

Consultation proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to construct a new Our Lady and St Patrick's High School, Dumbarton on the site currently occupied by the high flats in Bellsmyre, Dumbarton.

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.

1. Introduction

1.1 West Dunbartonshire Council proposes to re-locate educational provision from the existing Our Lady and St Patrick's High School to a new school building on the site currently occupied by the high flats in Bellsmyre, Dumbarton. The council proposes to open the new school in August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter. Previously the council consulted on a proposal to rebuild the new school either on the current site or at a site called Postie's Park in Dumbarton but after consultation it decided not to proceed with either location and charged the council officers to explore other potential sites.

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 meeting held on 26 March 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 representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal, including additional information provided by the council; and
- visits to the current and proposed site of Our Lady and St Patrick's High School and all of its associated primary schools in West Dunbartonshire including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 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
- 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 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook the initial consultation on these proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included the children and families of those children currently at Our Lady and St Patrick's High School and its associated primary schools. There were only 55 responses to the consultation proposal.

2.2 The proposal to build a new school is welcomed by all stakeholders who responded to the consultation and met with HM Inspectors. They recognise that the school is the only secondary school yet to be rebuilt within the council area. They all feel strongly that young people who attend, and will attend, Our Lady and St Patrick's High School are entitled to high quality facilities and an attractive learning environment equivalent to those available for all other young people of secondary school age in West Dunbartonshire Council. Representative groups of parents and children from Our Lady and St Patrick's High School and the eight associated primary schools, who met with HM Inspectors, are positive and excited about the provision of a new secondary school for the area. They appreciate that it has the potential to lead to a much improved environment for learning, including improved physical education facilities, outdoor space and internal social

spaces. Staff believe it has the potential to boost the morale of all connected with the school and provide a much needed improvement to facilities.

2.3 Almost all of the small number of stakeholders who responded to the consultation, including church representatives and residents of the wider community of Dumbarton, most of whom live furthest from the proposed site, have a range of concerns about the proposed location of the new school on the site of the high flats at Bellsmyre, Dumbarton. These include concerns about pupil safety in walking to and from the new school, the requirement for a much larger proportion of the school's population to be crossing the busy A82 on a daily basis, the close proximity of electricity pylons to the rear of the proposed site and the possible asbestos contamination of the site resulting from the demolition of the high flats. Other concerns focus on the significant likelihood of increased traffic congestion in the area due to the planned co-location of two primary and two early years' centres close by and difficulties around accessibility to the proposed site. Respondee who live closest to the proposed site are in favour of siting the new school at Bellsmyre. They recognise potential benefits of implementation of the proposal with regards to the regeneration it would bring to that part of Dumbarton. Staff and parents of St Peter's Primary School perceive significant benefits for children given the close proximity of the soon to be built co-located primary and early years' campus.

2.4 Most staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors, raised concerns that young people's involvement in after school activities may decline given the increased distance that the majority of young people will have to travel. Currently the school caters for a large number of after school clubs providing significant benefits to the school community. Most teaching staff who met with HM Inspectors, raised concerns about the possibility that the attainment and attendance of some of the most vulnerable young people will also decline, given similar concerns about travel and the likelihood of reduced commitment to after school supported study classes. Staff consider these classes to be a critical element of its proud and very positive attainment record. Most staff and some parents who met with HM Inspectors, raised concerns about the potential negative impact of the proposal on those families who have no access to a car and the risk that this may have a detrimental impact on their willingness to become involved in the life of the school.

2.5 While the scoring matrix used by the council to identify the best site was explained in the appendix of the consultation proposal paper and at the public consultation meeting, a significant number of consultees felt that the scoring exercise was a flawed process. They did not feel that the overall weightings of the particular factors were clear. Almost all staff and parents, who met with HM Inspectors, raised concerns about the speed at which the current process has taken place and what they believe to be a lack of detail in the proposal paper and the plan of the proposed location of facilities and buildings.

2.6 Almost all young people, who met with HM Inspectors, currently attending Our Lady and St Patrick's High School are concerned about the lack of outdoor sports facilities on the proposed site in comparison to other recently built secondary schools. They are also of the view that some young people and their parents may choose not to travel the longer distance to the proposed school and instead choose

to access educational provision closer to their home to avoid the increased cost and time associated with traveling to and from the proposed site on a daily basis. Some young people and staff are disappointed that the planned new-build will not have a swimming pool.

