

Consultation proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal to close Auchinairn Primary School, Woodhill Primary School and Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre and replace them with a new school on the Woodhill 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.

Introduction

1.1 East Dunbartonshire Council proposes to establish a new-build school and nursery facility at the Woodhill Primary School site. The new facility would be scheduled for completion in the summer of 2016. The new school would have a capacity of 514 pupils and 145 children in the nursery. The council would close Auchinairn Primary School, Woodhill Primary School and Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre once the new facilities are available. Both Woodhill and Auchinairn primaries serve the Bishopbriggs area and are within approximately one mile of each other. Across both schools there are 348 empty places from a total of 848. The council expects the pupil roll to remain stable for the next ten years after which it is expected to fall.

1.2 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; and
- visits to the sites of Auchinairn Primary School, Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre and Woodhill Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.3 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools and centre, 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 761 proposal packs and received 137 responses of which 41 agreed and 93 did not agree to the proposal. Three respondents did not specify whether they agreed or disagreed.

2.2 The council carried out a detailed analysis of the responses from parents, pupils and others. The most commonly raised concerns in written responses were related to traffic management, the size of the proposed new facility and the increased distance pupils would need to travel to school. Those who attended the public meeting raised similar concerns. Concerns raised by those who met with HM Inspectors during the visits to the schools and pre-school centre included, the council's arrangements for consulting children, the location of the proposed new facility and the desire to retain nursery provision within the community at Auchinairn.

2.3 Parents of children attending Woodhill Primary School highlighted the very positive report by HM Inspectors of Woodhill Primary School published in 2011 that evaluated children's learning experiences as excellent. They were keen to retain the very effective education their children received. They were generally happy with the existing accommodation, especially the newly-built pitch which helps the school to deliver two hours of physical education each week. 64 responses were received from respondents associated with Woodhill Primary School. Of these, two thirds were against the proposal. Parents meeting with HM Inspectors expressed strongly the view that they had not been listened to at the initial stages of the consultation. It would be helpful to remind parents that their various concerns relating to for example, the accuracy of future projected rolls given the volume of new houses being built in the area, have been fully explored by the council. Some remained unclear and unconvinced about any proposed educational benefits for the children.

2.4 Of the seven written responses identified as being associated with Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre, five agreed with the proposal. Parents from the Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre wanted to know more about how the

council would respond to the already high demand for extended day-care places within the community, especially for babies. They expressed the view that they did not feel that this aspect had been fully considered by the council and sufficiently addressed in the proposal. The parents were strongly in favour of keeping a dedicated nursery provision for under-fives. Some parents from both Woodhill Primary School and Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre expressed concerns regarding the proposed 'tandem build' nature of the proposal and how the council would manage this process.

2.5 Parents of those attending Auchinairn Primary School were positive about the possibility of upgraded facilities for their children. They shared how much they valued the supportive relationships they had with the school staff. Of the 63 written responses received, 49 were not in favour of the proposal to close Auchinairn Primary School and move to the new site at Woodhill Primary School. Parents spoke positively about the history of the school and the impact on the community if it were to close. They highlighted the other uses of the school after hours, for example, the local Brownie pack and after school care. Most parents thought that the walk to the new site was too long especially for younger children. There was a strong feeling that the closure of Auchinairn Primary School would disadvantage the most vulnerable families within the community, both through the proposed location and through the loss of existing supports that are established within the school. Parents were looking for clarification on how the council would support them with for example, free bus travel to school, especially for those who would have children both in pre-school and primary provision which would result in multiple journeys.

2.6 Children we talked to from both primary schools were positive about a few aspects of the proposal. They liked the prospect of a new building and about the possibility of making new friends. Almost all children we met expressed regret about the individual identities of their schools being lost. Children raised similar concerns to those highlighted by their parents.

2.7 Staff from each of the schools made it clear that, should the proposal go ahead, they would be committed to making it work. They also expressed the view that, if a decision to proceed was taken, they should be given the opportunity to be consulted on the design and layout of the new-build. Some were not in favour of the proposal but were positive about the benefits a new campus would bring including upgraded facilities and the benefits for transition arrangements. There were a few concerns expressed about the layout and design of the existing buildings. For example, the lack of natural light in Auchinairn Primary School and issues around the layout of rooms for pre-school children at Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre. Most expressed the view that the existing accommodation provided a good environment for learning, particularly in terms of the amount of outdoor space available to children in all schools. Woodhill Primary School staff talked positively about current outdoor facilities such as the new pitch and the 'trim trail'. Almost all thought the existing accommodation could be upgraded without the need for a new school. They also expressed concerns about the loss of identity of the individual establishments. Staff from Auchinairn Primary School were concerned that the proposed site would have a detrimental effect on the level of parental engagement.

Staff in Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre wanted the new facility to provide access to an equally attractive and stimulating outdoor area similar to that currently available to children.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 East Dunbartonshire Council has set out in its proposal a number of clear educational benefits for children and young people, should the proposal go ahead. These, in the main, relate to the proposed design of the new building and improved accommodation and facilities. The proposal indicates that the new building will provide accommodation which is more modern and flexible, thus better meeting the needs of Curriculum for Excellence. A purpose-built school will provide an attractive environment for learning and for children, including those with additional support needs. Children will benefit from more modern facilities, including better information and communications technology. In taking forward this proposal, the council needs to consider how it will respond to parents' request for continued early years provision in Auchinairn.

3.2 The council sets out clearly in its proposal, the condition of Woodhill Primary School, Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre and Auchinairn Primary School. The council has rated all three buildings as falling under condition B which means that accommodation is generally satisfactory but exhibiting some deterioration. Energy efficiency in all three establishments is not good. Both primary schools are currently under-occupied with Auchinairn Primary School significantly so at 63% and Woodhill Primary School less so at 20%. The council makes a relevant case for tackling the issue of under-occupancy in both schools and for ensuring more efficient use of the council's resources.

3.3 The council acknowledges that there are important issues to be addressed regarding the final design of the school, safe routes to school, increased traffic and congestion and parking issues. They also recognise that more children from the Auchinairn Primary School area will have to undertake a longer journey to school under the proposal and will benefit from the council's transport policy whereby a bus will be provided for pupils travelling one mile or more. In addition, the council has sought the advice of an independent traffic consultant and has begun to outline potential ways of addressing the issues. In taking forward the proposal, it will be important for the council to keep appropriate stakeholders fully informed and, where relevant, involve them in the decision-making process.

3.4 The council outlines benefits for community use, stay-and-play facilities and out-of-school care from the proposed improved indoor facilities and outdoor spaces. Auchinairn Primary School is currently used by a business which provides an after school care service and other community groups in the evening. The proposal describes a commitment to work closely with all groups to secure suitable alternative accommodation if that becomes necessary. Some consideration needs to be given to how the proposal will support access to out-of-school hours' clubs and activities given the costs of travel and walking distances for a number of children and their families to the proposed site of the new school.

Summary

4.1 If implemented, the proposal to establish a new build school on the Woodhill Primary School site has the potential to bring about clear educational benefits through the provision of a purpose-built new school that will provide a high-quality and improved learning environment for children. The proposal also addresses the issue of under-capacity in the school estate, particularly at the existing Auchinairn Primary School. In this way, it will help the council to ensure that it meets its duties to secure best value through the efficient and effective use of its resources. In taking forward this proposal, the council needs to continue to engage and consult with parents, learners, staff and other stakeholders to ensure that the educational benefits of this proposal are realised in full.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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