

## **Consultation proposal by East Ayrshire Council**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to discontinue education provision at Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools with effect from June 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter, and transfer children attending these establishments to a new-build school establishment, with effect from August 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter. The council also proposes to associate Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools with Kilmarnock Academy and Hillhead Primary School with Grange Academy from August 2016.**

### **Context**

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. As the council is proposing to close a school, it will need to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 East Ayrshire Council proposes to close Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools in June 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter. If the proposal is implemented, children will transfer from Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools to a new-build primary school establishment at the start of session 2016/2017, or as soon as possible thereafter. Children from Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools will transfer to Kilmarnock Academy at the start of session 2016/2017, then transfer to the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus due to open in session 2017. For children who currently attend Bellfield Primary School and transfer to Grange Academy, this represents a change in their associated secondary school. The rezoning of children from Bellfield Primary School catchment for the start of session 2016/2017 will reduce the number of children transferring from P7 to Grange Academy. This change creates capacity for children who attend Hillhead Primary School, which is of a similar size, to transfer to Grange Academy. The council's proposal to change the associated secondary school for Hillhead Primary School to Grange Academy is in response to views expressed during the recent James Hamilton/Kilmarnock Academy consultation.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meetings held on 18th, 19th, 20th and 26th February 2014 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the sites of Bellfield, Kirkstyle and Hillhead Primary Schools, Grange Academy and Kilmarnock Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of Bellfield, Kirkstyle and Hillhead Primary Schools, Grange Academy and Kilmarnock Academy; 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

## **2. Consultation process**

2.1 East Ayrshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included five public meetings and an invitation for written submissions. The council received a total of 30 written responses to the proposal. East Ayrshire Council commissioned a consultant to seek the views of a sample of children at all five schools involved in the consultation.

2.2 Almost all parents of children attending Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools, who expressed a view to HM Inspectors, were positive about the proposal if the new primary school was built on the ground adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre. Parents felt this was the best option to bring both communities together. Although parents expressed concerns about traffic issues for all sites involved, they felt this would be more manageable at the site adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre.

2.3 Parents were very positive about the proposed improvements to the learning environment for their children. They felt the increased access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support learning and better sports facilities were beneficial. A few stakeholders from Kirkstyle Primary School expressed slight concern that the location of the new-build limited the regular access children had to the sports facilities at Ayrshire Athletics Arena.

2.4 Concerns raised by most parents from Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools, who met with HM Inspectors, were linked to the travel arrangements for children attending Kilmarnock Academy's successor secondary at the new-build Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus. They accept the council has plans to ensure a safe route to school. However, they highlighted the most direct route was via the main A77. They felt a few young people who walk to school may use this route to reduce their travel time.

2.5 Parents of children from Bellfield Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors, were very concerned about the rezoning of their children from the Grange Academy catchment area to Kilmarnock Academy and the successor secondary school at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus. They are very pleased with the reputation and education Grange Academy provides and could see no benefit from the rezoning.

2.6 Collated responses of children's views provided by the council, show the majority of children from Bellfield Primary School are either unsure of, or do not think the rezoning of Bellfield Primary School children to Kilmarnock Academy and the successor school at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus is a good idea.

2.7 Staff and parents highlighted concerns about the timescales for the completion of the Kilmarnock Academy successor secondary school at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus. They felt if timescales for the Kilmarnock Academy successor school were not adhered to then some children may have additional disruption moving to the new primary school, then to Kilmarnock Academy, then to the Kilmarnock Academy successor secondary school at the new-build Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus over a short period of time. They also expressed slight concern for the disruption for the children in the P7 cohort in 2015/2016. They felt the proposal may cause some disruption for them moving from their primary school to Kilmarnock Academy and then moving to its successor secondary school at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus.

2.8 Children from Kirkstyle Primary School were positive about the new primary school. They would prefer it was built on the ground adjacent to the Bellfield Community Centre. A number of children felt the pupil council could have more involvement in gathering the views of children in each class. They expressed slight concern that the gathering of views by pupil council members was not consistent across the whole school and some children's opinions may not have been heard.

