Consultation proposal by Fife Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to rezone the catchment areas for Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School.

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.

1. Introduction

1.1 Fife Council proposes to rezone the catchment areas for Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School. The council proposes two options. Option A to rezone the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment areas for August 2014. Option B to rezone the Masterton Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment areas for August 2014 and rezone the Masterton Primary School and Canmore Primary School catchment areas for August 2016.

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 the public meeting held on 20 November 2013 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;

- 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 Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School; 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 Fife Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a public meeting.

2.2 Fife Council received 122 responses to the proposal. Just over half of those who responded to the consultation supported the proposal option A, to rezone the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment Areas for August 2014. Less than half support option B, rezone the Masterton Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment areas for August 2014 and rezone the Masterton Primary School and Canmore Primary School catchment areas for August 2016.

2.3 Parents have a number of concerns about the proposals. Those who spoke with HM Inspectors were not clear about the educational benefits of the council's proposals.

2.4 Seventy-seven per cent of parents of children who attended Masterton Primary School and responded to the consultation do not support the proposal option A, to rezone the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment Areas for August 2014. Fifty-six per cent do not support the proposal option B, rezone the Masterton Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment areas for August 2014 and rezone the Masterton Primary School and Canmore Primary School catchment areas for August 2016. Parents recognise the need for the

catchment area to be reviewed. They are aware the school cannot accommodate the number of children within the existing catchment area. However, they have strong views about how the proposal will affect which school younger siblings will attend. Parents are concerned siblings of those children currently attending Masterton Primary School will not be entitled to attend the same school and, as a result, children from the same family will have to attend different schools. Parents are also concerned about the potential split between siblings when moving on to secondary school. A few parents raised concerns about the safe walking route to Canmore Primary School. In addition, parents raised concerns about the proposed building of new houses within the catchment area and the impact this would have on children who are entitled to attend the school being guaranteed a place.

2.5 Parents of children who attend Canmore Primary School and responded to the consultation have mixed views about the proposal. Sixty-one per cent are in favour of option A, to rezone the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment areas for August 2014. Parents welcome the potential increase in roll for the school. They are positive about the planned refurbishment to the school should the proposal go ahead. However, they also raised concerns about how the change of catchment will affect which school younger siblings attend. A few did not feel the proposal would alleviate pressure on Masterton Primary School in the longer term. Parents are unclear how the proposed closure of Pitcorthie Primary School may affect the number of children requesting places at Canmore Primary School.

2.6 Parents of children who attend Pitreavie Primary School and responded to the consultation are positive about the council's proposal. Almost all who responded to the consultation supported the option A, to rezone the Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School catchment Areas for August 2014. Parents also welcome the potential increase in roll for the school and are positive about the planned refurbishment to the school should the proposal go ahead. They expressed concerns about the potential traffic congestion around the school if the roll increases and its impact on children's safety. They also raised concerns about the safe walking route to the school from the Pitreavie Castle area.

2.7 The headteachers of Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School are positive about the proposal.

2.8 Overall, staff at all the schools are in favour of the council's proposals. A few members of staff at Canmore Primary School query the impact of larger class sizes on active teaching and learning approaches.

2.9 Children who attend Masterton Primary School are not sure how the proposal will affect the school. They spoke of concern for families with children who attend different schools. Children are unclear how the proposal will impact on which secondary school they will attend.

2.10 Children who attend Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School are positive about the council's proposal. They felt they would be able to meet more children and make new friendships. Children are pleased the council will provide additional finance to improve their school environment if the proposal goes ahead.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Fife Council suggests a number of educational benefits for children should the proposal go ahead. Currently, Masterton Primary School cannot accommodate all children who live within its catchment area. For the last five years, over thirty children each year have been unable to gain a place at the school. The proposal indicates the change in catchment area will remove the uncertainty for parents in the area who would be unlikely to gain a place at Masterton Primary School based on distance to the school criteria; and reduce the constant pressure within Masterton Primary School of managing an over-subscribed school. The council's proposal has the potential to reduce the number of children who are entitled to attend Masterton Primary School. However, there is currently a list of children who are waiting for a place at the school. The proposal does not indicate if the council will allocate places to children on the waiting list. It does not give reassurance that all children in the proposed new catchment area will be guaranteed a place in their local school.

3.2 The proposal indicates there is insufficient capacity at Masterton Primary School to accommodate children from the existing 540 planned housing units and the additional 355 units from the three additional sites approved in June 2012. The proposal does not give information on the projected future increase in the school roll which may arise from the additional housing units. The proposal does not indicate if the school has the capacity to accommodate any increase in numbers which may arise from the planned building. It does not reassure the community that the review of the catchment areas will provide a long-term solution to the issue of Masterton Primary School being able to accommodate children who live within the catchment area in the future.

3.3 The consultation proposal indicates there will be an increase in the school rolls of Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School. This will result in children learning and socialising with a larger number of children of a similar age.

3.4 Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School will benefit from a substantial planned investment, including remodelling of internal areas, upgrading toilets, improving the visual appearance of the school; and upgrading Wi-Fi capability. It is not clear if this substantial investment will be sufficient to improve the accessibility rating of Canmore Primary School or the condition rating of Pitreavie Primary School.

3.5 Implementation of the proposal has the potential to enable the council to secure efficiencies and best value in the management of the school estate. It

will do so by addressing the under capacity in Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School. However, the council has not made it clear in the proposal the overall efficiencies which will be made should the proposal go ahead.

3.6 The council provides information about travel arrangements within its proposal. It has not provided information on addressing any traffic congestion which may be caused by increased numbers attending Canmore Primary School or Pitreavie Primary School. The council policy in relation to free transport to Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School for children in the Masterton Primary School catchment area needs to be further clarified in light of this proposal.

3.7 The Council gives consideration to the impact the proposal will have on the associated secondary schools and intends to implement a review of the secondary catchment areas should the proposal be approved.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal from Fife Council to rezone the catchment areas for Masterton Primary School, Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School has the potential to offer some educational benefits. The proposed changes may result in an increase in the school roll at Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School. As a result, children may benefit from socialising and working with a larger number of children their own age.

4.2 Both Canmore Primary School and Pitreavie Primary School will benefit from substantial financial investment. The council needs to ensure this investment will improve the accessibility rate of Canmore Primary School and the condition rating of Pitreavie Primary School.

4.3 Despite these potential benefits, the current proposal does not clearly address the issue of capacity at Masterton Primary School or provide a long-term and sustainable solution to this problem. Parents recognise the need for the catchment area of Masterton Primary School to be reviewed. They are aware the school cannot accommodate the number of children who live within the existing catchment area. The current proposal needs to set out how it will ensure there are sufficient places for children who live in its immediate catchment area. It needs to provide information on how it will allocate places to siblings of those children currently attending each of the schools affected. The current proposal only has the potential to alleviate pressure on Masterton Primary School in the short term. Future house building planned within the proposed catchment area may result in the same issue reoccurring. The council needs to provide further information on projected school rolls to address these concerns.

4.4 Parents expressed concerns about safe routes to school and traffic congestion. The council will need to provide further assurances about safe routes to school specified within the proposal and how it intends to ensure effective traffic management.

HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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