

Report by Education Scotland addressing the educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to extend the delineated area of Onthank Primary School from its existing boundary between the A735 and the B751 to incorporate areas of housing within the Southcraigs and Northcraig developments. The proposal will rezone the affected ground from the delineated area of Kilmaurs Primary School to that of Onthank Primary School and consequently from the delineated area of Stewarton Academy to that of James Hamilton Academy. Delineated area of Hillhead Primary School from its existing boundary along the A735 to the C177 to take in ground containing all the houses within the Cardhu Gardens and Cardhu Crescent development. Within the proposal all changes to delineated areas of the respective educational establishments are to be made with immediate effect, subject to the outcome of the consultation process.

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 East Ayrshire Council's proposal to extend the delineated area of Onthank Primary School from its existing boundary between the A735 and the B751 to incorporate areas of housing within the Southcraigs and Northcraig developments. The proposal will rezone the affected ground from the delineated area of Kilmaurs Primary School to that of Onthank Primary School and consequently from the delineated area of Stewarton Academy to that of James Hamilton Academy. The proposal will also rezone the delineated area of Hillhead Primary School from its existing boundary along the A735 to the C177 to take in ground containing all the houses within the Cardhu Gardens and Cardhu Crescent development. Within the proposal all changes to delineated areas of the respective educational establishments are to be made with immediate effect. 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 and early years centres; 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 meeting held on 23 February 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;
- telephone discussions with the headteachers of Grange, James Hamilton, Kilmarnock and Stewarton Academies; and
- visits to the sites of Hillhead, Kilmaurs and Onthank Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Ayrshire 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 consultation process ran from 6 February 2015 until 27 March 2015. During this period, the council held one public meeting in Onthank Primary School on 27 February 2015. In response from the Kilmaurs community the council held another public meeting. During the consultation period, the council consulted with parents, pupils and the wider community on proposed plans for the schools. The council received only 33 written responses to the proposal. In the written responses, stakeholder reactions to the proposal are mixed. Almost all agree to the review of Hillhead Primary School catchment area. Almost all disagree with the review of Kilmaurs Primary School catchment area. The majority are not in agreement with the review of Onthank Primary School catchment area.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal to review and amend the catchment areas is of educational benefit. It will ensure that children can attend the primary school in their neighbourhood. This will provide greater certainty for children and families residing within the designated catchment areas in terms of primary school education. The

proposal will remove a few anomalies for children and their families who reside next to schools for which previously they had to request a place, including for secondary education. The proposed catchment area amendments will result in little change to Hillhead and Kilmaurs Primary School in terms of distribution of pupils across schools. A few children from parts of the Hillhead catchment area may have increased time travelling when they start secondary school. In terms of Onthank Primary School, the changes may increase the size of the already large school.

3.2 Should the proposal go ahead, the council plans to implement it with immediate effect. Parents of children, who met with HM Inspectors had justifiable concerns that arrangements for transitions for children moving from nursery to P1 and from P7 to S1 may be affected, particularly for those children who had additional support needs. A few parents felt that it would be better to have more time to implement the proposal. In its final consultation report, the council needs to address concerns regarding the proposed timescale and make clear the arrangements for children and young people's transitions, including those who have additional support needs.

3.3 Across the primary schools, staff, children and parents who met with HM Inspectors have mixed views on the proposal. In telephone discussions with the headteachers of the secondary schools involved, they reported no concerns or issues with the proposal. They felt that the council had carried out effective consultation with the community and stakeholders involved with this proposal. Across the primary schools, staff and parents who spoke with HM Inspectors saw no educational benefits in the proposal other than parents would not have to put in placing requests for their children to attend their local school. A few staff had concerns that they would lose teaching staff as a result of changes to catchment areas. Most stakeholders felt that the proposal does not address the longer term impact of future house building. In all primary schools, the main concerns from staff and parents, who met with HM Inspectors, were around catchment boundaries. Most felt that there was a need to review the boundary for Kilmaurs Primary School to avoid similar issues in the future. Overall, primary-aged children in Hillhead and Kilmaurs Primary Schools had no significant views on the proposal. Those from Onthank Primary School had mixed views. Parents who lived near Hillhead and Onthank Primary Schools, but whose children were currently zoned to attend other schools, including Kilmaurs were happy that anomalies to the catchment area were being addressed.

3.4 Overall, parents from Hillhead Primary School raised some justifiable concerns over safe routes to school. A few would welcome further information over the transitional arrangements for their children moving to secondary school, particularly for those who needed extra support with their learning. Others wanted better transport arrangements for their children. They worried that their children would not want to attend school in bad weather due to a perceived lack of public transport in their area. Overall, almost all children from Hillhead Primary School who met with HM Inspectors are looking forward to attending Grange Academy. A few children wanted further reassurance to go the secondary school which their siblings attended.

3.5 Overall, stakeholders from Kilmaurs Primary School who met with HM Inspectors felt that the consultation process had been carried out well and that education staff had listened to their concerns. They were pleased that education staff had added an extra meeting in Kilmaurs in response to their worries. Staff and parents raised concerns over arrangements for the future of the school in terms of Kilmaurs pupil roll on account of planned building of houses. Parents who met with HM Inspectors wanted council education and planning officers to continue to work together to avoid unnecessary worries for stakeholders should catchments be reviewed again. Stakeholders wanted to ensure that any increase in pupil numbers would not lead to a reduction of resources for their children in terms of extra facilities which they currently benefit from, for example expressive arts and information and communications facilities.

3.6 Stakeholders from Onthank Primary School who met with HM Inspectors considered that the school is big enough. Parents were worried about increased school rolls and the adverse effect on traffic management around the school. These parents felt that there should have been separate consultations as each school has different issues. A few felt changes were going to take place anyway and that the proposal is only about financial savings. Children who met with HM Inspectors felt a large school helped them with transitions to secondary school. Others worried that there might be a negative impact on available resources. They wanted guarantees that their current learning experiences would not be affected negatively by the school roll potentially increasing and school resources being minimised and or over-stretched. For example, access to music, information technology, physical education and dining facilities. Staff felt that school resources should be increased to take account of the changing context and the increase in pupil numbers.

4. Summary

The council's proposal has educational benefit. The proposal addresses some anomalies in school catchment areas and will help to reduce the number of placing requests. If implemented, it will enable children who live in the catchment area to attend their local primary school instead of having to travel or make placing requests. This has the potential to provide fair and equitable access to schools in the local area whilst having no impact on the wider community. Implementation of the proposal will also enable the council to make more efficient use of its resources and help it secure best value in the delivery of its services. It has mixed support from stakeholders. In taking forward the proposal, the council should continue to provide reassurance for children and parents around transitions to secondary schools. It will also be important to have further discussions with stakeholders around safe routes to school, particularly in inclement weather.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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