

Consultation proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to discontinue educational provision at the existing Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and at Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres and to establish a new educational campus on the current St Peter's Primary School site comprising co-located new build replacements for Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and a new Early Education and Childcare Centre to replace Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres.

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 West Dunbartonshire Council proposes to discontinue educational provision at the existing Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and at Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres and to establish a new educational campus on the current St Peter's Primary School site comprising co-located new build replacements for Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and a new Early Education and Childcare Centre to replace Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres. The council proposes temporary arrangements to decant the pupils and staff of St Peter's Primary School to Aitkenbar Primary School and the children and staff of St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centre to hatted accommodation on the Aitkenbar Primary campus during the construction period of the new campus. The council proposes to open the new campus in January 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

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:

- 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; and
- visits to the sites of Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and the sites of Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the Aitkenbar and St Peter's Primary Schools and Andrew B Cameron and St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centres (EECCs); 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 its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a public meeting.

2.2 The majority of stakeholders who responded to the council's consultation were in favour of the council's proposals for the new campus.

2.3 Parents of children at St Peter's Early Education and Childcare Centre (EECC) and Andrew B Cameron Early Education and Childcare Centre (EECC) who met with HM Inspectors were very pleased with the existing provision. They had strong concerns about the size of the proposed roll of the merged EECC. They felt that the community ethos which their children enjoyed within the existing smaller establishments would be lost within a much larger EECC and that their children might feel less confident. Some parents were also concerned about the increased

distance for many parents and grandparents to travel to the new campus and the lack of public transport in the area.

2.4 Staff at St Peter's EECC and Andrew B Cameron EECC also expressed strong concerns about the proposed merger of the two nurseries. They recognised that a new build would have potential for an improved environment and resources. However, they felt that it would be more difficult to get to know children and families within a larger establishment and to meet the needs of vulnerable children. They had reservations about the proposal for shared facilities with the two primary schools and were concerned about the practical arrangements to provide pre-school children with access to a shared gym hall, taking into account the combined rolls of the schools and the new EECC. Staff at St Peter's EECC were concerned about the arrangements to decant into huddled accommodation whilst the new site was being prepared. They were uncertain about how they could transfer all their resources. They were also apprehensive about staffing issues in relation to the management of the proposed EECC.

2.5 Children at St Peter's Primary School and Aitkenbar Primary School were pleased with the council's proposal. They felt that they would be able to meet new friends and enjoyed the joint work with each other which their schools had already undertaken, for example, in relation to sports activities. They looked forward to having more outdoor resources.

2.6 Parents of children at St Peter's Primary School were generally in favour of the council's proposals. However, they felt that the council had not provided sufficient detail about their plans and design. They hoped that their views would be taken into account in the design preparation. They expressed strong feelings about the importance of each school retaining their individual identity.

2.7 Parents of children at Aitkenbar Primary School were very positive about the council's proposal. They felt that the shared campus would benefit their children and that it would assist in building community ethos.

2.8 Staff at Aitkenbar Primary School and St Peter's Primary School were generally pleased with the council's proposal. They recognised the benefits of a new build and were in favour of the shared campus. They welcomed the opportunity to build upon the anti-sectarian and other collaborative work which they had already established successfully. Both groups of staff were concerned about the practical arrangements for decanting St Peter's Primary School into Aitkenbar Primary School. They were positive about working together to resolve any difficulties associated with the decant.

2.9 Representatives of the Catholic Church were pleased that there would be educational benefits associated with a new build for St Peter's Primary School. They requested that the council take account of guidance which had been issued by the Catholic Education Commission in relation to shared campus arrangements (Planning for the School Estate Shared Campus Arrangements, Appendix 3. January 2010) and to be involved in all steps in the process.

2.10 Stakeholders from the four establishments affected by the proposal expressed reservations about the capacity of the new campus to accommodate the potential number of children and the ensuing difficulties of access, safety and parking.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council has recognised the need to address under-occupancy in the two primary schools and provide modern, fit-for-purpose accommodation to replace the existing buildings at St Peter's Primary School, Aitkenbar Primary School, St Peter's EECC and Andrew B Cameron. The facilities will require to accommodate 110 three and four year old children (for morning and afternoon sessions) and 200 children in each of the two primary schools, taking into account a projected rise in primary school rolls. The council anticipates that any placing requests can be accommodated within the proposed capacity of the two primary schools. It will be important for the council to consider further how it will address the operational management of the campus in relation to shared facilities such as the dining hall, gym, play areas and site access.

3.2 Both primary schools have experienced the effects of vandalism on their buildings and outdoor area. The council proposes that the new campus will provide safe and secure outdoor environments capable of being developed by staff and children for environmental and outdoor learning.

3.3 St Peter's Primary School and Aitkenbar Primary School already have well-established links and have worked successfully together, for example, on anti-sectarian initiatives. The co-location of the two schools would provide further opportunities for professional dialogue among staff and collaborative working among children in relation to specific initiatives.

3.4 The council's plans for inclusion of the EECC in the shared campus would provide further opportunities for enhancing liaison and build upon curriculum links and transition from nursery to primary. There is scope for the council to provide parents and staff with sufficient information and reassurance about how the needs of their children would be met effectively within a much larger establishment. It will be important to consider how the plans can provide a welcoming, nurturing and safe environment for children.

3.5 The council has asserted that the two primary schools and the EECC will continue to operate as separate establishments. It will be important that the council's plans ensure equality of opportunity for all children within the campus.

4. Summary

4.1 The council provides a sound case for a shared campus for Aitkenbar Primary School and St Peter's Primary School. This option would provide best value financially. It would benefit the children and young people of the two schools who would have access to improved facilities and outdoor spaces. The two primary schools already have well-established links and would be able to develop further collaborative initiatives.

4.2 The co-location of the EECC would provide potential opportunities for further curricular liaison between nursery and primary and enhance transition. Taking into account that the combined rolls of the two primary schools and the new EECC could potentially reach 500, the council needs to give further consideration to the operational management of the campus in relation to shared facilities. Should the proposals go ahead, the council will need to ensure that the shared facilities provide each school with appropriate opportunities including for physical education, assemblies, celebrations, religious observance, parent and staff meetings and professional development. The council needs to continue to work in consultation with staff and parents in taking forward the design of the campus,

4.3 Parents of children at Andrew B Cameron EECC and St Peter's EECC are generally opposed to the council's proposal to merge the two EECCs, mainly because of the size of the proposed roll of the new EECC and the distance which some children will need to walk. There is scope for the council to consider further how the needs of all young children will be met within a larger establishment. Parents need more information and assurance about how their children's education would be improved. The council will need to take account of Care Inspectorate requirements in relation to staffing.

4.4 Parents expressed concerns about the risk to children's safety as a result of the increased traffic at the new site. The council needs to provide an early indication of how it intends to ensure safety and effective traffic management.

4.5 The council have asserted that the two primary schools will continue to operate as separate establishments and that there will be further discussions with the Archdiocese of Glasgow to ensure that the plans for the co-location of the two schools are in accordance with the Catholic Church's protocols for a shared campus. It will be important for the council to work in partnership with the Archdiocese to assure parents that the design of the building will support the school to continue their children's education within a faith-based setting.

4.6 Stakeholders were generally concerned about the arrangements to decant St Peter's Primary School into Aitkenbar Primary School and to provide temporary accommodation for St Peter's EECC. If the council's proposals go ahead, there is a need for detailed planning to ensure that the education of pupils at the two primary schools and St Peter's EECC is maintained at a high standard and that the transition arrangements progress smoothly.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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