

Consultation proposal by Renfrewshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal relating to the closure of Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre in June 2016 and plans to build a new school and pre-five centre for children and young people with severe and complex support needs in this area.

1. Introduction

1.1 Renfrewshire Council proposes to close Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre in June 2016 and merge them on one campus with a new school and pre-five centre for children and young people with severe and complex additional support needs.

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 October 2012 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; and
- visits to the site of Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people currently attending Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre; 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 Renfrewshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions. Four public meetings were held at St Andrew's Academy Paisley, Clippens School, St Benedict's High School and Kersland School on the 23 and 24 October 2012. The council also sought the views of children and young people affected by the proposal as far as possible.

2.2 At the public meetings and in a large number of responses to the consultation there was significant support for the proposed new build and relocation of Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre into a new building. Those who responded were positive about the benefits for the children and young people who would be educated in a new purpose-built school. Some of those who responded raised concerns about some of the options in relation to each of the three proposed sites for the location of the new build. Although respondents noted advantages in relation to all three sites, some raised concerns about access to amenities and the security of the building if it was located beside other services. They also expressed concern about the possible disruption that construction traffic could have on Clippens School and wider community if the new school was sited near Clippens School.

2.3 Parents at all three establishments expressed concern over the need to retain a sense of community and the positive, secure ethos generated at the moment by all three establishments. Their concern was that this may be lost in the new school. Parents also raised the importance of consulting with staff and parents on the design of the new build. Parents were keen that classrooms were large enough to provide appropriate space to meet the wide range of needs of children and young people who will attend the new school. Parents were also keen that their concerns about parking, pick-up and drop-off points and traffic management at the new school would be taken into consideration in future plans. Parents also raised concerns about transport arrangements for children and young people to the school. They were keen that the number of drop-off and pick-up points was taken into account to ensure that children and young people's journeys to school were not lengthy.

2.4 Parents and staff were positive about the new provision and the educational benefits for the children and young people. However, they remained concerned over the staffing levels in the new establishment. Both parents and staff would appreciate assurances that current staffing levels would be maintained or enhanced to meet the needs of children and young people appropriately. Support staff, instructor staff and specialist staff of music, art and drama felt vulnerable in the process and would welcome clarification of the staffing allocation for the new school.

2.5 Staff at all three establishments felt the proposal was a positive move and endorsed the educational benefits outlined by the education authority. They felt the education authority's decision to retain the services of the retired headteacher of Kersland School to advise and oversee the process as a very positive step and

helped reassure staff that the needs of the children and young people would be taken into account.

2.6 Children and young people at Clippens School and Kersland School who took part in the consultation were clear about the facilities they wish to see in the new school.

2.7 Comments from partner agencies were positive and they welcomed the proposal to create a new school and co-locate some services. Staff in the three establishments welcomed the opportunity to have more ongoing support from NHS staff across the week on site given the increase in the number of children and young people on the new campus.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 In September 2012, Renfrewshire Council was successful in its bid to Scottish Futures Trust. The council is proposing to contribute capital which matches that of this successful bid. The combined funds should be sufficient to meet the estimated cost to successfully complete the project outlined in the proposal. It would be helpful if all parents were made aware of this position to alleviate some existing anxieties.

3.2 At present, the current schools and pre-five centre cater for children and young people with a range of complex learning needs including sensory and physical impairments and autistic spectrum disorders. The establishment of a new purpose-built school to meet the needs of these children and young people has the potential to enhance their learning experience significantly. Specifically designed outdoor areas would lead to improved physical and social activities. Purpose-built space should allow for active approaches to teaching and learning while being large enough to accommodate equipment and providing suitable break-out space. However, as yet there are no plans available for the new integrated building. Furthermore, no decision has been taken on the location of the new school. The council needs to ensure that it consults and liaises effectively with parents, staff, children and young people and the local community to ensure the new building meets the varied and complex needs of children and young people who currently attend the schools and pre-five centre. The new build should provide rooms which give sufficient teaching space and are large enough to manoeuvre children and young people while providing appropriate quiet spaces and break-out areas.

3.3 The new integrated provision would allow for improved transition arrangements from pre-five to primary and from primary to secondary stages. However, parents need reassurance that transition needs will remain subject to regular review on an individual basis. It will also be important for the council to ensure that appropriate transition plans are in place for all children and young people at the point of transfer to the new school.

3.4 The new provision should lend itself to more effective inter-agency working by providing improved facilities for therapy and medical personnel. Current provision in all three centres means that space for delivery of these services is limited. The new build should improve disabled access features and better support children and young people with sensory and physical difficulties.

3.5 In planning and design of the new build, due attention should be given to future-proofing the school to ensure capacity for a possible increase in roll. The new provision would not have any impact on the roll of other schools in the area. Parents and staff have already raised reasonable concerns about the current uncertainty over staffing levels and class sizes.

3.6 Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre are used for the sole purpose of education and there are no other users of the school facilities. Closure of the property would not impact on any other parties.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal by Renfrewshire Council to close Clippens School, Kersland School and Hollybush Pre-Five Centre and build a new school and pre-five centre for children and young people with severe and complex needs with effect from June 2016 offers a number of significant educational benefits. These include purpose-built provision to meet the complex needs of children and young people, spacious play areas and specialist support staff on site. Having an integrated provision will provide access to a wide range of expertise and should help transitions for children and young people. The current buildings are in need of significant repair and maintenance. The new provision should enhance the learning experience for children and young people with purpose-built specialist areas, accessible outdoor areas and appropriate life skill areas.

4.2 Almost all of the responses to this proposal have been positive. However, staff and parents are understandably apprehensive about a number of aspects of the proposal. The council has yet to make a decision on the location of the new school. There will be different issues for the council to consider in relation to each site. The lack of plans in place at this stage has caused some anxiety. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to continue to consult appropriately with parents, staff, children and young people and other relevant partners to ensure the new school meets the complex needs of all children and young people who will attend it. This includes consulting on decisions about the site, class sizes, staffing standards and transitional arrangements to ensure the needs of all children and young people affected by the proposal are met effectively.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2013**