

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Angus Council to create an Arbroath North Campus accommodating Hayshead Primary School, St Thomas RC Primary School and an Early Years facility.

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 Angus Council's proposal to create an Arbroath North Campus accommodating Hayshead Primary School, St Thomas RC Primary School and an Early Years facility. 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 Hayshead Primary School and St Thomas RC 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.

1.2 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; and

- visits to the sites of Hayshead Primary School and St Thomas RC Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Angus 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 The formal consultation ran from 10 May 2017 until 23 June 2017. The council posted the consultation document on its website. An advert to notify the public of the consultation process, including public consultation meetings, was placed in the local press. Copies of the consultation document were issued to parents of children attending Hayshead Primary School and St Thomas RC Primary School and associated nursery classes. Good use was made of social media to encourage stakeholders to share their views. A leaflet inviting stakeholders to share their views was also circulated. The council also made arrangements to gather the views of children and staff at both Hayshead Primary School and St Thomas RC Primary School.

2.3 A public meeting on 30 May 2017 at Hayshead Primary School resulted in the completion of 19 questionnaires. Of these, 12 were in favour of a shared campus, four supported retaining separate schools and three gave no preference. A public meeting on 31 May 2017 at St Thomas RC Primary School led to 15 questionnaires being returned. Of these, three were in favour of a shared campus, 11 supported retaining separate schools and one expressed no preference. At the St Thomas Barbecue and Sports Day on 13 June 2017, a further 19 questionnaires were returned. Of these, 12 were in favour of a shared campus, six supported retaining separate schools and one expressed no preference. A number of issues were raised. These included how the individual identity of St Thomas RC Primary School would be retained within a shared campus and how shared areas would be managed.

2.4 The council received 64 online and four written responses from a range of interested stakeholders including the Diocese of Dunkeld. The majority of these responses (46) expressed opposition to the proposal. Key concerns raised included the future independence of St Thomas RC Primary School, potential loss of its Catholic ethos/identity, and its ability to maintain its traditions within a larger campus.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 There will be a number of potential educational benefits for children and staff if the proposal goes ahead. These include the provision of a modern, purpose built campus offering an improved learning environment which suits the demands of a 21st Century curriculum. The new campus has the potential to be more environmentally friendly, making maximum use of natural light and ventilation. Access and security will be improved. Both schools will benefit from improved access to digital technology designed to meet the needs of all age groups. Early years provision will be increased to accommodate 100 children. The provision of two hall spaces with a moveable partition will address current space limitations

currently experienced in both schools and offer more flexibility for larger events. Opportunities for outdoor learning and sports for children from both schools will be enhanced. Social interaction between children will be increased through shared external play areas. The inclusion of a dedicated area for community use will benefit the local community and also improve opportunities to develop initiatives, such as, campus breakfast and out-of-school clubs.

3.2 Children with additional support needs from both schools will benefit from access to a dedicated central resource, including, a purpose built multi-sensory room. Existing collaborative working between teaching staff and children from both schools will be enhanced. A centrally located shared campus library will provide the opportunity for both schools to develop story telling events, paired reading and homework clubs.

3.3 In terms of best value, the proposal sets out a strong case. Hayshead Primary School is rated as 'C' (poor) for educational suitability. Ongoing maintenance and energy efficiency issues relating to single glazed metal windows, insufficient insulation and inefficient heating contribute to the poor quality of the building fabric. As a result, the building's Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is rated as 'E' on a scale of A+ (best) to G (worst). Whilst the overall educational suitability of St Thomas RC Primary School is rated as category 'B' (satisfactory), due to the electric heating system, and requirement for replacement windows the building's EPC is rated as 'G'. The new shared campus would reduce long term maintenance and utility costs in comparison to two separate buildings.

3.4 All the children from both Hayshead Primary School and St Thomas RC Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They liked the idea of a modern, bright, well equipped school with more spacious learning areas. Access to improved physical education accommodation, sports facilities, larger playground and after-school activities were seen as attractive. Children from both schools saw the proposal offered the opportunity for new friendships to be made and existing friendships from outside school to be maintained. Key concerns expressed by children in both schools related to the potential for congestion and potential impact on the safety of children during drop off and pick up times. Children from St Thomas RC Primary School also expressed concerns about moving from a small school to a big school campus and with it the potential for bullying.

3.5 All Hayshead Primary School parents who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal to build a new school for Hayshead. However, they were less clear on the benefits of a shared campus. The proposed Early Years facilities were seen as much needed and would improve transition arrangements. Parents expressed concerns around the potential for increased traffic and the safety of children should the campus progress. Issues arising from how joint-use areas would be managed fairly were also raised as a concern.

3.6 All teaching and support staff from Hayshead Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal and its potential to place the schools at the heart of the local community. Staff recognised the opportunity to build on existing joint cluster working with St Thomas RC Primary School colleagues.

3.7 All teaching staff from St Thomas RC Primary School who met with HM Inspectors opposed the proposal. They wished the schools to remain on separate sites. Staff clearly recognised the benefits that a new, modern, purpose built school with state of the art facilities would bring for staff and children alike. However, they expressed concerns about the possible loss of the school's identity and its future viability and, particularly, about possible transition arrangements for children moving from the proposed Early Years Centre into P1. Staff expressed the view that to maintain the overall wellbeing and ethos of their faith school their preference was to remain in a refurbished St Thomas RC Primary School. In taking forward its proposal the council needs to engage with school staff to address the areas of concern raised.

3.8 St Thomas RC Primary School parents who met with HM Inspectors were evenly split on their support for the campus proposal. Those in favour recognised that the new campus would offer a modern, well-resourced learning environment for their children. Parents who did not support the proposal were concerned about the potential threat to the future identity and ethos of St Thomas RC Primary School in years to come. Of specific concern was the perception that this proposal might eventually result in a merger. Programming of shared facilities without disadvantage to St Thomas RC Primary School children due to their smaller numbers was also an area of concern. In taking forward its proposal the council needs to engage with parents to address the concerns raised.

3.9 The Diocese of Dunkeld submitted a comprehensive written response setting out its opposition to the proposal. A major concern was the potential loss of the school's identity and ethos, built up over many years. Concerns were also expressed about the loss of the current St Thomas Nursery Class in favour of the proposed Early Years Centre and associated P1 transition arrangements. Sustaining and maintaining the Catholic ethos of St Thomas RC Primary School in the proposed shared campus alongside the larger Hayshead Primary School were also raised as concerns. The Diocese would wish to receive more detail about any future refurbishment of St Thomas RC Primary School should the proposal not proceed. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to engage with the Diocese to address the concerns and issues raised.

4. Summary

The proposal has clear educational benefits for children who may attend the shared campus in the future. These include the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence within modern, purpose-built accommodation and a rich digital learning environment with appropriate outdoor learning spaces. Children will potentially have access to increased learning opportunities and better socialisation across both schools. Staff in both schools will have access to more flexible work/meeting spaces, campus library and opportunities to share and improve their practice alongside colleagues from the other school. Community provision will be enhanced. It will also assist the council to deliver best value and make more efficient and effective use of its resources. Site security will be improved. However, traffic management measures during busy drop off and pick up times needs to be clarified.

Not all the stakeholders engaged in the consultation are supportive of the proposal. In its final consultation the council needs to clearly set out how it intends to engage with key stakeholders such as the Diocese of Dunkeld, parent representatives and teaching staff from St Thomas RC Primary School to address concerns raised during the consultation. In particular, it will need to clarify what arrangements it will put in place to retain the ethos and identity of each school and manage the shared facilities in a fair and equitable way.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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