

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to rezone Annanhill Primary School, Gargieston Primary School and Crosshouse 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 East Ayrshire Council's proposal to rezone Annanhill Primary School, Gargieston Primary School and Crosshouse 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; 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.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 8 November 2016 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 submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the sites of Annanhill Primary School, Gargieston Primary School and Crosshouse Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The council placed an advert in the local newspaper prior to the start of the consultation period. The consultation ran from 2 November 2016 until close of business on 13 December 2016, which included a period of 30 school days. Public meetings were held in Annanhill Primary School (8 November 2016), Gargieston Primary School (9 November 2016) and Crosshouse Primary School (10 November 2016). At the first meeting there were 14 attendees, including community representatives, elected members and parents. At the second meeting there were six attendees, including community representatives, elected members and parents. At the third meeting there were two parent attendees. Interested parties were invited to make written or electronic submissions on the proposal to the Head of Education. There were 25 written submissions received, of which 18 were in favour of the proposal and seven were against.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has three main aims for the proposal: to address over-occupancy issues within Annanhill Primary School; to drive space usage efficiency within the school estate; and to provide equity of provision for children in the central/western area of the town in terms of learning experiences and learning environment.

3.2 There are a number of educational benefits which the council believes will result from the implementation of the proposal. These are dependent upon the re-balancing of pupil numbers in the central/western area of the town. Annanhill Primary School is part of the Grange Campus in Kilmarnock along with Grange Academy. There are too many classes for the primary school to accommodate in its own area of the campus and two P7 classes are currently located in classrooms within the Art Department of Grange Academy.

3.3 The proposal involves a re-zoning which would allocate part of the current catchment area of Annanhill Primary School to Gargieston Primary School. This is designed to ensure that Annanhill will have the capacity to include children from new and developing housing estates which are close to the school. Many families in the area which will be re-zoned to Gargieston Primary School already have children attending that school through placing requests, as it is geographically closer to them. Whilst there would be an educational benefit in re-balancing pupil numbers, it is unclear from figures provided in the proposal document whether the re-zoning will have the desired impact or not. For example, roll projections are not given for Annanhill Primary School comparing the impact of implementing the proposal with the status quo. In preparing its final consultation report, the council should provide roll projections for all three schools which are within the scope of the proposal,

including information and data about the impact of re-zoning on the roll of Annanhill Primary School.

3.4 There are clear educational benefits to improving the learning environment for children attending Annanhill Primary School by alleviating current pressures on teaching spaces and reallocating accommodation in Grange Academy, although these are dependent in the first instance upon the reduction of the Annanhill roll. Whilst there would be educational benefits to children having opportunities to interact, both educationally and socially, with a wider group of peers, it is not clear how this would occur as a result of the proposal being implemented. The council should clarify how this would be achieved.

3.5 Staff, parents and pupils at Annanhill Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors have a number of concerns about the proposal. They have justifiable concerns that the implementation of the proposal could lead to brothers and sisters attending different primary schools. Some families currently have one or more children at Annanhill Primary School but would be moved out of the school catchment area if the proposal is implemented, and would then need to rely on the success of placing requests to allow younger brothers or sisters to join them. Whilst these placing requests will be prioritised, there is no guarantee that they will be successful. The council should consider offering a 'sibling guarantee' to allow younger brothers and sisters of current pupils to attend if they are re-zoned to a different school catchment area as a result of implementing the proposal. Some parents who spoke to HM Inspectors, or responded to the consultation in writing, noted that this guarantee was made in a previous review of catchment areas by East Ayrshire Council in the north of Kilmarnock in February 2015, with particular reference to Kilmaurs Primary School.

3.6 Some parents at Annanhill Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors also have justifiable concerns about the timing of the council decision on the proposal. The proposal paper indicates that the council will prepare a Consultation Report subsequent to receiving the Education Scotland report. This report will be published and available for further consideration for a period of three weeks prior to being considered by the council's Cabinet. No date is given in the proposal for the Cabinet meeting which will consider the Consultation Report. In previous years, parents were required to register their child for starting primary school by the middle of January and to make any placing requests by February. Some parents who spoke to HM Inspectors are concerned that they will register their child in January whilst living in the current Annanhill catchment area and, depending on the Cabinet's decision, require to lodge a placing request shortly afterwards because they have been moved out of it. The council should discuss this issue with parents who are directly affected by it and consider whether or not there is sufficient time to make any changes to current arrangements in time for the beginning of the new school session.

3.7 Staff, parents and pupils at Gargieston Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are generally content with the proposal. They think that it formalises the current situation where most families living in the area being re-zoned from Annanhill already make placing requests for children to attend Gargieston. Parents would like reassurance that the school roll will not increase dramatically if the proposal is

implemented. In preparing its final consultation report, the council should provide roll projections for all three schools which are within the scope of the proposal.

3.8 Staff, parents and pupils at Crosshouse Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are generally content with the proposal, which has very little direct effect on them.

4. Summary

- There is overall educational benefit to this proposal as long as it meets the council's own aims of addressing over-occupancy issues within Annanhill Primary School, of using the school estate more efficiently and of providing equity of provision for children in the central/western area of the town in terms of learning experiences and learning environment. However, it is unclear from figures provided in the proposal document whether or not the proposed re-zoning will have the desired impact. In preparing its final consultation report, the council should provide roll projections for all three schools which are within the scope of the proposal, including information and data about the impact of re-zoning on the roll of Annanhill Primary School.
- Whilst there would be educational benefits to children having opportunities to interact, both educationally and socially, with a wider group of peers, it is not clear how this would occur as a result of the proposal being implemented. The council should clarify how this educational benefit would be achieved in its final consultation report.
- Staff, parents and pupils at Annanhill Primary School have justifiable concerns that the implementation of the proposal could lead to brothers and sisters attending different primary schools. In the preparation of its final consultation report, the council should consider offering a 'sibling guarantee' to allow younger brothers and sisters of current pupils to attend if they are re-zoned to a different school catchment area as a result of implementing the proposal. Such a guarantee was made by East Ayrshire Council in relation to a catchment review affecting Kilmaurs Primary School in 2015.
- Some parents at Annanhill Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors have justifiable concerns that they will register their child in January to attend the school whilst living in the current catchment area and, depending on the Cabinet's decision, require to lodge a placing request shortly afterwards because they have been moved out of it. The council should discuss this issue with parents who are directly affected by it and consider whether or not there is sufficient time to make any changes to current arrangements in time for the beginning of the new school session.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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