

Consultation proposal by Fife Council

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Fife Council to close Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College and rezone the catchment areas of both schools to the new education campus for Levenmouth.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. As the council is proposing to close two schools, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 Fife Council proposes to close Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College and rezone the catchment areas of both schools to the new education campus for Levenmouth.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at a public meeting held 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 Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College, including discussions with representative groups of staff, parents, children and young people directly affected by the proposal.

1.4 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 In early 2013 Fife Council undertook a formal consultation under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* on a proposal to merge Buckhaven High School with Kirkland High School and Community College and provide a single secondary for the Levenmouth area to be constructed on the grounds of the existing Buckhaven High School from August 2016. The Executive Committee of Fife Council approved this proposal on 28 May 2013. At this time, the council did not consult formally on closing the two schools. When a council closes a school, the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* requires a council not only to consult on the proposed closure but also to notify Ministers within six working days of making its final decision. The council was therefore required to undertake a second consultation under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* between 28 October and 11 December 2013 on closing Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College.

2.2 The initial consultation in early 2013 to merge Buckhaven High School with Kirkland High School and Community College and provide a single secondary school from August 2016 for the Levenmouth area on the grounds of the existing Buckhaven High School had the broad support of parents, staff, children and young people and the community. In Education Scotland's report of March 2013 on the council's initial proposal, HM Inspectors concluded that implementation of the proposal would bring "significant educational, social and economic advantages". The report from Education Scotland also noted that some consultees had expressed concerns about the proposal and it concluded that, in taking forward the proposal, it would be important for the council "to engage and consult with parents, young people and staff in addressing their concerns."

2.3 Over 1200 consultees provided responses to the council on the consultation proposal undertaken between 28 October and 11 December 2013. Most parents, carers and staff supported the proposal. Just over 70% of the children and young people who expressed a view supported the proposal.

2.4 Representative groups of parents, staff and young people at Buckhaven High School who met with HM Inspectors felt there had been limited discussions with them about the closure of their school, the merger with Kirkland High School and Community College and the building of the new school. Representative groups of staff and young people at Kirkland High School and Community College who met

with HM Inspectors were more positive. They felt that they had been kept well informed about developments. Parents at Kirkland High School and Community College would welcome more information and a greater voice in helping make implementation of the proposal a success. Both communities are proud of their schools. In both Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College, parents, staff and young people recognise the need to work together in addressing any issues of concern and making the merger of the two schools on the new site a success. They would welcome regular opportunities to do so. They feel that opportunities to work together have been very limited since Fife Council made its decision in May 2013 to merge the two schools.

2.5 While giving the proposal their overall support, parents, staff and young people had a number of concerns. They had reasonable concerns about the differences in the current curriculum structures in both schools and were aware of the need for joint working between the schools in agreeing a shared curriculum. While many welcomed the provision of college facilities within the proposal, they felt that the current proposal lacked sufficient detail about how this would work in practice. They also had concerns that there had been limited information about the design of the school. Staff felt they had limited involvement in discussions about the design and allocation of classrooms. The planned capacity of the new school is 1800. Some expressed justified concerns about whether this took sufficient account of the long-term impact of proposed housing developments and the economic regeneration of the Levenmouth area. Some also had concerns about traffic arrangements within the new school particularly at the entrance to the school drive from the main road. Parents, staff and young people at Buckhaven High School were worried that the period of building work on the site had the potential to disrupt young people's learning. They were also anxious about the loss of access to the playing fields for physical education and sports related activities during the building programme. Some parents also wanted reassurance that there would not be any reduction in the provision of resources such as up-to-date information and communications technology for young people at either school during the period to the opening of the new school in August 2016. Staff were aware that the merging of the two schools would have an impact on staffing arrangements and management and leadership structures within the school. They were keen for the council to deal with these issues openly and transparently as soon as possible.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The proposal to merge Kirkland High School and Community College and Buckhaven High School and provide a single secondary for the Levenmouth area necessitates the closure of both schools. Taken together, the proposal of early 2013 and the current proposal to close both schools have the potential to bring significant educational benefit to children and young people and the wider community of the Levenmouth area. However, the current educational benefits statement lacks detail. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to take a number of steps to ensure that the potential educational benefits of the proposal for young people and the surrounding community are realised in full.

