

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Scottish Borders Council to relocate Galashiels Academy.**

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 Scottish Borders Council's proposal to relocate Galashiels Academy. 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 young people of the school; any other users; and 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 the public meeting held on 20 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; and
- visits to the site of Galashiels Academy, Burgh, Clovenfords, Heriot, Langlee, St Margaret's RC, and Tweedbank Primary Schools 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](#).

2.2 The council undertook the consultation between 13 March and 12 May 2023. The proposal was communicated to stakeholders via the council website, through social media and local press. The consultation paper was made available in the affected schools and other council buildings, and formal notice was given to a wide range of consultees. Scottish Borders Council held a public meeting at Galashiels Academy on 20 April 2023. This was attended by approximately 50 members of the community including a few school staff, parents and young people. Eight officials, including one elected member and two representatives from Galashiels Academy leadership team, were also present. Scottish Borders Council received 127 responses to their online survey. Responses were received from a mixture of parents, staff and members of the local

community. A majority (66%) agree with the proposal to relocate Galashiels Academy, a minority (29%) did not agree. A few (4%) did not know, and a few (2%) selected both agree and disagree to this question.

2.3 Overall, respondents to the survey largely recognise and support the need for a new school building to replace the existing aging campus. Where expressed, objections largely relate to the location of the new school on local parkland and why the school could not have been built on an alternative site. Other concerns raised within the survey responses relate to details regarding the design of the building, particularly aspects of the internal layout.

2.4 In order to progress the building programme and comply with funding requirements, the council's project board has allowed preparatory work to progress in tandem with this consultation proposal. The project board has acknowledged and accepted that there is a risk attached to undertaking these works before a final decision is made regarding the new school. HM Inspectors agree that this is a risk. In responding to the survey, a few stakeholders were confused by the timing and purpose of the consultation as they understood that the plan to build a new school had already been agreed.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 In their proposal, Scottish Borders Council set out a broad range of educational benefits for pupils, including pupils with additional support needs, and for other users of the school's facilities. These benefits include a modern learning environment designed to meet the current and future needs of a variety of learners, and a flexible design that supports a broad curriculum offer. The council states that the building provides more spaces for vocational learning and training in skills, and that more natural daylight will support wellbeing. There are also enhanced sport and recreational facilities for school and community use. The new building is intended to offer young people with complex physical and medical needs opportunities to learn across the whole school. HM Inspectors agree that there are significant potential benefits. In order for the council to fully realise their vision, they should continue to work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that the final design is able to fulfil their aspirations.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors strongly support the proposal to relocate Galashiels Academy adjacent to its current location. Almost all children and young people are looking forward to learning within a modern building designed to meet their needs. Overall, they like the design and welcome particular features such as increased social areas and study spaces. Young people at Galashiels Academy with a keen interest in sport are particularly enthusiastic about the enhanced physical education and sport facilities. Other young people who have a particular interest in the performing arts would like more clarity on what the new building will offer in terms of improved facilities for drama and music performances. Almost all children from the associated primary schools who met with HM Inspectors are excited about the prospect of a new Galashiels Academy. The opportunity to view a virtual tour of the new school has made them curious and is helping them to understand the potential educational benefits that the building offers.

3.3 All parents who met with HM Inspectors strongly support the proposal. They appreciate the investment in their child's learning and the potential of the new learning environment to strengthen and extend the curriculum offer. A few parents, young people and staff who met with HM Inspectors expressed some concerns about certain aspects of the new school. This includes the extensive use of glass and some semi-open plan learning spaces which they feel could be a distraction to learning. A few stakeholders were worried about safety in some aspects of the design, and in particular, how the areas used by the community would be securely separated from access to other learning spaces. They would like further information about how school and

community use of shared facilities will be used and operated safely. A few parents and staff would also like reassurance that the council will use the experience from other new school building programmes to maximise the education benefits that the new Galashiels Academy can provide. The council and senior leadership team should continue to work with stakeholders to provide assurance that their concerns are being listened to and addressed.

3.4 Staff from Galashiels Academy, and associated primary schools visited by HM Inspectors, recognise the need for a new modern building for the benefit of the young people of Galashiels. Staff are largely supportive of the proposal. A few staff would like assurance that the new facilities will have sufficient capacity to meet the current and future mix of complex physical and medical needs of the young people within the enhanced provision. A few staff would like assurance that they will be able to access appropriate spaces for non-class contact time and breaks. The council and senior leadership team should continue to engage with staff as they finalise the design and implement the school building programme.

3.5 HM Inspectors met with the Catholic Church's representative for Scottish Borders Council. The Catholic Church strongly support the proposal and recognise the potential educational benefits for young people who will attend the new Galashiels Academy. They did not identify anything in the proposal of particular concern to Catholic education.

## 4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are significant potential educational benefits from the proposal to relocate Galashiels Academy adjacent to its current location. The new building will provide a modern, welcoming and flexible learning environment. The planned design, although not yet finalised, should offer a variety of learning spaces well-equipped to meet the needs of young people and be adaptable to a changing curriculum offer. The enhanced sports facilities will continue to support the traditionally high levels of participation in Galashiels. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors, and a majority of people who responded to the council's survey, strongly support the proposal. The design, which is at an advanced stage, is already informed by a wide range of stakeholders. However, a few stakeholders have raised concerns about some aspects of the current design. It will be important for the council and senior leadership team to continue to listen, work closely with, and keep stakeholders informed should the proposal go ahead. This will support the council to fulfil their aspirational vision for the new Galashiels Academy.

**HM Inspectors**  
**May 2023**