

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to rezone the catchment area for St Columba's Primary School so that it is extended to match the current mainland catchment area for Oban High School.

June 2019

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 Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to rezone the catchment area for St Columba's Primary School so that it is extended to match the current mainland catchment area for Oban High School. 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 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 17 April 2019 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 sites of St Columba's Primary School, Dalmally Primary School, Taynuilt Primary School and Strath of Appin Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Argyll and Bute Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation period ran from 18 March until 17 May 2019, with a public meeting held on 17 April 2019. In total, 134 stakeholders responded. Most (over 80%) of those who responded to the council were in favour of the proposal. The council also sought the views of children in the schools affected by the proposal. All of the children were in favour of the proposal.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Argyll and Bute Council considers that, should the proposal be accepted, children within the revised catchment area would have access to St Columba's Primary School without the need for a placing request. Children attending St Columba's Primary School would experience a faith based curriculum supporting their spiritual growth. HM Inspectors agree, and further note that should the proposal go ahead this will provide a more equitable access to Catholic education for children and families in the revised catchment area.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders met by HM Inspectors, support the council's proposals. They feel the current situation is unfair on children and families who have no automatic right of a place in St Columba's Primary School, no guarantee of transport and have to pay for their children to be transported should it be available to them. A few parents expressed concern about additional costs for transport, although the council estimates only a modest increase in demand. A few staff are concerned that the rolls in other local catchment schools may decline and this could affect their staffing levels. Children who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of children's rights and choice to attend St Columba's Primary School should they wish to do so.

3.3 Representatives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Argyll and the Isles were strongly in favour of the proposal. They believe that this will assist the council in its statutory duties. They also believe that children will have greater opportunities to practise and gain a deeper knowledge of their faith by attending St Columba's Primary School. The Church supports a clearer and consistent position for parents who want to exercise their desire to send their children to St Columba's Primary School without seeking permission through placing requests or without additional transport costs.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors view that the proposal will bring educational benefits to children in the revised catchment area. If accepted, this will provide greater equity for children and families. This will make clear children's right to a place in St Columba's Primary School and, where appropriate, associated transport for the duration of their primary education. The council should continue to support the understanding of the few parents and staff who expressed concerns about additional costs and staffing levels through sharing the impact of any changes with relevant groups.

**HM Inspectors
June 2019**