

Consultation proposal by East Ayrshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the following proposal.

Discontinue pre-school and primary Gaelic Education Provision at Onthank Primary School and Early Childhood Centre and secondary Gaelic Education Provision at Grange Academy with effect from the end of the 2016/17 academic session in June 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter and relocate to the new 3 to 18 campus to be built at the site of the present James Hamilton Campus, Kilmarnock with the option of forming a single establishment within the new 3 to 18 campus.

Context

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 three 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. As the council is proposing to change the provision for Gaelic Medium Education, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 East Ayrshire Council proposes to merge the current early years, primary and secondary Gaelic Education Provision to form a single establishment within the new 3 to 18 campus on Sutherland Drive, Kilmarnock.

1.2 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 19 February 2014 in connection with the council's proposals;

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposals, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the site of Onthank Primary School (including the Gaelic Medium Provision), Onthank Early Childhood Centre, Grange Academy (including the Gaelic Medium Provision), Kilmarnock Academy, James Hamilton Academy, New Farm Primary School and Early Childhood Centre and Silverwood Primary School, including discussion with children and young people, parents and staff of the establishments noted.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposals for children and young people of the schools and 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 proposals;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposals; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposals, 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*.

2.2 HM Inspectors met with children and young people, headteachers, staff and parents from the schools affected by the proposals. There was overwhelming support for East Ayrshire Council's proposals to merge Gaelic Medium Education provision to create a 3 to 18 Gaelic campus. Almost all those consulted were of the view that the proposal for a 3 to 18 Gaelic campus in East Ayrshire Council had the potential to establish a strong basis for securing future provision. However, those consulted required more details of the proposals. Some parents also felt that the proposals had to be part of a long-term plan for Gaelic Education for East Ayrshire. They would like to be fully involved and consulted on all aspects of future planning. Parents of children and young people currently receiving Gaelic Medium Education also felt that the proposals had to be taken forward in a way that demonstrated a full commitment to Gaelic Medium Education. They felt that learning through the medium of Gaelic needed to be presented as an option available to all parents within East Ayrshire Council.

2.3 Most stakeholders were satisfied with how the council had involved them in the consultation process. Some parents and staff expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the overall consultation process. A few felt that information had only been passed on by word of mouth or through social media. A few stated that they were not able to submit their views online.

2.4 Those consulted by HM Inspectors were reassured that better continuity and progression could be provided through the proposal which brought together, on one site, provision that takes place currently on two campuses in different parts of Kilmarnock. Parents and staff, however, were still concerned with the lack of detail of how the 3 to 18 Gaelic campus would operate. At the primary stages, there was uncertainty as to whether children's learning operated alongside the English medium provision or whether it was a dedicated Gaelic Medium Provision. In both cases, parents were clear that the proposal had to lead to Gaelic Medium Education that was based on the principles of immersion. They referred to national advice on Gaelic Medium Education to illustrate their aspirations. Parents expressed disappointment with the availability of staffing over time at the current Gaelic Medium Provision at Onthank Primary School. They are now looking for a commitment for suitably qualified staffing to be part of the proposed new 3 to 18 Gaelic campus. Without this commitment, they felt that the proposed new 3 to 18 Gaelic campus would not lead to an improved quality of education.

2.5 All those consulted felt the proposal had potential to increase the quality of Gaelic Medium Education at the proposed new campus. Parents who met with HM Inspectors felt that references to the learning approaches in the proposal document such as 'cascading' were not sufficiently mindful of national advice on the principles of immersion. Some of those consulted were very clear that there had to be a strong focus on immersion for the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus to be classified as Gaelic Medium Education. Parents felt that the lack of detail on staffing for the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus, especially at the secondary stages, did not provide reassurances that children and young people would benefit from increased learning through the medium of Gaelic as a result of these proposals.

2.6 Parents would also like more information on how Gaelic Medium Education would operate at the secondary stages. They appreciated that young people would be part of a 3 to 18 Gaelic campus but they were unclear as to how this would link to the secondary school on the campus. Parents also highlighted a need for clarity on whether a range of subjects would be taught through the medium of Gaelic at the secondary stages. They were aware this was a challenge for the council but needed some re-assurance that all possible steps to secure appropriate staff would be taken. If this was not to be the case, the provision would not present parity in Gaelic Medium Provision with a nearby education authority. One of the aims of the proposal was to offer better Gaelic Medium Provision in East Ayrshire so that the council would not lose young people to study at this other education authority. Other parents recognised that if the council did not promote and advertise the benefits of Gaelic Medium Education and bilingualism it would not attract sufficient pupil numbers to justify staffing to provide a curriculum through the medium of Gaelic at the secondary stages. All parents had concerns about the current reduction of time that children spent learning through the medium of Gaelic as they moved from primary to secondary. In all cases, parents were clear that young people need to be able to take appropriate National Qualifications and awards to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding in Gaelic and through Gaelic.

