

Consultation proposal by South Lanarkshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to discontinue education at Stablestone Primary School, because of the falling roll and re-zone to Douglas 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.

As the council is proposing to close a school, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 South Lanarkshire Council proposes to discontinue education at Stablestone Primary School because of the falling school roll and to re-zone children to Douglas Primary School.

1.2 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.

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
- visits to the sites of Stablestone Primary School, Douglas Primary School, Rigside Primary School and Lanark Grammar School including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school, children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper, other children and young people in the council area and any other users;
- 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 Stablestone 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*.

2.2 South Lanarkshire Council consulted with stakeholders from 9 September 2013 to the 1 November 2013. A statutory consultation public meeting was held on Tuesday 1 October 2013 at 19:10 in Glespin Hall. Interested parties were also encouraged to submit their views in writing.

2.3 Almost all parents of children at Stablestone Primary School who have made their views known are in favour of the proposal to discontinue education at Stablestone Primary School and re-zone to Douglas Primary School. A very small number of children, who were decanted by the council to Rigside Primary School, would, however, prefer to continue their education there as they are well settled. For

the few children from Stablestone Primary School with additional support needs, remaining at Rigside Primary School would provide them with continuity in their learning and further their personal development by continuing the friendships they have already established.

2.4 Almost all parents from Glespin village, whose children attend Stablestone Primary School, feel that their children will gain a lot socially by attending Douglas Primary School. These children have already attended the nursery in Douglas Primary School as there is no nursery provision in Glespin village. Parents see advantages for their children attending a new primary school with an increased peer group. They are confident that staff would know their children well from their initial experience in nursery.

2.5 Parents felt their children would have increased opportunities to work with more children of the same age in groups and in pairs. They would also have more opportunities to participate in the large number of extra-curricular clubs available in Douglas Primary School.

2.6 Children who made a successful placing request to Douglas Primary School when the decision was made to decant Stablestone Primary School are strongly in favour of the proposal. They are very happy at Douglas Primary School and enjoy their learning there very much.

2.7 Children commented that whilst they loved their teachers and the learning offered at Stablestone Primary School, they recognised that their confidence and their social skills would benefit by being around many more children at the same stage at Douglas Primary School. They also enjoy the increased availability of technology in the bigger school.

2.8 Staff at Stablestone Primary School are clear that there are advantages in favour of the proposal to change the catchment area to Douglas Primary School. They recognise it is the closest school to the village of Glespin and offers much improved facilities from those previously available in Stablestone Primary School. They feel that learners can be involved in a wide variety of after-school clubs. The Stablestone management team would prefer to see continued travel funding in the short term for the very small number of children electing to remain at Rigside Primary School as this was the school that children were originally decanted to by the council before the decision was made to consider closing Stablestone Primary School. Senior managers at Rigside Primary School say that these children from Stablestone Primary School are very settled now at Rigside Primary School and would gain from continuing their learning there rather than experiencing another transition.

2.9 Of the five children who were left at Stablestone Primary School when the decant happened, three children moved to the decant school of Rigside Primary School and two put in successful placing requests and now attend Douglas Primary School.

2.10 Senior managers, staff and young people at the associated secondary school, Lanark Grammar School, agree with the proposal made by the council and recognise

its potential benefits. They commented that they can see no negative impact on Lanark Grammar School. Children felt that there would be a positive social impact which would help them be better prepared for the move to the local secondary. They commented that the Universal Connections community facility in Douglas is a vibrant hub for all the nearby villages including Glespin.

2.11 The proposal from South Lanarkshire Council to close Stablestone Primary School and re-zone to Douglas Primary School sets out the case for securing best value in the education budget through efficient use of the councils resources in an open and transparent way.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Until recently Stablestone Primary School and Douglas Primary School offered a broadly similar range of educational experiences for their children. As the numbers in Stablestone Primary School diminished to five this became increasingly more difficult to achieve. Douglas Primary School is a spacious new building which was opened in 2012. One other new classroom has recently been added to facilitate its increased roll.

3.2 Travel time from the Glespin village catchment area to Douglas Primary School is around four minutes by bus. If the proposal is adopted, all current and future pupils from the Stablestone Primary School catchment area attending Douglas Primary School, would become eligible for funded school transport. It would be helpful if the council continues to pay for the transport for the very small numbers of children choosing to continue their education at the decanted school of Rigside Primary School. This would allow these children to continue to attend the school. This would help ensure their needs were met effectively by providing appropriate support for their learning while deepening the friendships that they have already made in the school. No funded transport would be provided to Rigside Primary School thereafter for any other pupils in the Glespin village area electing to make a placing request to this school.

3.3 Based on projections made by the council, adoption of the proposal would have a very small negative impact on the roll at the present decanted school of Rigside Primary School. The council considers that Douglas Primary School could comfortably accommodate the very small annual enrolment from Stablestone Primary School catchment because it has an operational capacity of 225 and the projected roll for August 2014 is 159.

3.4 South Lanarkshire Council does not envisage any negative effects on the local community as a result of the proposal.

3.5 The Douglas Primary School Headteacher commented that re-zoning the children from Stablestone Primary School would lead to a broader range of opportunities to develop further their skills for life and learning. When Stablestone Primary School closed down it offered one teacher and one classroom for all levels. The new Douglas Primary School offers seven classrooms, a nursery class, open study areas and an information and communications technology (ICT) suite.

3.6 There could also be increased links between the local communities of Douglas and Glespin.

3.7 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 factors to which it should have special regard. The council considered fully the viability of alternatives to the closure of the school before it proceeded to consult on closure. They looked at the possibility of re-building Stablestone Primary School but the diminishing numbers attending now and in the future does not make a new school a viable option. The community of Glespin would benefit from clarity on the future use of the buildings, grounds and facilities if the school remains unused. The local community hall remains in use with limited clubs still taking place there. There is no significant effect on the environment and on children and young people and other school users by the different travelling arrangements occasioned by the closure. The journey to Douglas Primary School takes around four minutes. Permanent Staff from Stablestone Primary School who have been de-canted to Rigside Primary School would benefit from information informing them if and when they will be re-deployed in the event of the closure going ahead. They all agree that re-zoning to Douglas Primary School is the best option in the present circumstances.

3.8 South Lanarkshire Council needs to ensure that parents and their children are kept fully informed of the progress of the proposal and the timescales involved.

4. Summary

4.1 Parents, staff and children from Stablestone Primary School and South Lanarkshire Council agree with the proposal to re-zone the children of Glespin village to Douglas Primary School. They recognise that Stablestone Primary School has offered a positive educational experience until recently, and that the extremely low numbers now and in the future means that the school is no longer viable.

4.2 The journey time from Glespin village to Douglas Primary School would be around four minutes by bus. South Lanarkshire Council have agreed to provide transport to Douglas Primary School. Parents who wish their children to attend Rigside Primary School in future would need to lodge placing requests. Funded transport should continue in the short term to ensure that the needs of the very small number of children whose parents elected to continue their learning at Rigside Primary School are met effectively. This will provide these children with continuity in their learning and assist them socially.

4.3 Douglas Primary School has ample capacity to take the small extra annual enrolment from the Stablestone Primary School catchment.

4.4 Almost all parents support the proposal to change their children's school from Stablestone Primary School to Douglas Primary School. This view is supported by the children themselves, the staff of Douglas Primary School, senior managers of Lanark Grammar School, the decanted staff at Rigside Primary School and South Lanarkshire Council.

4.5 South Lanarkshire Council needs to ensure that parents and their children are kept fully informed of the progress of the proposal and the timescales involved.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2014**