

Consultation proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal to close St Andrew's Primary School and St Joseph's Primary School and replace them with a new school on the St Andrew's Primary School site.

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.

As the council is proposing to close two schools, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 East Dunbartonshire Council proposes to establish a new build school at the current site of St Andrew's Primary School which would be due for completion in the school session 2016-17. The council would close both St Andrew's and St Joseph's Primary Schools when the new facility is open. The new school would have a capacity of 445 pupils. St Andrew's Primary School would be demolished and the space developed to provide sports facilities 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 St Andrew's and St Joseph's Primary Schools, including discussion with pupils, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, and other interested parties affected by the proposal.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of both schools; 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 an invitation for written submissions and two public meetings. The council also sought the views of children and young people affected by the proposal at each of the two primary schools. The council issued 803 proposal packs to statutory consultees and received 265 responses from these. In addition, 291 representations were received from interested parties who had not fallen into the statutory consultees categories listed by legislation. Of the statutory responses, 51 agreed with the proposal.

2.2 The Roman Catholic Church and the St Joseph's Parent Council strongly disagree with the proposal. They both regard the closure of St Joseph's Primary School as a serious deterioration in the provision of denominational education in Milngavie. The Roman Catholic Church view Bearsden and Milngavie as two separate geographic areas. The St Joseph's Parent Council strongly support this view and they argue strongly for as they believe, the right for their children to walk to school and value this more than the promise of a new build school. They are proud of the nurturing environment provided by the school. They are willing to engage in discussions about a model that would support a shared campus thus retaining Catholic education in Milngavie.

2.3 Parents of children from St Andrew's Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors were mostly against the proposal. A few were of the view that a new build school offered some positive benefits for their children. Some raised concerns about the longer term position of Catholic education in the area and if this proposal was not accepted what would happen in the future to the present site of St Andrew's Primary School. Other matters raised in discussions included the disruption and safety of children during construction phases, and the temporary loss of outdoor play spaces. Parents wanted more information about how the council would facilitate the

merging of the two school communities and parishes. They were not convinced the projected capacity of the new school would adequately support the proposed new housing developments in the area. The proposal did not include a nursery facility and some parents felt this was a weakness of the proposal. Overall, parents who met with HM Inspectors indicated that many of the questions they raised at the public meeting had not been answered. They expressed the view that they wanted more information to have a better understanding of how the proposal, should it be accepted, would involve them in, for example, selecting a new name for the school and influencing the design of the school.

2.4 Parents of children from St Joseph's Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were unanimously opposed to the proposal. In addition, the parents stressed the importance for them of the existing location of St Joseph's Primary School. In particular, the benefits to children's health and wellbeing, their regular engagement with the village shops and community and the daily use of the nearby park. They talked about the value gained from other services such as the Time Out Club and after school activities. It was stressed to HM Inspectors that they would lose these arrangements which they were convinced contributed effectively to the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. They shared their concerns about the route to the new school and their strong reluctance to place young children on buses. Many felt there were other options which had not been fully explored by the council during the informal consultation phase such as a shared campus within Milngavie.

2.5 Staff at both schools were not supportive of the proposal. They shared concerns about the travel and traffic management arrangements at the proposed new school. They were also concerned about the size of the proposed new school and the semi-open plan nature of the facilities. Staff in St Joseph's and St Andrew's Primary Schools value their active, positive relationships with their respective faith and local communities. They are anxious that the current proposal may impact negatively on their strong community relations and partnerships. They were looking for more information about arrangements for redeployment should this be required.

2.6 Staff at St Andrew's Primary School felt that children get a good start to their education in St Andrew's Primary School. Staff felt they get to know the children very well. They were concerned that such aspects would be lost by moving to a larger school. Staff were concerned that some of their high-quality outdoor learning facilities would be lost. They are anxious about continuing to teach on campus while the building work is undertaken and expressed concerns about health and safety.

2.7 Staff at St Joseph's Primary School are proud of their school. They feel they have more flexibility in their current building. They feel that the positive engagement of parents in the life of the school will be threatened due to distance of the new school from Milngavie and the poor public transport arrangements. They are also anxious that the opportunities for children from Milngavie to be involved in after school activities may be reduced due to the pressure of transport and pick-up arrangements.

