

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to establish enhanced support bases at Castlehill and Wester Cleddens Primary Schools and to relocate Language and Communication Resource Services provided at Twechar Primary School.

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* 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 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to establish enhanced support bases at Castlehill and Wester Cleddens Primary Schools and to relocate Language and Communication Resource Services provided at Twechar Primary School. 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 of Castlehill, Wester Cleddens and Twechar Primary 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;

- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Castlehill, Wester Cleddens and Twechar Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East 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 formal consultation ran from 13 November 2017 to 22 December 2017. A public meeting was held in Wester Cleddens Primary School on 6 December 2017. The proposal document was sent to all consultees according to the Schedule 1 of the relevant act. A press release was also issued publicising the launch of the consultation. Copies of the proposal were issued to headteachers and the Parent Councils of the establishments affected and also circulated to Elected Members and senior officers in the council. Details of the proposal were also made available on the council's website. Pupils who attend Wester Cleddens and Castlehill Primary Schools were also consulted and their views gathered and recorded as part of the process. There was a total of 22 formal written responses to the proposal, with 14 being in favour, four being against and four undecided. Of the 230, P3 to P7 school pupils who responded to the survey about the proposal, 208 were in favour, 21 against and one was undecided.

2.3 Stakeholders who provided a written response to the proposal were mostly in favour recognising the benefits of greater integration for the children with additional support needs. They wanted to see a commitment to increased management time and corresponding resourcing in the receiving schools, given the increased pupil roll and expanded responsibilities for staff. Those against the proposal were concerned about the continuing access to appropriately trained staff with the relevant expertise in the new bases and a possible dilution in the high quality of provision currently experienced in the existing establishments. They were keen to express the need for formal ongoing monitoring and evaluation should the proposal go ahead. Stakeholders who were undecided about the proposal wanted more information about: the anticipated impact on children currently attending the Language and Communication Resource bases; the possible implications of staff having to meet a wider range of children's needs; the anticipated numbers of pupils to be accommodated within the new bases; the support and training available for mainstream staff and the plans for continuity in current staff children relationships within the new bases.

2.4 Children who responded to the survey about the consultation were almost all in favour of the proposal. They recognised the benefits for both children and parents of a shorter daily commute and of children being educated in their own local area. They had a few concerns over existing friendships being broken and staffing changes.

2.5 Stakeholders who attended the public meeting wanted further clarification about staffing ratios, access to after school clubs and secondary schools and whether there was a sound research base to support such a change.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to establish enhanced support bases at Castlehill and Wester Cleddens Primary Schools and to relocate Language and Communication Resource Services provided at Twechar Primary School is of educational benefit. The proposal aligns well with the new additional support needs strategy for the council. It will help to ensure that children requiring additional support will be able to access support in a new base closer to their home. It will reduce daily travel time for children and the associated costs. It will increase time available for their involvement in planned learning. It will enable more efficient use of the available space at Wester Cleddens Primary School. It will provide bases which enhance the range of support across a wider range of needs. Children in mainstream classes will benefit from socialising and learning alongside children with additional barriers to learning. The proposal has the potential to build staff capacity, knowledge and skills through professional learning and ready access to other professional support from staff with a greater range of expertise.

3.2 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors varied in their support for the proposal. Almost all children were in favour of the proposal, recognising the benefits of having an increased number of pupils in school. They appreciated the need to provide education locally and to reduce travel time for the pupils affected. Staff were more mixed in their view about the changes proposed. Most staff looked forward to the wider remit of the enhanced bases and the benefits for both staff and children of having a larger staff network of support. A minority of staff were concerned about the future level of resourcing and staffing in the new bases. They were also apprehensive about the breaking up of existing well performing staff teams. Almost all staff were concerned about the tight timescale and whether this would allow for appropriate transitions for the children who would need it and for receiving staff to build their capacity sufficiently to enable the successful integration of children with a wider range of additional support needs. Most parents who met with HM Inspectors were against the change as they considered that they had not been provided with sufficient information as reassurance that the council had fully considered all of the implications of the proposed change. Parents of children currently attending a Language and Communication Resource base were concerned that the quality of experience for their child would be diluted by the changes proposed. A few parents were wholly supportive and recognised the benefits to both mainstream and enhanced support base pupils of greater integration. Overall, they sought further clarification on the implications of what was being proposed.

4. Summary

4.1 Overall, East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to establish enhanced support bases at Castlehill and Wester Cleddens Primary Schools and to relocate Language and Communication Resource Services provided at Twechar Primary School is of educational benefit. While a majority are in favour of the proposal, it is not, however, universally welcomed by all stakeholders in its current form. The

proposal, if implemented, will enhance the ability of East Dunbartonshire Council to meet the needs of more children with additional learning needs. This will be achieved through improved facilities, designed to better meet children's needs, located closer to their local school and community. It will reduce travel time for children on a daily basis and consequently increase the time available for planned learning. The reduced associated costs can potentially be redirected to support improvements in teaching and learning. The proposal also supports a move towards greater opportunities for children to be more included in events and activities organised within their own local communities.

4.2 With the refurbishment of accommodation still to take place, the council should reconsider the planned timescale to provide a longer, more appropriate time frame for planning and progressing enhanced transitions for the children who will need it. This should allow children to be able to see and tour their new accommodation and meet the new staff who they will be working with before transferring to their new establishment. The additional time period should also allow for more focused professional learning for mainstream staff to ensure they are well placed and confident in their abilities to integrate children with identified additional support needs effectively, into their mainstream classes.

4.3 As it stands, the proposal is light on detail in terms of educational benefits, facilities, staffing ratios and the broad parameters of how the new enhanced support bases will function on a day-to-day basis. The council should provide greater detail including the broader educational benefits of the proposal for mainstream pupils affected by the plans. While most parents can appreciate the benefits of the move, they are particularly keen to know more about the potential challenges that this change will bring and how the council plans to both prepare for and overcome these. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to engage children, parents and staff further in discussion of the detailed plans for implementation.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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