

## **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council to close Panmure St Ann's Special 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 close Panmure St Ann's Special 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 young people of the school; young people likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other 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 6 February 2017 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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 Panmure St Ann's Special School and Gorgie Mills School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 The City of Edinburgh 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 consultation period ran from 10 January 2017 until 27 February 2017. The document was made available electronically and in paper format to a wide range of stakeholders as well as on the council website. A public meeting was held on 6 February 2017. It was attended by 20 stakeholders including parents. Almost all of the attendees were current or former pupils, parents of Panmure St Ann's Special School and current or former employees of The City of Edinburgh Council who have a connection with the school. Overall, significant opposition to the proposal was recorded at the meeting. The acting headteacher and council staff have engaged stakeholders well through discussing the proposal as appropriate during the consultation period. An online survey resulted in 40 responses. Thirty-nine of the respondents indicated that they do not agree that Panmure St Ann's Special School should close at the end of June 2017.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that the proposal to close Panmure St Ann's Special School does have the potential to bring about educational benefit for young people with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The current school building is lacking in key facilities resulting in a restricted curriculum. Therefore, young people have to spend time travelling to other venues during the school day to gain their entitlement to a broad curriculum in areas such as physical education, science, hospitality, design and manufacture. Opportunities for young people to progress at the senior phase are limited. Outdoor facilities are inadequate and offer no relaxation or social space for young people to interact with each other. HM Inspectors agree that pupil numbers are now, due to a reduction in referrals, so low that it is no longer viable as a school. However, the educational benefits for young people who would have continued to attend after June 2017 are not yet sufficiently robust. They need a clear plan which will provide the benefits of a bespoke curriculum and ensure attendance at school improves and is sustained.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who responded to the survey are not in favour of the closure. Families who spoke with HM Inspectors agree the school building is not ideal and that the arrangements for young people to progress toward national qualifications are not strong. However, stakeholders including families, praised highly the school ethos and the work of staff in engaging and nurturing young people. They do not agree with the view of The City of Edinburgh Council outlined within the proposal that young people would have better learning opportunities and perform more successfully in a mainstream school with appropriate support or in Gorgie Mills School. In taking forward this proposal, The City of Edinburgh Council needs to ensure that young people will continue to receive a high level of personal support.

3.3 Young people who spoke with HM Inspectors praised the work of Panmure St Ann's Special School in nurturing and supporting them on an individual basis. They do not agree with the proposal to close the school. Young people feel the provision at the school is unique and alternative arrangements, as outlined by The City of Edinburgh Council, are not appropriate. They do not have confidence in the proposal to provide them with individualised educational packages in conjunction with mainstream placements. However, all young people want to improve their national qualifications to secure a positive destination such as a place at college or apprenticeship. They recognise that this is likely to be achieved outwith Panmure St Ann's Special School.

#### **4. Summary**

In taking forward the proposal, The City of Edinburgh Council has the opportunity to improve the educational outcomes for young people with particular social, emotional and behavioural needs. Young people would have access to better facilities within mainstream secondary schools and opportunities for a more coherent senior phase which could incorporate, as the proposal states, college and employer partnerships. HM Inspectors agree that through utilising council wide services, The City of Edinburgh Council has the potential to devise effective, alternative individualised placements for young people who would likely have become pupils of Panmure St Ann's Special School in the future. However, the proposal needs to state more clearly how The City of Edinburgh Council will assure current and any potential future pupils of this school that the right support will be readily available.

Young people and their families oppose the closure of Panmure St Ann's Special School. In finalising the consultation report, The City of Edinburgh Council will need to offer them further reassurance that improved educational outcomes can be achieved through working in close partnership with them. Young people also seek assurance that any individualised educational plans involving alternative placements will be negotiated with them and will offer a realistic chance of improving their attendance and qualifications.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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