

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to relocate St Margaret's Primary School from its current location to a site within Berryhills Park, Cowie.

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 to it contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Stirling Council's proposal to relocate St Margaret's Primary School from its current location to a site within Berryhills Park, Cowie. 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 17 June 2014 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;
- visit to the site of St Margaret's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees and visit to the site of the proposed new building; and
- visits to Cowie Nursery Class and Fallin Nursery and Out Of School Care.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Stirling Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The council proposes to replace the current building of St Margaret's Primary School with a new build to be located within Berryhills Park, Cowie. The council carried out design and feasibility work to consider part refurbishment/part re-build on the existing site before making its decision to consult formally on this proposal. The preferred location of the replacement school at Berryhills was identified through consultation with the local community during 2013 and 2014.

2.2 The formal consultation on the proposal under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* ran from 9 June to 12 September 2014. A public meeting held on 17 June 2014 was attended by five people. Three written submissions were received by the council, all of which were in favour of the proposal. The council consulted with children and almost all of those who participated were in favour of the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal will improve significantly the educational experiences of children who attend St Margaret's Primary School. Improvements include greater accessibility, the provision of a brighter, safer school environment with suitably sized, flexible teaching areas and a secure and accessible outdoor learning area. Other significant benefits of the proposal include the availability of integrated information and communications technology as well as modern heating, lighting and ventilation. The location of the new school will provide opportunities to promote safe walking routes. The new building will be of significant benefit to the community and will be a valuable community resource, enhancing opportunities for adult and family learning. The council carried out a well-evidenced option appraisal informed by structural surveys. Options included refurbishment of the existing school buildings. However, this would involve part refurbishment/part re-build and associated demolition costs at a similar cost overall to the cost of building a new school.

3.2 The council considers that a new building will result in higher quality and more flexible accommodation in a safer location. Therefore the proposal will help it to secure best value in the delivery of its services.

3.3 In planning the design of the new school building, the council took appropriate account of the views of stakeholders, including school staff and the community in relation to the configuration of learning spaces and access to outdoor learning areas.

3.4 All written responses received by the council were in favour of the proposal and all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors were enthusiastic in their anticipation of the significant improvements to children's and the community's experiences which they believed would result from the new school. However, they were concerned that the council had been considering various options since 2010 and were keen for a final decision to be made without further delay.

3.5 The Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh is strongly in favour of the proposal. It believes that it offers sound educational benefits as well as the opportunity to maintain the unique Roman Catholic identity of the school. It believes that continuing links with the local parish will be facilitated by the inclusion in the proposal of safe pathways linking the new school building to the site of the Sacred Heart Church.

4. Summary

Stirling Council makes a strong case for its proposal to replace the current building of St Margaret's Primary School with a new build to be located within Berryhills Park, Cowie. It rightly identifies a number of educational benefits for the children who will attend the newly built school as well as the wider community, including enhanced opportunities for adult and family learning. The proposal has strong support from children and from current, past and future parents of the school as well as staff, the community and the Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh. The council now needs to take account of the need to eliminate uncertainty by deciding, without delay, whether to implement its proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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