2.7 Those consulted recognised that the creation of a 3 to 18 Gaelic campus presented an opportunity to have adults and organisations using the school as a centre of Gaelic which may also lead to partnership working to support children and

young people's learning through Gaelic. Parents highlighted that birth to three Pàrant is Pàiste provision was not, however, included as part of this provision and requested that it would be. They highlighted that it would be more convenient to have the same venue for children and young people's learning opportunities from birth to 18 within the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus.

2.8 Staff, parents and young people at Grange Academy expressed respect and value for having Gaelic Medium as part of their curriculum. They regretted that this unique and special aspect of Scottish Education would no longer be part of the curriculum at Grange Academy should the proposal go ahead. In so doing, they did, however, endorse the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus for its potential to realise positive benefits for young people. Children and young people in primary and secondary schools which currently have no Gaelic Medium Provision, but would in the future be part of the 3 to 18 Gaelic campus, were excited by the prospect. They would like to know more about how it would affect them and how they could support their peers, learning through Gaelic, who would be members of a larger school community. They were keen for links to be built to allow this to happen.

2.9 Those consulted were very positive about the innovative approaches to curriculum design which resulted in Gaelic Learner Education being part of all young people's learning in S1 at Grange Academy. Young people learning through the medium of Gaelic recognised this had greatly improved a wider understanding of the importance and value of the language. They commented on how this had led to a more inclusive culture and ethos within the school for Gaelic. They felt it was essential to have an inclusive culture and ethos across the proposed new 3 to 18 Gaelic campus to ensure children and young people learning through the medium of Gaelic are included.

2.10 All those consulted recognised the impact that very effective leadership of the school had on the success of Gaelic Education within Grange Academy. They highlighted the importance of having strong leadership at the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus with a vision, a commitment, an understanding of and support for a high quality Gaelic Medium Education. They stated these were key criteria for selecting a future headteacher.

2.11 A significant number of those consulted commented on current and longstanding difficulties arising from the council not being able to secure suitably qualified staff at the primary stages. This had resulted in their children not having enough of their learning through the medium of Gaelic. They expressed a strong desire that this new proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus would allow staff and children to provide and enjoy an improved quality of education.

2.12 Staff delivering through the medium of Gaelic felt that a dedicated 3 to 18 Gaelic campus would enable them to share practice in learning and assessment and engage in professional dialogue through the medium of Gaelic. They felt this would have a positive impact on their continued professional development. The headteacher of Onthank Primary School felt that the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus would increase flexibility in deploying staff to good effect for the benefit of children learning through the medium of Gaelic.

2.13 Young people and parents of those who would have embarked on secondary education at Grange Academy, at the time that the proposed Gaelic Medium Provision would open, requested arrangements be put in place to enable them to remain at Grange Academy while also being able to continue with Gaelic Medium education. This needed to include them being able to sit National Qualifications for Gaelic in the senior phase. A few children at Onthank Primary School stated they did not see the value of starting to learn at Grange Academy to then transfer to the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus. For them, their preferred option might be to attend their associated secondary, James Hamilton Academy with their peers, and to pick up their Gaelic Education again once they had moved to the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The proposals by East Ayrshire Council to discontinue Gaelic Medium Provision in the separate establishments and merge the current Gaelic Medium Provision into a single establishment in the new 3 to 18 Gaelic campus on Sutherland Drive, Kilmarnock offer a clear educational benefit to the children and young people who will attend the new provision.

3.2 The proposals acknowledge there will be an opportunity to strengthen the transition process for children and young people as they progress from pre-school, through primary and on to secondary education. In addition, children and young people will be part of a larger peer group within a single location.

3.3 Within the proposed arrangements, staff will be able to take part more readily in activities with practitioners from their own and other sectors and this will provide improved professional learning. There is an ambition, too, to develop further opportunities for the use of Gaelic within East Ayrshire through increased opportunities for extra-curricular activities through the medium of Gaelic.

