

Consultation proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal to construct a new Our Lady and St. Patrick's High School, Dumbarton either on the existing school site or on the Posties Park site adjacent to Levensgrove Park, Dumbarton.

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 West Dunbartonshire Council proposes to relocate educational provision from the existing Our Lady and St Patrick's High School building to a new school building either on the existing school site or on Posties Park adjacent to Levensgrove Park in Dumbarton. The council proposes to open the new campus in January 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 23 October 2013 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; and
- visits to the site of Our Lady and St Patrick's High School including discussion with relevant consultees including meetings with representative groups of

staff, parents, young people, church representatives and primary head teachers from the associated school's group.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of Our Lady and St Patrick's High 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 The proposal to build a new school is welcomed by all stakeholders. All stakeholders feel strongly that young people in Our Lady and St Patrick's High School are entitled to high quality facilities, equivalent to those available for all other young people of secondary school age in West Dunbartonshire Council. They acknowledge that the school is the only secondary school yet to be rebuilt or refurbished within the council area.

2.3 Young people are excited about the possibility of a new school. They appreciate that it will lead to a much improved environment for learning, including improved physical education facilities, outdoor space and internal social spaces. A number of young people commented that the proposal does not include provision for a swimming pool. They also note that swimming is a central part of the school's current programme in physical education and that the pool is well used by the local community groups.

2.4 Staff are positive about the new school build and the potential it would offer. They believe that it will boost the morale of all connected with the school and provide a much needed improvement to facilities. For example, they feel that improved facilities in subjects such as science, will enable them to offer a similar level of resourcing and coursing in line with provision in other secondary schools in the authority.

2.5 Staff, parents and pupils at the eight associated primary schools are positive and excited about the provision of a new secondary school for the area.

2.6 There is no clear consensus among stakeholders, including local residents and residents of the wider community of Dumbarton on the preferred location for the

new school. For a wide range of reasons, almost all staff, parents and pupils, church representatives, local residents and around two thirds of the respondents to the proposal paper feel that building the new school on the existing site is unsuitable. They also had a number of concerns about the potential disruption to learning that may result during the building programme if the new school is built on the current site. However, many also feel that Posties Park is also unsuitable for a range of reasons. These include concerns that building on this site would result in the loss of valuable green space within the community. A number of consultees feel that the council has not considered fully the viability of other options, including the site of the former Notre Dame High School.

2.7 Some young people from Argyll and Bute are currently within the catchment area of Our Lady and St Patrick's High School. Some staff and church representatives are concerned that the proposal does not set out clearly whether this arrangement will continue once the relocation to the new building is complete.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The proposal to relocate Our Lady and St Patrick's High School into a new and up-to-date building has significant educational benefits for young people. The existing building has serious shortcomings and does not provide suitable or appropriate accommodation for effective learning and teaching. The current building has a number of significant ongoing maintenance issues. These include poor heating, water ingress, flat leaking roofs, damp penetration, inconsistent and ineffective heating, poor soundproofing, ruptured flooring, draughty windows, limited internal social space and a lack of outdoor space and sport facilities. Maintenance of the current building incurs significant ongoing revenue costs for the council in making the building safe, secure and wind and watertight. The size of the current site means that there are limited outdoor facilities on site and this reduces the opportunities for physical education, school sport and physical activity and outdoor learning. The existing outdoor, all-weather pitch is often out of use due to poor drainage. The current building offers only limited indoor social space for young people.

3.2 Implementation of the proposal should enable the council to make long-term savings. These will result from projected reduced maintenance costs and more efficient running costs associated with the new building. These will help the council secure best value and will be of potential benefit to other children and young people across the council.

3.3 Our Lady and St Patrick's High School is well-used by the local community with a number of local organisations making use of the school's facilities in the evenings and at weekends. The new school will provide enhanced facilities for use by members of the community.

3.4 Stakeholders have some reasonable concerns with regard to limitations of building on the current site. These largely relate to the provision of sports facilities, access to outdoor social space, green space for outdoor learning, and the council's commitment to provide a more appropriate learning environment for young people with additional support needs. In taking forward the proposal, the council now needs to ensure that parents, young people and other stakeholders are kept fully informed

and consulted about the facilities to be included in the new build, particularly if the decision is to relocate the school within the current site.

3.5 The council also needs to ensure that the new school has sufficient capacity for its projected roll. School rolls in the associated primary schools are increasing. The council needs to ensure that this is factored into the design brief for the new school, particularly if it is built on the existing site.

3.6 Stakeholders have reasonable concerns about vehicular access to the current site at the start and end of the school day, particularly given the large number of young people who travel to school by bus.

3.7 If the council decides to locate the new school on the existing site, it will need to ensure that it takes appropriate steps to minimise the impact of the building programme on the quality of young people's learning experiences.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal to build a new Our Lady and St Patrick's High School is welcomed by all stakeholders. The provision of education in a new purpose built school provides a number of significant educational benefits. There is a lack of a clear consensus on the location of the school. If the council chooses to build the new school on the existing site, it will need to ensure that it addresses the reasonable concerns of stakeholders with regard to sports facilities, access to outdoor areas, provision for young people with additional support needs and issues relating to vehicular access. The council will also need to set out clearly the steps it will take to minimise disruption to learning and teaching when the new school is being built.

4.2 In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure it consults and communicates effectively with staff, young people, parents and residents in order to engage them fully in the choice of the final site for the school and in the future planning and design stages of the project.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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