

## **Consultation proposal by North Ayrshire Council**

### **Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to develop an educational campus in Ardrossan by the amalgamation of Auchendarvie Academy, Ardrossan Academy, Haysholm School and James McFarlane School.**

#### **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 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.

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 North Ayrshire Council proposes to build a new campus to serve the current catchment areas of Auchendarvie Academy, Ardrossan Academy, Haysholm School and James McFarlane School which provide education for children and young people aged 5-18 with complex additional support needs from across the authority area. The consultation process sought views on the question:

'Do you agree with the proposal to create a new educational campus in Ardrossan by amalgamating Auchendarvie Academy, Ardrossan Academy, Haysholm School and James McFarlane School?'

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

- attendance at the public meetings held between 9 and 16 May 2013 at Ardrossan Academy, Auchendarvie Academy and James McFarlane School 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 Auchendarvie Academy, Ardrossan Academy, Haysholm School and James McFarlane School including discussion with relevant consultees.

### 1.3 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
- 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 North Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The council consulted appropriately with a wide range of stakeholders on its proposal. Prior to the formal consultation process, early engagements took place with Parent Council representatives and staff between October and December 2012. The proposal document was provided to relevant Parent Councils, Community Councils, Youth Council, parents, pupils, staff and other users of Auchendarvie Academy, Ardrossan Academy, Haysholm School and James McFarlane School. A range of consultation approaches were used to engage with children and young people across all of the affected schools. Public consultation meetings were held for all interested members of the public in each of the four schools directly involved in the proposal. Elected members and officers of the council were present at the meetings. The council has provided a dedicated area on its website to keep members of the public updated on the progress of the consultation. At the time of the consultation there were no specific details available about the exact nature of the new build. The timescales for the new build were clearly outlined in the documentation. The proposal relates to two of the four schools in North Ayrshire Council for children with additional support needs.

2.2 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors were generally dissatisfied with the consultation process. Significant concerns about the proposal were expressed at the public meetings, in the responses received by the council as part of the consultation process and in discussions with HM Inspectors. Stakeholders expressed concerns about a perceived lack of clarity around the rationale for the location of the proposed new campus and a lack of choice of locations. They also had a range of other concerns including the short timescales for implementation, the temporary decanting of the two secondary schools into one building during the build period, the large size of the campus, road safety, transport costs and walking distances and the suitability of the new campus for children and young people with complex additional support

needs. In addition, concerns were raised about the impact of closing Auchendarvie Academy on the community and businesses of Stevenston.

2.3 A significant number of parents expressed concerns about the site choice. In particular, parents were concerned about the size of the selected site and that the site was too far away from some of the communities where many young people live. Parents also raised concerns about traffic management in the vicinity of the proposed new campus. Most parents and young people were anxious about the safety of young people walking from the Stevenston area to Ardrossan. Parents were worried about the route which children would take to the proposed school and the distance of the school from Stevenston. They felt that the roads young people would need to cross and walk along are very busy. They were worried that public transport costs to get to the proposed site may impact unfairly on children from low income families and that children from these families may not attend school as regularly as they should. They also expressed concerns about the inequity which might arise in the participation of extra-curricular activities. They felt that young people from the Stevenston area would be disadvantaged because of the perceived problems of getting home after school. Some stakeholders were concerned about the close proximity to St Matthew's Academy of the proposed site in what they believe is already a busy area. They were particularly concerned about the large numbers of young people that would attend both schools in the area and the possibility of conflict between the two schools. A number of Ardrossan Academy parents also raised the question of building on the current memorial playing fields site as a possible alternative.

