online survey oppose the proposal. Parents of children attending King's Meadow Primary School expressed mixed views on the proposal in the survey. Most agreed with the educational benefits set out in the proposal document but had some concerns about the possible impact of the proposal on staffing, leadership and resources in the new school. The majority of staff at Haddington Infant School who responded to the survey indicated opposition to the proposal. Staff at King's Meadow Primary School are, overall, in favour of the proposal.

2.4 Staff at both schools have some concerns about the council's approaches to communicating with them about the proposal. They feel that they should have been provided directly with more written information about the proposal. They do not feel that the council is listening sufficiently to their concerns about the potential impact on staffing, resources and leadership capacity which may result from the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal has clear educational benefits, including the opportunity for seamless progression in learning for all children from nursery to P7, in line with the aims and aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence. The creation of a single staff team operating provides scope for a strengthened focus on the development of a coherent curriculum framework. This should support further improvements in planning for continuity from early level through to second level. In addition, removing the need for children to transition to a different school at the end of P3 reduces the risk of progress being slowed as children settle into new routines and ways of learning. A consistent approach to learning, teaching, assessment and tracking children's progress can be more easily planned and implemented. There is also potential to increase the benefits of the range of achievement opportunities available through widening access to all children in P1 to P7.

3.2 Parents of children associated with Haddington Infant School and staff who met with HM Inspectors expressed significant disagreement with the proposal. Parents and staff feel that the school currently provides very well for children at P1-P3. They believe that the school has a strong positive ethos and sense of community. They do not believe that children are disadvantaged by the transition at P4 to King's Meadow Primary School and that the transition may, in fact, help children to develop resilience. Some parents feel strongly that the council has failed to consider other viable alternatives, such as, maintaining both schools as they are currently but with strengthened partnership working to improve curriculum coherence and progression in learning. Staff also expressed concerns that senior leadership capacity could be compromised by the appointment of a single headteacher for a large school operating on two sites.

3.3 Parents of children attending King's Meadow Primary School have mixed views on the proposal. Parents of children with additional support needs are supportive of the proposal and believe that it should lead to greater continuity in the support provided for their children. Staff at King's Meadow Primary School are, overall, in favour of the proposal, believing that it offers the potential for improved consistency in learning, teaching and assessment.

3.4 The pupil council at Haddington Infant School is well informed about the council's proposal. They report that pupils at the school have mixed views about the proposal. Some children thought it would be good to attend the same school as their older siblings and to have wider opportunities for making friends. Other children have concerns over safety in moving between the two sites and the time this might take. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to ensure that all children are supported effectively in helping them to understand how the proposed new school can operate safely and efficiently over two sites.

3.5 The pupil council at King's Meadow Primary School also demonstrated a good awareness of the proposal. They outlined several benefits which would arise from the proposal. They liked the idea of having more teachers who could work with them in different ways and thought their teachers would know them better by the time they reached P4. A few children indicated that they thought the proposed new school

would be designed to accommodate all pupils in the same building. Children will need continued support to understand more fully the proposal and what it would mean for them.

3.6 During the consultation period, a few of those who attended the public meeting expressed the view that the research which East Lothian Council had used to support its proposal was not broad enough. They would have liked the council to include research specifically about the impact of infant schooling. The council has indicated that any questions regarding the research undertaken that were received during the consultation period will be responded to in the final consultation report.

3.7 HM Inspectors sampled the views of other stakeholders who are included in the proposal document as being indirectly affected by it. Overall, we found no significant disagreement with the proposal. A few ancillary staff indicated that they would like more clarity about how their roles would be affected if the council takes forward this proposal.

4. Summary

4.1 Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal. Closing Haddington Infant School and King's Meadow Primary School and establishing a new primary school with an associated catchment area for Haddington provides an opportunity to improve learning and teaching and 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 will 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.

4.2 Parents and staff across the two schools 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. The council now needs to work with its stakeholders to agree an appropriate timescale for implementing its proposal. In taking its proposal forward, an effective communication strategy and an action plan based on the needs of both schools 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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