

Consultation proposal by South Lanarkshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to discontinue education at Crawfordjohn Primary School and rezone the existing catchment area to Abington Primary School.

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 Lanarkshire Council proposes to discontinue Crawfordjohn Primary School and rezone the existing catchment area to Abington Primary School. If the proposal goes ahead then it will not take effect before August 2014. South Lanarkshire Council originally planned to rebuild Crawfordjohn Primary School in line with its Schools Modernisation Programme. Work on this began in August 2009 when Crawfordjohn Primary School was demolished. At this time, children from Crawfordjohn Primary School were decanted to Douglas Primary School. In January 2011, children at Douglas Primary School moved to a new build. The children from Crawfordjohn Primary School were then decanted to Abington Primary School. Since 2009 the planned rebuild of Crawfordjohn Primary School has been subject to several delays. The council now proposes to close Crawfordjohn Primary School and no longer rebuild Crawfordjohn Primary School.

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:

- 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
- a visit to the site of Abington Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; any other users; for 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school as defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of:

- viable alternatives to the closure of Crawfordjohn Primary School;
- the likely effect on the local community with regard to sustainability and on the community's access to the buildings, grounds and facilities if the school were to close, and
- the likely effect of different travelling arrangements on the environment and on children and young people and other school users occasioned by the closure.

2. Consultation process

2.1 South Lanarkshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. During the period between 2009 when Crawfordjohn Primary School was demolished and 2013, some parents of pupils of Crawfordjohn Primary School questioned the appropriateness of moving their children from Abington Primary School back to Crawfordjohn Primary School should it be rebuilt. They raised this informally with council officers. The concerns of these parents were around the possible diminution of their children's curricular and social experiences. South Lanarkshire Council then engaged in an informal consultation with parents of pupils of Crawfordjohn Primary School or parents of children who were soon to be pupils to determine the nature and extent of parental opinion. Parents had mixed views but the overall preference of parents at that time was not in favour of the rebuilding of Crawfordjohn Primary School. As a

result of this a formal consultation process on the discontinuation of education at Crawfordjohn Primary School was initiated with all stakeholders.

2.2 The council received a total of 36 responses to the proposal, representing the views of 44 people or groups. Just over half of the total responses to the council's consultation proposal document were not in favour of the proposal. Slightly more than 30% were in favour. Other respondents were undecided.

2.3 None of the children who currently attend Crawfordjohn Primary School have been educated in the original Crawfordjohn Primary School building. Although broadly in favour of the proposal, the views of the children are varied. The children of Crawfordjohn Primary School feel that they currently have more friends than they would have if they were educated in a smaller school. They enjoy having a mix of children to engage in group work during lessons and to play with at intervals. They like the fact that there is more chance of them having a classmate that they are familiar with when they transfer to Biggar High School. Children of Abington Primary School like the wider social grouping and would not like to lose their friends from Crawfordjohn Primary School. A few children from Crawfordjohn feel that they would like to have the rebuild as it would be closer to their own homes which would be a healthier alternative as they could walk and cycle to school. A few are concerned about travel to Abington during adverse weather conditions. A few are concerned that not all pupils from Crawfordjohn would have access to after school activities due to transportation issues.

2.4 Views of parents of children currently at Crawfordjohn Primary School or are likely to become so in the next two years are mixed. Approximately half of parents who responded to the council's consultation document want the proposal to go ahead. Some feel that there is benefit to their children in having access to a wider social grouping. They feel that their children will have a broader learning experience if they are educated at Abington Primary School. They also feel that their children will benefit from not having to be educated in a P1 to P7 class with one teacher which they feel is not educationally beneficial. However, other parents would welcome their children being in such a single multi-stage class. Parents are happy that the current arrangements give their children a wider circle of friends which could help them settle at secondary school and that there is more opportunity for their children to be in a class with somebody that they know. These benefits would continue if the proposal were to go ahead. Some parents are concerned about the transportation of their children in a school bus during adverse weather conditions. A few are concerned that Crawfordjohn parents may play less of a role in the life of the school if the proposal goes ahead. Parents welcome the opportunity for a wider range of after school activities but are concerned that children from Crawfordjohn may not be able to benefit from these due to distance and having to rely on parents for transportation.

2.5 Staff have mixed views and can fully appreciate differing stakeholder views. Teaching staff welcome the increased opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and share good practice within a larger school. They feel that this supports their professional development and helps to develop a professional learning community. They feel that attainment has shown much improvement in recent years but are

aware that this has been partly due to enhanced staffing with the current decant arrangement. They feel that stakeholders may not fully appreciate that this enhanced staffing would not continue with implementation of the proposal.

2.6 Members of the community have mixed views. Some from the Crawfordjohn community fear that there will be a detrimental effect on their community if the proposal goes ahead. They feel that the primary school played an important part in the life of the village and its permanent closure would have a negative impact on the wider community. They fear that as a result, parents with young children will be discouraged from moving to the village and the community may be less integrated. If the proposal does go ahead the community would welcome support from the council to mitigate against such adverse effects. The community would also welcome clarity on the future use of the former Crawfordjohn Primary School site if the proposal goes ahead. A number describe the site of the former Crawfordjohn Primary School as very unattractive. A few members of both the Abington and Crawfordjohn communities do not feel that rebuilding Crawfordjohn Primary School is the best use of council funding whilst appreciating the feelings of loss that people will inevitably experience. A few questioned the educational benefits as outlined in the proposal.