3.2 Staff in both schools are aware of the significant challenges involved in aligning the curriculum structures of both schools. The council and schools have taken some positive initial steps to bring the associated primary schools and both secondary schools together to begin this process. The two secondary schools currently operate a different period structure in the week and different subject choice arrangements within the broad general education and the senior phase. The schools will need to agree a curriculum and timetable structure for the new school from August 2016. However, in the intervening period, it will be equally important for the schools to agree the broad general education provision for children and young people across the upper stages of primary and the first three years of secondary school. This will be particularly important for the current S1. This group will experience S1 to S3 in separate schools, but will begin their studies for national qualifications in the new school from August 2016 when they move into S4. Furthermore, the current S2 will sit national examinations when they are in S4 in May 2016 in both Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College. These young people will then move into S5 in the new school. The schools will need to ensure there are appropriate progression routes for all young people, but in particular, for the current S1 and S2 year groups when they move into S4 and S5 respectively in August 2016. The schools will need to take immediate steps to ensure there is breadth, coherence, continuity and progression in young people's learning across the schools, particularly for the current S1 and S2, between the present and August 2016.

3.3 The proposal sets out the clear benefits that will accrue to the new school and the wider community by the co-location of Fife College facilities in close proximity to the new school. This will give young people and the local community access to a wide range of courses, experiences and opportunities on a single campus. However, funding for this provision is outwith the control of Fife Council. Kirkland High School and Community College already provides some of these opportunities for young people and adults. This has a particularly positive impact on the range of vocational learning opportunities open to young people at the school. The council needs to demonstrate how it will maintain this aspect of provision in the new school if the proposed co-location of Fife College facilities does not materialise.

3.4 Parents, staff and young people are proud of their schools and their achievements. As the merger progresses, it will be important that the separate identities of the schools are respected. It will also be important to create opportunities for the primary and secondary schools and their immediate communities to work closely together in naming the new school and creating a new and shared vision and values for the merged school on the new campus. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to take the necessary steps to enable this to take place.

3.5 Since the end of the consultation period, designs for the new school have been published. These were openly on display for parents, staff and young people in Kirkland High School and Community College. Parents, staff and young people in Buckhaven High School felt that less information had been provided to them. Overall, staff, particularly in Buckhaven High School, did not feel there had been sufficient discussion about the specific layout of the new school and the classrooms within it. Parents, staff and young people also had reasonable concerns about

vehicular and pedestrian access to the school grounds. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure that parents, staff and children and young people are kept fully involved and informed about the overall design of the new school, the facilities within it and vehicular and pedestrian access to the school grounds.

3.6 The current proposal contains no information on the projected rolls for the new school. The current plan is to build a school for 1800 young people. In its final consultation report, the council needs to set out clearly the projected rolls for the school into the foreseeable future. In the absence of roll projections within the current proposal, it is not possible to judge whether the new school will have the capacity to meet the demand that may be created by any future rise in school rolls locally caused by new housing developments and any future economic regeneration in the area.

3.7 The proposal explains that the creation of the new school has the potential to enhance arrangements for supporting young people with additional support needs. However, it provides little information on how this will be achieved. A number of services are currently co-located within the Kirkland High School and Community College. These include the nurture team, the Family and Community Support Team and the Inclusion Unit. The creation of the new school on a new campus creates a real opportunity for the council to co-locate a range of services to coordinate and provide support for children, young people and families, including vulnerable learners. The current proposal makes no reference to this. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to explain how current strengths of provision in both schools will be maintained and enhanced. In particular, the council needs to set out clearly if it intends to maximise the educational benefit for young people by co-locating services in the new school.

3.8 The proposal does not provide details of the approaches the council will take to appointing a transitional leadership team to manage the school mergers and the move to the new school. However, since the end of the consultation period, the council has advertised for a headteacher designate for the new school. This appointment will help create the capacity to lead and manage the successful merger of the two schools.

3.9 Building the new school on the site of the current Buckhaven High School has the potential to disrupt the learning of young people at the school during the construction phase. In finalising the proposal, the council needs to set out clearly the steps it will take to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise during this period. This includes access for young people to playing fields at the school for physical education and sports activities.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal to close Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College and merge both schools to provide a single secondary for the Levenmouth area on the grounds of the existing Buckhaven High School from August 2016 has the potential to bring significant educational benefit for children, young people, parents, staff and the wider community. It will provide an up-to-date

state of the art learning environment for young people which is conducive to effective learning and teaching. In taking forward the proposal the council needs to take the necessary steps to ensure these potential benefits are realised in full. This includes ensuring that children and young people experience breadth, coherence, continuity and progression in their learning as the two schools merge, particularly for those in the upper stages of primary and the current S1 and S2. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure that approaches for engaging, consulting and communicating with staff, parents, children, young people and the wider community about the issues they have identified are more effective. As the merger progresses, it will be particularly important for the council to ensure that the separate identities of Buckhaven High School and Kirkland High School and Community College are respected. The council will need to ensure that staff, parents, children and young people in the associated primary schools and in both secondary schools are enabled to work closely together in building on the traditions of the past while creating a mutually agreed identity for the new school in the Levenmouth area.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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