

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Lothian Council to relocate West Calder High 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 West Lothian Council's proposal to relocate West Calder High 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 meeting held on 20 January 2015 at St Paul's Primary School in connection with the council's proposal;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents;
- consideration of written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to West Calder High School and East Calder, Mid-Calder, Parkhead, Addiewell and Woodmuir Primary Schools, including discussion with representative groups of staff, parents, children and young people in each school.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West Lothian 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 West Lothian Council's consultation on the relocation of West Calder High School ran from 8 January to 23 February 2015. The council held two public meetings on 19 and 20 January 2015. The first of these was held in West Calder High School and the second was held in St Paul's Primary School in East Calder. The council consulted very well with children and young people in each school affected by the proposal. The council received over fifty written responses to the consultation. These included letters, emails and reports. The responses came from a wide range of individuals and groups. Over 20 of the responses gave clear support to the proposal. Many of the other responses received by the council posed questions or raised concerns about the consultation process or issues related to the possible site for the school. The council replied to all those who submitted a response. This included providing answers to specific questions.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 West Lothian Council proposes to relocate West Calder High School from its current site in Polbeth to a new build school in an area to the east of West Calder. The council proposes that the new school will be built by March 2018 with a phased opening from Easter 2018 to become fully operational by August 2018. The current school was built in 1965. Prior to October 2014, the council had planned to refurbish and extend West Calder High School on its existing site. However, an officer review of these plans identified constraints with this approach. The constraints principally related to the presence of an ethylene pipeline that crosses the current site. This would have required any further development of the site to be outside the protection zone of the pipeline. The council decided to pursue the option of relocating the school by building a new school on another site. To facilitate this, the council begun a site search. The proposed site at Parkhead, West Calder emerged as the most reasonable and viable option. The new school will be funded through the Scottish Schools for the Future programme. In order to meet the conditions for the funding of the new school through this programme, the school needs to be built by March 2018. The site identified for the new school is to the east of West Calder. The council believes that the proposed site will enable it to build the new school and have it fully operational within the timeline required by the arrangements for funding through the Schools for the Future programme.

3.2 West Lothian Council's proposal to relocate West Calder High School by building a new school in the Parkhead area of West Calder has the potential to be of significant educational benefit to the children and young people of the area. It also has the potential to bring benefit to the community through, for example, access to

the enhanced community sports facilities and resources the council proposes to develop within the new school.

3.3 The principal educational benefit of the proposal will result from the significantly enhanced facilities the council proposes to provide at the new school. The council has given a commitment to ensuring the new school will be equipped with modern information and communications technology. The council has also given a commitment that the school will be designed to ensure young people have a full range of opportunities to experience appropriate breadth, continuity and progression in their learning across the broad general education to the end of S3. The council also proposes that the new build will give young people access to a range of enhanced provision in the senior phase of education from S4 to S6. This includes providing greater opportunities for vocational learning. In the proposal, the council indicates that the design and layout of the new school will be informed by recent new school builds that have taken place across Scotland.

3.4 Within the proposal, the council also gives a commitment to improving provision for young people with additional support needs. The existing school is on several levels. This means that access to some areas of the school is difficult for some users. The council has given a commitment to ensuring that the design of the new school will meet legislative requirements and make all parts of the school readily accessible for all users.

3.5 The current proposal contains no details of the proposed design and layout of the new school. There is also limited specific information about the enhanced facilities the council plans to include within the new school. For example, there is a swimming pool in the current school. The proposal document makes no reference to whether a swimming pool will be included in the new school. However, in a response to a question raised during the consultation period the council has indicated that the new school will have a swimming pool that will be at least the same size as the existing pool.

3.6 The council has given a reasonable assessment of the transport and travel issues associated with building the new school. The school is currently located to the east of the village of Polbeth. The proposed relocation of the new school to an area in the east of West Calder will mean the school is nearer to young people who live in West Calder. Those who live to the west of Polbeth will also live closer to the new school. Young people from the east of Polbeth will have further to walk. In taking forward the proposal, it will be important for the council to work on issues of transport to and from school for young people. This includes developing safe routes to school for those young people who will have to walk further to school. Young people who will attend the school and live in Breich, Addiewell, Mid Calder and East Calder will continue to receive free transport to school.

3.7 In considering the educational aspects of the proposal, HM Inspectors met with representative groups of parents, staff, children and young people at each of the schools directly affected by the proposal. Parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors were very positive about the proposal and gave it their full support. Children and young people were excited by the prospect of being able to go to the new school and were very positive about the proposal.

3.8 During the consultation period, the council received a wide range of responses to the proposal. The responses raised a number of issues. A number of these were linked to perceived problems associated with access to the site during the construction phase and once the new school is open. The proposal sets out two options for access to the school and the council used the consultation process to seek the views of consultees on these two options. If the council chooses to proceed with the proposal, it will need to address the issues of access to the site of the school as a matter of some urgency if it is to complete the new school by March 2018 and make it fully operational from August 2018.

3.9 Some consultees from East and Mid Calder were concerned that implementation of the proposal would delay any plans to build a new school in the east of the current catchment area. However, in both the consultation report and in answers to questions raised during the consultation, the council indicated that the building of the new school in West Calder was the first step in the implementation of a long-term strategy for the provision of two non-denominational secondary schools for the East, Mid and West Calder areas.

3.10 Many parents and staff felt that car parking facilities and arrangements for school buses at the current school were inadequate. The council needs to ensure that there are sufficient spaces within the site of the new school for car parking and for school buses to enter and leave the school safely at the beginning and end of the school day.

3.11 Some consultees raised concerns about the potential environmental impact of the new build. This included concerns about the number of trees that would be cut down to facilitate building the new school and the potential adverse impact on the community garden. A number of local residents did not feel that they had been fully consulted by the council. They raised a number of objections to the council's plans to build the new school on the proposed site.

4. Summary

4.1 West Lothian Council's proposal to relocate West Calder High School in a new purpose-built school by August 2018 has the potential to deliver significant educational benefits to the children and young people directly affected by it. These benefits will derive largely from the enhanced facilities the council proposes to provide at the new school. However, at the time of the consultation, the council had yet to produce detailed plans for the design and layout of the new school. The proposal has the clear support of parents, staff, children and young people. The proposal also has the potential to have a positive impact on the local community through the provision of enhanced facilities and resources for community use.

4.2 During the consultation, some consultees raised a number of issues in relation to the siting of the school. These included concerns about arrangements for access to the site during the construction phase and once the school is fully operational. Other concerns raised by those who responded to the consultation related to transport to and from school, including safe routes to school, and the provision of adequate car parking and facilities for school buses. Some consultees raised concerns about the impact on the local environment of the new school.

4.3 In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to continue to work with and consult staff, parents, children, young people and the local community to address their concerns and to ensure that the significant potential educational benefits of the proposal to relocate West Calder High School in a new purpose-built school are realised in full.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2015**