

Consultation proposal by Glasgow City Council

Report by HM Inspectors, Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to merge Milton and Ashcraig Secondary Schools into a new provision for secondary-aged young people with a range of additional support needs in the current Ashcraig building.

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 notify Ministers within six days of making its final decision. Consultees will then have three weeks to make representations to Ministers.

Introduction

1.1 Glasgow City Council proposes to merge Milton School with Ashcraig Secondary School in the current Ashcraig building which will be refurbished. It is proposed to close Milton School and Ashcraig Secondary School and to create a new special school in the refurbished Ashcraig building.

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; and
- visits to the site of Milton School and Ashcraig Secondary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of both schools and other users;
- 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 Glasgow City Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The proposal relates to two schools in Glasgow City Council for secondary aged young people with a range of additional support needs. The council consulted appropriately with a wide range of stakeholders on its proposal. The consultation included two public meetings and the issuing of consultation papers to stakeholders and interested parties. Respondents were invited to reply in writing or by using an online facility. Arrangements were put in place for consultees to receive a plain English/easy read version of the consultation document and upon request access to crèche facilities at the public meetings. The council received less than one hundred responses of which at least half were anonymous. It is intended that should the proposal be accepted, the merger would take place by August 2014.

2.2 Additional support for learning (ASL) schools do not have designated catchment areas and no defined capacity. The numbers able to attend depends on a range of factors around the individual needs of the young person. If the proposal is agreed then the new school would continue primarily to meet the needs of children and families from the north and east of Glasgow. The merged school would also continue to meet the needs of a number of young people placed by other Local Authorities. It is therefore difficult to determine the numbers of children and young people who are likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper.

2.3 In Milton School, staff, parents and partner agencies were in agreement that the existing accommodation, resources and some specialist equipment was in a poor state of repair and required to be replaced or modernised to better meet the needs of the young people. They highlighted the considerable positive support the school received from the local community. They expressed strongly the view that the support and access to the community to extend young peoples' learning would be lost if the proposal was agreed. Many stakeholders felt that the proposed merger would not meet the complex learning needs of the young people. A number of common themes emerged from discussions with staff, parents, partner agencies and the young people themselves. These included the lack of clarity around how much influence they as stakeholders would have over the final design of the refurbished accommodation and the increased amount of time young people would spend

travelling to and from the new school. Concerns were raised about the continuation of the popular DASH after school club and the contribution it makes to developing young people's social interaction and life skills. Other concerns included the safety and security for some young people in a location which currently has no perimeter fencing and its proximity to a busy road. Additionally, staff and parents expressed the view that co-location rather than a merger of both schools on a shared campus would offer greater educational benefit for all. Staff who met with HM Inspectors were firmly of the view that the council had not outlined clearly enough the educational benefits for Milton School's young people who have complex learning difficulties. Staff and parents felt that the young people would benefit from access to the pool at Ashcraig which they wanted to be improved as part of the refurbishment programme.

2.4 In Ashcraig Secondary School, the views of staff and parents were more varied. Staff understood the need to secure best value in times of financial constraint. Some were of the view that the proposal to merge the two schools would not be successful in delivering the best educational outcomes for the young people who attend Ashcraig. Parents we spoke to would prefer a shared campus model. A group of young people shared with us the views of their peers from each year group. Overall, most young people were not in favour of the proposal to merge the schools. The young people were keen to meet and make new friendships, to benefit from improvements to their environment but they also raised some concerns. They believed that a merger would mean changes to their curriculum and could affect their potential success in external examinations. Some were anxious about the behaviour of some of the young people currently in Milton School and how this might affect their learning in class and at break times in social areas. A few were worried about their safety given their own restricted mobility.

2.5 The senior managers in both schools acknowledged that the building used by Milton School is in a poor condition and that action needs to be taken to provide young people and staff with a high quality learning environment. They recognise that the number of pupils in each school has fallen and that the council has a responsibility to achieve best value from its school estate. They commented positively on the professional links between the schools and of their commitment to continuing to deliver the highest quality of experience for all young people. Some remained unconvinced that the proposed merger would work and that the educational benefits, particularly relating to the curriculum and meeting the needs of all young people could be realised.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The council sets out clearly the current condition of both schools. Milton School was assessed in 2011 as being in C (poor) condition and D (bad) in terms of suitability. The school roll at present is 51. Ashcraig Secondary School assessment in terms of condition is C (poor) and suitability is B (satisfactory). The school roll at present is 62. Both schools are significantly under-occupied. A refurbished Ashcraig building has the clear potential for young people who currently attend Milton School to have improved access to modern classrooms and a range of specialist teaching areas suitably adapted for their needs. Pupils of Ashcraig School would also benefit

from access to these improved facilities and resources. The council rightly contends that the refurbished Ashcraig building would enhance the learning experiences and health and wellbeing of all young people and others who may use the building. The proposal will also address the issue of under-occupancy in both schools thus ensuring more efficient use of the council's resources. In taking forward the proposal the council will need to ensure it involves stakeholders in the design and layout of the refurbished building and respond to their various concerns including those related to transport and campus security.

3.2 The Act requires the council to set out its assessment of the effects of the proposal on future pupils. The proposal describes the arrangements which apply to ASL schools with regard to determining pupil roll and catchment areas. The council expects that the current pupils attending both schools will be offered a continued placement at the refurbished school. Should the proposal go ahead, the council will need to work to support the young people and their families who were anxious about their future experience in a merged school through, for example, a well-planned transition programme.

3.3 The proposal sets out how staff will have increased opportunities to work within a bigger staff team, to share and develop skills and knowledge and extend links with the Smithycroft Learning Community. Staff will benefit from these opportunities. The council in response to a concern raised at the public meeting has given assurances that no redundancies of ancillary or support staff would take place. Should the young people from Milton School move to a new location, then the council needs to consider ways of achieving consistency in staffing to minimise the impact of the relocation on the wellbeing of young people in both schools.

3.4 The educational benefit statements relating to the curriculum and how the diverse needs of all young people will be met raises some important aspects which require further consideration. Milton School provides education for secondary aged young people with additional support needs arising from complex learning difficulties. Conversely, Ashcraig Secondary School provides education for secondary aged children with a physical disability or a chronic health condition. The council will need to outline more clearly how the proposal will improve arrangements for meeting young people's needs and how provision in the merged school will offer improved and more appropriate support and challenge to all young people.

Summary

4.1 Glasgow City Council's proposal to establish a new special school in the refurbished Ashcraig building will provide learners and staff with an enhanced environment for learning and will better support their health and wellbeing. Staff will benefit from being part of a larger team, sharing and extending their skills and expertise. The proposal addresses the under-capacity issues faced by the council and its commitment to providing high quality resources. The council has consulted widely and is committed to continue to do so should this proposal be taken forward. It needs to address a number of issues. Parents, staff and some of the young people were clear that they would support being co-located on the same campus.

4.2 Parents, staff and young people have concerns about how well the merged school will meet the diverse and complex needs of the young people affected by the proposal. In finalising the proposal, the council needs to outline more clearly the educational benefits for young people with additional support needs that arise from complex learning difficulties. In particular, it needs to set out more clearly how the curriculum will provide appropriate depth, breadth, coherence, relevance, progression, challenge and enjoyment in learning and how the proposal will ensure that the needs of all young people at the merged school are met. The council needs to continue to work with stakeholders to listen to their concerns and provide appropriate reassurances as required.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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