2.9 Staff at Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools are very positive about the proposal to build the new primary school and early childhood centre at the site adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre. They expressed concerns about the fabric

of the building of both primary schools in their present condition. Support staff are positive about the proposal. However, they would welcome more information about timescales in relation to their jobs. They were unclear about the council's procedures to reallocate posts. Most felt there was a need for further discussion to alleviate uncertainty about their future employment.

2.10 Puddleducks Nursery is a partnership nursery situated in Bellfield Primary School. They are registered with the Care Inspectorate for 24 children. Staff at Puddleducks Nursery are positive about the proposal. They feel being included in the new primary as an early childhood centre will enable them to increase their roll.

2.11 Bluebell Playgroup and Bellfield After School Care have sole use of classrooms within Kirkstyle Primary School. They lease the premises through East Ayrshire Council and their services are managed independently. Both groups provide affordable childcare for children in the local community. Bluebell Playgroup is a voluntary organisation registered with the Care Inspectorate. They are registered for 20 children with approximately 45 children age two attending over the week. Playgroup staff expressed concerns that their provision was not considered in the new proposal. They highlighted the playgroup has been in operation for over twenty years and they benefit from a dedicated room in Kirkstyle Primary School and access to the outdoor area. They were aware the provision for two year old children within the new early childhood centre is for a small group of vulnerable children. Bluebell Playgroup staff are positive about the proposals and with appropriate facilities, felt they could enhance further the planned early years provision outlined within the proposal. However, they expressed concern that the new-build primary school may not provide them with the same quality of accommodation.

2.12 Bellfield After School Care provides wraparound care for children attending Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools. They have 45 children registered and provide daily childcare before and after school for children at Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools. Staff at the After School Care are positive about the new-build primary school at the site adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre. They are confident if they are given appropriate facilities they can extend their provision to support parents at the neighbouring Shortlees Primary School who no longer have wraparound care for school children.

2.13 Most children from Riccarton Early Childhood Centre transfer either to Bellfield Primary School or Kirkstyle Primary School. Staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal to build the new primary school. Parents were concerned that changes to the associated secondary for children who attend Bellfield Primary School would cause additional travelling time to school. Staff from Riccarton Early Childhood Centre expressed no concerns about the proposal. They plan to continue to work closely with staff at the new school to support transitions.

2.14 Bellfield Youth Football Club (BYFC) has around 160 young people who use the football pitch at Bellfield Community Centre. Representatives from BYFC highlighted their concerns that their service would be temporarily unavailable if the new primary school was built on the ground adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre.

2.15 All parents from Hillhead Primary School, who met with HM Inspectors, felt the proposal to rezone Grange Academy catchment area to include P7 children transferring from Hillhead Primary School was a response to the travel issues they raised in the previous James Hamilton/Kilmarnock Academy consultation. They continue to express concerns about safe routes and financial issues from the rezoning. It is their understanding that there is no direct bus route for some young people to Grange Academy. They felt the increased cost from taking two buses is an added financial issue in particular for the most vulnerable families. They also felt the council using an online method for gathering views about the proposal was a barrier for some families to participate.

2.16 A few parents of children attending Kilmaurs Primary School expressed concern about the proposal. They believe the information contained in paragraph 4.2 of the proposal outlining the Hillhead Primary School catchment area is inaccurate. They do not feel the council has consulted with them properly in accordance with the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

### **3. Educational aspects of the proposal**

3.1 East Ayrshire Council sets out clearly a number of educational benefits for children and young people should the proposal go ahead. This includes the council's commitment to making East Ayrshire a positive place to live by the creation of a modern learning environment created for the needs of the 21st Century. For example, children who currently attend Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools do not benefit fully from learning using ICT due to the infrastructure of the buildings. Children will benefit from improvements in the access to ICT.

3.2 The new school with an early childhood centre will help children develop to their full potential. The increased complement of staff will benefit from the existing approaches to furthering professional learning such as teacher learning communities across the early years and primary school. This will provide an enhanced model for continuing professional development. They plan to achieve this through professionals working collaboratively to develop a shared understanding of standards and expectations.

