

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to amalgamate Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School in the current St Ronan's Primary School building from August 2015. At the same time, it proposes to relocate St Ronan's Primary School in the vacated Ladyton Primary School building. It further proposes that, in August 2016, Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will relocate to the new amalgamated school under the management of its headteacher. The vacated Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will be converted to a centre for children under three years of age.

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 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to amalgamate Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School in the current St Ronan's Primary School building from August 2015 and to relocate St Ronan's Primary School in the vacated Ladyton Primary School building. This report also gives consideration to the further proposal that, in August 2016, Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will relocate to the new amalgamated school under the management of its headteacher. The vacated Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will be converted to a centre for children under three years of age. 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 schools and early learning and childcare centre; 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 8 October 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected;
- visits to the sites of Highdykes Primary School, Ladyton Primary School, St Ronan's Primary School and Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- discussion with a representative of the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The council proposes to amalgamate Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School in the current St Ronan's Primary School building from August 2015. At the same time, it proposes to relocate St Ronan's Primary School in the vacated Ladyton Primary School building. It further proposes that, in August 2016, Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will relocate to the new amalgamated school under the management of its headteacher. The vacated Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will be converted to a centre for children under three years of age.

2.2 The formal consultation on the proposal under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* ran from 5 September 2014 to 31 October 2014. Notices about the proposal were placed in the local press and on the council's website. Parents of children attending the schools and early learning and childcare centre affected by this proposal were informed about the proposal by letter. As part of the consultation arrangements, a public meeting was held on 8 October 2014 with 94 people in attendance. Approximately 141 responses were received through an online survey made available by the council during the consultation period. The majority of the responses to the online survey opposed the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 At present, all three primary schools affected by this proposal have a condition rating C (poor). The schools are geographically close to each other and the roll of all three schools has declined significantly over recent years. Occupancy

rates for each school, particularly St Ronan's Primary School, are well below their individual working capacities. This proposal, which includes a significant level of refurbishment to the Ladyton Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School buildings, offers educational benefits to the children attending each school and the early learning and childcare centre affected by the proposal. Overall, staff in the primary schools who responded to the online survey and met with HM inspectors were more positive about the proposal. They recognised the educational benefits of having refurbished accommodation.

3.2 Amalgamating Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School in a refurbished building of suitable size has the potential to provide a high-quality learning environment well suited to the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. With a projected roll of approximately 250, children will benefit from increased opportunities to participate in paired and group activities with children of similar ages and stages. The co-location of Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre in the amalgamated school has the potential to enhance transition arrangements for children moving from the nursery class into P1.

3.3 Children who currently attend St Ronan's Primary School have the potential to benefit from moving to a significantly refurbished building of a size more suited to the school's current and projected roll.

3.4 The proposal will extend West Dunbartonshire Council's pre-school educational provision by developing a new centre for children under the age of three.

3.5 Parents, staff and children who responded to the online survey, and who met with HM Inspectors, had mixed views about the proposal. The majority of respondees were against the proposal.

3.6 The amalgamation of Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School would provide a greater range of experience and individual expertise and staff would have better opportunities to plan and work children's learning experiences collaboratively. Staff have concerns over the timescale for bringing the two schools together and for carrying out the necessary refurbishment to the current Ladyton Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School buildings. Should the proposal go ahead, the council needs to ensure that plans for establishing leadership and staffing arrangements are drawn up as soon as possible. It will also have to ensure that appropriate transition arrangements are put in place for children in the amalgamating schools and for those children in the nursery class who will start P1 in August 2015. The council should also consider how it will reduce any potential disturbance to learning and teaching due to the planned buildings' refurbishment.

3.7 Several parents who responded to the survey or met with HM inspectors and were not in favour of the proposal expressed high levels of satisfaction with the current schooling arrangements for their children. Their concerns included their views that their children are happy in their current school and may not be so happy in a less familiar environment. Children too were very loyal to their own school and its outdoor environment. A sizeable number of parents and children were concerned over the external appearance of the Ladyton Primary School building. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should outline clearly how it would address these

concerns. The council also needs to engage with children, parents and other community partners to develop plans to ensure children walking to school can do so safely.

3.8 The Archdiocese of Glasgow supports this proposal. It believes that the strong Roman Catholic identity of St Ronan's Primary School will be maintained and that children at all three schools will benefit from the planned reorganisation of schools within the New Bonhill area.

3.9 This proposal has the potential to assist West Dunbartonshire Council in securing best value in its provision of service. It should reduce the costs of supporting an over-provision of capacity in its school estate and the higher ongoing costs associated with non-refurbished buildings.

4. Summary

The council proposes to amalgamate Highdykes Primary School and Ladyton Primary School in the current St Ronan's Primary School building from August 2015. At the same time, it proposes to relocate St Ronan's Primary School in the vacated Ladyton Primary School building. It further proposes that, in August 2016, Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will relocate to the new amalgamated school under the management of its headteacher. The vacated Ladyton Early Education and Childcare Centre will be converted to a centre for children under three years of age. This proposal offers educational benefits for children. Current school accommodation has a number of weaknesses and this proposal has the scope to provide better learning opportunities and activities for the children of New Bonhill. In taking forward this proposal, the council now needs to ensure that detailed plans for the amalgamation and relocation of schools are put in place in good time to be implemented by August 2015. Transition arrangements which meet the needs of all children, reducing children's reasonable concerns of the unfamiliar, need to be planned and managed as soon as possible. Finally, the council needs to ensure that safe routes to school are put in place.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
November 2014**