

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by South Ayrshire Council to amend the current arrangements relating to placing requests for primary and secondary schools within South Ayrshire Council.**

## **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 amend the placing request arrangements for its primary and secondary 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 and young people of South Ayrshire Council; any other users; and children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper;
- 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 27 May 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 Barassie, Coylton and Straiton Primary School Nursery Classes, Belmont and Kyle Academies, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 South Ayrshire 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 The consultation process ran from 6 May 2015 until 26 June 2015. A public meeting was held on 27 May 2015. Appropriate arrangements for both electronic and postal responses were put in place. The council received responses from ten individuals. Overall, a majority agreed with the aspect of the proposal to amend the priority criteria for accepting placing requests. However, a number of respondents disagreed with the aspect of the proposal which gives priority to applications for children and young people who reside in South Ayrshire.

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

3.1 South Ayrshire Council publicises its arrangements for admitting children and young people to its schools and for the management of placing requests. This fulfils all relevant statutory duties. Where there are more requests than places available for a particular school, the council currently sets up a Local Attendance Council to consider the requests using agreed criteria. This arrangement is not a statutory requirement.

3.2 The council has identified that there are approximately 2600 children and young people in South Ayrshire who are not attending their catchment school. Each year the council receives around 600 placing request applications. Approximately 80 of these are for children and young people who reside outwith South Ayrshire. Placing requests from outwith South Ayrshire are currently considered on an equal basis with those from within the council area. This places considerable pressure on accommodation in some South Ayrshire schools. Residents of other councils whose children are zoned for a South Ayrshire school who met with HM Inspectors were concerned that the proposed arrangements may disadvantage them, should they decide to put in a placing request. The council should seek to reassure these families at the point of transition to any new school.

3.3 The council is proposing amendments to the criteria for determining placing requests and to discontinue the role of the Local Attendance Council. This is in response to South Ayrshire Council's Local Plan which includes land supply for approximately 10,000 new houses. This will increase the overall demand for school places and is also likely to result in an increased number of placing requests for particular schools. The council reasonably asserts that its proposed amendments will improve the efficiency of its arrangements for managing demand for school places arising from planned new housing. The proposal does not seek to change the present catchment areas and children and young people within a school's catchment area will continue to be given priority when places are being allocated.

Therefore, should the council decide to implement the proposal, it is unlikely that there will be any detrimental effect on quality of learning, teaching or the learning environment.

3.4 In the proposal, the council has set out a ranked order of priorities it will use for managing placing requests. The rationale for ranking the priorities is fair and reasonable. It will ensure that the council is well-placed to accommodate the wishes of parents who live within South Ayrshire. The council acknowledges that the proposal may result in an increase in unsuccessful placing requests for children and young people who are not resident within South Ayrshire and who do not have a sibling already attending the school which is the subject of the placing request. In the proposal document, the council outlines a number of reasonable steps it will take to minimise any adverse impact of the proposal, should it go ahead. These include making arrangements for the early communication of its priority criteria to those who may be considering making a placing request.

3.5 The proposal is of overall educational benefit to the children and young people across the South Ayrshire Council area. It will ensure that arrangements for deciding on the allocation of places within the council's schools are open, transparent and fair. It will also ensure that arrangements for handling placing requests from parents of children and young people who live outwith the South Ayrshire Council area are fair, clear and consistent. Implementation of the proposal will help the council to meet its duties to secure best value in the delivery of services as set out in the *Local Government in Scotland Act 2003*. It will also enable the council to meet its legislative duties to secure for its area adequate and efficient provision of school education under the terms of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*.

#### **4. Summary**

South Ayrshire Council has set out a reasonable case for amending its current arrangements relating to placing requests for its primary and secondary schools. Overall, the proposal will benefit children and young people who live within the council area by increasing the likelihood of their placing request being successful. Should the council decide to implement the proposal, it is unlikely that there will be any negative impact on quality of learning and teaching or the learning environment. The proposal will help the council to make effective and efficient use of its resources in view of the number of new homes that are planned. It will ensure that arrangements for processing placing request applications for children and young people, whether or not they live within South Ayrshire are open, clear and consistent. In taking forward this proposal, the council should seek to minimise any impact on families who may be affected, for example, through high-quality transition arrangements.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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