

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

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Lanarkshire Council to make changes to distance thresholds for mainstream home to school transport.**

May 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 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal to make changes to distance thresholds for mainstream home to school transport. 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 five public meetings held on 15 March, 16 March, 28 March, 29 March and 30 March 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- visits to the site of All Saints Primary School (PS), Cathedral PS, Cumbernauld PS, St Patrick's PS and Stepps PS, Coatbridge High School (HS), Clyde Valley HS, Our Lady's HS and St Aidan's HS, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- discussion with relevant consultees, including representatives from the Archdiocese of Glasgow, the Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh and the Diocese of Motherwell.

## 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 The council undertook the consultation between 27 February and 28 April 2023. The council published information on the proposal on its website and provided leaflets, summarising key points, which were distributed at the public meetings. The council created an online survey for

stakeholders to provide their views on the proposal. Written responses were also accepted by letter or email. North Lanarkshire Council held nine public meetings, council officers attended these meetings to discuss the proposal and to answer questions from attendees. A total of 101 stakeholders attended these public meetings.

2.3 Three thousand eight hundred and twenty-eight stakeholders submitted responses using the online survey. Most of these responses were submitted by parents and carers. A few responses were submitted by children and young people, representatives of Parent Councils, staff and other local residents. North Lanarkshire Council received 24 additional submissions by email. A further two representations were made directly to Education Scotland. Most of the respondents who completed the survey said that they would be directly affected by the proposal.

2.4 Almost all stakeholders who engaged with the consultation process are not in favour of the proposal. Approximately 2% of the respondents identified themselves as school pupils and most of them are not in favour of the proposal. Almost all parents and carers are opposed to the proposal. A few education staff in the local authority submitted responses, and most are not in favour of the proposal.

2.5 Overall, respondents expressed concerns about the safety of the proposed walking routes to school. They are worried about the proximity of some routes to busy roads and a lack of suitable crossing places. A minority of respondents commented that there was no public transport serving their address, or that the services available did not coincide with school day timings. A minority of respondents commented that the proposal, if implemented, would lead to greater traffic congestion, since parents may choose to drive their children to school. A minority commented that this may lead to higher levels of carbon emissions, which the proposal hopes to reduce. A minority of respondents commented that the proposal may lead to challenges for families, especially for working parents who may find it difficult to arrange to walk or drive their children to school. A few respondents are concerned about the physical demands of the longer walking routes, especially in inclement weather. They are concerned this may impact negatively on their child's attendance, success in school or their ability to participate in after-school activities.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 North Lanarkshire Council sets out in its proposal the current financial pressures it faces. To help tackle these pressures, the council outlines proposed changes to their home to school transport arrangements to provide transport for:

- any primary pupil who lives more than two miles from their catchment school by the nearest acceptable walking route; and
- any secondary pupil who lives more than three miles from their catchment school by the nearest acceptable walking route.

The council plans to introduce this change to secondary pupils from August 2024 and primary pupils from August 2025. If the council proceeds with the proposal, it will still meet expectations set out in the Scottish Government's School Transport Guidance 2021. The council states that if it proceeds with the proposal, it will help protect school budgets from further savings. The council may wish to provide additional information on the impact of not proceeding with the proposal in its final report.

3.2 The council's proposal outlines a variety of educational benefits for children and young people that will be affected. These include encouraging wider participation in active travel options such as walking or cycling and to promote the benefits of active and healthy choices. The proposal sets out that encouraging physical activity can have a positive impact on mental health and

wellbeing. Most children, young people, parents and staff that met with HM Inspectors agree that there are potential health and wellbeing benefits from active travel to and from school. However, HM Inspectors consider that it may be challenging for all the educational benefits outlined in the proposal to be achieved. HM Inspectors recommend that the council provides clearer evidence to support the proposal before they make a final decision.

3.3 If the council proceeds with the proposal, it estimates that around 37.5% of pupils (3,000) currently receiving free school transport would be affected. The number of school bus routes would be reduced to accommodate those pupils who would remain entitled. This would also reduce school transport to pupils who receive privilege passes from the council. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors raised concerns about the frequency, reliability and affordability of current public transport services. A few stakeholders indicated there are areas where there is no public bus service. They are concerned that there is not the capacity to cope with a potential increase in demand for travel to and from school. HM Inspectors agree that this is a concern. Almost all stakeholders disagree that the proposal will reduce carbon emissions. They believe the number of cars being used to transport children and young people to and from school will increase, which may have negative environmental impacts.

