

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Renfrewshire Council to establish a new campus to serve the Neilston area incorporating Neilston Primary School, Madras Family Centre and St Thomas's 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* ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Renfrewshire Council's proposal to establish a new campus to serve the Neilston area incorporating Neilston Primary School, Madras Family Centre and St Thomas's 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 statutory 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 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 5 June 2018 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 Neilston Primary School, Madras Family Centre and St Thomas's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Renfrewshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 The consultation process ran from 11 May 2018 to 26 June 2018. During this period the council held a meeting with St Thomas's Primary School Parent Council representatives on 22 May 2018, a meeting with Neilston Primary School Parent Council representatives on 23 May 2018 and a public meeting at Glen Halls in Neilston on 5 June 2018. Statutory consultees, including Parent Councils of the schools directly involved and pupils of the affected schools, were informed of the consultation in writing. Consultation documentation was published on the East Renfrewshire Council website and copies were available for public consultation at several venues during the consultation period, including the schools concerned. A proforma questionnaire was made available for responses. The council received 86 responses, most of which expressed support for the council's proposal. The council also engaged external consultants to seek the views of pupils in each school affected by the proposal. Four hundred and twenty-six pupils from P1 to P7 in both Neilston and St Thomas's Primary Schools were consulted and in each school, the majority of pupils agreed with the proposal. The proposal notes that funding is not yet available but that the new replacement schools are a priority for the council. The schools would continue to operate under separate headships and have separate Parent Councils, but would benefit from the new build and some shared facilities.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council believes that an educational benefit of the proposal will be an increased number of early learning and childcare places and improved transition from early years to primary. The council is planning appropriately to meet the expected increased demand in line with the national expansion programme by increasing the number of places available. Having the Madras Family Centre integrated into the proposed campus will make transitions to either Neilston Primary School or St Thomas's Primary School much more straightforward. There is a clear potential educational benefit from this aspect of the proposal.

3.2 The council states that a further educational benefit of the proposal will be ensuring ongoing provision for education within the community in an improved learning environment which is more accessible, efficient and sustainable. Whilst the proposal does not provide precise detail about the facilities of the new campus, the council has acknowledged that the current condition of all three facilities means that regular ongoing remediation work is required to keep them functioning appropriately. A new campus as proposed should provide an improved learning environment for children which will be easier to maintain and more efficient. There is a clear potential educational benefit from this aspect of the proposal.

3.3 The council believes that an educational benefit of the proposal is that adopting a campus approach will facilitate staff working together to improve learning, teaching and achievement. Staff from the Madras Family Centre, Neilston Primary School and St Thomas's Primary School are aware of the advantages in being able to work more closely together which will be facilitated by the proposed new campus. This should lead to improved outcomes for all children. There is a clear potential educational benefit from this aspect of the proposal.

3.4 The council also believes that an educational benefit of the proposal is that adopting a campus approach will aid developing a good relationship with the wider community, including community use of the library and leisure facilities. This benefit has been proven in other community campuses across the country but the first priority in the current proposal is to establish a joint learning campus, with the inclusion of library and leisure facilities dependent upon funding. There is a clear potential educational benefit from this aspect of the proposal, should sufficient resources be made available.

3.5 Children who attend either Neilston Primary School or St Thomas's Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are enthusiastic about the possibility of new, improved facilities, both within and outside the campus buildings. They also think that it is a positive move to have both primary schools on the same site along with the family centre. They are keen to find out more about the practical aspects of preparing for moving to a new building and would like to be involved in discussions about this.

3.6 Parents of children attending Madras Family Centre, Neilston Primary School and St Thomas's Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are generally enthusiastic about the proposal. They are in no doubt that new buildings are required and are keen for their children to have access to high quality learning environments. They have some queries about the safety aspects of preparing for moving to a new building and wish to continue to be involved in discussions as the proposal develops.

3.7 Staff and senior managers from Madras Family Centre, Neilston Primary School and St Thomas's Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are generally enthusiastic about the proposal and are well aware of the condition and suitability issues with their current learning provision. Staff from Madras Family Centre and Neilston Primary School are keen that as much as possible of their current well-used outdoor learning area is retained if the joint campus is developed on their present site. Staff would like reassurance about the size of learning areas to be provided. They wish to continue to be involved in discussions as the proposal develops.

3.8 The Diocese of Paisley notes the poor condition of Neilston Primary School and St Thomas's Primary School buildings and welcomes the proposed upgrading of the East Renfrewshire Council school estate. The Diocese is happy to support the proposed changes outlined in the consultative document as long as the distinct religious nature and reality of St Thomas's Primary School is not in any way diminished by being on a shared site.

4. Summary

- The proposal acknowledges that St Thomas's Primary school and Neilston Primary School are poor in terms of condition and suitability, requiring major refurbishment and remodelling. It also notes that Madras Family Centre would also benefit from modernisation and being co-located with both primary schools. This view is shared by children, their parents and staff, as well as the Diocese. There is a clear majority in favour of the proposal. HM Inspectors consider there to be potential educational benefits for children who currently attend the establishments involved or are likely to attend them within the next two years. However, HM Inspectors also note that the funding is not yet available and the location and design of the joint campus is yet to be confirmed.
- The council should continue to consult and communicate effectively with staff, children, parents, the Diocese and the wider community in engaging them fully in the future planning and design stages of the proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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