

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by South Ayrshire Council to change the catchment areas for Muirhead Primary School Troon and Struthers Primary School Troon.**

## **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 South Ayrshire Council's proposal to change the catchment areas for Muirhead Primary School Troon and Struthers Primary School Troon. 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 meeting held on Wednesday 8 September 2015 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; and

- visits to the site of Muirhead Primary School and Struthers Primary School including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 South Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The statutory consultation period ran from Monday 24 August 2015 to Friday 9 October 2015. The proposal document was posted on the council website and paper copies were available from schools, council offices and local libraries. Public meetings were held on the 8 and 9 September 2015 in Muirhead Primary School and Struthers Primary School respectively at which the background and rationale for the proposal was explained. The council received 13 responses during the consultation period of which five were opposed, four were in agreement and the rest were neither for nor against the proposal.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 The proposal gave details of the rationale for the catchment area changes. One of the main drivers is the new housing development at north east Troon. The site has an estimated capacity for 680 units and the proposals for the new housing have been in development for many years. The location of the development mainly falls within the catchment area for Struthers Primary School. Approximately 20% of the development falls within the catchment area of Muirhead Primary School. The housing development however is much closer to Struthers Primary School than it is to Muirhead Primary School. The proposal therefore provides the council with the opportunity to better align the schools' catchment areas with where families live.

3.2 The majority of South Ayrshire Council's school catchment areas have been in place for many years including those for Muirhead Primary School and Struthers Primary School. Within the current catchment arrangements, a proportion of children who live closer to Struthers Primary School are zoned for Muirhead Primary School. This results in a number of parents submitting placing requests for their child to attend the school nearest to their home. The proposal seeks to offer a more logical catchment area arrangement. The proposal does offer some educational benefits in that more children would be able to attend the school nearest their home and therefore may be more likely to walk using safe routes to school. The proposal states that, should the catchment areas be revised, it will not affect any children already attending Muirhead Primary School or Struthers Primary School or any siblings who may attend at a future date. The council needs to give greater emphasis to the educational benefit of keeping families together in its final report.

3.3 Stakeholders and community members from Struthers Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were generally in favour of the proposal. It was recognised as being a reasonable way to resolve the placing request issues and would result in children who lived across the road from each other being zoned for the same school. A few concerns were voiced by the group of parents who met with HM Inspectors about whether the existing school accommodation has the capacity to take all the

children from the new housing developments. The council could alleviate these concerns by giving a clearer indication of the timescales for the intended extension to the dining hall and learning spaces within Struthers Primary School.

3.4 Parents from Muirhead Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors did not agree with the proposed changes and wished to suggest an alternative catchment design. There was a strong feeling that the proposal would adversely affect the school roll and social mix of the school population. Staff and children held a similar view. In taking forward its final report the council needs to work with parents, staff and children to address these concerns.

#### **4. Summary**

South Ayrshire Council's proposal has potential educational benefits for existing children and those who may attend the two schools in the future. It offers the potential to increase the number of children who can walk to school and to address placing request anomalies. In taking forward its proposal the council needs to engage meaningfully with the families and staff in Muirhead Primary School who raise some concerns about the potential changes to the demographics of their school.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
October 2015**