

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council to address primary school capacity and accommodation pressures in South Edinburgh.

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 address primary school capacity and accommodation pressures in South Edinburgh. The council consulted on a number of options:

Option 1 – Establish a new primary school on the combined site of the existing South Morningside Primary School Deanbank temporary annexe and the Oaklands Care Home on Canaan Lane incorporating sections of the Bruntsfield, James Gillespie's and South Morningside Primary Schools catchment areas. This option includes the northern tip of the James Gillespie's Primary School catchment area being realigned with Tollcross Primary School and could be delivered with any of the following Early Years provision sub options:

- a. not including a nursery as part of the new school building and retaining the existing nursery classes of South Morningside Primary School which are currently based at Fairmilehead Church Hall;
- b. including a nursery as part of the new school building and retaining the capacity currently provided by the existing nursery classes of South Morningside Primary School at Fairmilehead Church Hall; or
- c. including a nursery as part of the new school building to replace the capacity currently provided by the existing nursery classes of South Morningside Primary School at Fairmilehead Church Hall resulting in the closure of that facility.

Option 2 – Increase the capacity of South Morningside Primary School to four streams by establishing a permanent annexe of South Morningside Primary School accommodating the nursery to P3 stages on the combined site of the existing Deanbank temporary annexe and the Oaklands Care Home on Canaan Lane. This would require the existing South Morningside Primary School catchment to be extended to incorporate sections of the Bruntsfield and James Gillespie's Primary School catchment areas and would also require the northern tip of the James Gillespie's Primary School catchment area to be realigned with Tollcross Primary School.

Option 3 – Maintain and improve existing accommodation arrangements by permanently establishing South Morningside Primary School's Deanbank temporary annexe, including the provision of a new gym, the relocation of the South Morningside Primary School Nursery to the Deanbank site and a minor catchment change to incorporate the combined site of the existing temporary Deanbank

temporary annexe and the Oaklands Care Home within the South Morningside Primary School catchment area.

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 schools and nursery; 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 meetings held on 3 September 2015 and 8 September 2015 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;
- visits to the site of Tollcross Primary School, Bruntsfield Primary School, James Gillespie's Primary School, South Morningside Primary School and South Morningside Nursery Class; and
- telephone conversations to gather the general views of pupils, parents and staff in Boroughmuir and James Gillespie's High Schools.

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 process ran from 24 August 2015 to 6 October 2015. During this period the council held four public meetings at four different schools in the South of Edinburgh. In total, approximately 170 people attended the public meetings. Statutory consultees were informed of the consultation in writing and officers of the council sought the views of children from all the schools involved in the proposal. Consultation documentation was published on The City of Edinburgh Council website. The council received 201 responses to the online consultation and a further 39 emails and written responses. In the online survey, all 201 respondents answered a question asking their preferred option. 15 preferred Option 1(a); 49 preferred Option 1(b); 59 preferred Option 1(c); 12 preferred Option 2; 43 preferred Option 3 and 23 did not want any of the options.

3. Educational Aspects of the Proposal

3.1 The council provided an appropriate set of educational benefits for each proposal. Overall, the option which provides the most educational benefit to the children of South Edinburgh is Option 1(c). This option would provide much needed increased pupil capacity in the area and may offer opportunities for existing schools to provide more flexible learning environments for children. The new purpose-built school would provide modern, flexible learning spaces in which a 21st Century curriculum could be more easily delivered. Option 1(c) would mean that children in the area would not need to attend a school with a split site, although some parents would continue to drop off children at a nursery which is located away from South Morningside Primary School. However, Option 1(c) would maximise learning time for all children in school by removing the need to travel between buildings. Safety would also be improved as school children and parents would not need to travel between sites during the school day. The younger children would have the advantage of having older pupils as role models in and around the school. There would also be fewer major transition points as children progress through the school. This option would also provide increased opportunities to bring the whole school together to develop the school ethos and easier opportunities for all staff to learn and develop from each other. Of most educational benefit would be a school with a nursery on site. This would provide the best opportunity for children to make smooth progress in their learning. However, the size of the proposed site for the new school does not meet the requirements laid down in the *School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967* and the amendments. If consent to build a school on the site is approved, the council needs to work closely with pupils, parents and staff to design facilities suitable for the size of the site.

