

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to replace the current St Mary's Primary School, St Martin's Primary School, Renton Primary School and Language Unit, and Riverside Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELCC) with a new campus to be constructed on the St Martin's/Vale of Leven Academy site.

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 replace the current St Mary's Primary School, St Martin's Primary School, Renton Primary School and Language Unit, and Riverside Early Learning and Childcare Centre with a new campus to be constructed on the St Martin's/Vale of Leven Academy site. The new campus would comprise a new build school known as St Mary's, co-located with a new build Renton Primary and Language Unit and a new build Riverside ELCC. St Martin's Primary School would close and the pupils attending St Martin's Primary School would attend the new St Mary's Primary School. The new campus would open in August 2018 or as soon as possible thereafter. 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 centres affected; 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 September 2015 in connection with the council's 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;
- visits to the sites of St Mary's Primary School, St Martin's Primary School, Renton Primary School, Vale of Leven Academy and Riverside ELCC including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- interviews with the Scottish Catholic Education Service and representatives of the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire 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 was held from 7 September 2015 to 30 October 2015. The consultation document was sent to parents and other affected stakeholders and notices about the consultation were placed in the local press. Copies of the document were placed in the affected schools, Alexandria Library and the council's offices. A public meeting was held in Vale of Leven Academy on 17 September 2015. The council received 568 responses to its online survey with 167 in favour and 401 against the proposal. A further 19 people responded through printed versions of the survey with 15 against the proposal. A total of 91 responses from Parent Councils were received with 76 against. In addition, 1059 people signed a petition and 453 signed letter templates opposing the proposal. Ten individual letters and three individual emails were received opposing the proposal and 185 signed a Save St Mary's Facebook Petition. Members of the three primary schools' Parent Councils submitted an alternative proposal urging the council to build two new schools on existing sites.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal has potential to be of significant educational benefit to children attending St Martin's Primary School, Renton Primary School and Language Unit and Riverside ELCC. The existing school buildings are in poor condition. Children and staff would benefit considerably from moving to a new facility built to current standards and offering a properly equipped, modern learning environment. Children attending the Renton Primary School Language Unit would benefit from moving from unsatisfactory conditions into a facility designed to meet their needs. The council's proposal has the potential to improve children's transition from Riverside ELCC to primary school and for staff to improve collaboration and sharing of expertise in learning at early level.

3.2 The council proposes to include St Mary's Primary School within the new campus. Its proposal document makes reference to the old fashioned design of the current building and the location of the dining area in a separate building. However, the council considers the existing building to be in good condition. The council has not provided sufficiently detailed, clear or specific information on the educational benefits of the proposal for the children of St Mary's Primary School in its consultation proposal document. It will need to address this very significant issue in its final proposal document.

3.3 At Renton Primary School and Language Unit all staff and some parents who spoke with HM Inspectors welcomed the proposal. They expressed a strong desire to move out of a building in poor condition. They saw considerable educational benefits in the council's proposal, including a much improved environment for learning and teaching and an enhanced ability to meet children's needs in the language unit through provision of much better space and equipment. Staff were of the view that moving to a new building would assist the school community in raising aspirations and could result in improved learning outcomes. Members of the parent council who spoke with HM Inspectors were opposed to the proposal. They recognised the need to replace the school building but were opposed to the campus proposal and had concerns about road safety at the combined Vale of Leven campus. Children at Renton Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors had mixed views about the proposal.

3.4 At Riverside ELCC staff welcomed the proposal. They recognised that the current building is not fit for purpose and presents several challenges related to managing space for users in an appropriate and safe way. The new campus would result in a much better learning environment with the potential to improve transition from nursery to school. The proposal could enable staff to provide better support for children with additional support needs. Parents were keen to see the building replaced and recognised that existing arrangements were not fit for purpose. Children wanted to see better playrooms and outdoor play areas.

3.5 Staff at St Martin's Primary School shared the views of staff at Riverside ELCC on the pressing need to replace the school building. They acknowledged that current pupil roll of 58 made certain curricular activities difficult and felt that children would benefit from working with a larger number of peers, including participation in some team sports which was not currently possible. They thought the proposal could result in valuable opportunities for them to share professional learning with a wider range of colleagues. Parents and children at St Martin's Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors were opposed to the proposal. They wanted a new building but were not in favour of the proposed combined campus.

3.6 Parents and children at St Mary's Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors were opposed to the proposal. They were content with the location and classroom layout of the existing school building and felt the existing school offers high quality learning experiences for children. They did not see significant educational benefits from the proposed new campus and had a number of concerns. These included road safety at the proposed combined campus and the loss of children's current easy access to their local church. Parents were concerned that

the proposal document made no mention of the neighbouring Ferryfield ELCC and the potential impact of the proposal on existing transition arrangements. They expressed reasonable concerns about how existing services such as the breakfast club, homework and lunchtime clubs would operate at the proposed new campus. Staff had concerns about the high numbers of pupils at the proposed new campus and the potential volume of traffic. They expressed the need for training in order to work effectively in an open learning environment. The council will need to clarify the educational benefits it believes the proposal will deliver to the children and families of St Mary's Primary School and address the concerns of the school community in its final proposal document.

3.7 Young people, parents and staff at Vale of Leven Academy felt the proposal had the potential to be detrimental to the school and expressed a number of concerns. These included increased traffic and the potential for building works to cause disruption, particularly during examinations. They were concerned about the impact of the proposal on the school's physical education and sports capacity. If the council decides to proceed with its proposal it will need to reassure stakeholders through providing a clear traffic management plan and details of how it will address the loss of sports and athletics facilities.

3.8 The Archdiocese of Glasgow's response to the proposal acknowledged the need to replace the St Martin's Primary School building. It noted that with a school roll of 58 pupils, amalgamation with St Mary's Primary School was in the best interests of children's education. The two schools already operate under the management of a single headteacher and could therefore operate as one school. The Archdiocese was opposed to the inclusion of St Mary's Primary School in the new campus. It expressed a preference for refurbishment of the existing building which would also incorporate St Martin's Primary school. The current roll of St Mary's Primary School is 208 pupils. The building has a capacity of 330 and could therefore accommodate the current roll of St Martin's Primary School. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work with the Archdiocese to clarify the benefits it believes will be delivered for all groups of children involved.

4 **Summary**

The council's proposal has the potential to offer significant educational benefits for the children of some of the schools and settings involved. These are mostly as a result of replacing buildings which are in poor condition with modern educational facilities. The proposal also has potential to enhance children's transition experiences, improve support for children with additional needs and provide greater opportunities for staff collaboration. Individual consultees and local groups made alternative proposals during the formal consultation. In taking forward its proposal, it will be beneficial for the council to consider the viability of alternative proposals suggested by stakeholders. Educational benefits for children attending St Mary's Primary School are not clear in the council's proposal document. The Archdiocese of Glasgow has expressed a preference for refurbishment of the existing St Mary's Primary School to incorporate St Martin's Primary School. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work with the Archdiocese and the communities of St Martin's and St Mary's Primary Schools to clarify its reasons for believing the current proposal is the most reasonable and viable option open to it.

If it decides to go ahead with the proposal, the council will need to address stakeholders' concerns about road safety and the potential loss of sports facilities at Vale of Leven Academy.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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