

## **Consultation proposal by Fife Council**

**Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to close Tanshall Primary School and to rezone the catchment areas of Southwood Primary School and Caskieberran Primary School, to close Tanshall Nursery Stage if Tanshall Primary is closed and establish additional nursery class provision at Southwood and Caskieberran Primary Schools and to transfer the Primary Pupil Support Base to Warout 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.

As the council is proposing to close a school, 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 Tanshall Primary School in August 2014, rezone the catchment area of Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools, close Tanshall nursery stage and establish additional nursery provision at Southwood and Caskieberran Primary Schools and transfer the Pupil Support Service from Tanshall Primary School to Warout Primary School.

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:

- 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 Tanshall Primary School, Tanshall Nursery, Tanshall Pupil Support Base, Caskieberran Primary School, Southwood Primary School and Warout 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 school; 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 Fife Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included a public meeting and an invitation for written submissions. The council also sought the views of children and young people affected by the proposal.

2.2 The council received a total of 671 written responses to the proposal to close Tanshall Primary School. 310 of these comments were from parents of pupils at Tanshall Primary School. Almost all respondents were not in favour of the proposal. 90% of parents were not in favour of the proposal to rezone the catchment area to Southwood and Caskieberran Primary Schools. 93% of respondents were not in favour of the proposal to close Tanshall Nursery Stage and 91% were not in favour of the proposal to transfer the Pupil Support Base to Warout Primary School. All children from Tanshall Primary School who responded were against the proposal to close Tanshall Primary School in August 2014 and rezone the catchment area of Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools. 100% of staff at Tanshall, Caskieberran, Southwood and Warout Primary Schools who responded to the consultation were against the proposal.

2.3 Children in Tanshall Primary School were overwhelmingly against the proposal. They like their school and feel that they are very well supported by their teachers. They feel that they are achieving well and are given lots of opportunities to take responsibility, for example in citizenship groups, as part of the pupil council and in contributing to the wider community through the 'ChitCh@t' (Community Help @ Tanshall) group. Children were concerned about moving to another school. They worry about the distance from home and the safety of the route, they are concerned

about being in larger classes, that they will have to get to know new teachers and are concerned about social issues including how difficult it might be to fit in with other children who have been at the other schools for a long period of time.

2.4 Parents of children at Tanshall Primary School are overwhelmingly against the proposal. They commented very positively on the quality of education that their children presently receive. They are very satisfied with the school and feel that staff support their children very well. They feel that the school is very inclusive and that all children are well-included in the daily life of the school. Parents were also very positive about the role the school has played in supporting the regeneration of the Tanshall precinct through the CH@T group. Parents felt that the school building had been substantially upgraded over the past few years and was in better condition than the proposed receiving schools. They appreciated that classes in P1 – P3 were capped at 18 and held the view that this has impacted very positively on their children's progress. They are concerned that this is not the case in all of the receiving schools. Parents are also concerned about the potential split between siblings when moving on to secondary school. If the proposal were to go ahead, some children would be zoned to go to Glenrothes High School instead of Glenwood High School.

2.5 Staff at Tanshall are not supportive of the proposal. They voiced many similar concerns to those of the parents. They commented on the very inclusive ethos which is promoted by all who work in the school. Staff also expressed concern about the distance and safety of the proposed travel routes to the receiving schools.

2.6 Parents of nursery children were against the proposal. They feel that nursery staff provide a caring, nurturing learning environment. They feel very well supported by nursery staff and know that they can approach them and be helped when experiencing difficulties in family life.

2.7 Nursery staff are against the proposal. They feel that they provide quality learning experiences for children in a nurturing environment. They feel that they support children and families very well. Nursery staff and parents expressed concerns that if the nursery stage was no longer within the local community then it may be more difficult for parents to attend nursery provision.

2.8 Parents of children in the Pupil Support Base had a number of concerns about the proposal. There was a strong feeling that the closure of Tanshall Primary School and the necessary move for the support base to Warout Primary School would disadvantage the most vulnerable children within the community. Parents feel that well-planned and lengthy transition arrangements would need to be put in place to support these vulnerable children with yet another major change in their lives. Parents feel that their children are presently very well-supported and included in the life of Tanshall Primary School and their children would lose these established relationships.

2.9 Staff in the Pupil Support Base expressed very similar concerns to those of parents. They are concerned about the impact any such move would have on their children. They feel that they work very well together with the school to include their

children and appreciate the shared social times and planned events. They feel that if they had to move, it would take a significant amount of time to settle their children and build relationships with staff and children at Warout Primary School. They also have concerns about the time available for properly managed and well-planned transitions given the timescale for the proposal.

2.10 Other interested parties do not support the proposals. There was particular concern expressed about the loss of the school as an important resource within a regenerating community. Presently CH@T are based within the school and membership includes a number of parents and children from Tanshall. They work in conjunction with Community Learning and Development and a wide range of other agencies to support the improvement of the Tanshall area. This joint work has been much appreciated and commended locally. The group are concerned that if the school were to close, there is no other available, suitable premises within the Tanshall area resulting in CH@T being removed from the community they serve.

2.11 Most parents of children attending Caskieberran, Southwood and Warout Primary Schools were against the proposal. These parents expressed similar concerns about distance travelled and safety of the proposed routes. They also expressed concern about the increase in class sizes and the subsequent impact this may have on the support their children required.

2.12 A few comments were received from the staff of the above schools. They expressed concern about class sizes and social issues, and staff at Warout Primary School were concerned about potential loss of space. They all indicated that if the proposal were to go ahead then they would work with all staff of other schools to address any concerns and make the transition arrangements as smooth as possible for all children concerned.

