

Consultation proposal by East Ayrshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal for future provision of children and young people currently attending James Hamilton Academy, Kilmarnock Academy, Silverwood Primary School and New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre.

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

Introduction

1.1 East Ayrshire Council proposes to discontinue education provision at James Hamilton Academy and Kilmarnock Academy with effect from the end of the 2016/17 academic session in June 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter, and that the young people attending these establishments transfer to a new-build school establishment, with effect from the start of the 2017/18 academic session in August 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter, to be sited on ground at either the existing James Hamilton Academy site on Sutherland Drive, Kilmarnock or the former Diageo site on Hill Street, Kilmarnock. Further, that if the school establishment is sited at the existing site on Sutherland Drive, Kilmarnock that education provision at New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre and Silverwood Primary School be discontinued with effect from the end of the 2016/17 academic session and that the young people attending these establishments transfer to a new Primary School with an integrated new build Secondary, Primary and Early Childhood Centre campus on the present James Hamilton Academy site with effect from the start of the academic session 2016/17 or as soon as possible thereafter.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meetings held on 14 and 15 May 2013 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;
- visits to the site of James Hamilton Academy and its associated primary schools and nurseries, New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre, Silverwood Primary School, Woodlands Nursery and Onthank Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- visits to the site of Kilmarnock Academy and its associated primary schools Hillhead Primary School, Kirkstyle Primary School and Loanhead Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

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

2. Consultation process

2.1 East Ayrshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a series of public meetings which were held in all of the schools affected by the proposal. Overall, stakeholders felt that the consultation process was well organised and helped to assist them in their understanding of the proposal. Some stakeholders felt that the focus on the location of the proposed school detracted from potential discussion about the educational benefits of the proposal.

2.2 In the schools visited by HM Inspectors most stakeholders were in agreement about the benefits of merging Kilmarnock Academy and James Hamilton Academy. Overall, young people at the two secondary schools recognised that a larger school would be able to offer a wider curriculum including more subject choices and the opportunity for better sports facilities. A few parents were concerned about the impact of the increased roll of the secondary school should the two schools merge. They felt that their children would not receive sufficient attention in a larger school. Concerns were also raised about the potential disruption to those young people who would be at S4 and S5 at the time of transfer to the new school. Parents, pupils and staff at Kilmarnock Academy and some stakeholders from associated primary

schools were disappointed that the council was not retaining Kilmarnock Academy. They felt that the strong historic significance of Kilmarnock Academy within the town should be preserved. Some stakeholders highlighted the potential benefit for young people in relation to vocational education, as a result of its close proximity to the new Kilmarnock College.

2.3 Stakeholders differed in their views about the proposed sites for the merged school. They expressed strong concerns about travel, transport costs and safety to sites which were currently outwith their catchment area. They felt that there was potential for truancy if their children have a greater distance to travel to and from the new school, particularly in inclement weather. Parents from schools not currently within the catchment area of Kilmarnock Academy were concerned about their children's safety in and around the town centre. Most parents considered that the site at Hill Street was unsuitable. They perceived that there would be traffic congestion in the event of a College, commercial development and school occupying this site.

2.4 Parents, pupils, staff and the community associated with the New Farm Community area and Onthank Primary School stated a preference for the existing campus of James Hamilton Academy on Sutherland Drive site because it would offer greater scope for school and community facilities. In addition they welcomed the council's further proposal for a 3-18 campus, if the school is sited on Sutherland Drive. They recognised that the site was a better option financially as set out in the council's proposal. Overall staff, pupils and parents of children at Kilmarnock Academy and most of its associated schools preferred the site on Hill Street for proximity. They were concerned about the impact on the town of Kilmarnock if the site was in the New Farm Loch Area. Some parents felt that there might have been less distance for young people to travel if the council had considered more strategically the issue of zoning and catchment areas for the all the secondary schools within the council area.

2.5 Staff at Kilmarnock Academy and James Hamilton Academy recognised the importance of working together to ensure a smooth curricular and pastoral transition for pupils. Staff from James Hamilton Academy and New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre were very positive about the potential enhancement of the 3-18 campus. They valued the existing opportunities for curricular liaison as they were already within a shared campus.

2.6 Most staff from the associated primary schools felt that the proposal had focused mainly on the implications for secondary staff and pupils and had not fully addressed the implications for primary school pupils and staff. Staff from Silverwood Primary School and Woodlands Nursery regretted that the council's proposal would lead to the closure of the primary school and nursery. They recognised the benefits of the potential site at Sutherland Drive but felt that the removal of education provision would impact on the community in the vicinity of the primary school. Staff at Woodlands Nursery were concerned about the implications of the council's proposal for their future. Parents of children at Woodlands Nursery were pleased with the current provision for their children. They did not have enough information about the council's plans for the nursery.

2.7 Pupil representatives at the two secondary schools and their associated primary schools were aware of the council's proposals. Overall, they welcomed the opportunity for enhanced facilities of a new school. A few were concerned about potential rivalry between pupils from the two catchment areas but recognised that there was potential to work together positively within a new school setting. They shared their parents' concern regarding distance to travel, depending on where they lived.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 East Ayrshire Council has set out a series of 13 options within the consultation proposals. The council has also provided information about the outcome of a critical option appraisal exercise carried out by officers from a range of council services. The option appraisal took account of educational benefits that will be delivered, the financial considerations and available funding support from Scottish Government, and maximising the number of young people who would directly benefit from the proposal. Having considered all the relevant factors as described above, the preferred option of officers is to create a new 3-18 campus with community facilities that is located at the current James Hamilton campus. If the option for the 3-18 campus is not pursued, it would be the council's intention to proceed with a merged secondary school. The council recognises that in this event, a new consultation on the future of education provision at New Farm Primary and Early Childhood Centre and Silverwood Primary School would be required.

