

Consultation proposal by North Lanarkshire Council

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal to build a denominational primary school within the Airdrie Local Area Partnership with an associated merger of St Edward's and St Dominic's Primary School catchment areas to form one new primary school with associated nursery provision; along with providing a joint campus facility with a new-build Tollbrae Primary School and Nursery Class

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. As the council is proposing to close schools, 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 North Lanarkshire Council proposes to build a new joint campus facility in the Craigneuk area of Airdrie. The joint campus facility would include a denominational school, as a result of the merger of St Dominic's and St Edward's Primary Schools, and a non-denominational school, Tollbrae Primary School. The proposal also includes nursery provision on the campus.

1.2 The 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 proposal:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 24 and 25 March 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;

- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected;
- visits to the sites of St Edward's, St Dominic's and Tollbrae Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- meeting with representatives of the Scottish Catholic Education Service and Diocese of Motherwell.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools and nurseries; 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 Lanarkshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included three public meetings held in March 2014, attended in total by approximately 150 people. Council representatives met with staff in each of the schools. The council received a significant number of responses to its proposal, including 136 completed consultation forms and 23 other written responses. In addition 289 petition letters from parents and local residents against the proposal were received.

2.2 Parents from across the three schools who met with HM Inspectors expressed a number of concerns about the proposal. Whilst parents of children at Tollbrae Primary School welcomed the facilities offered by a new school, they were worried about the safety of children crossing Carlisle Road (A73) in order to access the school. This was also a concern of parents of children at St Edward's Primary School. They felt the site of the new school would result in a higher number of children crossing this road. They would like reassurances from the council about how their safety concerns will be addressed. Parents raised questions in relation to proposed plans for a large supermarket and petrol station to be built in close proximity to the new school and the potential increase in the volume of traffic this

would cause. They perceived that this, in addition to a campus for over 650 children, would present traffic issues in relation to access to the school and the surrounding area. Parents had concerns about the size of the campus. They felt that children benefited from being part of a smaller school community and were concerned about the size of the proposed roll of the new school. They would like more information on the design and management of the new school, including use of shared spaces. Parents would also like reassurance that children will participate in two hours of physical education each week.

2.3 Overall, parents of children who attend St Dominic's Primary School were opposed to the merger as specified in the proposal. Currently, parents and members of the community access celebrations and religious services within the school. They felt that siting the new campus in the Craigneuk area of Airdrie would be detrimental to the Petersburn area. They wanted the council to consider other options and have submitted an alternative plan.

2.4 Parents of children who attend St Edward's and St Dominic's Primary Schools felt it was important, should the proposal go ahead, for schools to retain their individual identity within the shared campus. They would like more information about how this will be achieved.

2.5 All staff in Tollbrae Primary School were positive about the proposed joint campus. They felt that the new school would provide improved learning opportunities for children, especially with the addition of outdoor learning spaces and sports' pitches. However, they shared concerns of staff in the two other schools about the design of the school and the need to ensure there are sufficient facilities to meet the needs of a large school roll.

2.6 All staff in St Dominic's and St Edward's Primary Schools were opposed to both the merger and to relocating to a joint campus. They felt their buildings provided very good opportunities for learning and have appropriate facilities, including information and communications technology. They did not perceive any educational benefits associated with the proposal. Staff in both schools felt that children benefited from being part of a smaller school and that it was important for schools to maintain their individual identity, should the proposal go ahead.

2.7 Children in all the three schools who met with HM Inspectors identified benefits in relation to a new building and a joint campus, such as new outdoor sports' facilities and opportunities to make new friends. However, most children were opposed to the proposal. They were concerned about the traffic issues, size of the campus and the bringing together of the three schools. Children in all three schools felt that their buildings were in good condition and that refurbishment would be their preferred option.

2.8 Parents of nursery children in the three schools who met with HM Inspectors expressed similar concerns to others in relation to traffic, road safety and the size of the school. They were not yet clear about what the nursery provision would entail. Parents were keen to ensure that educational opportunities were at least similar to what is currently offered. Parents of children who attend the Gaelic nursery

provision in Tollbrae Primary School felt strongly that the proposed new school should also include Gaelic Medium Provision.

2.9 The Diocese of Motherwell and Scottish Catholic Education Service did not support the proposal. They have submitted responses to the council setting out their concerns, including the perceived reduction in denominational education in North Lanarkshire Council and how the shared campus would operate. They have raised questions about an amendment to the proposal and some of the educational benefits stated.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 There are a number of educational benefits for children and staff if North Lanarkshire Council were to implement the proposal. These largely relate to the benefits from providing a new school and an improved environment for learning, its duty to secure best value and its overall strategy to improving the school estate. Children will have access to a wider range of educational activities and opportunities for more flexible groupings of children. The council claims implementation of the proposal will result in a broader range of skills and expertise within a larger staff team. However, it is not clear from the proposal how the council will translate this into educational benefits for children.

3.2 The council is committed to designing the school to promote learning for the 21st Century. The enhanced provision of physical education facilities also has the potential to assist in the delivery of two hours of high-quality physical education per week. However, as the design of the school has not yet been agreed, the council's final consultation report needs to set out clearly how these potential benefits will be realised, given the projected combined roll of approximately 650 children.

3.3 During the consultation a large number of parents, children and staff raised a number of reasonable concerns about road safety and related traffic issues that may arise from implementation of the proposal. The current proposal includes limited information on road safety and related traffic management issues, including safe routes to school. In its final consultation report, the council needs to provide more detailed information on how it will address concerns.

3.4 The council believes that improved learning opportunities and transition arrangements for nursery children will result from implementation of the proposal. The council indicates a number of options to be considered for developing nursery provision within the new campus. However, as the nature of nursery provision has not yet been finalised it is difficult for parents, staff and other organisations to provide a response to the proposal. In its final consultation proposal, the council needs to provide more details with regard to nursery provision.

3.5 Currently, children can attend Gaelic provision in Tollbrae Primary School Nursery Class. The proposal does not state clearly enough if and how Gaelic Medium Education will be delivered as part of the new nursery provision. Before finalising the consultation, the council needs to ensure it has consulted with Bòrd na Gàidhlig. In its final consultation report, the council needs to provide more details with regard to Gaelic Medium Education as part of the new nursery provision.

4. Summary

4.1 There are a number of educational benefits for children and staff if North Lanarkshire Council were to implement the proposal. However, while some respondees recognise the potential benefits of the move to a new school, many children, parents and staff at all the schools affected by the proposal have expressed a number of concerns. These include concerns about travel issues in relation to the new campus, the accuracy of the projected school rolls, the capacity of the new school and access to facilities for physical education. There are a number of concerns about how schools would operate as part of a shared campus. If the proposal is approved, the council will need to work in partnership with parents, children and staff to address these concerns.

4.2 The council's current proposal does not provide sufficient details with regard to nursery provision, including how it will meet the educational needs of children who currently attend the Gaelic provision in Tollbrae Primary School Nursery Class. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to provide more details about nursery provision, including delivery of Gaelic Medium Education.

4.3 The Diocese of Motherwell and the Scottish Catholic Education Service do not support the proposal. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to work in partnership with the Diocese to reassure them and stakeholders that the design and management of the shared campus will support children to continue their education in a faith-based setting.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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