

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to close St Ninian's and Lochside Primary Schools and Nursery Classes and Maxwelltown High School and establish a new 2-18 Campus for North West Dumfries at the area known as the North West Park, Lochside Road, Lochside, Dumfries.

1. Introduction

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 St Ninian's and Lochside Primary Schools and Nursery Classes and Maxwelltown High School and establish a new 2-18 Campus for North West Dumfries at the area known as the North West Park, Lochside Road, Lochside, 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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

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

1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meetings held on 1 and 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; and
- visits to the site of St Ninian's Primary School, Lochside Primary School and Maxwelltown High School including discussion with relevant consultees. A representative of the Maxwelltown Play Care Centre which shares the campus with Maxwelltown High School also met with HM Inspectors.

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 Dumfries and Galloway Council has a vision to plan and deliver education on a whole town basis. Extensive stakeholder consultation has taken place since May 2008 with the aim of improving the schools estates in conjunction with a wider regeneration agenda for the town. This particular consultation is being undertaken as part of phase 1 of the Dumfries Learning Town programme. The statutory consultation period ran from Wednesday 26 August 2015 to Wednesday 7 October 2015. The council held four public meetings between 1 and 3 September 2015 in the schools detailed in the proposal. Fewer than ten members of the public attended each meeting. The council placed details of the formal consultation on their website. A copy was also available in council offices, libraries and schools. They received less than ten written submissions. Staff, parents, children and young people and community members have had a range of opportunities to comment on the proposal. This includes completing surveys and attending design workshops. During the consultation period, the proposal received varied responses from staff, parents and children.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to create a 2-18 campus for north-west Dumfries offers positive educational benefits for children and young people. This includes the potential to improve transitions for children and young people at key points in their learning journey. The council rightly points out that some of the existing school accommodation is in a poor state of repair and is under occupied. The proposal provides an opportunity to address these issues. It would also give the children, young people and local community members of north-west Dumfries access to high-quality learning spaces which are modern and more suited to delivering Curriculum for Excellence and lifelong learning experiences. There is the potential, should the council take the proposal forward, to bring together communities who can work together to improve outcomes for all learners. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to continue to reassure all concerned that the proposed building is large enough and that the internal spaces are designed in a way that will meet existing and future needs of users.

3.2 HM inspectors met with representatives of community groups as well as parents, staff and children and young people from all the schools concerned. There was positive support for the proposal from almost all stakeholders representing Maxwelltown High School. There was mixed support for the proposal from those stakeholders representing St Ninian's Primary School and Nursery Class, Lochside Primary School and Nursery Class. Stakeholders from Maxwelltown Play Care Centre felt the service had not been sufficiently considered in the proposal and were seeking more information about where this service would be located in the future. Those who supported the proposal thought it was a good idea to bring together the two primary schools, secondary school, early years settings and Langlands School onto one campus as this would offer better value than spending funds on maintaining older buildings. They were also of the view that the children and young people in the area deserved to have the very best facilities and that the campus would more effectively support their learning and help to raise attainment. Those who were opposed and the few who were strongly opposed to the proposal had a number of concerns. These included opposition to the location and design of the new building, its limited size and flexibility to meet the complex needs of some learners and its ability to accommodate any future increase in the school roll. Dumfries and Galloway Council in its consultation document sets out clearly the benefits of the proposal. They have been working with stakeholders to find solutions to specific concerns. In taking forward the proposal, the council should ensure all stakeholders continue to be fully involved in discussions to develop the final design for the 2-18 campus.

4. Summary

The proposal to establish a 2-18 campus on a site known locally as North West Park, Lochside Road, Lochside has the potential to bring about a number of positive educational benefits. Children and young people will benefit from being educated within modern purpose-built learning accommodation. There is the potential for greater collaboration between the existing school communities and the wider area of north-west Dumfries and with national agencies and further education providers. The proposal has the potential to make better use of council resources and to deliver best value. Overall, the council has set out a clear proposal for a 2-18 campus in north-west Dumfries. It now needs to continue to work with children, young people, parents, staff and communities to deliver a final building design that will meet the needs of a diverse community of learners.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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