

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

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Lanarkshire Council to relocate Willowbank School within St Margaret's High School campus.**

November 2019

## 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 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal to relocate Willowbank School within St Margaret's High School campus. 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 public meeting held on 8 October 2019 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; and
- visits to the sites of Willowbank School, St Margaret's High School and Cardinal Newman High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## 2. Consultation process

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

2.2 North Lanarkshire Council undertook the consultation between 18 September and 7 November 2019. Copies of the proposal document were made available at the three schools affected, placed in local libraries and council offices and on the council's website. A public meeting held in St Andrew's Community Centre on 8 October 2019 was attended by 18 people. Young people and staff at Willowbank School and St Margaret's High School were given the opportunity to discuss and provide their views on the proposal. The council received four written responses to the consultation of which two were opposed to the proposal, one was in favour and one was unsure. In addition, the council received a detailed response from St Margaret's High School Parent Council. This stated that the Parent Council had no objection in principle to the council's

proposal but raised a number of questions and concerns on the details of the proposal and its potential implementation.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal to relocate Willowbank School has the potential to be of educational benefit. In the recent past, Willowbank School operated across a split campus with the main building in Coatbridge and an annexe on the grounds of Cardinal Newman High School in Bellshill. In 2018, structural damage to the Coatbridge building required all Willowbank School pupils to be placed temporarily at Cardinal Newman High School. In June 2019, North Lanarkshire Council held a meeting with parents and pupils and proposed that S1 to S3 pupils at Willowbank School would be provided with accommodation at St Margaret's High School, Airdrie, whilst S4 to S6 pupils of Willowbank School would continue to follow a community based outreach curriculum from the annexe of Cardinal Newman High School. The council has identified that neither the Coatbridge site nor the annexe at Cardinal Newman High School are currently fit for purpose. Since August 2019, all Willowbank pupils and staff have been located within St Margaret's High School. The council proposes to permanently close both sites and permanently relocate all Willowbank School pupils within St Margaret's High School building from April 2020.

3.2 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal has the potential to provide staff and pupils of Willowbank School with much improved classroom space and facilities for learning and teaching including access to specialist space within St Margaret's High School for home economics, science, art, music and physical education. This has the potential to improve the curriculum for young people attending Willowbank School, including enhanced options for developing the young workforce. The council's proposal has the potential to enable greater flexibility in responding to the needs of individual young people within both specialist and mainstream learning environments. It will bring together all staff and young people in Willowbank School within one facility, enabling better staff planning and potentially enhanced transition between learning stages for young people. The council's proposal has the potential to be of some benefit to St Margaret's High School through enabling young people to engage in joint activities between the two co-located schools. There is the potential for staff to benefit from increased opportunities for joint professional learning and networking across the two schools.

3.3 The council's proposal paper states that, following the initial costs of the necessary adaptations, there will be no financial implications associated with its proposal. The proposed adaptations include an improved dedicated entrance area. The current dedicated entrance for Willowbank School pupils is a fire exit door at an unattractive area at the rear of the St Margaret's High School building. This does not fulfil the council's stated aspirations. The council should clarify its plans and include consideration of costs and outline of the process for taking stakeholder's views into account on the details of implementation.

3.4 During the consultation the council made reference to its wider review of Additional Support Needs provision when responding to points raised by parents on the focus and purpose of Willowbank School. A number of parents felt that clarity was needed on the particular support needs which Willowbank School will be meeting. The council will need to provide reassurance to parents that their points regarding clarity of purpose for the services provided by Willowbank School are considered.

3.5 Staff at both Willowbank School and St Margaret's High School who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal. Staff from Willowbank School agreed that they now had much improved space for learning and teaching. Staff in both schools were now beginning to work together, for example, de-escalation behaviour training had recently been provided. They saw potential for further joint work between pupil support teams. Some examples of young people

benefiting from the two schools working together were already in place including a few young people from St Margaret's taking part in a vocational learning opportunity through Willowbank School and a few young people from Willowbank School joining some mainstream classes at St Margaret's High School. However, staff at both schools had some concerns regarding the implementation of the council's proposal, particularly relating to the current configuration of accommodation for Willowbank School. Staff at Willowbank School saw a clear need to improve arrangements for a dedicated separate entrance which would be welcoming for pupils. They also regarded the need for pupils to be escorted to classroom space via a long and busy corridor and past a dining area as far from ideal for those pupils suffering anxiety. Staff at St Margaret's High School were concerned about a loss of access to a Millennium information and communications technology suite and felt that the way space was allocated and arranged could be improved. The council will need to consider these points in its final proposal paper. It will need to outline how stakeholders' views will be taken into account raised regarding the details of implementation. It will need to provide details including timescales for the provision of a fit for purpose, dedicated separate entrance for Willowbank School.

3.6 Most young people at Willowbank School who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal. Young people were enjoying access to better facilities and a few looked forward to further opportunities to join some mainstream classes at St Margaret's High School. A few young people felt that more could be done to bring the two schools together and help them fit in at St Margaret's High School. For example, they felt that having substantially different ties and uniforms from St Margaret's High School pupils was not helpful when accessing areas of the school or joining mainstream classes. Young people at St Margaret's High School welcomed the council's proposal and hoped that more would be done to create opportunities for pupils from both schools to get to know each other.

3.7 Most parents from Willowbank School who spoke to HM Inspectors supported the council's proposal. They thought the proposal was clearly beneficial and had already resulted in substantially improved classroom and other space. They agreed that the previous accommodation had not been fit for purpose. A few parents who spoke with HM Inspectors opposed the proposal and were of the view that the disruptive experience of moving between schools over the recent past had been detrimental to the wellbeing of some young people. They thought that the accommodation as currently configured within St Margaret's High School could add to pupils' anxieties and that a standalone facility would have been a better option.

3.8 The Parent Council of St Margaret's High School wrote a detailed response to the council's proposal stating that whilst it had no objection in principle to the council's proposal, parents had a number of concerns regarding its implementation and potential disadvantages to St Margaret's High School. Concerns and questions included the rationale for choosing St Margaret's High School over other schools, health and safety and risk assessment, traffic management, details of shared accommodation and potential impact on learning and attainment. Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors felt that the Parent Council had not received a sufficient response to the questions and concerns it had raised. The council will need to provide a response to questions and concerns in its final consultation paper.

3.9 The headteacher of Cardinal Newman High School supported the council's proposal and had no particular concerns. The representative of the Roman Catholic Church had no further comments to make following assurance received that the headteachers of the affected schools supported the proposal.

## 4. Summary

There are clear potential benefits to North Lanarkshire Council's proposal. Young people and staff will benefit from much improved space for learning and teaching. The proposal has the potential to extend learning opportunities for young people within both specialist and mainstream environments. The council should ensure that its aspirations within the proposal are supported by a detailed implementation plan. This should include specific details, including costings on its proposal to create a fit for purpose dedicated separate entrance for Willowbank School within St Margaret's High School campus. Staff and young people at both schools expressed concerns about some negative aspects of how the space allocated to Willowbank School is currently configured. They thought that arrangements could be improved. The council should demonstrate how staff and young people's views on the details of implementation will be considered and ensure that space made available to Willowbank School maximises the educational benefits and minimises any potentially negative effects. The council will need to provide a response to points raised by parents during the consultation.

**HM Inspectors  
November 2019**