

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Renfrewshire Council to relocate St Fergus' Primary School to a new school building on an adjacent site and review catchment areas affecting St Fergus' and St Mary's Primary Schools.

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 Renfrewshire Council's proposal to relocate St Fergus' Primary School to a new school building on an adjacent site and review catchment areas affecting St Fergus' and St Mary's Primary Schools. 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 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 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 meeting held on 6 October 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;

- meetings with representatives of the Catholic Church; and
- visits to the sites of St Fergus' Primary School and St Mary's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Renfrewshire 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 In 2013, Renfrewshire Council consulted on its School Estate Management Plan. It decided to take forward formal consultation on a new school build to replace the current St Fergus' Primary School and to review the catchment areas of St Fergus' Primary School and St Mary's Primary School. The public consultation took place between 6 October 2014 and 25 November 2014. The public meeting held on 6 October 2014 was attended by 24 members of the public, almost all being in favour of the proposal to build St Fergus' Primary School on a new site. The council provided online and hard copy response forms to be completed by interested parties. The council received 17 written responses to the proposal. Eighty two per cent of respondents were in favour of the construction of a new build St Fergus' Primary School and 18% against. Sixty five per cent of respondents were in favour of the proposal to revise the St Fergus' and St Mary's Primary Schools catchment area with 35% against. Officers of the council consulted with the Parent Councils and staff of both schools. The headteachers of both schools consulted with pupils and provided written responses of the pupils' views to the council.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council's proposal to relocate St Fergus' Primary School to a new school building has a number of educational benefits for the children of St Fergus' Primary School. The proposed enhanced learning environment has the potential to better cater for modern approaches to learning and teaching, and help to provide improved learning experiences. Implementation of the proposal will provide better, more flexible space for children's learning activities. There will be better opportunities for staff to work and plan together. Children's learning has the potential to be enhanced by accessing improved information and communications technology provision. The proposal will lead to improved dining, physical education, playground and social gathering facilities which will encourage better social interaction, different kinds of energetic play and daily opportunities to participate in physical activity. This has the potential to lead to improvements in children's social and physical health and wellbeing.

3.2 If implemented, the proposal will provide enhanced provision for family learning and partnership working as the new school will be immediately adjacent to Glencoats Primary School. It will also provide better facilities for the out-of-school

care group currently housed in St Fergus' Primary School by providing designated storage facilities and access to improved accommodation.

3.3 The proposal will enable the council to make more effective and efficient use of its resources. Through the council's school estate review process, the current St Fergus' Primary School building and grounds was identified as not performing well for the school community as it was too big and the condition of the building was deteriorating. The school is 40.75% full and has a sufficiency rating of D (bad). Its condition rating is C (poor). A process was undertaken to estimate the cost of various options and the construction of a new St Fergus' Primary School was deemed to offer best value for the people of Renfrewshire. The proposed new build will be more efficient to run with a condition rating of A (Good) and a sufficiency rating of A/B (Good/Satisfactory).

3.4 The council expects that the revised catchment arrangements affecting St Fergus' and St Mary's Primary Schools will lead to an increased sense of community as all children living in Ferguslie will have the opportunity to attend their local denominational primary school. It also expects that the proposal will not adversely affect the educational experience of children in St Fergus' Primary School. The proposal has the potential to increase the sense of community and at least maintain the standard of education in the Ferguslie area. Should the proposal go ahead, there will be little impact on the children of St Mary's Primary School. The council has provided assurances that, if the proposal goes ahead, all children attending St Mary's Primary School will be entitled to continue to attend that school. The council has stated that those pupils, currently entitled to free school transport and wishing to remain in St Mary's Primary School, will continue to have an entitlement to free school transport. The proposal will assist in the planned longer-term review of Renfrewshire Council's school estate.

3.5 Parish Priests are in favour of both parts of the proposal. They think that having a new school and revised catchment areas will benefit the wider communities.

3.6 Children, most parents and almost all staff of St Fergus' Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors, were in favour of the proposed new build and the revised catchment area. Children felt that new facilities will help them to learn better and that new outdoor spaces will mean they can be more active during break and lunchtimes. Parents felt that it is an opportunity to improve the community and encourage more people to come to the area. A few parents would like to see the current building refurbished. Staff believed that the proposal will provide opportunities for increased collegiate planning and delivery, leading to better learning experiences for children.

3.7 Stakeholders associated with St Mary's Primary School had some concerns about the proposed changes to catchment areas. A few parents who attended the public meeting expressed some concern regarding the reduction in the size of the St Mary's Primary School catchment area. Most parents and almost all staff in St Mary's Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors, recognised that the council is trying to do the best for both schools but have concerns about the impact of a possible decline in roll on staffing levels in St Mary's Primary School. They are

supportive of the continuing process of catchment review being undertaken by Renfrewshire Council. Children in St Mary's Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors, had some reservations about whether there will continue to be free transport from the old catchment area to St Mary's Primary School, for children who want to continue attending the school. The council should continue to reassure the children that transport will continue.

4. Summary

Renfrewshire Council's proposal to relocate St Fergus' Primary School to a new school building on an adjacent council owned site and review catchment areas affecting St Fergus' and St Mary's Primary Schools has a number of educational benefits for the children of St Fergus' Primary School and those who will attend in the future. These benefits mainly stem from access to improved accommodation leading to enhanced indoor and outdoor learning environments. Other children in Renfrewshire will also benefit from a best value approach which uses resources effectively. Children, parents and staff of St Mary's Primary School have raised some concerns about the review of catchment areas. They would also like continuing reassurance about free transport for children who decide to remain at St Mary's Primary School. The council needs to ensure that the final consultation report considers the views expressed by children, parents and staff, and takes reasonable account of their concerns.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
December 2014**