

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by South Lanarkshire Council to alter distance thresholds for mainstream secondary pupils to qualify for free school transport.

April 2024

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 a proposal by South Lanarkshire Council. The proposal is to alter the distance that a mainstream secondary school pupil must live from their catchment school to qualify for free school transport from more than two miles to more than three miles. 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's 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 consultation report at least 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 four public meetings held on 29, 30, 31 January and 1 February 2024 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, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- visits to the sites of Calderside Academy, Cathkin High School, Holy Cross High School, Lesmahagow High School, St Andrew's and St Bride's High School, Blackwood Primary School, Hallside Primary School, St Bride's Primary School, St Elizabeth's Primary School and St Vincent's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- discussion with relevant consultees including representatives from the Diocese of Motherwell.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The consultation ran from 15 January until 15 March 2024. A copy of the consultation proposal document was made available in all school establishments, local council buildings,

libraries and via the council website. All mainstream primary and secondary schools were emailed details of the consultation and asked to share it on their social media and communication channels. Schools were also asked to ensure pupils were aware of the consultation and how to participate. Public meetings were held in Lanark Grammar School, Holy Cross High School, Trinity High School and St Andrew's and St Bride's High School. A total of 253 stakeholders attended these meetings. This included two group meetings that were requested by parents for the public meetings in Trinity High School and Holy Cross High School.

2.3 The council received 6,315 consultation responses to the proposal from a range of stakeholders. Of these, 13% are in favour of the proposal and 84% are not in favour. There were 3,480 responses received from parents, almost of whom are against the proposal. There were 965 responses from members of the public and other interested parties. Almost all of these, are also against the proposal. Approximately 22% of the respondents to the survey identified themselves as school pupils. The majority of them are not in favour and a few are undecided. Staff, parent councils, elected members, trade unions and community councils returned fewer responses. Most of these do not support the proposal.

2.4 Not all respondents left comments. Those who did cited a range of reasons for not supporting the proposal. The council will need to address these comments in their outcome report.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council's educational benefit statement highlights financial pressures it faces. The council believes that the proposal, if implemented, will protect schools from further cuts that would impact on them directly. They state this would continue to protect resources that are prioritised on frontline learning and teaching and maintain the provision of other non-statutory services. The council believes encouraging young people to adopt more active means of travel will have potential benefits. This will contribute to an active, healthy lifestyle, have a positive impact on mental focus and mood, and the opportunity to build resilience in young people. The council also states the proposal could reduce traffic around schools. This would contribute to the council's sustainability agenda of reducing carbon emissions. A few young people, parents and staff, that met with HM Inspectors, agree that walking to and from school could improve health and wellbeing. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential benefits from active travel to school. However, HM Inspectors do not agree that the council have demonstrated fully the educational benefits of the proposal to stakeholders, including young people.

3.2 If the proposal is implemented, the council estimates an approximate two million pound saving per annum. The number of school bus routes would be reduced to accommodate those pupils who would remain entitled. All stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors stated that whilst young people may have access to public transport through the Young Scot Under 22 travel scheme, this did not resolve the potential transport issue entirely. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors raised concerns about the frequency, reliability and affordability of current public transport services. A majority of stakeholders indicated there are areas where the public bus service is limited and that current public transport timetables do not align with the school day. Almost all stakeholders are concerned that the transport infrastructure in South Lanarkshire may not have the capacity to meet an increase in demand for travel to and from schools. Almost all stakeholders also disagree that the proposal will reduce carbon emissions. They believe the number of cars being used to transport young people to and from school will increase. This could increase congestion further and negatively impact on the environment.

3.3 While the proposed distance will meet expectations set out in the Scottish Government's School Transport Guidance 2021, almost all stakeholders are concerned it is too far. Almost all expressed concern about the safety of the proposed walking routes, particularly in poor weather

across all seasons. Almost all young people and parents that met with HM Inspectors feel they need additional information about the criteria used to determine acceptable walking routes. Almost all stakeholders raised concerns about the speed of traffic on busy roads and the lack of safe crossing places and crossing patrols. Almost all stakeholders noted issues with street lighting, narrow paths, and walking routes through underpasses, parks and near woodland areas. Most stakeholders highlighted the lack of cycle routes in the local authority area. Most stakeholders raised concerns about long walks while carrying a school bag and heavy equipment, such as musical instruments.

3.4 A majority of stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors are concerned that the proposal disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged areas and families in the authority. A minority of stakeholders also highlighted that this may negatively impact families with additional caring responsibilities, including those with siblings at different schools. They are concerned about the impact on working families, as working routines or employment may be negatively affected by this proposal. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe there would be a need to purchase additional clothing for the wet weather conditions, which families may not be able to fund. During the consultation process, the council updated their Equality Impact Assessment on the proposal. HM Inspectors recommend that the council continues to work with stakeholders to share information and minimise the potential negative socio-economic impact for families.

3.5 Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors are concerned the proposal may negatively impact on attainment and achievement. They are concerned the lack of public transport may lead to an increase in arriving late to school or absenteeism. A minority of stakeholders feel there may be a need for staff to revise the school start and finish times to relieve congestion, particularly on shared campuses. If the proposal is agreed, the council will need to monitor any change in attendance and address any negative impact.

3.6 Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe the proposal could impact negatively on young people's wellbeing including those that may require additional support. For example, young people being anxious about using public transport and their personal safety walking to and from school. Most stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors are concerned about the potential negative impact on young people accessing activities after school. A few secondary pupils noted they have part-time jobs that start after school. They are concerned that the additional travel time may negatively impact on their employment. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe young people would need to get up earlier and may get less sleep and miss breakfast. They are concerned this may affect young people's energy, mood, readiness to learn and ability to concentrate in school.

3.7 All stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors with association to the Roman Catholic faith, including representatives from the Diocese of Motherwell, do not support the proposal. They are concerned that the proposal could affect young people attending denominational schools. Stakeholders noted that the catchment area for Roman Catholic schools is usually larger and there may be non-denominational schools closer to home. Almost all stakeholders, with association to the Roman Catholic faith believe the proposed changes restrict young people's right to an accessible Roman Catholic education.

4. Summary

South Lanarkshire Council has identified the need to make financial savings through aligning their secondary school transport arrangements more in line with legislation. They state that this will continue to protect resources that are prioritised on frontline learning and teaching and maintain provision of other valuable non-statutory services. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal is in line with national guidance and statutory walking distances. However, almost all stakeholders that met

with HM Inspectors raised notable concerns. These include the capacity of current public transport services and a lack of information on safe walking routes. They are concerned about the impact this may have on families. It will be important for the council to review walking routes and consider any changes in traffic and other factors to ensure safe routes to school. Almost all stakeholders are also concerned about the potential negative impact on attendance at school and on attainment and achievement. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential benefits of adopting more active means of travelling to and from school. However, HM Inspectors do not agree that the council has sufficiently set out the potential educational benefits of this proposal. The council may wish to provide additional information on the impact of not proceeding with the proposal in its final report. HM Inspectors recommend, if the proposal is agreed, that the council should work with stakeholders to mitigate against the range of concerns raised.

HM Inspectors
April 2024