

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to discontinue education provision at the current location of Hillside School with effect from June 2018, or as soon as possible thereafter. The children and young people attending Hillside School would transfer to a new-build Hillside School with effect from August 2018 or as soon as possible thereafter.

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 East Ayrshire Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at the current location of Hillside School with effect from June 2018, or as soon as possible thereafter. 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 school; any other users; children and young people 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 25 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; and
- visits to the site of Hillside School, 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 This proposal arises from representations made as part of the consultations on the future of Greenmill Primary School and Early Childhood Centre and Barshare Primary School and Supported Learning Centre and Early Childhood Centre made in June 2014 and before. The Parent Council of Hillside School expressed the view that they would wish to retain the links established with Barshare Primary School and Supported Learning Centre and Early Childhood Centre and viewed co-location as important. Views were also expressed that consideration should be given to other sites for the new primary school in the Cumnock area. The council took regard of these views in coming forward with the current proposal.

2.3 The council also proposes that the new-build Hillside School should be co-located either with a new secondary school resulting from the merger of Auchinleck Academy and Cumnock Academy in addition to a newly merged primary school resulting from the merger of Greenmill Primary School and Barshare Primary School, or with a new primary school, resulting from the merger of Greenmill Primary School and Barshare Primary School. The council proposes that the new-build Hillside School will be situated on the Broomfield site in Cumnock.

2.4 The proposal sits alongside two other proposals which are running concurrently.

2.5 An advert was placed in local newspapers and the consultation period ran from 12 February 2015 to 27 March 2015. A copy of the consultation document was placed on the East Ayrshire Council website. A public meeting was held in Hillside School on 25 February 2015. Written responses could be made by email or through completion of an online response form, available on the council website.

2.6 In advance of the consultation period the council also sought the views of children and young people at some of the schools affected by the proposals. The council engaged an independent organisation to carry out the consultation. However, it was agreed that this was more appropriately explored in Hillside School through class discussions and also through meetings of the pupil council, due to the nature of the additional support needs of children and young people in the school.

2.7 The council received 22 responses to the consultation directly and 78 further responses as a result of the concurrent proposals for a new Campus on which Hillside School would co-located. Of the direct responses, 12 were in favour of the new-build Hillside School being co-located with the new primary school resulting from the merger of Greenmill Primary School and Barshare Primary School and eight were against. Ten of those who responded were in favour of the new-build Hillside School being co-located with the new Secondary School resulting from the merger of Auchinleck Academy and Cumnock Academy in addition to the newly merged Primary School resulting from the merger of Greenmill Primary School and Barshare Primary School and 12 were against.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council outlines clearly a number of educational benefits from this proposal. It acknowledges that the current building is not well designed to meet the needs of the children and young people who now attend Hillside School and believes that a new purpose-built school, which will retain its own identity, will improve outcomes for the children and young people who attend it. Staff and parents who spoke to HM Inspectors agree with this and are keen to be involved in the design of the new school. Children and young people who spoke to HM Inspectors also have clear ideas about the features of the current school they would like retained and the additional features which should be included. The current largely open-plan building was designed to meet the needs of children and young people with physical additional support needs, whilst the majority of those now attending the school have autistic spectrum disorders.

3.2 The proposal has the potential to improve relationships between schools and to promote the sharing of resources as a result of co-location which could result in enhanced learning experiences for children and young people from Hillside School. These could include aspects of the curriculum such as music, science, technical and physical education. Staff and parents who spoke to HM Inspectors agree, acknowledging that it is difficult to get regular access to this expertise currently. They are hopeful that a more inclusive approach can be developed in other schools on the new shared campus through closer involvement with Hillside School. Stakeholders from both Barshare and Greenmill Primary Schools are entirely supportive and in favour of Hillside School being co-located on a new shared campus. Barshare Primary School staff and parents would like to maintain existing strong links whilst Greenmill Primary School parents would welcome the opportunity to further develop such links. Children and young people from Hillside School who spoke to HM Inspectors agree that access to more up-to-date resources such as computers will be important to them. To ensure this potential benefit is realised it will be important for senior managers and staff to discuss possible arrangements as plans for the shared campus are developed.

3.3 The proposed co-location has the potential educational benefit to improve relationships between children and young people from different schools, to their mutual benefit.

3.4 The council feels that the presence of Hillside School on the shared campus will be of direct benefit to children and young people in the other schools in the same

location. Parents of pupils at Hillside School who spoke to HM Inspectors are enthusiastic about the benefits of the shared campus to their children as well as to children and young people in the other schools. They feel that there is significant potential for buddying opportunities between schools as well as encouraging a more inclusive approach in other schools which enables children and young people to be more accepting of additional support needs. They worry that their children are too segregated from others who should be part of their peer group. Staff who spoke to HM Inspectors have run some joint events for young people with other schools but agree that there should be more opportunities for pupils to mix with others their own age. Should the proposal go ahead, the council will need to plan regular opportunities for children and young people from all schools involved in the shared campus to develop good working relationships.

3.5 The majority of staff and parents who spoke to HM Inspectors are enthusiastic about the possibility of a new school and would prefer to be on a shared campus with primary and secondary schools. A minority of staff and parents who spoke to HM Inspectors consider that it would be preferable to be on a shared campus with primary schools only, as they were concerned that children and young people could find it difficult to cope with the size of the proposed shared campus if it also included secondary pupils. A few of the written responses to the consultation expressed the same concern, as did some stakeholders in Cumnock Academy and Auchinleck Academy who spoke to HM Inspectors. A few of the written responses expressed worries about the vulnerability of children and young people from Hillside School on a large shared campus. The council has experience of undertaking similar mergers in the past, including the involvement of special schools. In its proposal document, the council acknowledges concerns about the size of the campus and about potential vulnerability but indicates that these problems rarely become significant issues once children and young people begin to attend a new campus of this type. In its final consultation report, the council should ensure that these concerns are addressed.

4. Summary

4.1 There is overall educational benefit to the proposal to close the current Hillside School building and transfer to a new-build Hillside School with effect from August 2018 or as soon as possible thereafter. The proposal for a new school is supported by staff, parents, children and young people. Whilst the majority of staff and parents would prefer Hillside School to be part of a shared campus, including both primary and secondary schools, this will depend upon the outcomes of other consultations.

4.2 Co-locating primary, secondary and special schools on a shared campus has the potential educational benefit of improving relationships between staff, children and young people from different schools and promoting the sharing of resources. Should the proposal proceed, the council should continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure this benefit is realised.

4.3 Parents, staff, children and young people at Hillside School realise the importance of the new school being appropriately designed to meet their needs. They have clear ideas about what this should include, which facilities should be shared and which should be kept separate. The council has indicated at all public

meetings its intention to include all stakeholders should be fully involved in the final design brief for the school as it is being developed. In its final consultation report, the council should also ensure that concerns relating to the size of the shared campus and to the potential vulnerability of children and young people attending Hillside School are fully explored and addressed.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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