2.4 Overall, parents of children attending Haysholm School and James McFarlane School were positive about the possibility of upgraded facilities for their children. However, they were concerned that North Ayrshire Council was proposing to have four schools move into one campus and that, in their view, this was not a suitable learning environment for children with complex additional support needs. Parents expressed many uncertainties about the possible facilities in the proposed new campus arising from there being no plans for the new build available. Parents were also concerned about having primary aged children in a predominantly secondary campus and whether children would be able to focus and learn in a larger, noisier environment. Distances to the proposed new campus were also a concern for parents from Haysholm School whose children travel from across the authority area. Parents of children with complex additional support needs were concerned about the ease of access for emergency services at peak times.

2.5 Some parents were positive about the possibility that the new campus may offer a broader range of subjects and more clubs and activities. A few parents felt that there would be benefits to the young people and the community if all the children attended one school. Parents also felt that there had been recent improvements in attainment and awards in all of the affected establishments and there was concern about the potential detrimental impact on attainment of merging the schools into one campus. Almost all parents expressed concerns about the decanting of Ardrossan Academy young people into Auchendarvie Academy for two years during the build period. They were concerned that the planned decant by August 2014 would not provide enough time for staff to agree and plan for a single curriculum structure.

Almost all parents were concerned about the impact of the transition arrangements on young people preparing for the new qualifications associated with the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

2.6 Overall, children and young people from across the schools had a range of concerns about the proposal. They could see the benefit of working in a modern environment with new facilities and some were positive about the possibility of making new friends and studying a wider range of subjects in the new campus. They were particularly worried about the safety of young people walking from the Stevenston area to the new campus. Children and young people's concerns related to the distance, nature of the route and the possibility of disagreements between young people from each community. Those who would be affected by transitional arrangements at the Auchendarvie Academy site were worried about the impact of all of the changes on their learning and achievement. They highlighted issues of potential bullying and lack of continuity of working with staff who knew them well as individuals.

2.7 Almost all parents and young people living in Stevenston expressed concerns that the proposed closure would impact negatively on the community, local business and the attractiveness of the area for families considering living in the area. They noted that Auchendarvie Academy is very well used by the community and they did not understand the rationale for building another community hub next to the existing facilities in St Matthew's Academy.

2.8 Some teaching staff were positive about the benefits a new campus would bring including upgraded facilities and the opportunity to work with a wider range of colleagues on one campus. They were concerned about the proposed timescales and the impact that the transition plans would have on delivering the curriculum and maintaining recent improvements in attainment. They were positive about current working arrangements across the cluster areas and could see potential benefits of a purpose-built school on learning and teaching. Most had concerns regarding safe and cheap travel to the proposed site for some families and found it hard to see benefits of the four schools coming together. Staff at Haysholm School and James McFarlane School were concerned about the impact on children and young people of moving from small specialist provision to a large generic campus. They were also concerned about whether the needs of young people with complex additional support needs would get lost among the issues in a large campus.

2.9 Should the proposal go ahead, staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors felt that it was important that the management structure for the proposed campus be agreed and headteacher and senior management team were appointed as soon as possible.

### **3. Educational aspects of the proposal**

3.1 Auchendarvie Academy and Ardrossan Academy are the two non-denominational secondary schools serving the towns of Ardrossan, Stevenston, Saltcoats, West Kilbride and outlying areas. The distance between the two schools is 2.6 miles. Both schools are significantly under-occupied. Haysholm School and

James McFarlane School support children from 5-18 with complex additional support needs from across the authority area. The council's Schools Estate Management Plan rates the buildings of each school as B (satisfactory) for condition. It rates their suitability as B with the exception of Ardrossan Academy which is rated C (poor). Haysholm School and James McFarlane School have limited space available within teaching areas to introduce more flexible approaches to learning including increasing the use of information and communication technology. The council's proposal sets out that the four schools will amalgamate to create a single campus on the site of the current Ardrossan Academy which will offer provision to enhance the quality of the learning and teaching environment.

