

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Midlothian Council to discontinue primary education provision at St Margaret's RC Primary School with effect from 1 July 2022.

November 2021

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 Midlothian Council's proposal to discontinue primary education provision at St Margaret's RC Primary School with effect from 1 July 2022. 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 and young people of the school; 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 12 October 2021 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
- online visits to the sites of Loanhead Primary School, Paradykes Primary School, Sacred Heart RC Primary School, St David's RC High School, St Margaret's RC Primary School, St Mary's RC Primary School, St Matthew's RC Primary School, and Treehouse Additional Support Needs provision, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 Midlothian Council undertook a statutory consultation, which ran from 28 September until 16 November 2021. Information was provided to stakeholders including parents of children attending St Margaret's RC Primary School, St Mary's RC Primary School, St Matthew's RC Primary School, Sacred Heart RC Primary School, and St David's RC High School. Details of the

consultation were published in the local newspaper and on the Midlothian Council website. Details were also available at Loanhead Library. A public meeting was held on 12 October 2021 and a virtual public meeting was scheduled for 13 October 2021. There were no attendees at the public meeting and no stakeholders indicated that they wished to join the virtual meeting. The council received 68 written responses to the proposal. Thirty responses approved of the proposal and 38 responses objected to it.

2.3 The council proposes to discontinue primary education provision at St Margaret's RC Primary School with effect from 1 July 2022. This is due primarily to the school's roll declining considerably over recent years. Only two pupils attended St Margaret's RC Primary School at the start of the 2021-22 school year. Subsequently, these pupils moved to another school.

2.4 The council has experienced considerable recruitment challenges at St Margaret's RC Primary School over recent years. These have included being unable to recruit a Roman Catholic (RC) headteacher. The council has worked well with representatives from the RC Church to try to ensure appropriate staffing in the school. However, it has had limited success with this. Midlothian Council undertook a review of its denominational school provision in 2019, prompted by a national shortfall in the availability of teachers with the necessary approval to teach in RC schools. The review led to the council committing to maintain six RC primary schools and one RC secondary school in Midlothian.

2.5 Subject to the outcomes of the consultation exercise, the council proposes to extend the catchment areas of St Mary's RC Primary School, St Matthew's RC Primary School and Sacred Heart RC Primary School to include the St Margaret's RC Primary catchment area. Pupils at St Margaret's RC Primary School, of which there are currently none, would be allocated a place at St Mary's RC Primary School or be able to attend their non-denominational catchment primary school. St Mary's RC Primary School and the non-denominational primary schools in the catchment are suitably equipped, and situated within 4.2 miles of St Margaret's RC Primary School. The council would provide school transport for children without a safe walking route to school and children who would need to travel more than two miles from home to school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council believes rightly that there would be a number of potential educational benefits for children should the proposal be accepted. Children from St Margaret's RC Primary School would be able to experience a broader range of learning experiences, in which they could interact with a larger group of peers at their age and stage. Children would also be able to take part in team activities, move with their peers to secondary school and benefit from daily interactions with a larger denominational peer group. This is likely to help them develop important friendships, improve their confidence and wellbeing, and nurture their faith development.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors said they did not have strong feelings about the proposal. Most stakeholders understand the council's rationale for proposing to discontinue primary education provision at St Margaret's RC Primary School due to it having no pupils currently. A few stakeholders expressed sadness about the proposed closure. They noted that, if the closure goes ahead, they would want to celebrate the previous successes of St Margaret's RC Primary School. A few children said that, although they enjoyed their time at St Margaret's RC Primary School, they are happy and well supported in the schools they now attend. One parent expressed discontent about the proposed closure, expressing that the council could have tried different strategies to maintain or strengthen the school roll.

3.3 Many parents praised St Margaret's RC Primary School in their written responses to the council. They said that it catered well for children with additional support needs due to its size, and

that its small class sizes were beneficial. Parents were mixed in their views about pupil experiences in composite classes at St Margaret's RC Primary School. A few parents indicated that they had moved their children from St Margaret's RC Primary School because they were afraid of the school closing. Other parents highlighted the staffing challenges faced by the school.

3.4 The Archdiocese of Edinburgh expressed regret on behalf of the Catholic Church that the council proposes to close St Margaret's RC Primary School. The Archdiocese would prefer all Catholic schools in Midlothian to be kept open and viable. However, church representatives acknowledge that no pupils attend St Margaret's currently and, as a result, the school may no longer be viable.

4. Summary

4.1 The council provides a strong case for the proposed discontinuation of primary education provision at St Margaret's RC Primary School with effect from 1 July 2022. If the proposal is implemented, HM Inspectors consider that the proposal has the potential to support the council in providing high-quality denominational provision across six RC primary schools. This would include St Mary's RC Primary School, the neighbouring denominational primary school. St Mary's RC Primary School would provide children from St Margaret's RC Primary School with a wide range of experiences and outcomes linked to Curriculum for Excellence, and increased opportunities for success. It would also help children to develop social relationships more easily with their peers.

4.2 In its final report, the council should outline more clearly the considerable work it has engaged in with the Catholic Church to try to remedy the previous staffing challenges at St Margaret's RC Primary School.

**HM Inspectors
November 2021**