3.2 The merger of Kilmarnock Academy and James Hamilton Academy within a 3-18 campus, which would include Silverwood Primary School and New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre has potential to provide a wide range of educational benefits for children and young people. There would be an opportunity to build upon existing collaboration in developing the curriculum and easing transition across sectors, sharing standards and moderating levels of achievement. A larger pool of staff expertise would have potential to improve learning experiences for children and young people by providing greater personalisation and choice for secondary age pupils and sharing subject knowledge and teaching approaches across sectors. The council's proposal highlights the enhanced opportunities for shared facilities including sports and outdoor learning. The council recognises that should the proposal be approved, forward planning will be required from the Department of Educational and Social Services in order to ensure effective curriculum delivery and staff management. Senior officers have already set up a Project Board which includes the headteachers of all schools involved in the proposal.

3.3 In finalising its report, the council will need to consider fully the impact of the proposals on children and young people with additional support needs. It states that the 3-18 campus would provide easier integrated working involving support services such as educational psychology, learning support, health and social services with these specialist services being better able to plan across sectors and work with one enlarged staff team. As a result, there would be potential for better personalised planning for children with additional support needs and improved transition processes.

3.4 Approaches to improving attendance will require further attention, taking into account that attendance of secondary aged pupils (2010/11 figures) in both schools is below the national average. There is potential to enhance partnerships with other agencies and services such as health and to develop a coherent approach to support the most vulnerable young people and those at risk of missing out. The council's proposal highlights improvements in attainment in specific measures in both secondary schools and outlines a range of benefits which could have potential to improve attainment. There is scope to address more fully how the proposal would impact positively on attainment across 3-18.

3.5 The council's proposal does not fully consider the implications for collaboration among the other associated primary schools, taking into account that Hillhead Primary School, Kirkstyle Primary School, Loanhead Primary School and Onthank Primary School and Early Childhood Centre would not be included in the 3-18 campus. The proposal would affect the pupils in these schools at the time of transition to secondary school. Parents of pupils from these schools are concerned that there could potentially be a negative impact on the roll of some schools as parents may ask for placing requests into the catchment of the proposed new school to minimise further difficulties at a later date.

3.6 If the proposal goes ahead and the new school is sited on the ground at the existing James Hamilton Academy campus, there will be a direct impact on Woodlands Nursery, which is a partner provider for pre-school education, and is based within a classroom in Silverwood Primary School. The nursery delivers a pre-school provision for 3-5 year old children, with 20 places available in the morning and 20 places available in the afternoon session. The council will need to consider how the needs will be met of all the pre-five children affected by the proposal. New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre is already located within surplus accommodation within the James Hamilton Academy buildings.

3.7 The provision of courses and the benefits of integrated curriculum planning at the senior stage would still be available within the 3-18 campus. If the council decide to go ahead with the 3-18 campus there is further scope to clarify how learning facilities might be used for joint delivery of courses, thus reducing the number of young people who require to travel to attend college courses.

3.8 The council's proposal envisages that the new school would be designed to offer access to some facilities to the community and provide potential for intergenerational work. Full development of the site would allow the present New Farm Community Centre to be closed, bringing further economies of scale. The new school would be able to provide flexible accommodation for community use. There is potential for the council to consult with users of the proposed facility in order to build capacity within the community to develop lifelong learning.

4. Summary

4.1 The council provides a sound case for the proposed merger within the 3-18 campus. This option would provide best value financially. It would benefit the children and young people of the merged schools who would have access to a larger

complement of staff expertise, improved facilities and outdoor spaces. It would also allow more to be spent on staffing and resources.

4.2 In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to give further consideration to how the strengths of each school might be built upon and staff expertise shared within the 3-18 campus. Approaches to improving attainment, the curriculum, the range and number of qualifications and teaching and learning will need to be considered carefully in order to deliver the entitlements for young people within existing curriculum structures. There is also scope to clarify how partnership with Kilmarnock College might be further enhanced taking into account the potential for joint course delivery. The council have acknowledged the importance of planning, to ensure effective curriculum delivery and staff management across the schools affected by the proposal. It will be important for staff to work together to evaluate the quality of existing provision in order to plan effectively for improvement. The leadership of the merged school and staffing structures will need to be addressed by the council as early as possible.

4.3 Parents expressed strong concerns about the risk to children's safety as a result of the increased traffic at the new site. There will be a greater degree of travel from a greater number of young people regardless of which site is chosen. Parents need to be reassured about how this might be managed by the council. The council needs to provide an early indication of how it intends to review school travel plans to ensure pupil safety and effective traffic management.

4.4 Many parents are concerned about how the learning needs of children and young people will be met. The council needs to continue to work with parents to allay their concerns about how children and young people will be supported in a much larger campus with greater numbers of people. It will be important for the council to consider fully approaches to inclusion and equality of opportunity.

4.5 The council's proposal does not clarify how it will provide education for the pre-five children who are currently accommodated in Silverwood Primary School. The council will need to consider how the needs will be met of all the pre-five children affected by the proposal.

4.6 The council's proposal needs to consider fully the implications for collaboration among the other associated primary schools, taking into account that Hillhead Primary School, Kirkstyle Primary School, Loanhead Primary School and Onthank Primary School and Early Childhood Centre would not be included in the 3-18 campus.

4.7 The new school would be able to provide flexible accommodation for community use. There is a need for the council to consult with users of the proposed facility in order to build capacity within the community to develop lifelong learning.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
September 2013**