

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Scottish Borders Council to discontinue spectrum support class provisions at Wilton Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School and establish a new additional support needs school in the village of Earlston.

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 Scottish Borders Council's proposal to discontinue spectrum support class provision at Wilton Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School and establish a new additional support needs school in the village of Earlston. 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:

- 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 Wilton Primary School, St Ronan's Primary School, Earlston Primary School and Earlston High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Scottish Borders 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 consultation ran from 26 August 2016 until 10 October 2016. The council held three public meetings on 13, 14 and 15 September 2016 at Wilton Primary School, Earlston Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School respectively. It sought views from a range of stakeholders, including through questionnaires appended to the consultation proposal. Of 16 people who responded through written representations, 75% agreed with the proposal to discontinue spectrum support at Wilton, 81% agreed to discontinue spectrum support at St Ronan's and around 25-29% indicated no preference to agree or disagree to either of these aspects of the proposal. Along with this, 81% agreed with the establishment of the new additional support school in Earlston with 29% indicating no preference to agree or disagree. Many respondees commented on the positive benefits which would come with a new, purpose built and improved learning environment, and improved facilities for children in a building specifically designed to support the needs of children who attend autistic spectrum classes.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Overall, the proposal has many potential educational benefits for current and future learners. At Wilton Primary School, the spectrum support class is located in demountable hut accommodation. At St Ronan's Primary School, the spectrum support class is located in an upstairs classroom, with children accessing toilets downstairs. The proposal will lead to improvements in the quality of learning environments within a building specifically designed to support the needs of children attending autistic spectrum classes, including for any users of the building with mobility issues.

3.2 The current provision is split over two sites, with Wilton Primary School hosting predominantly P1 to 3 depending on individual needs, and St Ronan's Primary School hosting P4 to 7. Learners will benefit from continuity in education, attending P1 to 7 without having to move school, instead of the current split site arrangement in different towns.

3.3 Stakeholders at Wilton Primary School and St Ronan's Primary School who met with HM Inspectors, including those who are directly involved with the spectrum support classes, all reported many positive benefits to children which could arise from the new, purpose built and specifically designed learning environment in the new school at Earlston. Staff of Wilton and St Ronan's Primary Schools spectrum support classes who are more directly affected than others, are very positive about the proposed improved learning environments for children. Several, however, have concerns regarding increased travel times and changes to the length of their working

day due to the location of the new school being in Earlston. Stakeholders are also keen for greater clarity regarding timescales for the full proposal to take place and for reassurance around children's continued access to specific learning opportunities, such as swimming. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work closely with staff from Wilton and St Ronan's Primary School spectrum support classes to provide greater clarity regarding travel arrangements and curricular issues.

3.4 Stakeholders at Earlston Primary School and Earlston High School are very positive about the new additional support needs school being located in the village of Earlston. They can see many opportunities for partnership working for children, young people and staff in each of the schools. Stakeholders in these schools also sought clarity on timescales for the full proposal to be implemented. In taking forward the proposal the council will need to work closely with all stakeholders regarding timescales for the full proposal to be implemented.

4. Summary

The proposal has a number of potential educational benefits for learners. It has the capacity to lead to improvements in the quality of learning environments, within a building specifically designed to support the needs of children attending autistic spectrum classes. The new building's greater accessibility for all learners will promote inclusion. Given that the current provision is split over two sites, with Wilton Primary School hosting predominantly P1 to 3 depending on individual needs, and St Ronan's Primary School hosting P4 to 7, the proposal will support continuity in learning from P1 to 7. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work closely with staff from Wilton and St Ronan's Primary School spectrum support classes, to provide clarity regarding changes to travel and curricular issues, and with all stakeholders regarding timescales for the full proposal to be implemented.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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