

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to close Merkland and Campsie View Schools and establish a new build additional support needs (ASN) school in Kirkintilloch.**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to close Merkland and Campsie View Schools and establish a new build ASN school in Kirkintilloch. 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; 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:

- 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 Merkland and Campsie View Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 East Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Act 2010*.

2.2 The consultation ran from 23 April until 15 June 2018 having been extended for one week to allow a sufficiency of time for respondents. The council made appropriate arrangements to consult with stakeholders. The council announced the consultation in local press and information, including the proposal paper, was placed on the council website, council buildings and libraries. Copies of the proposal were made available to relevant consultees by post. Stakeholders were invited to respond to the proposal through a consultation response form. Public meetings were held on 8 May 2018 in Campsie View School with 80 attendees and 15 May 2018 in Merkland School with 36 attendees. During the consultation period the council received 101 responses from stakeholders including parents. Almost all were in favour of the proposal. A further 134 responses were received from members of the public. Most opposed the proposal.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 Merkland and Campsie View Schools provide education for children and young people who have complex needs across East Dunbartonshire. The proposal is one of several changes to the provision for children and young people who have ASN as a result of the local authority ASN strategy. It sets out the rationale to close both schools and establish a new build ASN school in Kirkintilloch.

3.2 HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has educational benefit. The council outlines clearly the educational benefits which it believes will be brought about by establishing a new ASN provision. The Merkland School building is in poor condition and does not offer the range of suitable permanent learning and wellbeing environments children and young people can benefit from. Campsie View School is cramped and does not offer a sufficiency of appropriate spaces for learning or health and wellbeing needs. Neither school offers quality social spaces and a choice of vocational learning environments which young people desire. Whilst transition arrangements for children are well-managed, they would be enhanced by a single standalone building. Increased pupil numbers at the schools have made transport arrangements more challenging. A new provision with appropriate bus and car parking facilities would ease transport arrangements for young people and their families.

3.3 Stakeholders at Merkland School welcome the proposal. Young people expressed the desire to have flexible learning spaces which are adaptable but similar to the environments enjoyed by teenagers in mainstream settings. They would like a wider range of life skill and vocational opportunities which would broaden their senior phase. HM Inspectors feel these views are justified. Families agree that the Merkland building is in poor condition and places restrictions on their children, young people and staff. Families would like adaptable learning spaces which facilitate a

broad, rich curriculum. Staff welcome the proposal to provide a bespoke learning environment which enables high quality, creative teaching approaches designed to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

3.4 Stakeholders at Campsie View School also welcome the proposal. Pupil numbers have grown. Staff and visiting professionals no longer have appropriate spaces to meet pupil's wellbeing needs, talk with families privately and ensure children and young people have large enough learning environments for them and essential equipment. HM Inspectors agree with these views. Families feel the building places restrictions of staff who they acknowledge make a tremendous effort to compensate for the facilities each day. Children, young people and staff are in favour of the proposal. HM Inspectors believe they are justified in their desire for more space, appropriate sports facilities and dedicated learning spaces which will enhance their curriculum.

3.5 Stakeholders at both schools wish to continue to be consulted as the new building is designed and constructed. Overall, they are pleased with the level of consultation from East Dunbartonshire Council to date and believe they have been kept informed through the process. Parents would like this to continue and for their children and young people to have a strong say in the indoor and outdoor environments of the proposed new school. HM Inspectors believe this is a reasonable expectation. In its final report, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that they will continue to be consulted as the new building is planned and constructed.

3.6 Most residents who live close to the preferred school site at Waterside oppose the proposal. They are concerned at the loss of a green field site and increased traffic. In its final report, the council will need to reassure residents that current users of the site will be involved in seeking alternative spaces.

#### **4. Summary**

- HM Inspectors believe the proposal has educational benefit and is justified. We are assured that the council has consulted appropriately. HM Inspectors agree that the current arrangements at both Merkland and Campsie View Schools can no longer continue to meet the needs of children and young people who have ASN in the future. In particular, HM Inspectors agree with the desire of children and young people to have a bespoke learning environment on which they have been consulted. In its final report, the council needs to set out how it will continue to reassure them, their families and staff that their views will be taken into account.
- HM Inspectors note the local opposition regarding the preferred site at Waterside. In its final report, the council needs to set out how it will continue to work with them to alleviate their concerns.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
June 2018**