

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to the discontinuation of the Willowbank Primary School within the existing Willowbank School and its relocation to the current Onthank Campus and the establishment of an additional early years transition facility within the relocated Willowbank Primary School.

July 2022

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 East Ayrshire Council's proposal to the discontinuation of the Willowbank Primary School within the existing Willowbank School and its relocation to the current Onthank Campus and the establishment of an additional early years transition facility within the relocated Willowbank 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 2010 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; and 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 the public meeting held on 18 May 2022 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 site of Willowbank School and Onthank Campus, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The consultation period ran from 25 April 2022 until 9 June 2022. The consultation was advertised across a range of social media platforms. Electronic copies of the proposal were made available to consultees. Paper copies of the proposal were made available from council headquarters, Willowbank School, Onthank Primary School and Mount Carmel Primary School. Stakeholders were invited to attend the public meeting on 18 May 2022 using a video conferencing digital platform. This was in line with current government health advice. Officers shared a presentation outlining the proposal. They committed to answering questions from the 18 public attendees.

2.3 Almost all responses received during the consultation were strongly in support of the proposal. A few stakeholders sought reassurances that any new school building would have sufficient capacity for future growth in school roll. Children and young people from Willowbank School shared aspects of the school that are important to them.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Willowbank School is a specialist additional support needs (ASN) school. It is located in a modern and purpose built building, opened in 2013. This can be for children and young people identified as having severe and complex needs. All children and young people are in their primary or secondary school stages of education. The school provides education for children and young people across East Ayrshire. The proposal proposes to relocate the primary aged children to a new and purpose built early years and primary campus on the grounds of Onthank Primary School. This is to address the significant increase in children and young people requiring specialised additional support in Willowbank School.

3.2 HM Inspectors agree that the proposal to develop an early years and primary campus has strong potential educational benefits. The council originally predicted that the school would have a maximum of 50 children and young people attending. Since then, numbers of children and young people attending the school has approximately doubled. The school roll is currently nearing 100 pupils. As a result, the current building has had several modifications to accommodate the significant increase in school roll. This includes changing the use of specialist additional support rooms into general classroom spaces. A new building will alleviate the pressure on classroom and other learning spaces for all children and young people.

3.3 If the council moves forward with the proposal, a new and purpose built school has potential to significantly improve the availability of high-quality learning areas for all children. A new early years and primary campus has the possibility to reinstate the specialist additional support rooms for all pupils. These spaces will be important to meet individual needs ensuring dignity, high-quality additional support, emotional support and important work supported by allied health professionals.

3.4 Children and young people expressed their views on what aspects and areas of school are important and of value to them. These include: physical education spaces; gardening zones; quiet reflection areas; access to reading areas; things to walk and climb on; equipment to help children and young people be more independent; and a swimming therapy pool. Many of these areas in the current school are less accessible due to timetabling pressures. Should the proposal progress, there is greater capacity for children and young people to have access to these valued spaces more frequently. It is important for the council to include children, families and staff when designing a school building if the proposal progresses.

3.5 If the proposal does progress, children moving from primary to secondary will experience an additional transition. This has both benefits and risks. For some children, the transition will be a key step in continuing their independence, regulation and resilience skills as relationships change. For other children, they may find the loss of key relationships more challenging. The change of school building to a less familiar building will also present challenges for some children. It is essential that the council work closely with children, families and staff to ensure transitions are planned carefully and child-centred. They should work to reduce disruption where possible.

3.6 HM Inspectors agree that the introduction of an early years transition base has educational benefits. The specialised support and assessment proposed may provide younger children an improved transition to Primary 1. Children from across the authority with severe and complex needs would have potentially enhanced access to specialist resources and professionals. The

co-location of an early years transition base within the primary campus, may reduce unnecessary transitions for very young children. It provides potential for early years staff and primary staff to work closely to meet children's needs.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there is clear educational benefits in building an early years and primary campus for children attending Willowbank School. HM Inspectors agree that school roll capacity issues can be alleviated. An early years and primary campus has the potential to meet better the educational needs of all children and young people. In delivering an early years and primary campus there is an opportunity to reintroduce the range of indoor and outdoor education spaces that have been diminished since 2013. Where possible, the council should ensure the proposed early years and primary campus meets potential future increases to the school roll of Willowbank School. HM Inspectors recommend that children and young people are active participants in the design of the proposed new campus.

Careful consideration must be given to children and young people currently attending or likely to attend Willowbank School. Their access to high-quality learning and teaching opportunities should not be diminished while waiting for a new early years and primary campus to be opened. The council should provide reassurance to children, young people, families and staff of how they plan to meet additional support needs during this interim period.

HM Inspectors
July 2022