

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Renfrewshire Council to change the arrangements for admissions and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary in respect of all East Renfrewshire Roman Catholic and non-denominational primary and secondary schools effective from January 2017.**

## **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 change the arrangements for admissions and the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary in respect of all East Renfrewshire Roman Catholic and non-denominational primary and secondary schools effective from January 2017. 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 East Renfrewshire; 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 meetings held on 21 and 28 September 2016 in connection with the council's proposal;

- attendance at the meetings with Parent Councils (West) held on 13 September 2016 and Parent Councils (East) on 19 September 2016 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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;
- visits to the site of Our Lady of the Missions Primary School, St Cadoc's Primary School, St Ninian's High School, St Joseph's Primary School, Braidbar Primary School, Giffnock Primary School, Woodfarm High School, Thornliebank Primary School, St Luke's High School, Barrhead High School, St Vincent's Primary School (Glasgow) and St Angela's Primary School (Glasgow), including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- meeting with the Roman Catholic Church representative on the East Renfrewshire Education Committee.

## **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 formal consultation ran from 26 August until 10 October 2016. Public meetings were held on, 21 and 28 September 2016. These were well attended. Meetings with Parent Council representatives were held on 13 and 19 September 2016. An advert was placed in the local press outlining the proposed changes and inviting the views of interested parties. The council posted the consultation document on its website. Copies of the consultation document were made available at local schools, council offices at Barrhead and Eastwood Park and in local libraries. Children and young people across all East Renfrewshire denominational and non-denominational primary and secondary schools actively engaged in the consultation process as did children in two Glasgow primary schools. A summary document of the proposal was made available and issued to all interested parties. This engagement was well organised.

2.3 The council received 1718 responses to the proposal. Of these, 1238 (72%) were supportive. Four hundred and eighty (28%) opposed the proposal. Main points in support included giving Roman Catholic children priority for Roman Catholic schools when over subscription arose and that more priority should be given to East Renfrewshire Council residents. A main area of objection concerned the possibility of siblings being split up. The proposal was also seen by respondents of the Muslim faith to be discriminatory or divisive against other faith groups and that implementing the proposal could result in less diversity within denominational schools.

2.4 Formal written responses were received from a number of Parent Councils. The Parent Councils of St Cadoc's Primary School, St Ninian's High School, and St Joseph's Primary School were all supportive of the proposal. However, they

recognised that this may lead to difficult personal circumstances for some non-Catholic families with the possibility of siblings attending different schools. Our Lady of the Missions Primary School Parent Council's response reflected the diversity of views gathered from a survey of parents. Seventy Six per cent of surveyed parents were supportive. St Ninian's High School Parent Council's support was conditional on the basis that placing requests are effectively managed to ensure no over capacity at any schools and that adequate resources are committed to manage the projected capacity issues from 2021 to 2029. St Angela's Parent Council (Glasgow) in their written submission rejected the proposal. Their main concern was that under the proposal St Angela's pupils would now be given lowest priority in terms of placing requests.

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

3.1 There has been a significant increase in demand for places in the east of the council area, especially in the following Roman Catholic schools: Our Lady of the Missions Primary School; St Cadoc's Primary School; St Joseph's Primary School and St Ninian's High School. As a result many of these schools are either at or approaching full capacity. This situation has occurred despite actions to alleviate the pressure on denominational schools. The proposal to change the admissions policy will allow the council to fulfil its duty to provide education to children and young people who are baptised into the Roman Catholic Church in a denominational school, including when a school is oversubscribed. The proposal may have implications for younger siblings, not of the Roman Catholic faith who may wish to attend the same denominational school as their brother or sister. The council needs to consider the potential impact for children and young people and their families if they require to be educated in different schools across the council, or elsewhere should the proposal go ahead.

3.2 This proposal has a number of educational benefits for children. The proposal will help reduce the risk of high occupancy rates and reduce the pressure on general purpose areas. It will enable the council to ensure best value on managing its estate. Potential capital investment can be reduced. Available resources can be directed more equitably. Timetabling of pupils, teachers and teaching spaces will be improved.

3.3 Staff from denominational and non-denominational schools who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They felt the proposal would improve the quality of learning by reducing the existing pressure on accommodation and resources. Timetabling and planning would be improved. However, staff were concerned about the possible impact on the cultural diversity. This was seen as a real strength and contributor to the positive ethos within schools. Staff expressed concern about the potential for siblings to be split up and their wish for this to be given higher priority in terms of placing requests. Staff at St Ninian's High School were concerned about the impact of long term use of temporary accommodation on both staff and young people.

3.4 Parents, carers and Parent Council representatives from denominational and non-denominational schools who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They agreed that priority should be given to Roman Catholic children

when schools were oversubscribed. They recognised the need to address overcrowding and make better use of resources and space to enhance learning. Parents from non-denominational schools would welcome additional pupils at their school. However, parents expressed a number of concerns. These included the capacity of St Ninian's High School to accommodate additional numbers over a sustained period without detriment to the quality of learning. The priority given to siblings of children currently attending denominational primary schools in the east when progressing to St Ninian's High School was a major concern to St Cadoc's Primary School parents, particularly those of other faiths. Parents expressed the view that siblings be moved higher up the proposed priority list for placing requests.

3.5 The majority of children and young people from denominational and non-denominational schools who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. Young people across non-denominational schools would be happy to welcome pupils to their school. Young people played an active part in the consultation process. Surveys were organised in every school. Results in almost all schools indicated strong support for the proposal. They recognised the need to address the over capacity issue. Money could be better spent on delivering quality teaching and learning rather than additional accommodation. However young people from St Ninian's High School expressed concerns about the possible loss of much valued cultural diversity. They were also concerned that the proposed temporary accommodation might become a permanent fixture. The majority of young people (62%) from Woodfarm High School who participated in the survey did not support the proposal. Their main concern was that in future siblings, particularly those who live outside East Renfrewshire, may not gain access. They would wish siblings to be moved higher up the priority list in terms of placing requests. This view was also reflected by young people in other schools.

3.6 The council also received written submissions from the Scottish Catholic Education Service, the Archdiocese of Glasgow and the Diocese of Paisley. All were fully supportive of the proposal to change arrangements for admissions to oversubscribed Roman Catholic schools within East Renfrewshire. They saw the proposal as a practical solution to an on-going problem. The Diocese of Paisley, in its response to the council, expressed concerns around the substantial pressures that will exist in St Ninian's High School, in particular, during years 2021-2029. Of particular concern is the potential impact on resources, accommodation, recreational and social areas as well as the effective delivery of the curriculum. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to engage with the Diocese to address these concerns.

#### **4. Summary**

Overall, the council's proposal is of educational benefit. The majority of stakeholders who submitted responses were supportive of the proposal. The council's proposal, if it proceeds would reduce the risk of over subscription and resulting high occupancy rates in denominational schools. It will also enable the council to meet its legislative requirements in relation to denominational education and allow the council to demonstrate best value through making effective use of its existing school estate. In taking forward the proposal the council needs to set out how it will address the concerns raised during the consultation. These include, the order of priority given to

siblings of those families, including those of other faiths, who already have children attending denominational and non–denominational schools within East Renfrewshire. How the authority intends to meet the proposed increased demand in St Ninian’s High School during the period 2021–2029, without loss of quality, needs to be explained in more detail.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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