

Consultation proposal by South Ayrshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to relocate Ayr Academy and change the catchment area of Belmont Academy, Ayr.

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 South Ayrshire Council was awarded funding to replace Ayr Academy under the Scottish Government's Schools for the Future programme and proposes to relocate the school to a new Ayr Academy learning campus within the Craigie Estate, Ayr. The Craigie Estate sits within the catchment area for Belmont Academy. The council also proposes to mark out part of the Belmont Academy catchment area as a 'floating zone'. Parents and children attending Holmston Primary School who live in part of the Craigie area will have the choice of sending their children to either Belmont Academy or the new Ayr Academy learning 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 6 November 2013 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 information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Holmston Primary School, Ayr Academy, and Belmont Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; any other users; and 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 South Ayrshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Overall, stakeholders in Holmston Primary School were positive about the council's proposal related to the 'floating area' which provides families living in the Craigie Estate with the choice of sending their children to either Belmont Academy or Ayr Academy. A few parents and children were concerned that the choice would split the school community impacting on children's friendship groups.

2.3 Overall, stakeholders were positive about the council's proposals for the new school building at the Ayr Academy learning campus especially in providing access to improved physical education and technology facilities, external social areas and disabled access.

2.4 Parents, staff, children and young people at both Holmston Primary School and Ayr Academy raised concern about the impact of the new learning campus on traffic congestion at the entrance to the Craigie Estate and identified the need to ensure safe crossings for young people making their way to the new learning campus.

2.5 A few stakeholders expressed concern about the impact of the new school's location on the Craigie Estate. They were concerned about the increased numbers of people on the estate, the increased traffic in and around the area and desirability of property in the area. Some felt that the close proximity of the new Ayr Academy, Belmont Academy and Kyle Academy, which is across the river, would result in clashes between young people from the different schools.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The council's proposals set out a number of potential benefits for current and future young people of Ayr Academy. The new learning campus will provide an improved learning environment. The current Ayr Academy building impacts negatively on young people's learning as a result of poor ventilation, heating, water penetration, lack of appropriate PE and external social facilities, limited access to technology and provision of information and communication technology (ICT), and poor accessibility. The new facilities would provide space which could be used flexibly and offer the opportunity for creative use of technology. It would offer an enhanced sporting experience for young people and the wider community who will have access to a range of sporting facilities including games hall, gym, fitness suite, dance studio and external grass and all weather facilities.

3.2 The proposals would benefit current and future young people through better meeting young people's personal, social, emotional and health and wellbeing through improved social areas, sporting facilities and opportunities to learn in a variety of settings and with different groups of learners across the learning campus. Young people with disabilities would have improved access to the curriculum. Young people and staff from Ayr Academy felt that the move away from the town centre would have a positive impact on the school ethos and reputation in the community. They felt that improved canteen and social area facilities would help improve young people's health and wellbeing, including through improved access to healthy food.

3.3 Young people who attend Ayr Academy and Belmont Academy are responding well to an increasingly broad range of opportunities to achieve. Increasing numbers are achieving success in a wide range of nationally accredited awards, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Youth Achievement, Saltire and Sports Leadership Awards. Teachers in both schools are continuing to develop the curriculum taking account of Curriculum for Excellence and to ensure that all young people benefit from a broad general education from S1-S3. In both schools, staff are increasing the range of opportunities for young people to experience personalisation and choice and to link their learning including through enterprise and citizenship activities. Attainment levels varies in both schools and staff in both schools are taking positive steps to improve attainment, particularly of those young people from areas of high deprivation.

3.4 Parents and children from Holmston Primary School had mixed views on the proposal for the 'floating area'. While welcoming the choice, they felt that it would split families and children's friendship groups. Some parents were anxious that the council would revoke this flexibility at some time in the future. They would welcome a specified time period for the commitment to the 'floating area' and reassurance from the council that their children would not be disadvantaged.

3.5 Ayr Academy and Belmont Academy work well with their cluster primaries to support transitions. Both schools are continuing to develop their approaches to meeting young people's needs including through improved links with pupil support/guidance staff and support for learning staff and improving approaches to

tracking young people's progress and achievements. The council is supporting improved curriculum transitions with each cluster across the authority taking responsibility for planning for progression in a curriculum area. In this initiative, Ayr Academy is leading on the literacy development, with Belmont Academy leading on the technology development. The aim is to provide a progressive planning framework for each curriculum area that is shared across South Ayrshire and which will support children's continuity and progression across transition from one school to another.

3.6 Staff in Holmston Primary School, Ayr Academy and Belmont Academy identified the need to ensure appropriate transition arrangements for children were in place to support children in moving to both Belmont Academy and Ayr Academy. The council should ensure that appropriate support is maintained to meet effectively the needs of children transferring from Holmston Primary School to Ayr Academy should the proposal go ahead and families from the Craigie Estate choose to send their children to Ayr Academy instead of Belmont Academy.

3.7 Both Ayr Academy and Belmont Academy have successfully improved young people's progress into positive destinations including through improving monitoring and tracking, provision of individual support programmes and links with a range of agencies and employers. Young people in both schools currently benefit from access to an increased breadth of progression pathways through the consortium arrangements between the secondary schools in South Ayrshire.

3.8 The improved partnerships between Ayr Academy and Ayr College and the University of West of Scotland would improve young people's access to both academic and vocational provision in the senior phase and to progression pathways beyond school. This would help better meet the needs of a wider range of learners, provide the opportunity to develop entrepreneurial learning experiences through the business development centres and to provide personalised learning for young people. This should ensure equality of opportunity to positive destinations. As a result of the consortium arrangements in place, young people in Belmont Academy would also benefit from this improved provision. Staff, parents and children and young people were positive about the proposals for improved links with Ayr College and the University of West of Scotland. They felt that this would improve choice and progression for young people and improve young people's ambition and aspirations.

3.9 The proposals offer opportunities for links with teacher education, improved arrangements for staff development and shared resources contributing to improved leadership development opportunities for staff. In this respect, the council's proposals are based on best value, taking account of their responsibility to use its resources effectively and efficiently.

3.10 The council has indicated that free school transport will be provided for entitled children and young people in accordance with its transport policy. It should reassure parents that in further developing plans, steps will be taken to ensure safe routes to schools.

3.11 A number of stakeholders raised concerns about the location of the new learning campus in the Craigie Estate. They identified the need for the council to take action in relation to flood prevention, safety around the river, and reduce the ecological impact of building on the Craigie Estate. The council should provide them with information about the effect of the building projects on the local community and what steps will be taken to minimise these.

4. Summary

4.1 South Ayrshire Council's proposals are likely to result in a quality of educational experience for children and young people from Holmston Primary School, Ayr Academy and Belmont Academy across a range of aspects, which is the same as or better than which they currently experience.

4.2 Some stakeholders expressed concerns about the proposal, including the impact on the Craigie Estate community and environment, traffic congestion and young people's safety. The council should reassure stakeholders by providing further information for them on these aspects for the proposals.

4.3 The council has set out a case that the implementation of the proposals would contribute to its actions to secure best value for available resources. This argument is strong in the context of improved provision and access to academic and vocational pathways for young people through shared resources at the new learning campus.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
December 2013**