

Consultation proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to build a new primary school on the current site of the Lenzie Moss Primary School playing fields.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation 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. Introduction

1.1 East Dunbartonshire Council proposes to establish a new build school at the current site of Lenzie Moss Primary School which would be due for completion in the summer of 2016. The council would close both Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class and Lenzie Moss Primary School when the new facility is open. The new school would have a capacity of 560 pupils and a nursery class with a capacity of 30 children. Lenzie Moss Primary School would be demolished and the space developed to provide sports pitches, playing fields and other outdoor spaces including a turning circle and a car park.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and

- visits to the site of Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class and Lenzie Moss Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 East Dunbartonshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included two public meetings and invitations to respond to the consultation proposal. Pupils at both schools were also consulted. The council issued 641 proposal packs and received 114 responses of which 80 were in favour of the proposal. Respondents raised a number of common concerns, these related to the increased volume of traffic, the design of the new school and roll projections.

2.2 Around half of the parents who responded were in favour of the proposal. Some parents of children attending Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class expressed dissatisfaction about the methods used to consult children. This view was also shared by a few parents at Lenzie Moss Primary School. Other concerns centred on the transparency of the consultation process, the lack of information on how the council will resolve the increased volume of traffic and how children will be kept safe during the construction of the proposed new school. Parents felt the council's roll projection figures did not accurately reflect the impact of new housing in a nearby estate. They were looking for reassurance from the council the new school would be large enough to accommodate all pupils and nursery aged children in the future without the need to build an extension. Parents were largely supportive of the view that a new school building was needed. It would be better able to provide access to modern information and communications technology. However, they expressed strongly their view that they and their children should have an influence over the final design of the new school and outdoor spaces. Parents spoke very positively about the positive relationships they had with the headteacher and her staff. They praised the quality of education and the friendly ethos which they hoped to retain in the future.

2.3 Around two thirds of the parents of children attending Lenzie Moss Primary School who responded were in favour of the proposal. While largely supportive of

the proposal they raised some concerns. They were very keen to retain certain features of the existing school grounds including the retention of the regularly used woodland areas and outdoor learning spaces. They were very satisfied with the quality of education their children received. They valued highly the support the headteacher and her staff provided, stating that the learning environment was a particular strength of their school. They were keen to retain these strengths. A few parents were not convinced there was a need for a new build and that modernising the existing Lenzie Moss Primary School was a better option. They also raised concern about how the council will address traffic management and the safe movement of construction vehicles during the school day.

2.4 Staff in both schools were largely in support of the proposal though they, like parents were keen to be fully involved in the final design process. Staff at Lenzie Moss Primary School valued their separate assembly hall and dining hall. Staff at Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class commented positively on their spacious classrooms, but acknowledged the poor condition of the heating system and deteriorating fabric of the building. Staff from both schools felt it was important to retain where possible the positive features of the two schools in the final design. Staff welcomed the opportunity the proposal offered to have better access to modern technology in their classrooms.

2.5 Children from both schools had mixed views about the proposal. Overall, they were in favour of a new school but with some reservations. Children from Lenzie Primary School were very fond of their school building stating that they would be unhappy if it were to be demolished. They did welcome the possibility of larger grounds for playing, learning and sporting activities. Children from Lenzie Moss Primary School expressed strongly the need to retain the woodland which they had worked very hard to develop as a place to learn. They looked forward to making new friends in a larger school. Children from both schools hoped they would be able to help design the new school building and outdoor learning spaces.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The main educational benefit the council sets out in its proposal is to provide access to a superior design of school which is purpose built for the delivery of 21st century education and supports Curriculum for Excellence. The council rightly states that the existing schools are not particularly well configured to respond to the demands of a modern curriculum. The council intends to build a school which provides flexible indoor and outdoor learning spaces for the combined rolls of the existing schools. The educational benefits of such a proposal are clear in so far as the initial design brief would suggest. These include, improved facilities for pupils with indoor learning spaces designed to contain modern technology, and flexible and adaptable teaching areas with direct access to the outdoors. It is not clear how well the proposed design will ensure the delivery of at least two hours of high quality physical education indoors given the projected number of children on the combined school roll. The council implies the delivery will rely on access to a combination of indoor and outdoor facilities. The council's educational benefits statement also lists elements of architectural innovation which the design will utilise. It will be important

to ensure the final design delivers effective acoustic absorption to minimise any disruption to other learners in open areas.

3.2 It is noted that as a result of the 3-18 cluster policy, staff from both schools already work well together and there are occasions when both schools share facilities. Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class use the Lenzie Moss playing field for their school sports. Should the proposal go ahead a carefully considered transition plan will need to be put in place to ease the move for pupils, parents and staff.

3.3 Both Lenzie Primary School and Nursery Class and Lenzie Moss Primary School are currently operating under capacity. The council expects pupil numbers to remain stable for the next ten years. There is however, significant new house building in the area and it will be for the council to reassure stakeholders that the proposed new school will accommodate future growth in the local population. The proposal outlines clearly how it will support community use. The council has taken due account of how these community activities could be accommodated within the new facility.

3.4 The council sets out that this proposal is financially the most cost efficient solution to addressing under-occupancy in its schools and ensuring the delivery of high quality education in buildings that are fit for 21st century education. The combined rolls will create a more viable school for the future. Parents in each school value and wish to retain the unique identity of their school and the highly supportive ethos. Should the proposal be accepted the council's arrangements for consulting with and involving parents and others will need to be clear and transparent to ensure the specific parental concerns and implications of the proposal are addressed. These include, traffic management, school design and the smooth transition to the new school

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to establish a new build school on the site of the Lenzie Moss Primary School playing fields by the summer of 2016 sets out some clear educational benefits. These largely relate to the need to address the low occupancy rates in schools across the council. The proposal would deliver for residents of East Dunbartonshire a reduction in the cost of the delivery of education. The costs of maintaining the existing building are a drain on council resources and the proposal would provide pupils and nursery aged children with access to a modern purpose-built learning environment.

4.2 During the consultation the council received 114 written responses from stakeholders, a significant number of these raised concerns about the increased volume of traffic that would use the narrow road leading to Lenzie Moss Primary School. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to take early action to investigate safe routes to school and minimise the impact on residents and others using the roads surrounding the school, and during any construction phase.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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