2.7 There were some common views expressed by a few staff, parents and pupils. This included a view that should the proposal go ahead, consideration be given to a new school identity to support the transition process. One widely held opinion across all stakeholder groups is that the uncertainty over the Crawfordjohn Primary School rebuild and its future needs to be resolved. Stakeholders have been unsettled and a few felt that this had significantly lowered morale.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 A new build for the current Abington Primary School is programmed to commence in August 2015. The proposed new build will be able to accommodate up to 66 pupils. It will provide sufficient purpose built and up-to-date accommodation for the pupils of both schools. The council's consultation paper details some sound educational benefits for children arising from the proposal. In a larger establishment comprising of Crawfordjohn and Abington Primary School, children will have more opportunities to learn together with other children of their own age and/or stage. They will have enhanced opportunities to learn effectively through collaborative approaches such as peer assessment and cooperative learning. There will be greater flexibility for effective group working across all aspects of the curriculum. Children will potentially benefit through greater opportunities to engage with a wider range of children in their age group. Children will be able to take part in a wider range of educational activities. The increased distance which children need to travel at the end of the school day and the reliance on parents for this travel, potentially may prevent some children from benefiting from after school activities. The proposal will not adversely affect the quality of education for children presently in Crawfordjohn and Abington Primary Schools.

3.2 Abington Primary School currently houses the Rigside and Rural Communities Nursery with pre-school children from the Crawfordjohn catchment area in attendance. A dedicated and enhanced early years facility is planned for inclusion in

the rebuild of Abington Primary School. The potential for a seamless transition as children progress from nursery to P1 in the same educational establishment is enhanced if the proposal is implemented. Children from both Crawfordjohn and Abington Primary Schools currently transfer to Biggar High School and there is no planned change to existing arrangements. There are potential social and emotional benefits for children transferring to Biggar High School from having more peers with whom they are familiar as they make this move.

3.3 The council's proposal indicates that it will enable efficiencies accruing from the discontinuation of Crawfordjohn Primary School of £1.7 million capital and £70,000 annual revenue costs. The council needs to set out more clearly in its final consultation report, the benefits the efficiencies will achieve for the children in the council area.

3.4 The council is planning an extensive transition programme involving both establishments and the designated Quality Link Officer to facilitate the transition and establishment of a shared identity. It is not clear from the proposal how this process will be managed to ensure that the proposal brings sustained educational benefits for children.

3.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school as defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the viability of alternatives to closing the school. The council took reasonable steps to consult with parents of children at Crawfordjohn Primary School before proceeding to consult on discontinuing education there. The council has also considered the viability of rebuilding Crawfordjohn Primary School on the existing site as previously planned. This original plan was delayed for various reasons. Funding for the new build at Crawfordjohn is already included in the council's capital programme if this proposal does not go ahead. The council has already identified funding for the rebuild of Abington Primary School. The council needs to set out clearly in its final consultation report the full cost of building a new primary school in Crawfordjohn and the impact of this on its budgets in the event of the current proposal not going ahead.

3.6 The council has given reasonable consideration to the effect of the proposal on the local community. The council reports that the former Crawfordjohn Primary School building was let by the Parent Council only and was not used for community events as Crawfordjohn has a community-owned village hall. As part of the transition and integration process, the council has indicated that the Crawfordjohn Village Hall would continue to be used for school events which would ensure links with the community are maintained in the future. Current information available to the council shows no additional housing developments are planned throughout the period ending in 2018/19.

3.7 Abington Primary School is 5.5 miles from the site of Crawfordjohn Primary School with a journey time of approximately 15 minutes. Additional transport arrangements have been in place for the last two years as a result of the decant to enable Crawfordjohn Primary children to travel to Abington. The existing travel arrangements in place for pupils currently attending Abington Primary School from

the Crawfordjohn community would remain in place. The council needs to work with parents to address their concerns about the potential impact of any adverse weather.

4. Summary

4.1 The council has outlined some clear educational benefits of the proposal. Children could benefit from a broader staff expertise and range of learning and teaching approaches. There would be better opportunities for children to discuss, plan and review their work together in line with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence. They would have increased opportunities to learn from each other and engage in group work across all areas of the curriculum. Children could benefit socially and emotionally through having increased opportunities to engage in social activities with others of similar age and stage. Implementation of the proposal has the potential to improve transition arrangements from nursery to primary school and from primary to secondary school. Teachers will have better opportunities for professional development as they work collaboratively with a greater number of colleagues. There would be no detriment to children's education if the proposal was to go ahead. The council needs to make clear how it will monitor the indicated educational benefits of the proposal and ensure that they are achieved.

4.2 Of those that responded to the council's consultation process, a slight majority oppose the proposal for a variety of reasons. Concerns were raised about the possible negative impact on the Crawfordjohn community. The council needs to make clear how it plans to mitigate against this. It also needs to make clear how it will minimise the impact of adverse weather on children affected by the proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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