

Consultation proposal by Falkirk Council

Report by HM Inspectors, Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to relocate Carrongrange School to one of two locations.

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.

Introduction

1.1 Falkirk Council proposes to relocate Carrongrange School to one of two locations:

- Land alongside Moray Primary School in Grangemouth, or
- Weedingshall in Polmont.

1.2 The report from HM Inspectors 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 Carrongrange School, Moray Primary School and Weedingshall House, 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 Falkirk Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Parents of young people attending Carronrange School express no significant majority view for one site. A minority do not support relocation to either site. For almost all parents, the understandable lack of any kind of image or representation of what the new building may look like in either setting has made forming a view problematic. The Parent Council at Carronrange was fully involved with site selection but not all consultees feel fully aware of the sites assessed and the reasoning behind selection and rejection of these sites. Parents of young people in other settings who may attend Carronrange School in the future are similarly split and express similar views overall. Almost all parents would value more information on the site selection process and relevant discussions arising.

2.3 Parents who support the Moray Primary School site feel it offers better community and educational links. Supporters also value the large level site that they believe allows easier movement for the young people with physical difficulties and visual impairments. Those in favour believe that there are easier transport links for parents to visit the school for events and meetings. Those parents who oppose the Moray site believe that relocating Carronrange School next to a primary school removes the current proximity to appropriately aged role models for their young people. In addition concerns were also expressed over the site location being within the refinery consultation ('blast') zone and about potential anti-social behaviour.

2.4 Parents in favour of Weedingshall are positive about the rural setting which they believe would offer many opportunities for outdoor learning and ample room to expand the Carronrange School facilities over time. Those who do not support the move to Weedingshall feel it is too remote. Furthermore, some feel that their young people are being placed outwith any community to contribute to. Opponents also feel that young people would not be able to access amenities and educational resources given the longer travel time involved compared to their current site and the Moray Primary School site. Opponents also feel the terrain is problematic in that it is

contoured and will cause difficulties for young people with physical difficulties and visual impairments in moving around beyond the footprint of the proposed new building. There is also a concern about the proximity of a cemetery which may cause distress as some of young people are terminally ill.

2.5 The young people at Carrongrange School marginally prefer the Moray Primary site. The student council visited both sites and prepared a presentation which was shared with the whole school. They believe it is closer to amenities and educational resources than Weedingshall. They also feel the site's level terrain will provide easier movement around the site for those with physical difficulties and visual impairments. This contrasts with Weedingshall which they feel is more contoured and harder to move around beyond the proposed site of the new building. The young people do feel there will be more travelling required at the Moray Primary School site to access local amenities and Grangemouth High School than at their current location. They are not yet certain how this will be supported so as not to encroach too much on their learning time. However, they feel it would involve less time than similar activities from the Weedingshall site. The young people believe that both sites present challenges when they move about, around the wider community for safe and easy movement. They have concerns over the pavements in terms of heights and widths and of safe places to cross. Falkirk Council needs to provide the young people with the information and reassurance they require that they will be able to move beyond either site with safety and independence.

2.6 Pupils at Moray Primary School have few objections to the relocation of Carrongrange on their playing fields. The concerns they have are about the proposed new school not taking over too much of their playing fields and the impact of additional traffic congestion at crucial times of the day. They are enthusiastic about the possibility of sharing some of the new school's facilities and resources.

2.7 Staff at Carrongrange School show a similar split in views and preferences to those of their parent community. They feel, however, that unlike parents, they have been given limited opportunity to participate fully in the process to date. Many are not yet convinced of the case for relocation.

2.8 Staff at Moray Primary School are positive about relocating Carrongrange School to their playing fields and see opportunities for strong educational links and sharing of resources and facilities. They share their pupils' concerns over the new building taking over too much space and the possibility of increased traffic congestion should no new entrance be incorporated into the plans following site agreement.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The educational benefits statement for the rebuilding of Carrongrange School proposes that it will deliver a better learning environment for the young people who will attend the new school. In designing the new building, whichever site is agreed, the impact of current legislation regarding equality of access and opportunity will assure this. However, the proposal relates to the site and not to the design and layout of a new school. This aspect will only be attended to once a site has been agreed.

3.2 A number of stakeholders, especially staff in Carrongrange School, feel that they have not been fully involved in the site selection proposal or understand the rationale for arriving at the final list of two proposed sites. Stakeholders holding such views, feel concerned that their limited involvement does not provide them with confidence that they will be as fully involved in the design and build stages as they would want to be once the site is agreed. The council needs to provide staff with reassurance that they will have a significant role in the later stages beyond site agreement.

3.3 Young people continuing at Carrongrange School when it relocates to its new building and those who will join after that date will benefit from the commitment to provide teaching areas on ground floor level only. Many current young people have physical difficulties and/or visual impairments and accessing teaching areas on upper levels can be problematic.

3.4 The projected intake over the coming years is expected to significantly alter the profile of the school population. A greater proportion of young people with physical difficulties and/or visual impairment will attend the school. This was not the school population that the current building was designed to accommodate. The commitment to ground floor teaching areas will be of significant educational benefit in terms of ease of access to future learners.

3.5 The proposal to make the latest technological innovations in learning for young people with additional and complex learning difficulties integral to the design will also benefit the young people who attend the new school. They will be able to move around the building more independently and access their learning more fully. Taking account of best practice within the Falkirk area and beyond will also benefit through the design of a building that can more fully support the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence.

3.6 The current location of Carrongrange School allows access to a range of local amenities that are integral to the development of life skills such as independence. The current location also allows for easy linkage with Larbert High School. Falkirk Council has not yet given enough information on how such community and educational links will be developed for either site within the proposal. Each site has opportunities for such links to be developed although neither is as close or accessible as the current location. Given the central importance of developing life

skills for the young people who will attend the new school, the council needs to provide more information about how it will support the school and staff in developing and maintaining links outwith the school site.

3.7 Senior students are encouraged to build their independence through going out into their community on their own or in small unsupervised groups. There are concerns about the ability for such movement around and beyond either of the proposed sites in terms of pavements, traffic and crossings as well as distances involved. Falkirk Council needs to provide more information on how it will support young people accessing and interacting independently and safely with whichever selected local area.

4. Summary

Falkirk Council has set out the case for relocating Carrongrange School and given concise and helpful information on the two preferred sites to allow consultees to inform them on the final site decision. They have explained the context and reasoning for their proposal well. They have made a strong case for the building and facilities that will be built on the chosen site. However, the proposal provides less detail on the proposed sites. The proposal is focused on site selection. Key information to inform such a decision has not yet been provided. Respondents have not given either site a significant majority of support. Falkirk Council need to provide information on how all key stakeholders will be involved in the design and build stages, whichever site is selected. The importance of developing young people's life skills in settings such as Carrongrange School is crucial and, in taking forward the proposal, Falkirk Council needs to provide more information on how it plans to support the development of links with whichever local community and high school is selected and provide reassurance to young people that they can move about their new local area safely and independently.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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