

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by South Ayrshire Council to relocate the North Ayr Extended Learning Facility from Dalmilling Primary School to Heathfield Primary School.

October 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 South Ayrshire Council's proposal to relocate the North Ayr Extended Learning Facility (ELF) from Dalmilling Primary School to Heathfield Primary School. 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory 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 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 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 4 October 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 sites of Dalmilling Primary School and Heathfield Primary School including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 South Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) from 4 September 2023 to 25 October 2023. The council's proposal was available to members of the public and published on the council website. In addition, copies of the proposal were made available to the public from Dalmilling Primary School, Heathfield Primary School, Ayr Academy and two South Ayrshire council buildings, located in the town of Ayr. The council held a public meeting, with 29 attendees, on 4 October 2023. At the meeting attendees asked a range of questions that representatives of the council responded to. Most questions related to whether the current educational experiences of children will be the same, if the ELF relocates.

Members of the public provided a total of 63 written representations to the council by email or through using the council's online form. Seventeen of the written responses were submitted by members of staff. About half of the responses received by staff were in favour of the proposal. Staff in favour of the proposal welcome the opportunity to include children with a range of needs in another school and the potential to access more facilities than currently available. Those in disagreement with the proposal cited concerns around safe transport drop off zones, unnecessary transition for children with additional support needs, challenges of joining a busy school, loss of identity and impact of the change on children settled within their current primary school location. The majority of the public respondents do not agree with the proposal to relocate the extended learning facility (ELF). A minority of public respondents were in favour of the move or had no preference where the ELF was located.

2.2 The council gathered the views of children at Dalmilling and Heathfield Primary Schools, in line with their consultation arrangements. Children expressed their worry about missing out on educational experiences at Dalmilling Primary School and losing friendships and relationships they have developed. However, children could articulate benefits they may experience as a result of the ELF changing. For example, they recognise the potential for more classroom and outdoor spaces and newer resources.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 South Ayrshire Council sets out a number of educational benefits for the relocation of the ELF at Dalmilling Primary School to Heathfield Primary School in its proposal. HM Inspectors agree with the council's statement that there are educational benefits for children to access a modern, purpose-built learning environment for children with additional support needs. However, it is the view of HM Inspectors that many of the proposed ELF learning environment's facilities are ones that children already benefit from in their current ELF. Additionally, children, their families and staff believe that the current ELF provides a safe, nurturing environment with appropriate outdoor spaces for children to learn in. Before the council reaches its final decision, HM Inspectors recommend that the council provide more detailed examples to parents of how relocating to Heathfield Primary School will enhance their child's experiences, when compared to the current facility.

3.2 South Ayrshire Council has identified correctly the need to consider how to accommodate a projected increase to the roll at Dalmilling Primary School. In doing so, HM Inspectors agree that the council is required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education. The council projections show an increased school roll at Dalmilling Primary School due to new affordable housing being built within catchment area. The current ELF at Dalmilling Primary School uses three classrooms and one sensory room. If the school roll does increase as projected, it is the view of HM Inspectors that there is no suitable classroom space for new children to learn in. Equally, there is no suitable classroom space within the school for children in the ELF to relocate to within the current school. Heathfield Primary School has a declining roll leaving many classrooms available. This provides the council with a reasonable option to relocate the ELF from Dalmilling Primary School to Heathfield Primary School. It is the view of HM Inspectors that this will ensure appropriate classroom space is available in Dalmilling Primary School for any future roll increases. Therefore, children moving into or living within the Dalmilling Primary School catchment area will be less likely to require external and temporary modular classrooms. This has potential educational benefit for children living within the Dalmilling Primary School catchment zone.

3.3 As children are selected by the local authority for attendance at the ELF, they may not be from the school catchment area. Therefore, the council provides transport for these children when accessing the ELF. During the public consultation period, stakeholders shared concerns regarding safe drop off of children attending the ELF if relocated to Heathfield Primary School. They noted

there will be an increase to traffic in the local area as a result. To reassure parents, HM Inspectors recommend that the council continue to take appropriate measures to ensure that pick-up and drop-off points are safe and accessible. The council should share these arrangements with parents, staff and relevant members of the local community.

3.4 The council has stated that if the proposal is agreed that transitions will be designed around the needs of all individuals through an extended process. If the proposal progresses, HM Inspectors recommend that the council continues with plans to undertake individualised transition planning for all children to make any move smooth and purposeful as possible. However, HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders that the proposal has potential to result in unnecessary transitions, specifically for those moving into P6 and P7 in August 2024. For these children, the council should work in partnership with children, their parents and appropriate agencies to ensure that there are no unnecessary transitions. This may mean that some children in P6 or P7 continue to be educated in Dalmilling Primary School until they move to secondary, in line with their needs.

3.5 The council places a strong emphasis on the positive impact the reallocation of the ELF will have on the Heathfield Primary School community. HM Inspectors agree that children with additional support needs will experience a very welcoming and inclusive school at Heathfield, similar to Dalmilling Primary School. There is potential for staff at Heathfield Primary School and staff from the ELF to share good practice across the school. This can build capacity and enhance planning to support all children across the Heathfield Primary School community. However, this gain for Heathfield Primary School has the potential to be a significant loss for Dalmilling Primary School. There is existing strong and inclusive links between staff in Dalmilling Primary School and the current ELF. They regularly share their knowledge and skills to enhance planning for all children. Children regularly access mainstream classrooms and join school activities. HM Inspectors recommend that the council works with staff to consider how to continue this practice if the ELF is reallocated.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there is a need to address the projected increase to the roll at Dalmilling Primary School. Heathfield Primary School has a roll below the capacity of school building, providing the council with a reasonable option to relocate the ELF from Dalmilling Primary School to Heathfield Primary School.

HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits for children to access a modern, purpose-built learning environment for children with additional support needs. However, if the council progresses with the proposal, it will be important that the council work with stakeholders to address their concerns. This includes that for children in P6 and P7, the council works in partnership with children, their parents and appropriate agencies to ensure that there are no unnecessary transitions. The council should provide more information to parents of how relocating to Heathfield Primary School will enhance their child's learning outcomes and experiences. The council should also take appropriate measures to ensure that pick-up and drop-off points are safe and accessible.

HM Inspectors
October 2023