

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Falkirk Council to establish specialist classes in three primary schools and two secondary schools to provide high quality education provision for children and young people who have social and communication difficulties and autism.**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (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 Falkirk Council's proposal to establish specialist classes in three primary schools and two secondary schools to provide high quality education provision for children and young people who have social and communication difficulties and autism. 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 Moray Primary School, Sacred Heart Primary School, Easter Carmuir's Primary School, Bo'ness Academy and Larbert High 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
- 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 26 September 2017 and 27 September 2017 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 Moray Primary School, Sacred Heart Primary School, Easter Carmuir Primary School, Bo'ness Academy and Larbert High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 Falkirk 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 13 September 2017 to 10 November 2017. Public meetings were held on 21, 26 and 27 September 2017 and 3, 5 and 23 October 2017. In total, 60 members of the public attended the six public meetings. The proposal document was emailed to elected representatives. Parent Councils in each of the five schools were sent the consultation document and a pro-forma for responses. All relevant trade unions were consulted. In total, 107 individual responses to the consultation were received. Of the submissions, 92 (86%) were in favour of the proposal, 11 (10.3%) were against with four (3.7%) undecided. Benefits cited included the promotion of inclusive attitudes and improved social interaction by allowing young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) to go to their local school or a school closer to their home. For those opposing the proposal, key concerns expressed included the potential for additional strain being placed on mainstream teaching staff and on existing teaching spaces. There were no responses from organisations such as parent bodies or trade unions. There was no response from the Catholic Church.

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

3.1 Falkirk Council has identified an increase in demand to support children and young people with social communication difficulties and autism. The proposal has a number of clear educational benefits for children and young people with ASN. The proposal will offer children and young people with ASN the opportunity to be educated either in or closer to their local school. As a result, travel to existing specialist units will be reduced. Children and young people with ASN will benefit from being able to mix with their peers, friends and siblings. This will encourage inclusion. Children and young people with ASN will benefit from a differentiated curriculum which makes good use of social, communication and autism friendly strategies. The proposal offers scope to integrate support from the Speech and Language Therapy Service more effectively. This has the potential to benefit all children and young people attending these schools. Where appropriate, children and young people with ASN will have the opportunity to access mainstream learning experiences and environment and engage in whole school, extracurricular activities.

3.2 All parents, staff and children and young people from Moray Primary School, Sacred Heart Primary School, Easter Carmuir Primary School, Bo'ness Academy

and Larbert High School who met HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They saw a number of clear benefits for all children and young people attending the schools, including those with ASN. The proposal has the potential to encourage inclusion and tolerance and to increase children and young people's awareness of additional support needs. Teaching staff in the schools affected by the proposal welcomed the opportunity to engage in specialist training to improve their own professional practice.

3.3 The majority of staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors, whilst supporting the proposal, had a number of justifiable concerns should the proposal proceed. Falkirk Council has not provided clear detail in its consultation paper of how the proposal will be developed within the proposed timescale. Concerns were expressed about the need to ensure the location and access of accommodation best met the needs of children and young people with ASN. A major concern was the recruitment and training of suitably qualified and experienced staff in the proposed timescale and the potential impact on existing school staff if this was not successful. Another concern related to when transition arrangements for children and young people with ASN would commence to ensure they were suitably prepared to make a confident start in their new schools.

#### **4. Summary**

Falkirk Council's proposal to establish specialist classes in three primary schools and two secondary schools has the potential to bring educational benefits to children and young people who have social and communication difficulties and or autism. The majority of stakeholders who submitted responses were supportive of the proposal. It will allow Falkirk Council to respond to an identified increase in demand for ASN services. Children and young people with ASN will benefit from joining the school roll and being educated either in or closer to their local school, building a positive sense of inclusion. Where appropriate, children and young people with ASN will have the opportunity to access mainstream learning experiences and environment and engage in whole school, extracurricular activities. Children and young people with ASN will benefit from a differentiated and tailored curriculum. The proposal offers scope to integrate support from the Speech and Language Therapy Service more effectively. This has the potential to benefit all pupils attending these schools. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out in detail how it will address the concerns raised during the consultation. These include, ensuring access to accommodation best meets the needs of children and young people with ASN, the recruitment, training and deployment of suitably qualified staff and ensuring that effective transition arrangements for children and young people are planned and implemented.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
November 2017**