3.4 East Ayrshire Council's proposals are mindful of the aims of the National Gaelic Language Plan. By taking account of national advice, the proposals have the potential to help secure an increase in the numbers benefiting from Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland. If this was not to be the case, the provision would not present parity in Gaelic Medium Provision with a nearby education authority. One of the aims of the proposal is to offer better Gaelic Medium Provision in East Ayrshire so that the council will not lose young people to study at this other education authority. In its final consultation report, the council needs to include more information about arrangements for staffing to deliver Gaelic Medium Education; and how a secondary Gaelic Medium Curriculum will be delivered and the role that staff in the Gaelic Medium campus will have in its delivery.

3.5 The proposals highlight the success of Gaelic Education at Grange Academy can, in part, be attributed to the very effective leadership and to the senior leaders' understanding and vision for Gaelic. In its final consultation report, the council needs to be much clearer on the arrangements that will be in place for the leadership and management of Gaelic Medium at the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus to ensure support and development of Gaelic. It is not clear whether Gaelic Medium Education will be led by the headteacher of the primary or secondary stages. There is much

more clarity required to confirm the arrangements for ensuring the quality of children and young people's education.

3.6 The final consultation report needs to be much clearer on how the council will consult with, and take account of, the views of parents of those learning through the medium of Gaelic in the development of the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus.

3.7 The current proposals do not provide sufficient information on how quality Gaelic Medium Education will be delivered. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out clearly how this will allow it to implement national guidance on Gaelic Medium Education, including the principle of immersion.

3.8 In taking forward the proposals, the council should outline how it will work with the whole school community to create and develop a common understanding of Gaelic language and culture amongst all stakeholders. East Ayrshire Council should also include how an ethos for Gaelic will be created across the entire campus with the use of, for example, bilingual signage.

3.9 The proposals highlight that in moving forward there is the potential to increase the numbers learning through the medium of Gaelic. It is not clear how this will be achieved. In its final consultation report, the council needs to commit to a strategy for promoting the availability and benefits of Gaelic Medium Education to parents. In so doing, there needs to be a clear link to the benefits of bilingualism as afforded through the medium of Gaelic. Currently, the proposals do not link Gaelic Medium Education to bilingualism. Approaches to assist parents in selecting Gaelic Medium Education should also be included.

3.10 Young people learning through the medium of English at Grange Academy benefit from opportunities to learn Gaelic as a second language. HM Inspectors commended Grange Academy for such innovative approaches as part of their inspection findings in December 2013. Grange Academy is making a significant contribution to increasing numbers learning Gaelic in line with the National Gaelic Language Plan. The final consultation report needs to detail how parents will be consulted on the impact of curriculum provision for Gaelic Learners at Grange Academy if specialist teaching staff are to be transferred to the proposed new 3 to 18 Gaelic campus. Additionally, as a result of the delivery of Gaelic as a second language at Grange Academy, young people learning through the medium of Gaelic talk about improved fairness, equality, inclusion and respect towards them. The council needs to outline how an understanding and empathy to Gaelic Medium Education will be promoted at the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus.

3.11 The final consultation report needs to ensure that all the language used is respectful and inclusive of the Gaelic language and towards the whole community.

3.12 The council's final consultation report needs to give a commitment to working closely with parents in taking forward the proposal. This needs to include working in partnership with parents on the issues identified in this report, including interim arrangements for transition.

3.13 The proposal contains a range of terminology to describe the proposed 3 to 18 Gaelic campus, including a 3 to 18 provision, a 3 to 18 campus, a single establishment and a Gaelic hub. In its final consultation report, the council needs to ensure a consistent use of terminology.

3.14 Under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* Statutory Guidance, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is listed by the council as a consultee on the proposals. The council had not received a response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig during the period of consultation. However, Bòrd na Gàidhlig had indicated to the council that they would still be making a response available. The council should ensure it takes into account Bòrd na Gàidhlig's written response in their final consultation report.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors consider that the proposal from East Ayrshire Council to locate Gaelic Medium Education in a 3 to 18 Gaelic campus has the potential to deliver clear educational benefits for children and young people. However, for these benefits to be fully realised, the council needs to ensure that it sets out a long-term strategy and vision which it takes forward with stakeholders, including parents. The council needs to include more specific detail in its final consultation report on the issues detailed in this report. These include more detail on the leadership and management arrangements, the staffing and the curriculum which will be on offer in the new provision, and how the council plans to ensure that there is a shared understanding across the campus of learning through the medium of Gaelic. As the council takes forward its proposals for Gaelic Medium Education, it needs to ensure that it continues to consult with parents, children and young people, staff and appropriate organisations in developing its plans.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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