

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Ayrshire Council to relocate Largs Academy to a new 2-18 education campus, along with a relocated St Mary's RC Primary School and amalgamated Brisbane and Kelburn Primary School, on the grounds of the sportscotland Inverclyde National Centre at Burnside Road, Largs.

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 North Ayrshire Council's proposal to relocate Largs Academy to a new 2-18 education campus, along with a relocated St Mary's RC Primary School and amalgamated Brisbane and Kelburn Primary School, on the grounds of the sportscotland Inverclyde National Centre at Burnside Road, Largs. 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 school; 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 meetings held on Tuesday 4 November and Thursday 6 November 2014 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 Largs Academy, St Mary's RC Primary School, Brisbane Primary School, Kelburn Primary School, Fairlie Primary School and Skelmorlie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees;
- discussion with staff of Cumbrae Primary School; and
- discussion with representatives of the Catholic Church.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 North Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal 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 undertook pre-consultation stakeholder engagement, asking for views on the proposed relocation of Largs Academy as well as whether or not a new 2-18 campus should be built.

2.3 The consultation period began on 1 October 2014 and was due to run until midday on 21 November 2014. Four public meetings were held in relation to the consultation. Two separate meetings took place in Largs Academy on Tuesday 4 November 2014 as well as meetings in Cumbrae Primary School on Wednesday 5 November 2014 and St Mary's Primary School on Thursday 6 November 2014. The council also consulted pupils from schools affected by the proposal on their views relating to the proposed new campus development.

2.4 In order to access additional funding from the Scottish Futures Trust the council amended the timescale for creating the new campus. As this was a material change to the initial proposal, the council extended the consultation period by two weeks, finishing on 5 December 2014.

2.5 A total of 185 responses were received in relation to the consultation, including six incomplete responses. Of those who expressed a preference, 146 respondents were in favour of relocating Largs Academy and 28 were against. Seventy-five respondents were in favour of relocating St Mary's Primary School and 82 were against. Eighty-five respondents were in favour of amalgamating Brisbane and Kelburn Primary Schools and 78 were against. Eighty-four respondents were in favour of relocating early learning provision to the new campus and 80 were against.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council's proposal has educational benefits for children and young people of Largs Academy, its associated primary schools and St Mary's Primary School, including enhanced sporting experience for pupils and the wider community,

improved information and communications infrastructure and the enhancement of facilities for subjects such as science, music and physical education.

3.2 Young people from Largs Academy and their parents agree that they need a new school and are very aware of the deficiencies of the current building. The new building is long overdue and will have educational benefits by improving the learning environment for young people. The layout of the current building is not conducive to staff working and planning together and the new building has the potential to significantly improve this. The proposal has the potential to provide young people with greater personalisation and choice in their learning to support them to achieve their best. It will support a greater focus on vocational and technological pathways. In addition the new building will be fully accessible to young people with additional support needs, including specific mobility needs.

3.3 Should the council's proposal go ahead, children who attend Brisbane, Kelburn and St Mary's Primary Schools will benefit from the enhanced facilities of a modern learning environment to support all-weather participation in sporting activities and creative arts performance activities. The proposal also has the potential to support staff to share practice more effectively. Children at St Mary's Primary School, their parents and staff are concerned about the educational benefits of moving from a school which they are proud of, which has an increasing roll and attains well. In its final consultation report, the council will need to reassure stakeholders of the educational benefits for children who attend St Mary's Primary School.

3.4 The Diocese of Galloway submitted a written response to the council setting out its views. In its final consultation report the council will need to take account of the views expressed.

3.5 While children from Cumbrae, Fairlie and Skelmorlie Primary Schools will not be located on the new campus they are also affected by the proposal. Children and their parents agree that a new secondary school is needed and look forward to children accessing improved facilities when they move from their primary schools to Largs Academy. Parents and staff would like reassurance that children will not lose out by not being part of the new campus and that they get regular and equitable access to the new facilities. Parents of children from Cumbrae Primary School would like reassurance that appropriate travel arrangements will be put in place to allow them to arrive at school in good time and return home at the end of the school day, given the increased distance from the ferry terminal to the new campus. In its final consultation report the council will need to ensure that these reasonable concerns expressed by parents and staff are addressed.

3.6 Almost all stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors are concerned about potential traffic management issues at the site of the new campus. They are concerned about the high volume of traffic accessing the new campus and issues caused by traffic congestion which may impact on the pupil safety. In its final consultation report, the council needs to address concerns raised by stakeholders about potential traffic management issues at the site of the new campus.

3.7 Currently, there is no finalised specification or design for the new campus. Stakeholders raised concerns about how schools located within the campus will operate. Some of the young people and parents associated with Largs Academy, who responded to the consultation, did not agree with the inclusion of the primary schools in the new campus and feel that they should remain on their current sites and be refurbished if necessary. Others were concerned about the potential loss of identity and ethos of each establishment. In discussions with HM Inspectors, staff and children at both Kelburn and Brisbane Primary Schools expressed concerns over the size of the new primary school at over 600 pupils. They felt that the new school would be too large to hold whole-school events. Staff raised concerns regarding the timescale of the proposal and felt the move to the new campus should take place in June 2018 rather than January 2018. Should the proposal go ahead the council needs to continue to engage fully with stakeholders in the planning and design of the new schools; and provide reassurance about how the individual schools will operate as part of the new campus.

4. Summary

The council's proposal has educational benefits for children and young people. The provision of a new, purpose-built Largs Academy will be of educational benefit to the young people who will attend it. The current building is in a very poor state of repair and is long overdue for replacement. Children who attend St Mary's, Brisbane and Kelburn Primary Schools will benefit from the enhanced facilities of a modern learning environment and from having access to enhanced sporting facilities. There will be potential for staff across all the schools to share of practice more effectively. However, some stakeholders have concerns about the proposal. Their concerns are set out within this report. In its final consultation report the council needs to address these concerns. It should provide more information about arrangements for managing traffic across the site. Should the proposal go ahead, the council will need to ensure that all stakeholders have an opportunity to be involved in the design of the new campus.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
December 2014**