

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Lothian Council to establish three special classes at St Mary's RC Primary School, Polbeth for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Two classes would commence in August 2015 and a third class would commence in August 2018.

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 West Lothian Council's proposal to establish three special classes at St Mary's RC Primary School, Polbeth for children with ASD. Two classes would commence in August 2015 and a third class would commence in August 2018. All three classes would be managed by the headteacher of St Mary's RC 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 school; 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 meetings held on 4 November and 6 November 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;
- visits to the sites of St Mary's RC Primary School and Ogilvie School Campus, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- discussion with the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West Lothian Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The council proposes to establish three special classes at St Mary's RC Primary School, Polbeth for children with ASD. Two classes would commence in August 2015 and a third class would commence in August 2018. All three classes would be managed by the headteacher of St Mary's RC Primary School.

2.2 The formal consultation on the proposal under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014* ran from 16 October 2014 to 18 December 2014. Notices about the proposal were placed in the local press and on the council's website. As part of the consultation arrangements, three public meetings were held on 4, 6 and 12 November 2014. For this proposal, two responses were received by the council during the consultation period.

2.3 Prior to running the formal consultation under the Act, the council consulted with a range of stakeholders, including individual parents over its vision and specific plans to improve education for children with additional support needs. This proposal is one of four which have resulted from the council's review of provision for children with additional support needs.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal to establish three special classes at St Mary's RC Primary School has the potential to establish suitable provision for children with ASD from across West Lothian and offers educational benefits. The school has the capacity for three specialist classes for children with ASD. With a planned maximum of six children in each of the three classes, there are opportunities for children to receive suitable support in their learning appropriate to their needs. Children will have access to mainstream learning experiences as appropriate and will benefit from the school's refurbished accommodation and resources, including, a wide range of information and communications technology.

3.2 Children who met with HM Inspectors and currently attend St Mary's RC Primary School support the proposal. They are proud of their school and its welcoming and inclusive ethos. Older children are beginning to develop their understanding of issues associated with autism.

3.3 Staff at St Mary's RC Primary School who met with HM Inspectors are positive, overall, about the proposal. Some see this proposal as an opportunity to acquire and develop new skills, benefiting from the experience of specialist staff who will work in the school.

3.4 Very few parents of children at St Mary's RC Primary School responded to the council's consultation or met with HM Inspectors. Those who have responded have mixed views. Some see this as a further opportunity for the school to demonstrate its caring and inclusive approaches. The council has responded promptly to address a concern that the school's strong Roman Catholic identity might be affected by the creation of a non-denominational specialist ASD provision within the school.

3.5 The Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh supports the proposal. It would wish the council to provide further clarification over the provision of management posts and responsibilities as a result of this proposal.

4. Summary

The council proposes to establish three special classes at St Mary's RC Primary School, Polbeth for children with ASD. Two classes would commence in August 2015 and a third class would commence in August 2018. All three classes would be managed by the headteacher of St Mary's RC Primary School. This proposal offers educational benefits for children across West Lothian as well as those currently attending the school. As a result of this proposal, children with ASD would have good access to specialist support and provision and also benefit from access to well-resourced, mainstream learning activities. In taking forward this proposal, the council now needs to ensure that detailed plans for refurbishments to St Mary's RC Primary School are implemented promptly. The council should also ensure that there is a shared understanding about the provision and responsibility of promoted staff within the school.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2015**