3.4 The School Transport Guidance 2021 sets out that parents remain responsible for their children's journey to and from school. However, most stakeholders are concerned that the proposed change in distance is too much, particularly for younger children. They expressed concern about the safety of the proposed walking routes, particularly in inclement weather across all seasons. A minority of stakeholders raised concerns about long walks while carrying a large school bag and heavy equipment, such as musical instruments. Almost all children, young people and parents that met with HM Inspectors felt they need additional information about the criteria used to determine acceptable walking routes. Most stakeholders raised concerns about the speed of traffic on busy roads and the lack of safe crossing places and crossing patrols. Almost all stakeholders noted issues with street lighting and narrow paths, and most noted the lack of cycle routes in the local authority area. If the proposal is agreed, the council should work with stakeholders to ensure safe routes to school.

3.5 Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe the proposal may negatively impact on attendance and attainment. They are concerned that the reduced transport to school may lead to an increase in arriving late to school or absenteeism. If the proposal is agreed, the council will need to monitor any change in attendance and address any negative impact. Most stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe the proposal could impact negatively on wellbeing with, for example, children and young people having anxiety about using and availability of public buses. The majority of stakeholders HM Inspectors met are concerned about the potential negative impact on children and young people accessing activities after school. A majority of stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe children and young people would need to get up earlier and may get less sleep and miss breakfast. They are concerned this may affect their mood, readiness to learn and ability to concentrate in school. A few believed this may lead to an increase in disruptive behaviour in school.

3.6 The majority of stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors highlighted that they are concerned that the proposal disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged families. While they are positive about the Young Scot Under 22 travel, many noted that younger children may need to be accompanied by an adult on public transport, which would incur additional costs for families. A few stakeholders are concerned about the impact on working families, as working routines, access to childcare or employment may be affected. A few secondary pupils noted they have part-time jobs that start after school. They are concerned that the additional travel time may negatively impact on their employment. A few stakeholders noted the importance of considering the needs of young carers to identify factors that may cause them to be late to school. Almost all stakeholders

that met with HM Inspectors believe there would be a need to purchase additional clothing for the wet weather conditions, which families may not be able to fund. A few parents noted the importance of the council undertaking a children's rights and wellbeing impact assessment. HM Inspectors recommend that the council continues to work with stakeholders to undertake and share information on impact assessments.

3.7 HM Inspectors met with church representatives from the Archdiocese of Glasgow, the Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh and the Diocese of Motherwell. They do not support the proposal. They noted concerns that the proposal may negatively impact on baptised children and young people's right to access education in a Roman Catholic school. They note that the catchment area for Roman Catholic schools is usually larger and there may be non-denominational schools closer to home. As a result, they believe the proposed changes restrict rights to an accessible Roman Catholic education. Almost all parents of children attending a denominational school are not in favour of the proposal. A few parents from a Roman Catholic faith that live out with North Lanarkshire, but whose children attend school within the authority, are concerned that their views are not being adequately represented. HM Inspectors recommend that the council works closely with the Dioceses and families from denominational schools to alleviate their concerns prior to making its final decision.

## 4. Summary

North Lanarkshire Council has identified the need to make financial savings through aligning their school transport arrangements more closely with the School Transport Guidance 2021. They state that this will protect school budgets from further savings. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal is in line with national guidance and statutory walking distances. However, almost all stakeholders raised notable concerns. These include information about adequate walking routes and the capacity of public transport to meet any increase in demand. They are concerned that the proposal may disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged families. Stakeholders are also concerned about the potential negative impact on attendance at school and on attainment and achievement. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential benefits through wider participation in active travel. However, HM Inspectors do not agree that the council have sufficiently set out the potential educational benefits that may help address concerns expressed by stakeholders. It will be important for the council to review walking routes and any changes in traffic to ensure safe routes to school. Should this proposal be agreed then the council should work with stakeholders to help mitigate their concerns.

**HM Inspectors**  
**May 2023**