

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

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to expand secondary additional support needs specialist educational placements.**

June 2021

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 Stirling Council's proposal to expand secondary additional support needs (ASN) specialist educational placements. 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; 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 virtual public meetings held on 13 May 2021 and 17 May 2021 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
- virtual meetings with McLaren High School and Balfron High School, including discussion with relevant consultees. HM Inspectors also met virtually with senior managers of current specialist provision at Calendar Primary School, Castleview School, Ochil House and St Modan's High School.

## 2. Consultation process

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

2.2 Stirling Council identified an increasing need for secondary specialist ASN placements across the local authority. The council projected that a minority of secondary placements will be allocated to young people living in rural areas. The current provision is housed in two centrally located schools in Stirling City; one supports young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the other young people with severe and complex needs. To access the current provision, some young people travel extensive distances to an educational placement outwith their local community. The council developed three options for consideration and seek to extend secondary

ASN placements and meet the needs of all young people. The council developed its proposal following discussion between education and health staff and a subsequent informal discussion with a group of parents of children with ASN.

2.3 The statutory consultation period ran from 19 April to 4 June 2021. Information about the consultation, a link to it, and invitations to take part, were sent to a wide range of relevant stakeholders. Copies of the consultation proposal were made available to statutory consultees through the council's platform Engage Stirling. This platform also provided access to an online public survey and arrangements for submitting written comments. Views were also sought from relevant groups, including young people in ASN settings, and in Balfron and McLaren High Schools. Due to the current COVID 19 restrictions that are in place, two virtual public meetings took place on 13 May 2021 and 17 May 2021, attended by 35 members of the public.

2.4 There were 283 responses to the online survey. Eighty-six percent of respondents were parents of school-aged children and over half were parents of children and young people with complex ASN. A total of 164 written comments were made in the survey. In addition, five email responses were submitted by consultees. Most felt it was important to educate children and young people as close to their local communities as possible and to maintain contact with their peers. Travelling into the city from very rural locations was felt to be a tiring and sometimes a stressful experience for children and young people. A majority felt that opportunities for inclusion in mainstream, as appropriate, was important. Overall, 70% of respondents expressed a preference for option 1, to extend specialist provision to two rural secondary schools followed by a further city provision in phase two. A preference for option 2, to build an additional ASN school within Stirling city serving the whole council area, was expressed by 28% of respondents. Only 2% of respondents expressed a preference for option 3, to purchase ASN educational placements in other council areas and not increase the ASN provision within Stirling Council. A few parents expressed concern about how well the needs of their child were being met in their current setting.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Option 1 of the proposal is to extend specialist provision to two rural secondary schools followed by a further city provision in phase two, approximately a year later. This is the preferred option of the council and the stakeholders responding to the consultation. HM Inspectors believe this option has several potential educational benefits. It reduces extended travel for young people living in rural areas and allows them to be educated in their local community alongside their friends. Opportunities for families to be involved in their child's learning within a local provision would increase. In addition to learning in small groups, young people would be able to access different contexts for learning in the mainstream school. For example, access to various curriculum subjects, social experiences and wider achievement opportunities, appropriate to their needs. This option also has benefits for the wider school. It could allow staff to work with, and learn from, specialist staff. Staff could gain skills and knowledge and use this to meet the needs of young people in the provision, as well as learners across the mainstream school. With strong leadership and planning, there is also the opportunity for learners across the school community to work together, further developing an inclusive culture where all respect and value diversity.

3.2 The proposal for option 1 offers two flexible rural-based specialist provisions designed to meet a diverse range of young people's needs. To do this, each provision would need access to a range of specialist resources, staff, partner agencies and services. The council should consider developing a rationale, which outlines clearly to stakeholders, how they plan to offer an equitable service in a rural context to that experienced by young people in the city-based, targeted provisions. This could also outline the recommended conditions for the allocation of a city-based or rural-based provision based on a child or young person's individual needs.

3.3 Option 2 proposes an additional city-based ASN school serving the whole council area. HM Inspectors recognise the benefit of having a purpose-built facility designed to meet a range of young people's needs. However, this option would place all ASN provisions in central locations leading to some young people being taught outwith their local community and having to travel considerable distances. It would also limit the opportunity for mainstream staff to learn from specialist staff. HM Inspectors also acknowledge stakeholders' views regarding the advantages of option 1 over option 2. These views were expressed with regard to reducing travel time to school and allowing young people to be better connected to their local community. Option 3 proposes that the council do not extend existing provisions and focus on purchasing ASN educational places in other council areas. HM Inspectors feel this would lead to young people becoming further disconnected from their local community and that option 3 does not represent best value for money for the council.

3.4 Young people, parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors, valued young people being educated in their local community. All groups raised concern about young people travelling extended distances and the impact of not being able to attend school with friendship groups in their local area. All stakeholders recognised the benefits for inclusion by incorporating specialist provisions in rural schools. They felt that young people could learn from each other, develop respect for the differences of others, and this would enhance the sense of community.

3.5 All young people interviewed were positive about the provisions being added to their school. They shared their pride in the ethos of their schools, where respect and positive relationships were a strong feature, and did not foresee issues arising from the introduction of the new provision. A few young people talked about how busy and noisy the school can be. They expressed a need for this to be taken into consideration when planning for the new provision to ensure young people are not overwhelmed.

3.6 Most parents liked that their child would be educated closer to home and could benefit from access to more subject choices. Most parents wanted to ensure decisions taken by the council are focused on the needs of young people and not based on cost. A few parents described to HM Inspectors some of the challenges they have experienced in accessing support for their child or young person's ASN through the current provision. This experience has impacted on a few parents' confidence in the council to provide an appropriate provision. All parents wanted to know they would be listened to, consulted, and that their knowledge of their child or young person would be used by the council to shape the plans for the provision. The council should continue to work with stakeholders in taking forward the detail of the plans. A few parents think it is important to have a choice to send their young person to the city-based provision if it was deemed more appropriate to meet the young person's needs.

3.7 All staff interviewed were positive about the values underpinning option 1. They are excited about the potential and recognise the importance of professional learning to build confidence in advance of the provision being established. A few staff raised concern around how the existing school buildings could be adapted effectively to meet the needs of the ASN provision. If this option is adopted, the council should consider creative solutions to maximise or enhance existing spaces and ensure they are adequately resourced to meet the complexity of young people's ASN. A few staff also raised concern about the access to specialist staff, such as allied health services, in a rural setting. The challenges faced by rural schools in recruiting staff was raised by a few staff who felt this could be a potential challenge should option 1 go ahead.

## 4. Summary

HM Inspectors believe option 1 of the proposal has potential educational benefits. The council has recognised the need to expand their existing ASN specialist provision and are striving to do this in a way that allows young people to be educated in their local community. Whilst the consultation focuses on the specialist provision, the council also recognises the opportunity to use specialist staff to upskill staff in mainstream schools. This has the potential to support their approaches to meeting the needs of all learners, as well as enhancing the ethos of inclusion.

In taking forward the proposals, it is important that the council continues to consult with stakeholders. This includes drawing on the views, knowledge and experience of children and young people, parents, specialist staff and partner agencies. This will allow the development of innovative solutions to the challenges associated with the selected approach. They should ensure the rural-based provisions are equitable to the experiences of young people with similar needs in the city-based, tailored provisions, particularly in relation to access to resources, facilities and specialist support staff. They should consider how access to specialist staff, including allied health professionals is maintained to ensure the needs of young people are fully met.

**HM Inspectors**  
**June 2021**