2.8 The pupils of both schools stated that they enjoy their learning in their current school and are well supported by staff. Both groups of children were reluctant to consider moving to a new school. St Andrew's Primary School pupils who spoke to

HM Inspectors were against the proposal, although a few recognised the benefits a new and bigger school might bring, particularly in relation to information and communication technology (ICT). A number of pupils were anxious about making new friends, not knowing people, including concerns over the school name and uniform. All pupils who spoke to HM Inspectors were very positive about their school and the opportunities it provided. They all felt that their school has a positive ethos, and teachers and pupils knew each other well. Some were worried that the possibility of bigger class sizes might mean less attention from their class teacher. Pupils felt that they had worked hard to develop their grounds and garden and this would be lost in the new development. The pupils had a number of health and safety concerns including their safety during the period of the new school build and the impact of increased traffic. They wanted to know if it was safe to stay there during the build and were unsure if they would have an outdoor playground during the building process.

2.9 Pupils at St Joseph's Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors were all against the proposal. They did not feel that the consultation process had been effective. All pupils who spoke to HM Inspectors, were very positive about their school and the opportunities it provided. The pupils think their school has many strengths, including the caring teachers, the high quality education, the large outdoor space, the strong friendships and links with the community. They spoke enthusiastically about the role that many of their parents had in supporting the school and their learning and were concerned that a number of parents may not be able to work in the new school as it was too far away. They were particularly keen to speak about the memorial garden and wanted to know what would happen to it if they moved to a new school. They were anxious about the size of the proposed new school. They explained that St Joseph's Primary School felt like a family, many of their parents and relatives had attended the school. They liked being educated in their local community and being able to walk to school and their local Catholic church. They would like to visit a working new school as they are uncertain about the benefits that a new school would bring.

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 purpose built school which will enhance the current educational provision. In a condition survey undertaken by the authority, St Andrew's and St Joseph's Primary Schools were rated condition B, meaning that the building is generally satisfactory but is exhibiting some deterioration. Neither building is energy efficient. The proposal states that the new school will be fully compliant in terms of Disability Discrimination and the Equality Acts, it will be more energy and carbon efficient, and will have lower running costs. The council rightly states that the proposed new school will provide flexible indoor and outdoor learning spaces and will be able to respond to the demands of Curriculum for Excellence.

3.2 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to develop a new school addresses the under capacity issues in the two primary schools, offering modern, upgraded facilities. St Andrew's and St Joseph's Primary Schools are the two denominational primary schools serving the areas of Bearsden and Milngavie. The distance between the two schools is approximately 1.9 miles. Both schools are currently

operating under capacity. The current roll of St Andrew's Primary School is 293 pupils with a capacity of 462. It is therefore operating at 63% of its capacity. St Joseph's Primary School has a current roll of 138 pupils with a capacity of 289. It is therefore operating at 48% of its capacity. Rolls in both primary schools have declined over a number of years. It is predicted that the rolls will remain steady for the next ten years. The proposed new school should accommodate approximately 445 pupils, so will have the capacity to accommodate pupils from both communities.

3.3 In taking forward this proposal, the council needs to further consider a number of issues which include concerns about travel arrangements and traffic congestion associated with the new school. There is a concern in both communities, but particularly in Milngavie, that the distance to the proposed site may act as a barrier to learning. The council in its proposal outlines it is committed to a detailed process of assessing the traffic impact of the proposal. This will include a full transport assessment. Parents, children and young people would welcome continuing engagement about the proposal, including visits to new schools. The council needs to provide reassurance to children, staff and parents ensuring that it will build on the current strengths of both schools in bringing them together. This is particularly important in view of the opposition to the proposal, particularly from the community of St Joseph's Primary School and the parent council.

3.4 The council states in its proposal that it will work closely with the school and the Church to create a new school community. This is important as it will ensure that the links with both parishes continue. This was a major concern of nearly all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors.

4. Summary

4.1 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to develop a new campus addresses the under capacity issues in the current primary schools and clearly offers upgraded facilities and the potential for an enhanced curriculum for all learners. The council has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and is continuing to do so. A significant part of the council's proposal relates specifically to the benefits of a new build campus. The proposal needs to further consider the impact of bringing together these two denominational schools and more clearly outline the benefits to the two local communities of Bearsden and Milngavie.

4.2 The proposal is opposed by a significant number of stakeholders who responded to the consultation. Stakeholders are concerned about the timescale for implementation and the rationale for the site selection. The council needs to continue to provide all stakeholders, including children and their parents and religious leaders with appropriate information and assurances on how it will deal with their concerns, including catholic education provision. The council also needs to outline more clearly how it will minimise the impact of the loss of St Joseph's Primary School and its current facilities on the Milngavie area. The council needs to continue to consult further as planned with pupils, parents and staff to address their concerns and provide appropriate reassurances as required.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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