2.13 Fife Council did not provide any information on the views of children at Caskieberran, Southwood and Warout Primary Schools. Children at Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools told HM Inspectors that they would welcome the children from Tanshall if the proposal went ahead. They welcomed the opportunity to make new friends but were concerned that they would need more classrooms and more teachers. They were not fully aware of the proposal and the impact it could have. Children from Warout Primary School had heard that the Pupil Support Base might be coming to their school but again were not fully aware of the proposal or its possible impact on their school.

### **3. Educational aspects of the proposal**

3.1 Fife Council considers that there are a number of educational benefits for children and young people should this proposal go ahead. This includes increased opportunities for children to take part in extra-curricular activities, and to strengthen the work of a number of school committees. They expect children to develop wider friendships and that staff expertise and opportunity for collegiate working will increase. There will be more opportunities for assessment and moderation of children's work. Fife Council also considers that there will be shared curricular planning, more stage partners for teachers to work with and increased management

time at Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools resulting in enhanced school improvement.

3.2 The council's consultation proposal suggests that, as part of a larger school, Tanshall Primary School children will have opportunities to take part in a wider range of extra-curricular activities including enterprise and 'buddy' activities. However, children at Tanshall Primary School currently attend a range of extra-curricular activities, act as 'buddies' to P1 children, represent the pupil council and Children's Parliament and take part in citizenship and community groups. Tanshall Primary School is also a 'Make Waves' champion school and won the 2013 Fife Enterprise Game. The proposal does not make it sufficiently clear how children will benefit further if the proposal were to go ahead.

3.3 The Council expects that some educational benefit will be gained by the increased number of staff working together and sharing expertise through collegiate working. They expect more opportunity for shared curriculum planning and delivery of learning. It is not clear how this will improve if the proposal were to be taken forward. At present, staff at Tanshall Primary School work closely with their cluster group of schools and have worked together to improve writing and numeracy. There is a joint agreed cluster action plan.

3.4 The consultation proposal suggests that there will be an increased pool of Pupil Support Assistants in both Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools which should better meet the needs of children. In Tanshall Primary School, there are a significant number of Pupil Support Assistants and a full-time Learning Support Teacher who presently work together to effectively meet the needs of children in their school.

3.5 With increased teacher numbers at Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools, there may be some benefit from staff working together to share planning and deliver the curriculum. Children may benefit from a wider range of staff skills which could promote a greater variety of learning experiences. The proposal, however, does not make sufficiently clear the actual improvements that would be made to the curriculum.

3.6 The council suggests that the relocation of the Primary Support Base to Warout Primary School will enhance the staff team and bring additional knowledge and expertise in this area of support. They also expect that this will have a positive impact on all children across the school. The proposal does not set out clearly how this will improve learning for all children.

3.7 Although there are no transport arrangements necessary in this proposal, except for children who attend the Pupil Support Base, there are a number of areas not yet addressed. Parents have a number of reasonable concerns. There are issues about children from Tanshall Primary School who would need to cross busy roads to access their new school, issues about traffic management at Warout Primary School in relation to the pick-up and drop-off of children by taxi. There are a number of issues about access to and vehicle management at Caskieberran Primary School.

3.8 The council have made a case for securing best value from council resources. They have identified financial savings and indicated that work will be undertaken to improve facilities at both Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools. They have also identified a sum of money to assist the relocation of CH@T. They have presented arguments for the benefits to the wider educational community across Fife Council by addressing the under capacity in its school estate. Should the proposal go ahead, the site of Tanshall Primary School would be declared surplus by the Education and Learning Directorate. There are no clear proposals in the consultation paper for the future use of the site.

3.9 Scottish Ministers have the right to call-in decisions to close schools. The current timeline for this proposal does not give sufficient consideration to the possible impact of the council's plans on the children concerned, particularly those in the Pupil Support Base, were the call-in process to take place. If the council cannot advise children and parents until a late stage in the school year of the school they will be expected to attend in the following school session, it could be detrimental to the children's education because of the need to prepare for their transitions. The current timescale for the proposals will make it difficult to avoid this. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure that it provides sufficient time for effective communication with parents, staff and children to alleviate some of their concerns and ensure effective transitions for all children.

#### **4. Summary**

4.1 The proposal for Fife Council to close Tanshall Primary School in August 2014, rezone the catchment area of Caskieberran and Southwood Primary Schools, close Tanshall Nursery Stage and establish additional nursery provision at Southwood and Caskieberran Primary Schools and transfer the Pupil Support Service from Tanshall Primary School to Warout Primary School has the potential to offer some educational benefits to children directly affected by the proposal and more widely across Fife Council. However, children at Tanshall Primary School currently experience many of these benefits. Much of the current statement of educational benefit is too generalised. The council now needs to set out more clearly and specifically how the proposal in its current form will improve outcomes for children and young people and enable them to do their best.

4.2 There is significant opposition to this proposal from all stakeholders with regard to its educational benefit, safe walking routes, class sizes, transition arrangements and improved opportunities for children. Given this opposition to the proposal, the council needs to ensure that necessary arrangements are planned and implemented, allowing sufficient time for children, including those with additional support needs to be well supported in their learning and wellbeing during the time of transition. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure that it provides sufficient time for effective communication with parents, staff and children to alleviate their concerns and ensure effective transitions for all children in the school, nursery and Pupil Support Base. Furthermore, the council needs to ensure that it has fully explored the viability of alternatives to the closure of Tanshall Primary School and the options for rezoning the related primary and secondary catchment areas. The council also needs to consider fully the impact of the closure of the

school on the community in Tanshall. The safe walking routes and issues for pick-up and drop-off of children at the receiving schools requires further consideration.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
December 2013**