3.2 North Ayrshire Council has set out in its proposal a range of educational benefits for children and young people. In particular, it highlights potential improvements to the learning environment within a new campus and that a modern, purpose-built building would provide more space for delivering a modern curriculum, including the development of science and technology. Such proposed improvements would offer educational benefits for children and young people. In addition, the proposed new campus would have flexible spaces designed to support the delivery of vocational courses. The new campus would act as an additional community hub by offering increased sports and leisure facilities. North Ayrshire Council envisages that a key element of the new campus will be the provision of integrated Health and Social Care Services which will enable seamless support for children and their families. On-site access would provide clear benefits for children and young people who require regular access to these services.

3.3 The timescale outlined in the council's proposals raises a number of important issues that require further consideration. Young people from Ardrossan Academy would transfer to Auchenharvie Academy in August 2014 and both schools would work together until the new school is ready in August 2016. The authority will need to plan for an effective transition and for staff to work together on approaches to learning and teaching and the curriculum structure. The introduction of the new national qualifications and assessments during 2013 may impact on the time staff have for planning for the transition to the new school. The council's proposal is focused on the benefits of the new campus which would not be available until 2016. The authority need to more clearly outline the educational benefits for young people who would attend the existing Auchenharvie Academy site from summer 2014.

3.4 Haysholm School and James McFarlane School have already begun sharing knowledge and skills, working on complementary school improvement plans and considering the benefits of joint Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance skills, knowledge and expertise. Staff from Auchenharvie Academy and Ardrossan Academy have also begun looking at aligning their curriculum and increasing joint staff CPD. These joint approaches to planning and resourcing have clear benefits but are not predicated on moving to the proposed joint campus.

3.5 The council outlines strong benefits for campus users in locating the new campus close to St Matthew's Academy as this would offer greater access to sports facilities and the potential for increased joint working. Auchenharvie Academy is currently used for both out-of-school hours clubs run by the school and for groups

and activities in the evening and at weekends. Consideration also needs to be given to how the new campus would ensure young peoples' access to out-of-school hours clubs and activities given the costs of travel and walking distances for all children and young people involved.

#### **4. Summary**

4.1 North Ayrshire Council's proposal to develop a new campus addresses the under capacity issues in the current secondary schools, offering upgraded facilities and the potential for an enhanced curriculum for all learners. It also addresses imminent pressures on available capacity for learners with complex needs. The council has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders and is continuing to do so. In taking forward the proposal, it needs to address a number of issues. Pupils, parents, staff and other stakeholders have concerns about safe routes to the school for young people walking from the Stevenston area. There is concern that distance to the proposed site and the cost of travel may act as barriers to learning. The council needs to outline to parents and pupils how it proposes to minimise the effects of possible increased travel costs. It also needs to continue to work with pupils, parents and staff to address their concerns and provide appropriate reassurances as required.

4.2 A significant part of the council's proposal relates specifically to the benefits of a new build campus. There are no detailed design plans yet available for this new build which the council indicates would not be completed until August 2016. The council intend to consult further with stakeholders to develop the plans during the next stages of the process. The proposal does not address sufficiently the educational benefits for young people who would attend the existing Auchendarvie Academy site from summer 2014. The council has yet to make clear the benefits of primary and secondary aged children with complex additional support needs from Haysholm School and James McFarlane School learning and working within a single campus with a large roll. In taking forward this proposal, the council needs to further consider the impact of bringing together these four schools and more clearly outline the benefits for children with complex additional support needs.

4.3 The proposal is opposed by a significant number of stakeholders including children and young people, parents, staff and the local community. Stakeholders are concerned about the timescale for implementation and the perceived lack of rationale for the site selection. The council needs to continue to provide all stakeholders, including young people and their parents with clearer information and assurances on how it will deal with their concerns, including transport and related safety issues. The council also needs to outline more clearly how it will minimise the impact of the loss of Auchendarvie Academy and its current facilities on the Stevenston area.

4.4 The council needs to communicate clearly to parents, learners and local communities about the outcomes of their ongoing considerations in order for the potential education benefits to be fully understood.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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