

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Renfrewshire Council to establish a new non-denominational primary school and nursery class at Maidenhill, Newton Mearns.

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 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 Renfrewshire Council's proposal to establish a new non-denominational primary school and nursery class at Maidenhill, Newton Mearns. 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 the affected 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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 15 December 2016 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 Kirkhill Primary School and Mearns 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* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation process ran from 28 November 2016 to 20 January 2017. During this period, the council held a meeting with Parent Council representatives on 6 December and a public meeting at Mearns Primary School on 15 December 2017. 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 pro-forma questionnaire was made available for responses. The council received 37 responses, the majority of which expressed support for the council's proposal.

2.3 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors felt that the council had provided good opportunities for being consulted and for giving their views. Pupils at both Kirkhill and Mearns Primary Schools appreciated the opportunities which they had had to discuss the proposal with council officers. As a result, they were very well-informed about the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 This proposal involves the establishment of a new non-denominational primary school and nursery class, and associated catchment area, in the Maidenhill area of Newton Mearns. The two existing schools in the area, Mearns Primary School and Kirkhill Primary School are already running at around 99% capacity and it is not considered feasible to extend either school. Further planned house building in the area would lead to school rolls exceeding the number of places available.

3.2 The proposal has the potential to provide children who will attend the new school with a purpose-built learning environment well-suited to their learning needs. At the same time, the proposal will reduce the possibility of overcrowding at both Kirkhill Primary School and Mearns Primary School. As a result, the proposal offers clear educational benefits to children attending each of the three schools.

3.3 Almost all parents, pupils and staff who met with HM Inspectors support the proposal. These stakeholders share a clear understanding that the rolls of both Kirkhill Primary and Mearns Primary would exceed capacity in coming years as a result of housing developments in the area.

3.4 As well as increasing the number of non-denominational primary pupil places in the area, the proposal would also result in an increase in the number of places for three and four year old children in this area of Newton Mearns.

3.5 Although a majority of stakeholders support the proposal, a few parents expressed some concerns about the future provision of safe walking routes to the new school, particularly for those children who may have further to travel as a result of the proposed changes to catchment areas. In taking forward its proposal, the council should continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that safe walking and cycling routes are identified and promoted.

4. Summary

East Renfrewshire Council's proposal to establish a new non-denominational primary school and nursery class in Maidenhill, Newton Mearns has clear educational benefits. The proposal has the potential to provide children who will attend the new school with a modern, purpose-built building designed to meet the learning needs of its learners. The new school will enhance provision for early learning and childcare which will potentially benefit the wider community. The proposal will also ease pressure in indoor and outdoor facilities at Kirkhill and Mearns Primary Schools, both of which are already running at near-full capacity. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors support the proposal. In taking its proposal forward, the council should continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure that safe routes to school for walking and cycling are clearly identified.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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