

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to close Elmbank Centre and create a service which caters for social, emotional and behavioural needs, delivered within existing secondary schools across Dumfries and Galloway and at the proposed Learning Hub, which will be located in Dumfries.

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 Dumfries and Galloway Council's proposal to close Elmbank Centre and create a service which caters for social, emotional and behavioural needs, delivered within existing secondary schools across Dumfries and Galloway and at the proposed Learning Hub, which will be located in Dumfries. 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 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
- 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 Wednesday 2 September 2015 in connection with the council's proposals;

- 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;
- visit to the site of Elmbank Centre, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Dumfries and Galloway 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 statutory consultation period ran from Monday 24 August 2015 to Monday 5 October 2015. The proposal document was posted on the council website and paper copies were available from schools and local libraries.

2.3 A public meeting was held to discuss the proposal in Elmbank Centre on Wednesday 2 September 2015. The meeting was publicised in the local press, online through the Dumfries and Galloway Council website and also by the school through letters and text messages sent directly to parents. No parents or other members of the public attended the meeting. Minutes of the meeting were subsequently posted on the council website.

2.4 The council invited comments by email or letter in the proposal paper and on its website. There were no written submissions made to the council in relation to this proposal during the consultation period.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Elmbank Centre is an offsite facility in Dumfries for young people who have social, emotional and behavioural needs. The curriculum provided has an emphasis on literacy, numeracy and skills for learning, life and work. The building has been assessed as being in poor condition and requiring significant investment. It is not fit for its current purpose.

3.2 The council considers that this proposal will help to improve outcomes for young people who have social, emotional and behavioural needs. It also considers that implementing the proposal will extend the knowledge and experience of all staff so that they develop a better understanding of supporting learning needs. The proposal has the potential educational benefit of developing the ability of staff in schools to meet a wider range of needs by giving schools more responsibility for young people who would currently be placed at Elmbank Centre. However, the proposal is not clear on the process to achieve this. The council should ensure that this is clarified in its final proposal paper.

3.3 The council states that the Learning Hub would provide the type and scale of opportunities for young people to develop social or work-related skills in a working environment that cannot be delivered at the Elmbank Centre. The proposal has the

potential to deliver this but more detail now needs to be given regarding the provision which will be available at the Learning Hub and the implications for staff who are currently employed at Elmbank Centre. The council should ensure that this is clarified in its final proposal paper.

3.4 Staff at Elmbank Centre who spoke to HM Inspectors acknowledge that young people can become isolated from their peers whilst attending the centre. They welcome the improvement in specialist facilities but they have justifiable concerns about how this will work in practice. They would like the opportunity to become more involved in the development of the practical aspects of the proposal. They do not feel well-informed about the transition process for themselves or the young people if Elmbank Centre is closed. In the preparation of its final report, the council will need to ensure that current Elmbank Centre staff are fully involved in planning for the proposed Learning Hub.

3.5 Young people at Elmbank Centre who spoke to HM Inspectors appreciate the support they receive from staff. However, they are aware of gaps in the curriculum at Elmbank compared to mainstream schools. They think that they should get opportunities to experience college provision before they leave the centre so that they can make an informed choice about their next steps. In the preparation of its final report, the council will need to ensure that the views of young people who currently attend Elmbank Centre are taken into consideration in planning for the proposed Learning Hub. Whilst parents have been reluctant to participate in the consultation, the council should continue to give them opportunities to contribute to the planning process.

3.6 Staff from schools which make referrals to Elmbank Centre who spoke to HM Inspectors are aware of the need for change so that outcomes for young people are improved. They would welcome a system which provides greater flexibility to meet the needs of young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. They are enthusiastic about the potential of the Learning Hub as part of flexible learning packages for young people and see this as an improvement on the provision which can be made at Elmbank Centre. However, they would appreciate more information about how this will work in practice. The council should ensure that this is clarified in its final proposal paper.

4. Summary

This proposal has potential educational benefits for young people who are currently referred to Elmbank Centre. Almost all stakeholders who spoke to HM Inspectors agree that the proposed closure of Elmbank Centre and the provision of a new Learning Hub would be likely to improve outcomes for young people. However, they would welcome further information about how this will work in practice.

The council should ensure that this is clarified in its final report and that current Elmbank Centre staff, pupils and parents are fully involved in planning for the proposed Learning Hub.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
October 2015**