

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to close Jamestown Primary School and Haldane Primary School and open a new primary school on the present St Kessog's Primary School campus. This new primary school will be co-located with a new St Kessog's Primary School, a new Jamestown Early Education and Childcare Centre and a new base for primary school children with additional support needs.

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 of 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 close Jamestown Primary School and Haldane Primary School and open a new primary school on the present St Kessog's Primary School campus. This new primary school will be co-located with a new St Kessog's Primary School, a new Jamestown Early Education and Childcare Centre and a new base for primary school children with additional support needs. 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 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 22 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; and
- visits to the sites of Haldane Primary School, Jamestown Primary School, Jamestown Early Education and Childcare Centre and St Kessog's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

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*. The council proposes to close Jamestown Primary School and Haldane Primary School and open a new primary school on the present St Kessog's Primary School campus. This new primary school will be co-located with a new St Kessog's Primary School, a new Jamestown Early Education and Childcare Centre and a new base for primary school children with additional support needs.

2.2 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook formal consultation in terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* in relation to this proposal. The formal consultation ran from Friday 12 September 2014 to Friday 7 November 2014. During this period, the council issued the formal proposal paper, advertised the proposal in the local press, in council buildings and on the council's website. A public meeting was held in Vale of Leven Academy, Alexandria, on Wednesday 22 October 2014. West Dunbartonshire Council received 246 responses to the consultation. Of those who responded, just over half were in favour of the proposal. Thirty-nine per cent of those who responded opposed the proposal.

2.3 As part of the consultation, West Dunbartonshire Council also sought views on arrangements for continuing children's education during the period required to clear the site and construct the new buildings on the present St Kessog's site, should the proposal go ahead. Most of those who responded preferred the option to decant St Kessog's Primary School into the present Haldane Primary School building. A few preferred the option to move children from St Kessog's Primary School to Jamestown Primary School and move Jamestown Primary School to share the Haldane Primary School building.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal for children currently attending or expected to attend Jamestown Primary School, Haldane Primary School, St Kessog's Primary School and Jamestown Early Learning and Childcare Centre has a number of educational benefits. The existing buildings are currently rated C (poor) by the council in terms of condition and provide little flexibility for offering a range of contemporary educational experiences to children. In addition, access to Jamestown Primary School and Haldane Primary School is limited for those with restricted mobility. Should the proposal go ahead, children will benefit from moving into high-quality facilities that are fit for purpose for modern educational practice with flexible learning opportunities more readily available indoors and outdoors. The increased size of the school population and staff team also provides good opportunities for wider educational experiences.

3.2 The proposal ensures that St Kessog's Primary School will maintain its Roman Catholic identity and so provide current and future families in the area with their statutory right to Catholic primary education.

3.3 The proposal will enable children currently attending or expected to attend specialist additional support needs provision to benefit from high-quality facilities that are fit for purpose for modern educational practice in meeting the specific needs of identified individual children. This will provide an opportunity for the council to make more efficient use of resources by reducing the use of external provision in neighbouring authorities.

3.4 Across the Haldane, Jamestown and St Kessog's communities, almost all stakeholders who oppose the proposal express concerns over the choice of the St Kessog's site for the new campus. There was widespread concern about the site's size and proximity to a main road. These stakeholders also believed that the increased number of children, families and staff will place too great a burden on the site and surrounding road system. In taking the proposal forward, it will be important for the council to provide further information on the process for selecting the site against possible alternatives, including sites other than current school site. It should also provide assurance to stakeholders about arrangements for traffic management in the immediate area and road safety arrangements so that children can travel safely to and from their new school or early education and childcare centre.

3.5 While support for the proposal is clear, a significant number of stakeholders across all the communities affected have expressed concern over the uncertainty regarding arrangements for continuing children's primary education during the interim period until the new schools are completed. There is concern over the level of possible disruption to children's learning and their progress. It will be important for the council to work closely with communities involved to provide reassurance that any possible disruption will be minimised and managed sensitively.

3.6 Currently, drawings and/or other representations of the proposed new campus are not available. It will be important for West Dunbartonshire Council to provide reassurance to all communities affected that they will be appropriately included in the design phase of their new campus should the proposal be approved.

3.7 The Archdiocese of Glasgow on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church supports the proposal. They provided a written submission setting out their views. The views included the preference for St Kessog's Primary School to be decanted to Jamestown Primary School and Jamestown Primary School to be decanted to Haldane Primary School. The Archdiocese encourages the council to ensure that should the proposal be approved, St Kessog's Primary School is supported in continuing to maintain its individual identify as a denominational school.

4. Summary

West Dunbartonshire Council sets out a clear case for the educational benefits arising from its proposal. Current and future cohorts of children will enjoy wider educational experiences in higher-quality facilities and outdoor areas that have been built to be fit for purpose for modern education. Children with additional support needs will benefit from an increased range of support across West Dunbartonshire to more appropriately meet their individual needs. Stakeholders broadly support the proposal. However, the council needs to provide further assurance on the suitability of the site chosen and its reasoning for selecting the St Kessog's site over possible alternatives. The council also needs to provide further reassurance regarding arrangements to allow children and families to travel to and from their new school safely and how they plan to minimise risk. It will be important for the council, should the proposal be approved, to engage fully with all stakeholders to ensure that arrangements for continuing children's education in the period until the new campus is completed do not impact on children's progress and take full account of the needs of all who are affected by such arrangements.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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