

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Lanarkshire Council to build a new joint campus facility for St Brigid's Primary School and Newmains Primary School and to incorporate early years and childcare provision.

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 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal to build a new joint campus facility for St Brigid's Primary School and Newmains Primary School and to incorporate early years and childcare provision. 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 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:

- 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 St Brigid's Primary School and Newmains Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 North Lanarkshire 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 council undertook the consultation between 8 November 2017 and 20 December 2017. Notices were placed on the council's website. A public meeting held in Newmains Primary School on 20 November 2017 and in St Brigid's Primary School on 21 November 2017. The council received five responses to its consultation questionnaire and four additional written responses. A range of views was expressed, with an overall majority supporting the proposal. Children of both St Brigid's and Newmains Primary Schools were offered the opportunity to respond to a survey led by council officers. Overall, most children who responded to the survey supported the proposal.

2.3 HM Inspectors were informed during their visits to the two schools, that a joint staff meeting had taken place in December, led by council officers, although not all staff were aware of this or were able to attend. If taking forward this proposal, the council should engage with all stakeholders.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has stated that the new joint school building will be a significant improvement on the current establishments. They consider that the new joint campus would provide the opportunity to make available to pupils the most modern standards of school facilities and resources to support the delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence, including flexible learning spaces in a fully accessible building. However, no detail is given on current challenges within the existing two school buildings. HM Inspectors noted on their visit that the current access for children and staff at Newmains Primary School to the dinner hall/gym hall by going outside through the playground to a separate external building. There are a number of other accessibility challenges throughout the school. St Brigid's Primary School has limited availability of flexible learning spaces to meet learning needs, combined with a lack of storage facilities.

3.2 The council has stated that there will be community benefits from the proposal, including providing improved facilities to the wider community. However, there is no detail in the proposal as to what the community facilities would be. No detail is given in the proposal regarding timescales. No detail is given regarding the provision for, or management of, the existing nursery class. Due to the limited information provided in the consultation paper, the council has not been able to demonstrate that it has assessed clearly the short or longer term effects on children in the relevant schools. The educational benefits statement currently lacks sufficient detail to allow stakeholders to make an informed choice or HM Inspectors to provide a professional view on the merits of the proposal.

3.3 Children from St Brigid's Primary School and Newmains Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal.

3.4 Parents and staff from St Brigid's Primary School and Newmains Primary School who spoke with HM Inspectors had mixed views about the proposal. Stakeholders acknowledged concerns about the condition of the current St Brigid's and Newmains Primary School buildings not being conducive to fully meeting the needs of learners in a 21st century school. However, they had many concerns, including the lack of information about the internal design of a new school; the management of shared facilities at a campus; traffic safety and safe routes to school. They were unclear about future arrangements for Newmains Nursery and Family Centre. Overall, stakeholders do not feel they have enough information to make an informed choice. Whilst many stakeholders are keen for new school facilities, they have concerns that with the lack of detail, the proposal may result in a building which meets needs less well than at the moment.

3.5 The Diocese of Motherwell have stated that their preference is for separate standalone denominational schools and believe the proposal would have an adverse effect on the ethos and identity of St Brigid's Primary School.

4. Summary

Newmains Primary School is over 100 years old and St Brigid's Primary School is over 60 years old. Both buildings have challenges in meeting modern learning and teaching needs. There may be potential educational benefits for learners from a modern, purpose designed learning environment with appropriate facilities, including accessibility. However, there is insufficient accurate and high quality information to allow HM Inspectors to comment on the educational benefits of the proposal. In these circumstances, having been notified of material omissions, North Lanarkshire Council should consider its options in how it proceeds with this proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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