

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to alter arrangements for the provision for pupils attending mainstream schools.

May 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to alter arrangements for the provision of transport by West Dunbartonshire Council for pupils attending mainstream schools. 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 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.

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.
- 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 a public meeting held on 18 April 2023 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- visits to the site of St Eunan's Primary School, Knoxland Primary School, Clydebank High School, St Peter the Apostle High School, Dumbarton Academy, Vale of Leven Academy and Our lady and St Patrick's High School, including discussion with relevant consultees and;
- discussion with relevant consultees, including representatives from the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

2. Consultation process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation ran between 9 March and 9 May 2023. The council published information on the proposal on its website and provided printed versions at the council headquarters and in all

the affected schools, including alternative formats and in translation. The council created an online survey for stakeholders to provide their views on the proposal. Responses were also accepted by telephone, letter or email. West Dunbartonshire Council held three public meetings about the proposal. These took place on 18, 19 and 25 April 2023. A total of 48 stakeholders attended these public meetings in person. A further eight attended using an online link.

2.3 The council received 542 survey responses. Parents and carers submitted the majority of responses. Children and young people submitted a minority of the responses. Representatives of Parent Councils, school staff and other local residents submitted a few responses. West Dunbartonshire Council received additional submissions by email or letter from a few individuals. Most of these individuals opposed the proposal. The consultation survey asked, 'Do you agree that West Dunbartonshire Council should bring transport provision for schools more in line with the safe walking distance to school?'. Most stakeholders who engaged with the consultation through the online survey answered 'yes' to this question. However, 'yes' responses do not align with the comments which are negative overall. A few respondents specifically commented on the lack of clarity in the survey question. Less than half of survey respondents left a comment in the survey. However, of those that did, most were not in agreement with the proposal. Respondents who identified themselves as Roman Catholic were less likely than others to answer 'yes' to the survey question.

2.4 A few stakeholders who made a positive comment identified the potential health benefits of the proposal in terms of children and young people walking to school. Stakeholders who completed the survey and those who attended public meetings expressed a range of concerns, including safety of the proposed walking routes to school. These concerns covered the proximity of some routes to busy roads and a lack of suitable crossing places. Stakeholders also expressed concern about the distances children would be walking, especially younger children. A minority of respondents noted a lack of reliable public transport which does not align with school day timings. A minority of negative comments expressed concern about the impact on wellbeing for children and young people, for example when walking in poor weather conditions. A few stakeholders consider that if the proposal is agreed, this would lead to greater traffic congestion, since more parents may choose to drive their children to school. A few commented that this may lead to higher levels of carbon emissions, which the proposal hopes to reduce. A few stakeholders suggested that the proposal may lead to challenges for families. For example, working parents and carers finding it difficult to walk or drive their children to school. There are also concerns about how this might impact on children's participation in after-school activities. In some schools staff carried out consultations with young people. However, there was not a coordinated approach to consultations with young people in their schools.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council believes that the proposal, if implemented, will bring educational benefits through improved health and wellbeing. Active travel to school brings opportunities for physical activity and social interaction which support physical and mental wellbeing. There would also be a positive impact on the environment if parents encourage children to participate in active travel. A few stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors agree with the health benefits of walking. The council have acknowledged that some of these benefits will only be realised if children and young people walk to school. HM Inspectors agree that walking to school has potential health and wellbeing benefits. However, HMI Inspectors do not agree that the council have not fully demonstrated the educational benefits of the proposal to stakeholders, including young people.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders reject the environmental benefits put forward by the council. A few parents that spoke to HM Inspectors feel that there may be an increase in traffic if more parents drive their child to school. They are concerned that this contradicts the council's stated benefit to

active travel, leading to increased emissions from the volume of traffic. Congestion at school gates at peak times is already a concern of both staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors. Parents at St Eunan's Primary School are particularly concerned as this will result in school transport being withdrawn completely from their school. The council should have further dialogue with these parents to discuss ways to address the issues raised.

3.3 Almost all stakeholders, including young people, who met with HM Inspectors are against the proposal. They feel strongly that walking longer distances to school will potentially lead to an increase in late coming. This will have a detrimental impact on attainment and achievement. Stakeholders expressed concerns about both the safety of walking routes to schools and the reliability and frequency of public buses. Whilst recognising that many young people will have a Young Scot Card, not all parents are happy for their child to travel on the public bus. Stakeholders cited examples of public buses being full and not picking school pupils up. Currently, monitors on school buses help to regulate behaviour, but this would not be available on a public bus leading to an increase in anti-social behaviour. Parents are also concerned that young people will be reliant on the continuation of Young Scot Under 22 travel scheme. Most stakeholders feel that walking three miles to school is not acceptable, particularly in bad weather. They are worried that this means sitting in classrooms all day in wet clothing. Young people and staff at Clydebanks High School do not think that this proposal will have a significant impact for them. Many young people who would be entitled to school transport are using their Young Scot card to access public buses.

3.4 Staff who met with HM Inspectors also had reservations about the proposal. There is concern that the most deprived communities in West Dunbartonshire will be adversely impacted. In a few schools, attendance of young people from these communities is already lower than those from other areas. They fear that the proposals may lead to some children and young people not attending on days they face challenges getting to school. As a result, they may not be able to access free school meals.

3.5 HM Inspectors met with a representative of the Archdiocese of Glasgow. They are not in favour of the proposal. The Diocese expressed concern that the proposal, if implemented, may further disadvantage pupils living in the most deprived areas. In line with other respondents, they are concerned that young people may have to walk long distances in inclement weather. This may restrict after-school activities and homework. There is also a concern that the withdrawal of the bus service from some pupils will lead to a negative impact on attendance and ultimately educational attainment. The Archdiocese believes that Roman Catholic parents may then choose to send their child to a non-denominational school, due to transport difficulties.

3.6 A few parents who met with HM Inspectors raised concerns about the online survey and the process of engagement for the proposal. They felt that the survey question was unclear and potentially misleading. As a result, they do not think that this was an open and fair process.

4. Summary

In their proposal, West Dunbartonshire Council state that there will be educational benefits gained through active travel. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal is in line with national guidance and statutory walking distances. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential benefits through active travel. However, HM Inspectors do not agree that the council have set out sufficiently the potential educational benefits to address concerns raised by stakeholders. Almost all stakeholders raised significant concerns. These include the safety of children and young people while walking to and from school, and the reliability, availability and capacity of public transport to meet increased demand. Most stakeholders also have a concern that the proposal, if implemented, would incur financial costs for families already facing significant financial hardship. Stakeholders are also concerned about the potential for lower attendance which will impact on attainment and

achievement. Should this proposal be agreed, it will be important for the council to work with stakeholders to address their concerns.

The online survey main question may have been misunderstood by respondents and therefore the outcome may not be accurate. The survey responses do not fully reflect the comments or the issues raised by stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors. The council will need to consider if this data should be used to inform the final decision.

HM Inspectors
May 2023