

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Ayrshire Council to replace Haysholm School, James McFarlane School, James Reid School and Stanecastle School with a new Additional Support Needs School; and to replace Stanecastle Early Years class with new provision at Annick Primary School.

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 North Ayrshire Council's proposal to replace Haysholm School, James McFarlane School, James Reid School and Stanecastle School with a new Additional Support Needs school; and to replace Stanecastle Early Years Class with new provision at Annick Primary School. 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 the schools; 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 meeting held on 28 September 2016 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 Haysholm School, James McFarlane School, James Reid School, Stanecastle School and Annick Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 North Ayrshire 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*.

2.2 North Ayrshire Council proposes to build a new Additional Support Needs school at a site adjacent to Auchendarvie Academy, replacing Haysholm School, James McFarlane School, James Reid School and Stanecastle School and to replace the Early Years Class at Stanecastle School with a new purpose built early years provision at Annick Primary School. North Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal between 12 September and 4 November 2016. The proposal document was published on the council's website and copies were sent to stakeholders and placed in public libraries and other community venues. Public meetings were held at each of the five affected schools from 22 to 29 September 2016. The council received 69 written responses, of which 64 agreed with the proposal, four disagreed and one did not answer.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 North Ayrshire Council's proposal has the potential to be of significant educational benefit. Four schools currently classified as being in poor condition will be closed and replaced by a purpose built school serving children and young people with a wide range of additional support needs. The council's proposal will also result in the establishment of a new purpose-built early years provision at Annick Primary School.

3.2 The council proposes to establish a new school for children and young people with additional support needs at a site adjacent to Auchendarvie Academy. The new school would have a capacity for 200 children and young people aged 2 to 18 years. This has the potential to enable children and young people to benefit from learning in a modern purpose built facility designed to meet a broad range of needs. The proposal could result in enhanced learning space, better sporting and outdoor facilities, improved dining and social spaces and access to specialist features and equipment including a new hydrotherapy pool. The larger complement of staff could enable sharing of good practice in working with children and young people with additional support needs and has the potential to improve the range of subjects available to learners. The colocation with Auchendarvie Academy has the potential to enable some children and young people to access some courses and resources in an adjacent mainstream secondary school as well as providing wider benefits for staff, children and young people through improving links between the two schools.

The establishment of an early years provision at the proposed new facility has the potential to improve transition arrangements and to better meet the needs of pre-school children with additional support needs.

3.3 The proposal to establish a new purpose-built Early Years provision at Annick Primary School and discontinue provision at Stanecastle School is of potential educational benefit. It could result in improved purpose built modern facilities and high quality early years provision for the community. The proposal has the potential to improve transition arrangements for children who will attend Annick Primary School. Since Annick Primary School is located to the rear of Stanecastle School there would be no additional travel implications resulting from the proposal.

3.4 North Ayrshire Council proposes that the new school to be built adjacent to Auchendarvie Academy will provide for children and young people with a broad range of additional support needs. The four existing schools which would be replaced currently have different roles. Haysholm School and James MacFarlane School serve children and young people with severe and complex learning difficulties. James Reid School and Stanecastle School meet a broad range of needs including children and young people with moderate learning difficulties, some of whom also access learning provision in mainstream settings for part of the time. The colocation of the proposed new facility with Auchendarvie Academy has the potential to improve, where appropriate, access to mainstream provision for young people in the secondary stages. However, it is not clear from the proposal paper what role staff in the new facility would have to link to primary schools to support and promote inclusion in mainstream settings. The council will need to clarify its approach to broader aspects of inclusion policy and practice in its final paper and set out how the new facility will link to primary schools.

3.5 All children, young people and parents and almost all members of staff who spoke with HM Inspectors in the five schools visited supported the proposal. Most expressed enthusiasm about the potential new opportunities provided by the proposal. A telephone conversation was held with the headteacher of Auchendarvie Academy who confirmed his support for the proposal. During discussion with stakeholders on the details of the proposal a range of questions and concerns were raised over how the proposal will be implemented. These included concerns over the size of the new facility, some anxiety from young people on being colocated with a large mainstream secondary school, questions about traffic congestion and the potential for children and young people to experience anxiety resulting from changes to school transport routes and related arrangements. Parents expressed confidence in the council's approach to involving them in discussion of these and other issues during a pre-consultation engagement phase and during the consultation. Steps had been taken to enable further informed dialogue, including the formation of a combined parent council group to represent parents' views on transport and other issues. A few members of staff expressed the view that they had only limited opportunities to discuss the details of the proposal and had some concerns over how the new facility would operate and how staff from the four existing schools would be brought together. They felt it would be important to ensure that staff had a voice in the design and implementation phase should the proposal be agreed. The council will need to reassure all stakeholders by outlining how they will be involved in planned implementation should the proposal go ahead.

3.6 The proposed site at Auchendarvie Academy is busy with vehicular transport at particular times of the day. The potential for additional traffic was a cause of concern to parents and staff. The council will need to outline what steps it will take to manage traffic and mitigate risk in its final paper.

4. Summary

- North Ayrshire Council's proposal has the potential to be of significant educational benefit. If implemented, four schools in a poor condition will be replaced with a single new facility, purpose built to modern standards. The larger staff team and the proposed colocation with Auchendarvie Academy could improve children and young people's experience of the curriculum. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to engage with parents, children and young people and staff and address concerns raised during its consultation including issues of traffic management at the proposed site.
- North Ayrshire Council will need to clarify how children and young people at the new facility will be supported to access provision in mainstream schools including primary schools, where appropriate to their needs, and ensure that the role of the new facility is consistent with current policy on inclusion.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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