3.2 Option 2 provides younger children in South Morningside Primary School with an improved learning environment and the possibility of a wider range of out of school hours activities. It would also provide increased opportunities for staff to learn from each other. Option 2 would also help to alleviate some of the pressure on capacity in Bruntsfield and James Gillespie's Primary Schools. However, the

concerns regarding a split site in South Morningside Primary School would remain and the large roll would make it more difficult for staff to develop strong learning partnerships with children.

3.3 Option 3 would provide some educational benefits to the youngest pupils in South Morningside Primary School and Nursery Class. The improved learning environment and opportunities for better transitions between nursery and primary would help younger children to progress in their learning. However, the concerns regarding a split site would remain and this option would do little to alleviate the pressures associated with increasing rolls in Bruntsfield and James Gillespie's Primary Schools.

3.4 In Tollcross Primary School almost all pupils, parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors were very positive about the proposal and welcomed the opportunities an increase in the school roll could bring. Parents and staff in the school discussed the possibility of further increasing the catchment area of the school. They thought this might be a cost-effective way to decrease the rolls in nearby schools. The council needs to continue to discuss with stakeholders how it can achieve best value from its school estate in South Edinburgh.

3.5 In Bruntsfield Primary School, almost all pupils, parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors welcomed the proposal and favoured Option 1. They recognised the need to alleviate the pressure on their own school building and felt that a new school in the area would provide an opportunity to do this.

3.6 In James Gillespie's Primary School, there were a number of concerns but almost all pupils, parents and staff agreed that, within the current proposal, Option 1 was the best. Parents who met with HM Inspectors shared their concerns at the length of time the effects of the proposal would take to work through. The proposal would not help the children currently in James Gillespie's Primary School and they feared that the roll would continue to rise, with subsequent increased pressures on the school. Parents were very concerned that the figures regarding the projected rolls were not accurate. The council needs to continue to work closely with parents to address these concerns.

3.7 In South Morningside Primary School, the parents, pupils and staff who met with HM Inspectors had mixed views on the proposal. Almost all pupils favoured Option 3; all staff and most parents favoured Option 1; a few parents favoured Option 2. Pupils wanted South Morningside to remain as it is with better facilities for younger children. Staff saw advantages to having a new school in the area and felt that it was the best option to alleviate the pressures on South Morningside. While parents saw the advantages of having a single site school, a few thought that Option 2 would ensure continued high quality education while providing increased capacity for the South Edinburgh area. A few staff thought that closing the current nursery at Fairmilehead might mean a poorer transition from nursery to primary for future pupils attending South Morningside Primary School. Some parents were keen to look at the possibility of demolishing the Deanbank temporary annexe. They felt that this had not been investigated well enough and that the council had not provided them with sufficient information as to whether attempting to get permission to

demolish Deanbank House was at all feasible. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to work with parents to address these concerns.

3.8 Pupils, parents and staff of Boroughmuir and James Gillespie's High Schools were content with the slight changes to the schools' catchment areas.

3.9 During the consultation period the council notified stakeholders of one non-material inaccuracy in the proposal and was made aware of one non-material omission as a result of a question asked at one of the public consultation meetings. The council took the necessary steps to notify stakeholders of this issue during the public consultation period and will need to ensure the full implications are highlighted in its final consultation report.

4. Summary

4.1 The City of Edinburgh Council's proposal to address primary school capacity and accommodation pressures in South Edinburgh has a number of strong educational benefits which will help to improve learning and teaching across the area. If a new school is built, there is the potential for improved transition between nursery and primary, and between primary stages, for pupils in the new school and for improved transitions between some stages for those in South Morningside Primary School. Learning environments in all the schools in the area could improve as rooms became available, providing increased opportunities for innovative teaching. A new purpose-built school would provide the flexible spaces which help to deliver a modern curriculum. Staff in South Morningside Primary School would find it easier to meet for professional learning. Finally, Option 1 would ensure there would be no school in the area with a split site, which would increase the safety for school children, parents and staff who currently travel between two school buildings.

4.2 Stakeholders have a number of reasonable concerns. In particular, they would like further information about the projected rolls for the schools in South Edinburgh. Stakeholders would like further consideration given to the possibility of demolishing Deanbank temporary annexe. Some parents in Tollcross Primary School would like more information on how the current proposal secures best value for the council. These are all fair and reasonable requests. The size of the proposed site for the new school does not meet current legislative requirements and, should the proposal go ahead, the council needs to engage with stakeholders to discuss the design of the building. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out how it will address stakeholders' concerns. In its final consultation report, the council also needs to set out the actions it has taken to address the non-material inaccuracy and omission in the consultation paper which emerged during the public consultation period.