3.3 The proposal to create a new school with early years provision will support the council's objective to provide 600 hours per annum of early learning and care. The proposal does not make direct reference to Bluebells Playgroup. It does, however, refer to Riccarton Pre-5 group. The voluntary playgroup, registered with the Care Inspectorate provides affordable childcare for 20 two-year-old children. It is a well-used service by a wide group of families. The council states there will be no significant deterioration of community access to council premises. There is a need for the council to ensure: continuity of learning for children attending Bluebells Playgroup; effective communication by the council with Bluebells Playgroup; and effective liaison with Riccarton Early Childhood Centre who have a well-established professional links with both Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools.

3.4 The consultation proposal suggests the increased pupil population from the creation of the new school will attract greater staffing and resource allocation. For example, the East Ayrshire Support Team (EAST) will be better placed to allocate their time to benefit children with additional support needs.

3.5 The proposal states the council's view on the benefits for each of the communities through the building of the new school. They are mindful of the impact on parents and children's levels of anxiety on bringing together two schools. To address this, the council has set out a number of planned measures. These include arrangements for supporting the care and welfare of children during the transition to the new school. The council will build on the experience and strengths from its previous modernisation projects. A few children consulted had concerns about coming to physical harm when the two school communities join. The council needs to ensure it addresses children's concerns as early as possible to ensure all children are supported effectively through this process.

3.6 The proposal will lead to improved access to sports facilities through purpose-built outdoor facilities. These will offer children enhanced opportunities to become involved in sport. Kirkstyle Primary School children presently access a state-of-the-art sport facility at Ayrshire Athletics Arena to enhance physical education. In developing detailed plans for the new school, the council will wish to ensure that children continue to benefit from appropriate access to the Ayrshire Athletics Arena.

3.7 The council has made a sound case for securing best value. They propose that reduced revenue costs will alleviate pressure on the Education Service budget. Support staff who spoke to HM Inspectors need to be kept fully informed how implementation of the proposal will directly affect them as individuals.

3.8 The proposal sets out the educational benefit from rezoning Kilmarnock Academy to include Bellfield Primary School catchment when the new primary school opens. It is reasonable to expect there are benefits from an entire merged cohort transferring from the new primary school to the same secondary school. However, the council needs to provide reassurance to families if these arrangements lead to children from the same family attending different secondary schools.

3.9 The council needs to be clear how it will support transition arrangements for children to minimise disruption in their learning. This is particularly the case if the council does not meet the timescales for the completion of the buildings. If there are delays, some children may attend their existing primary school, the new-build primary school, Kilmarnock Academy and then its successor secondary school at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus in a very short period of time. The council also needs to clarify to parents if the rezoning of secondary schools will take place in August 2016 irrespective of the completion date of the new primary school.

3.10 The proposal takes account of the views expressed by parents during the recent James Hamilton/Kilmarnock Academy consultation. The council needs to continue to work with parents from Hillhead Primary School. In taking account of their concerns, there is a need for the council to clarify issues parents have raised with regard to safe routes to school, transport and travel arrangements.

3.11 The proposal does not set out clearly enough the involvement of community groups, including Bellfield After School Care, Bluebells Playgroup, Puddleducks Nursery and Bellfield Football Club. There is a need for the council to communicate effectively with community groups currently using the facilities to ensure continuity of learning.

3.12 A few parents of children who attend Kilmaurs Primary School expressed strong concern about the proposal. They do not feel they have been properly consulted in line with the council's duties under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. In its final consultation report, the council needs to ensure it has addressed these concerns.

#### **4. Summary**

4.1 The proposal for East Ayrshire Council to close Bellfield and Kirkstyle Primary Schools and build a new primary school has some clear educational benefits. Overall, children, parents and staff are very positive about the proposal, particularly if the new school is built on the ground adjacent to Bellfield Community Centre. The council needs to ensure transition arrangements support children effectively and alleviate the concerns of a few children about the two school communities joining together.

4.2 There is a need to ensure timely completion of building works and effective transition arrangements to minimise disruption for children transferring to the new secondary school at Kilmarnock Academy and its successor at the Sutherland Drive 3 to 18 campus.

4.3 In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure staff, children and parents are clear about timescales and the impact the proposal has on them as individuals. To date a number of support staff are not clear on timescales and implications for them as employees within the council.

4.4 Although there are minimal transport arrangements necessary arising from this proposal, there are a number of areas not yet addressed. Parents have a number of reasonable concerns. In its final consultation report, the council needs to address fully traffic management, transport and travel arrangements.