

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Midlothian Council to relocate St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, including the nursery, to a new school campus on the former Hopefield Primary School site in Bonnyrigg.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by 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 Midlothian Council's proposal to relocate St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, including the nursery, to a new school campus on the former Hopefield Primary School site in Bonnyrigg. 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 of the school and any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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:

- 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 sites of the current St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School and the proposed new site of the former Hopefield Primary School site, including discussion with school staff, children, parent council representatives and parents.

2. Consultation Process

Midlothian Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The statutory consultation period ran from 8 May until 19 June 2017. Copies of the proposal document were made available to stakeholders and other interested individuals. The council consulted formally with the Parent Council, parents, including those of any children expected to attend within two years and pupils and staff from St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School. The council also consulted the Community Councils of Bonnyrigg and Lasswade, Poltonhall and District and Midlothian Community Planning Partnership. The council held one public meeting at St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School on 24 May 2017. Ten members of the public came along, including the local church representative. A staff consultation meeting was held on 22 May 2017 attended by 17 staff. Twenty pupils from P1-P7, including the pupil council attended a consultation meeting on 2 June 2017. The council received four written responses and nine responses to an online survey about the proposal. Overall, across these meetings and surveys, almost all stakeholders reported that they were supportive of the proposal and saw positive benefits for the children's education. They also raised several, similar points where they wanted further clarity should the proposal go forward. There has been formal consultation with the Roman Catholic Church through the diocesan representative. The headteacher, has also been involved in discussions about the consultation with the local church and its parishioners.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal has clear educational benefits, including lower maintenance as the current school building is likely to need a significant amount of maintenance work to maintain current standards. The move to the new campus has the potential to enhance children's learning experiences in modern, purpose-built facilities. Staff would have improved access to additional space in classes and breakout areas to develop further children's learning and achievement. The proposal also indicates that the new school would have increased outdoor spaces with modern resources including playing fields and areas to enhance children's learning when outside. There is scope for these areas to potentially support children's broader achievements, including developing their skills as 'Midlothian learners' when outdoors, including in science throughout the year. There are clear benefits for maintaining the school in its current locality, including its population within the catchment area and the proximity and links to the church. There is unlikely to be any disruption to children's learning during the building period. Improved facilities and resources for early learning and childcare would allow children to access indoors and outdoors as one learning environment. Parents with younger children might also be able to access better facilities, for example, places to shelter in inclement weather and park buggies and prams.

3.2 All parents, children and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors during the visit to St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School supported the proposal. Staff and parents reported that they had waited a long time for a new school and were confident that the proposal offered their children a much improved learning environment. The Roman Catholic Church is in favour of the proposal. All consultees saw clear advantages to the proposal, including better access to modern purpose-built facilities and resources, such as digital technology and quality outdoor spaces for children's learning and enjoyment. Staff and children are keen to be involved in influencing the design and making decisions when appropriate when choosing some resources, including furniture. Children are looking forward to taking forward their travel plan subject to the proposal going ahead. All staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors commented on the importance of maintaining the school's Catholic identity and values on a shared campus. Points on which consultees are seeking further clarification relate to traffic management, school capacity, community use of and any plans for shared facilities with Burnbrae Primary School on the new campus. Staff and parents are also unclear about the links between the early learning and childcare provision on the new campus. Parents want assurance that the building itself would reflect the highest possible safety standards. Written responses from consultees reflected the views noted in this section.

4. Summary

Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal. Relocating St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School, including the nursery, to a new campus on the former Hopefield Primary School site in Bonnyrigg has the potential to enhance children's learning, including when outdoors. Children would have better access to digital technology and increased opportunities to enhance their experiences, for example, in science and in health and wellbeing. Staff would have much improved learning and teaching spaces and modern purpose-built resources and facilities. However, an important consideration has been raised on how staff from both schools and from the early learning and childcare provision would work together should there be any shared resources and/or facilities. In taking its proposal forward, the council needs to provide clarification about this, including a communication strategy to keep stakeholders informed providing greater detail in its final report.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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