2.7 Some children from Argyll and Bute are currently within the catchment area for Our Lady and St Patrick's High School and are provided with transport. While the proposal paper makes it clear that there is no plan to change this arrangement, parents, staff, pupils and church representatives are concerned that some of those young people, who currently choose to attend the school, will no longer do so because of the increased travel involved.

2.8 Some of the stakeholders, including more than a few young people, are concerned about the environmental impact of the proposal given the likelihood that many more young people than presently will be required to travel by bus or car to the proposed site on a daily basis. Train travel will be less likely. Residents of Bellsmyre will lose access to a grass area well used by the local community should the proposal go ahead. Many stakeholders express frustration at the delay in agreeing a suitable location.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The proposal to relocate Our Lady and St Patrick's High School into a new and up-to-date building has significant educational benefits for young people, including access to better quality sports facilities. Although some stakeholders have expressed concerns about the proposed location, the educational benefits for young people far outweigh these concerns. The existing building has major and serious shortcomings and does not provide suitable or appropriate accommodation for effective learning and teaching. The current building has a number of significant ongoing maintenance issues. These include poor heating, water ingress, flat leaking roofs, damp penetration, inconsistent and ineffective heating, poor soundproofing, ruptured flooring, draughty windows, limited internal social space and a lack of outdoor space and sport facilities. Maintenance of the current building incurs significant revenue costs for the council in making the building safe, secure and watertight. Presently there is significant under-occupancy of the current school building. The size of the current site means that there are limited outdoor facilities on site and this reduces the opportunities for physical education, school sport, physical activity and outdoor learning. The existing outdoor all-weather pitch is often out of use due to poor drainage. Part of the current building is presently closed to young people due to concerns over the condition of the walls and pupil safety.

3.2 Implementation of the proposal will enable the council to make long-term savings. These will result from reduced maintenance costs and more efficient running costs associated with the new building. These will help the council to secure best value and will be of potential benefit to other children and young people across the council.

3.3 Our Lady and St Patrick's High School is well-used by the local community with a number of individuals and local organisations making use of the school's facilities in the evenings and at weekends. The new school will provide higher quality facilities for use by members of the community.

3.4 The council has taken appropriate and reasonable steps to identifying another site for the new school. While the council has considered a number of possible sites, stakeholders have some concerns with regard to the location of the school on the Bellsmyre site. These are set out in Section 2 of this report. During the course of the consultation the council began to address these concerns. The council needs to set out the actions it has taken in its final report. In taking forward the proposal, the council now needs to ensure that it continues to engage effectively with parents, young people and other stakeholders in addressing their concerns and keeping them fully informed.

3.5 Stakeholders have some reasonable concerns about vehicular access to the proposed site given the close proximity of the proposed new joint primary and co-located early years campus nearby. The council needs to ensure it takes appropriate steps to manage safely the increased volume of traffic in this area particular at peak times. It is noted that the new-build is anticipated to open at the same time as the co-located primary and early years centre nearby. The council needs to reassure parents and residents of the steps it will take to ensure the safety of all stakeholders during the busy building phase and the associated increase in construction traffic.

3.6 Children currently attending St Peter's Primary School are already involved in decanting to temporary accommodation in connection with another proposed new build school. As a result, children will experience significant additional disruption to their school experience over the next few years, due to an increased number of transitions as a result of these proposals. The council needs to ensure that it puts in place appropriate arrangements to support these children and their parents in the lead up to, during and beyond these times of transition to minimise the risk of any possible adverse impact on children's education.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal to build a new Our Lady and St Patrick's High School is welcomed by stakeholders. While most of the small number who responded to the consultation expressed concerns about the proposed site, the educational benefits of implementation of the proposal for young people outweigh these concerns. The provision of education in a new purpose-built school provides a number of significant educational benefits including addressing a number of potential health and safety concerns for young people in the current accommodation. The council has given due consideration to a range of possible sites. All of the considered sites present potential difficulties. Although there are some potential shortcomings with the Bellsmyre site, it is the most reasonable option available to the council. In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to ensure that it addresses the concerns of stakeholders with regard to traffic management, vehicular access, accessibility of the site, young people's safety and the access for young people and the wider

community to the outdoor sports facilities. In doing so, it needs to ensure it consults and communicates effectively with staff, children, young people, parents and the wider community in order to engage them fully in the future planning and design stages of the proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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