

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Lothian Council to adopt admission arrangements and a single catchment area for all specialist provision.

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 adopt admission arrangements and a single catchment area for all specialist 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 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 Thursday 4 December 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; and

- a visit to the site of Pinewood School Campus, including discussion with relevant consultees.

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 The consultation period ran from Friday 14 November 2014 until Friday 16 January 2015. Public meetings were held on Thursday 4 December 2014 at Bathgate Academy and on Wednesday 10 December 2014 at The James Young High School, Livingston. The council made the consultation documentation available in English and provided the facility to have it translated into eight other languages. It encouraged responses by letter and email. Several written responses were received to the consultation, each of which raised some concerns about the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The admission arrangements included in the proposal paper outline procedures for referral, admission, transition and placing requests in relation to specialist provision in West Lothian Council. The adoption of admission arrangements will be of educational benefit to children and young people with additional support needs by clarifying the decision-making processes related to specialist provision for professionals and for parents.

3.2 The adoption of a single catchment area will ensure that children and young people in West Lothian Council can have access to all available specialist provision, wherever it is located and irrespective of where they live.

3.3 Parents of children who attend specialist provision who spoke to HM Inspectors have justifiable concerns that the admission guidelines indicate that they have no right of appeal with respect to the decision of the Senior Officer Review Group (SORG) in relation to referrals of children and young people at key transition stages or with respect to decisions of SORG in relation to referrals following a Child's Planning Meeting. Whilst they appreciate the publication of these admission guidelines, parents would appreciate more detailed information about the decision-making processes which could affect their children. They would also like reassurance that split placements between mainstream and specialist provision will still be possible. In preparing its final proposal, the council should ensure that these concerns are addressed.

3.4 Parents of children who attend specialist provision in West Lothian Council, staff who work in specialist provision, staff from mainstream provision and young people from specialist provision who spoke to HM Inspectors unanimously support the proposal to adopt a single catchment area for specialist provision in West Lothian Council.

4. Summary

There is overall educational benefit in this proposal for children and young people with additional support needs in West Lothian Council. Through the adoption of a council wide catchment area, children and young people will have access to the most appropriate specialist provision, wherever they live within the council area. All stakeholder groups agree that this is a helpful proposal. Similarly, the adoption of admission arrangements for specialist provision will clarify the procedures for all stakeholders. Parents are keen to work in partnership with West Lothian Council to develop its admission arrangements for specialised provision. The council should ensure that the concerns of parents are addressed as it prepares its final report.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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