

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to discontinue educational provision at Mouswald Primary School, reassigning its catchment area to that of Collin Primary School.

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 discontinue educational provision at Mouswald Primary School, reassigning its catchment area to that of Collin Primary School. 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.

HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of Mouswald Primary 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, including those who attend Collin Primary School;
- 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 meeting held on 8 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the site of Mouswald and Collin Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.3 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Mouswald Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements as a result of the proposed closure.

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 formal consultation ran from 24 August 2015 until 5 October 2015. The council posted the consultation document on its website. It issued copies of the document to all parents of pupils in the catchment areas of Mouswald and Collin Primary Schools and the Parent Councils of both schools. Further copies were made available to local community groups and at the Education Service Head Office in Dumfries and at Mouswald Primary School. The council made suitable arrangements to gather the views of children currently attending Mouswald Primary School about the proposal. The council placed advance notice of a public meeting in local newspapers. The meeting on 8 September 2015 was attended by ten stakeholders who were all supportive of the proposal. Less than ten written communications were received in response to the consultation.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal has clear educational benefits to children and Dumfries and Galloway Council has secured the confidence of stakeholders. If the proposal goes ahead, children at Mouswald Primary School would receive their entire curriculum in the same school. Currently they travel between their own school and their partnership school, Collin Primary School, for some of their learning. Children would have a larger group of peers with which to engage, both in and beyond the classroom. The proposal would increase the number and the age range of peers with which children could discuss their learning. There would be better opportunities to participate in team activities and these would have the potential to contribute positively to children's social and emotional development. Suitable arrangements would be available to support children who need additional help with their learning.

3.2 All stakeholders, including parents, children and staff who responded to the consultation and met with HM Inspectors supported the proposal. They reported that they had been kept well-informed and consulted about the proposal. Parents and children who met HM Inspectors expressed their appreciation for the educational service that Mouswald Primary School had provided. The school roll has been decreasing gradually over a number of years, and several parents have chosen to educate their children in other schools through placing requests. There are currently only two children on the school roll and no anticipated enrolments at P1 in the foreseeable future. The council projects that there will be no pupils on the school roll from August 2016. Mouswald Primary School is rated 'C' (poor) for educational suitability. The proposal will assist Dumfries and Galloway Council to make effective and efficient use of its resources by addressing capacity issues within its school estate.

3.3 The two children currently attending Mouswald Primary School are taught in a single class group. They travel to Collin Primary School for specialist teaching in art, music and physical education. They also access some of the school's programme for achievements by attending Collin Primary School. The time for travelling reduces the amount of time which would otherwise be available for learning and teaching. The proposal would result in all of the learning and teaching programme being delivered in the same school. This may also assist in planning for progression in children's learning across all aspects of the curriculum. The staff, parents and children at Collin Primary School stated that they already benefit from joint learning activities with children at Mouswald Primary School. They welcomed the prospect of this being a more permanent arrangement. There is capacity at Collin Primary School to absorb the increase in roll that may result.

3.4 Mouswald Primary School does not have provision for early learning and child care. The current proposal gives appropriate consideration to early learning and child care being provided at Collin Primary School. Should the proposal go ahead, this should assist in providing continuity in children's learning and help the council to secure best value from its school estate. Staff at Collin Primary School would welcome the potential increase in the roll of their early learning and child care provision. Collin Primary School has capacity for any foreseeable increase of roll in the nursery class.

3.5 There is a shared headship between Mouswald and Collin Primary Schools and existing examples of good partnership working between staff. Should the proposal go ahead, parents and staff would appreciate further clarity on the arrangements for headship and partnership working.

3.6 Dumfries and Galloway Council has given due consideration to reasonable alternatives to closure. These include: considerations on increasing the catchment area to Mouswald Primary School; suspending provision or mothballing; reviewing how three to five provision is assigned to Mouswald Primary School and the creation of a community hub. HM Inspectors are of the view that a sufficient range of alternatives have been considered and that the council's proposal is reasonable and fair. An assessment of rural and economic issues associated with the closure has been carried out by the Community Planning Partnership. It has not identified any negative impact of the proposed closure.

3.7 A small minority of stakeholders have requested more clarity on how the council's policy on school transport will be applied should the proposal go ahead. The council will need to address this request in its final report and in doing so it should include a continued focus on safe routes for those who may wish to walk or cycle to school.

3.8 The community of Mouswald village does not make use of the school building for events and gatherings. The school is located 0.5 miles outwith the village, with no street lighting or pavement to the facility. There is limited parking. Instead, the community makes use of the village hall. Stakeholders are, however, interested in having a continued say in the future of the building.

4. Summary

The proposal to close Mouswald Primary School has clear educational benefits for children. It has the strong support of stakeholders. Future pupils will have access to their entire curriculum in the same school and benefit from interacting with more children. The proposal will also help Dumfries and Galloway Council to address capacity issues in its school estate and secure best value. The council will need to ensure that it continues to engage with stakeholders where further clarification is required, such as in arrangements for travel.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
November 2015**