

Consultation proposal by North Lanarkshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to provide a new build non-denominational primary school within the Coatbridge Local Area Partnership by merging Carnbroe Primary School and Sikeside Primary School and Nursery Class and rezoning the catchment areas to form one new primary school catchment, and to provide a joint campus facility with a new build St Stephen's Primary School, Coatbridge including the additional support needs provision.

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 schools, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 North Lanarkshire Council proposes to provide a new build non-denominational primary school within the Coatbridge Local Area Partnership by merging Carnbroe Primary School and Sikeside Primary School and Nursery Class and rezoning the catchment areas to form one new Primary School catchment, and to provide a joint campus facility with a new build St Stephen's Primary School, Coatbridge, including the Additional Support Needs Provision.

1.2 The 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.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meeting held on Thursday 27 March 2014 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected;
- visits to the sites of Carnbroe Primary School, St Stephen's Primary School and Nursery Class and Sikeside Primary School including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- meeting with representatives of the Scottish Catholic Education Service and Diocese of Motherwell.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; 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 North Lanarkshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. Parents, children, staff and other stakeholders expressed a range of views on the proposals. North Lanarkshire Council received 19 written responses to its proposal. Of the few individual written responses received from parents, the majority were in favour of the proposals. Public meetings were held at Sikeside, St Stephen's and Carnbroe Primary Schools. North Lanarkshire Council held separate meetings with children, staff and representatives of Parent Councils and noted questions and concerns raised.

2.2 Children in all three establishments were well informed on the proposals and had a number of specific questions and ideas to contribute to discussion on design and management of the proposed new campus.

2.3 At Sikeside Primary School the headteacher, staff, parents and children who spoke with HM Inspectors recognised the need for change and agreed broadly with the council's outline of educational benefits in moving to a new building. Whilst they have a strong attachment to their school, staff welcomed the opportunity to secure improved facilities, particularly for the nursery, improved space for physical education and improved information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. Staff who spoke to HM Inspectors felt that Sikeside Primary School, as a small neighbourhood school, offers very good support to vulnerable children and families and that there might be a risk of losing this aspect in a larger school.

2.4 Currently, Sikeside Primary School benefits from enhanced staffing levels associated with weighting given for the high percentage of children entitled to free school meals. Staff perceived that this may be reduced within the proposed larger school.

2.5 The children at Sikeside Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors look forward to having new facilities and to the opportunity to make new friends. They hope they will be able to play with their friends from St Stephen's Primary School at school break times in the new joint campus. Those children who made use of the youth club at the community centre on the site were concerned about the future of the community centre. Children wanted to know if the breakfast club and after-school club would still operate in the new school.

2.6 At Carnbroe Primary School, staff and parents who spoke to HM Inspectors were opposed to the proposals. They acknowledged that the proposal would result in enhanced physical education facilities and nursery provision but were of the view that the viability of alternatives, including a new building on the existing site should be more fully explored. They valued the ethos, quality of learning, teaching and achievement, the high levels of parental involvement and high aspirations in Carnbroe Primary School. They were not clear about the educational benefits. They were concerned that some of the school's positive qualities might be diminished in the new establishment. Carnbroe Primary School parents were of the view that the use of cars to transport children to school could increase at the proposed new site.

2.7 The headteacher at Carnbroe Primary School had a number of specific and detailed questions related to the proposed site and design and management of the shared campus. She shared parents' concerns on the road traffic and safety issues but believed that the proposal could be made to work provided the concerns of stakeholders were fully addressed.

2.8 At St Stephen's Primary School, staff, parents and children who spoke to HM Inspectors thought the proposal could be positive for the schools and the local community. They thought the enhanced physical education facilities, nursery and Language and Communication Support Centre (LCSC) space would be beneficial. They had a number of questions related to how the design of the new establishment and LCSC base would help meet the needs of children with additional support needs. Staff were concerned about the potential loss of some resources. St Stephen's Primary School grounds include a small golf course which contributes to opportunities for sports, achievement and family involvement in school life. Staff

and children were unclear as to whether this resource could be made available in the proposed new establishment. Staff at St Stephen's Primary School had some concerns over perceived arrangements for the use of shared spaces within the joint campus for celebrations and religious observance. They have been reassured about how the campus will operate following visits to other shared campus sites.

2.9 Staff, parents and children at all three establishments raised questions about safety and safe walking routes to the proposed site. Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors and those who attended the public meeting emphasised the potential hazardous aspect of water courses on the proposed site. Parents expressed concerns that a potential retail development on a neighbouring site could significantly increase the volume of traffic.

2.10 Staff, parents and children in all three establishments who spoke with HM Inspectors expressed a need for more detailed information on specific plans, including aspects of shared space, the policy for playground and dining area supervision and behaviour management. All saw a need to be more closely involved in working with the council on detailed plans, should the proposal be approved.

2.11 The Diocese of Motherwell and the Scottish Catholic Education Service did not support the proposal. They recognised the benefits of improved facilities of a new building. However, the Diocese raised a number of concerns, including the perceived reduction in denominational education in North Lanarkshire Council and how the shared campus would operate. They raised questions about some of the educational benefits contained in the proposal.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal would provide a number of educational benefits. The council has set out a clear rationale for the proposals related to existing and forecast school rolls, the condition of existing buildings, its duty to secure best value and its overall strategy to improving the school estate. Children attending the new schools would benefit from a better building with improved facilities more fit for purpose. The current condition of Sikeside Primary School and St Stephen's Primary School is classified as 'poor'. The proposed facilities for nursery provision, outdoor areas, physical education, and the LCSC would improve significantly on existing provision.

3.2 A number of those affected by the proposal raised concerns and questions related to the potential design and management of the shared campus. If the proposal is approved, the council will need to involve stakeholders further in the design of the new campus.

3.3 The proposed site for the new campus includes a community centre and sports pitches. A number of after-school clubs operate in the existing schools. The community centre accommodates youth clubs and community groups. The council's proposal refers to improved facilities for community use but contains no specific plans for Calder Community Centre. Sports Scotland has responded to the consultation to advise on provision for community use of sports facilities. If the

proposal is approved the council will need to work with other stakeholders to ensure that provision for community groups, sports groups and wider learning opportunities is improved.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal provides clear educational benefits in relation to improved facilities for children, particularly for enhanced physical education, outdoor space, nursery space and provision for children with additional support needs. A larger staff team resulting from the merger of Carnbroe Primary School and Sikeside Primary School has the potential to enhance flexibility and broaden curricular opportunities.

4.2 A number of respondees raised concerns about how schools would operate as part of a shared campus. The council's proposal indicates that the new campus design will preserve the individual identity of the two schools. If the proposal is approved, the council will need to work in partnership with staff and parents in taking forward the design of the new campus and ensuring shared spaces provide both schools with appropriate opportunities for activities such as celebrations, religious observance and physical education.

4.3 The Diocese of Motherwell and the Scottish Catholic Education Service do not support the proposal. It will be important for the council to work in partnership with the Diocese to reassure them and parents that the design and management of the shared campus will support children to continue their education in a faith-based setting.

4.4 Road safety, the potential hazards of water courses on the proposed site and the volume of traffic have been raised as concerns by those affected in all three schools. If implemented the council, working with partners, will need to ensure that these concerns are fully addressed through an effective traffic management plan and planned safe walking route to school. The council needs to ensure that it fully addresses these concerns in its final consultation report.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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