

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council to change the catchment area of Towerbank Primary School.

1. Introduction

1.1 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 The City of Edinburgh Council's proposal to change the catchment area of Towerbank Primary 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 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 and young people of the school; any other users; children and young people 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 public meetings held on 21 May 2015 and 1 June 2015 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 Towerbank Primary School, Brunstane Primary School, Craightinny Primary School, Duddingston Primary School, The Royal High Primary School, Leith Academy and Portobello High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 This proposal arises from the significant projected increase in the number of school age children living in the catchment area of Towerbank Primary School. In the immediate future, the school will not be able to accommodate all of these children. The consultation considers four options to make the school's catchment area smaller so that fewer children live in it.

2.3 In March 2015, the council ran informal consultations at each of the four directly affected primary schools (Towerbank, Brunstane, Duddingston and The Royal High). In addition to the views expressed at these sessions, 48 representations were received from parents, guardians, carers and residents. Options 3 and 4 were developed as a result of this informal consultation process.

2.4 The council proposes four options for reducing the size of the catchment area of Towerbank Primary School. Options 1, 2 and 3 transfer varying parts of the current catchment area to neighbouring primary schools. These options offer current catchment area families within the proposed transfer areas priority places for younger brothers and sisters in any year, up to 2022, if there are still P1 places available after catchment needs are met. This would only apply if, when entering P1, they continued to be resident in the parts of the Towerbank Primary School catchment from which transfer had previously been approved and an elder sibling remains at the school. Option 4 transfers a larger proportion of the current catchment area to neighbouring primary schools. It offers a guaranteed place at Towerbank Primary School to the younger siblings of current pupils as long as they are born by the time of any final council decision and, by the time they enter P1, continue to be resident in the parts of the Towerbank Primary School catchment from which transfer had previously been approved and an elder sibling remains at the school. This has been generally referred to as the 'sibling guarantee'.

2.5 If catchment changes are approved by the council, it is proposed that the changes would take immediate effect and the placing procedures for P1 pupils for the start of the 2016/17 school session would be conducted on the basis of the revised catchment areas.

2.6 The consultation period ran from 8 May 2015 to 22 June 2015. A copy of the consultation document was placed on The City of Edinburgh Council website. Public meetings were held in Towerbank Primary School on 21 May 2015, Brunstane Primary School on 25 May 2015, Duddingston Primary School on 1 June 2015 and The Royal High Primary School on 3 June 2015. Written responses could be made

by email or through completion of an online response form, available on the council website.

2.7 The council received 406 responses to the online response form, 390 expressed a preference for one of the options and 307 people made further comment on why they selected a particular option. Option 1 was preferred by 28 (6.9%), Option 2 by 66 (16.3%), Option 3 by 28 (6.9%) and Option 4 by 268 (66%). Sixteen of those who responded (3.9%) favoured none of the four options. Twenty-two people also sent emails to the council, expressing their views. Option 1 was preferred by two of those who responded (9.1%), Option 2 by four (18.2%), Option 3 by two (9.1%) and Option 4 by ten (45.4%). Four of those who responded (18.2%) favoured none of the four options.

2.8 Council officers consulted groups of pupils at each of the four directly affected schools. None of the pupils favoured Options 1 or 2. 6.7% were in favour of Option 3, 86.7% were in favour of Option 4 and 6.7% were unsure.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council asserts that a reduction in the number of pupils eligible to attend Towerbank Primary School will improve the learning and teaching environment and outcomes for children. This assertion is reasonable as the school does not have the capacity to accommodate all children residing within its existing catchment area over the coming years. In addition, the school is currently very short of space, requiring classes of children to have differing arrival, departure and lunch times. Due to its current roll, the school does not have space to prepare school lunches on site, nor host a library or a digital learning area, despite recent extensions to the school.

3.2 The council acknowledges that children affected by the proposed catchment change are likely to have a longer walk to school and may follow a route which includes busier roads. It also notes that Options 1, 2 and 3 may result in some families having children who do not all attend the same primary school which could present logistical problems for parents.

3.3 The council has continued to discuss proposed routes to schools with parents potentially affected by proposed catchment changes. The route which still concerns some parents is along Milton Road East to Brunstane Primary School, although it is the opinion of the council that this is still a safe route. Council officers have walked this route with parents and discussed measures which could be taken to enhance the route for pedestrians. They have identified that one potential improvement is the introduction of a pedestrian crossing near the junction of Milton Road East and the A1.

3.4 This proposal has the potential to address the current capacity issue in Towerbank Primary School. To ensure this potential benefit is realised it will be important for senior managers and staff to continue to discuss possible arrangements with children and their parents as plans for the reduction of the catchment area are developed.

3.5 The majority of staff, parents and children who spoke to HM Inspectors have a preference for Option 4, as they consider the 'sibling guarantee' to be the fairest solution to a difficult problem.

4. Summary

There is overall educational benefit to the proposal to reduce the size of the catchment area of Towerbank Primary School. Parents, staff, children and young people at all schools affected by the proposal realise the importance of addressing the issue of over-capacity which will affect Towerbank Primary School. Overall, Option 4 and its 'sibling guarantee' has most support. Parents and children feel that this is the fairest solution for families with children who currently attend the school. The council has indicated at all public meetings its intention to continue to involve all stakeholders as the proposal is being developed. In its final consultation report, scheduled for October 2015, the council should also ensure that concerns relating to safe routes to school are fully explored and addressed.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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