

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council to build a new non-denominational secondary school to replace Castlebrae High School and implement minor catchment change to formalise and align catchment boundaries.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (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 The City of Edinburgh Council's proposal to build a new non-denominational secondary school to replace Castlebrae High School and implement minor catchment change to formalise and align catchment boundaries. 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:

- 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 Castlebrae High School, Castlevie Primary School, Newcraighall Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees, along with headteachers of Niddrie Mill Primary School and Prestonfield Primary School.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The main proposal within the consultation is to build a new non-denominational secondary school to replace Castlebrae High School, in Craigmillar. Along with this, there is an additional proposal to implement minor catchment changes to formalise and align particular catchment boundaries.

2.3 The council undertook the consultation between 13 November 2017 and 22 December 2017. Copies of the proposal document were intimated to stakeholders and placed in local schools and in Craigmillar Library. Notices were placed on the council's website. Young people of Castlebrae High School were given the opportunity to provide their views in meetings led by school staff. A public meeting held on 28 November 2017 was attended by 17 members of the public. The council received 24 responses to its consultation questionnaire and one additional written response. Overall, the majority of respondents support the proposal to build a new secondary school.

2.4 HM Inspectors were made aware during their school visits that the council is planning to undertake consultation with primary school children in forthcoming weeks. In taking forward the proposal, the council should engage with all stakeholders and share information in its final report regarding the views of stakeholders.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has stated that the current Castlebrae High School building is in poor condition and has significant issues with suitability which constrain effective learning and teaching. HM Inspectors endorse this view. The council have indicated the financial challenges of maintaining the current building over the next five years. Children and young people attending the new secondary school would benefit from a modern, purpose designed learning environment with appropriate facilities. The council indicates its intention to develop a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) Centre of Excellence at the new school, in partnership with further education establishments such as the University of Edinburgh. The paper also outlines that the council has obtained funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge and this would entail the development of science facilities tailored to meet the needs of its science development project in this area. The council's proposal paper provides a positive case for a new secondary school and outlines the clear potential educational benefits which will result.

3.2 The council estimates a timescale for opening the proposed new school in August 2021. It outlines that stakeholders will be integral to decisions made on the type of building they want. It will be important that the council engages with stakeholders across the whole catchment area on the details of its plans and timeline for transition from existing arrangements to establishing a fully operational school.

3.3 The proposed location of the new school is more central in Craigmillar than the current Castlebrae High School, is next to the library and includes easier public transport access for most of the catchment area. However, a few stakeholders raised concerns regarding possible traffic congestion and safety around the proposed site. The council will need to address these in its final proposal paper.

3.4 The impact of the council's proposal on other neighbouring schools is minimal. Castlebrae High School is operating under capacity, with the majority of young people living in the catchment area currently attending schools other than Castlebrae High School. The neighbouring secondary schools of Portobello High School and Holyrood RC Secondary School are nearing capacity. The council indicates that the new school would be built for a roll of 700 pupils initially, with the option for expansion in due course, given the major housing developments across the catchment area.

3.5 Almost all parents, staff, children and young people from Castlevue Primary School and Castlebrae High School and staff and children from Newcraighall Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors fully supported the proposal to build a new secondary school. Stakeholders raised concerns about the condition of the current Castlebrae High School building not being conducive to meeting the needs of learners in a 21st century school.

3.6 A group of parents who met with HM Inspectors at Newcraighall Primary School were not positive about the proposal. They were of the view that the council had not fully considered the needs of families living in the Newcraighall catchment, particularly safe walking routes to school from the Gilbertstoun estate. The council paper indicates that the distance to the proposed new school is slightly less than the current Castlebrae High School. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to address the aspect of safe routes to school.

3.7 The proposal also includes a minor aspect of catchment realignment, which currently affects a handful of children in a part of The Wisp. The council has stated that these children can be accommodated in their current schools for the duration of their primary or secondary education. There is limited information in relation to this aspect of the proposal, including the timescales or impacts of this, particularly for future inhabitants of addresses affected. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to provide fuller information in relation to this aspect.

4. Summary

4.1 The council's proposal provides a positive case for a new secondary school and outlines the clear potential educational benefits which will result. Young people attending the new secondary school would benefit from a modern, purpose designed learning environment with appropriate facilities.

4.2 The council will need to address concerns raised by stakeholders about road safety around the proposed location for the new school and safe walking routes to school, particularly from the Gilberstoun estate.

4.3 In taking forward the proposal, the council should engage with all stakeholders across the whole catchment area further. This includes sharing details of its plans and timeline for transition for the new school. The views of stakeholders should be shared in the council's final report.

4.4 The council will need to provide fuller information in relation to the aspect of the proposal regarding catchment realignment, including timescales and impact on future inhabitants of addresses affected.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2018**