



Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to review the placing request criteria for mainstream schools (primary and secondary).

May 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 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to review the placing request criteria for mainstream schools (primary and secondary). 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; 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 virtual public meeting held on 16 March 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
- virtual visits to Bonhill Primary, Clydebank High School, Gavinburn Primary, Our Lady and St Patrick Secondary, St Mary's Duntocher Primary, St Michael's Primary, St Peter the Apostle Secondary, St Stephen's Primary and Vale of Leven Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire 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 16 May 2020 and 31 March 2021. The initial end date was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Advertisements were placed in the local newspapers and through social media platforms and copies of the proposal document were made available through the council's website. Four virtual public meetings were held which were attended by a total of one person. An online survey tool which asked a series of questions and invited additional comments was used to enable stakeholders to respond to the proposal.

2.3 The council received 175 responses to its online survey. The survey asked stakeholders to reflect on each proposed criteria for the allocation of school places and whether they agreed with individual proposals rather than the proposed changes in their entirety. Most respondents expressed agreement with the council's proposed approach to offering more transparency and fairness over the allocation of placing requests.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Over the past two years, West Dunbartonshire Council has been unable to grant all received placing requests. These proposed changes to the policy seek to make the process of allocating placing requests more accessible and clearer to all. The proposed changes establishes a list of ranked criteria with school places being allocated to children and young people who meet the criteria ranked highest. Places will then be allocated according to the next criteria on the list until places are exhausted. The council also seeks to clearly define criteria to ensure children or young people and parents understand whether the criteria will apply to them. The council has also offered further information about proof of residency documentation required and possible checks that the council may use to confirm the information provided. HM Inspectors believe these steps will be of educational benefit because it will allow parents to make informed decisions about their child's education and ensure places are allocated in a fair, transparent and consistent manner.

3.2 Stakeholders who responded to the consultation were generally positive about the council's proposal. A few highlighted concerns about the ranking of criteria and believed that the order should be reviewed to offer more importance to particular circumstances, such as siblings attending the same school or travel distance to establishments. The council should review this feedback before making final decisions relating to the ranking.

3.3 Staff, young people and Parent Council representatives who met with HM Inspectors, recognised the value of the council offering a clear, systematic approach to allocating placing requests. Staff and Parent Council representatives discussed the need for greater clarity in the description of some of the criteria. For example, a criteria relates to children and young people with medical conditions who require specific facilities or support. Stakeholders would like further clarity on whether this extends to children and young people with additional support needs. Council leaders should review the language used for criteria to ensure clarity for all. Parents also requested that the policy is written in Plain English to support transparency and accessibility.

3.4 The council received a written submission from the Archdiocese of Glasgow. It was supportive of the proposal and welcomed the distinction between admission priorities for non-denominational and denominational schools being made. It requested clarity in the language used within the policy in relation to placing requests to a denominational school. The wording states that as well as providing a baptismal certificate, parents should also hold the same religious beliefs as the school. The Archdiocese of Glasgow wants to ensure all children and young people who are practicing Roman Catholics are not disadvantaged if their parents do not hold the same religious beliefs. As stated above, council leaders should review the language used in the criteria to address this issue.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors believe West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal is of educational benefit. It will offer clear criteria on the process of allocating school places. Children or young people and parents will be able to review the ranked criteria to identify which criteria they will meet. They can then use this information to make informed decisions about educational placements. It should offer transparency and fairness to all children and young people as the criteria will be applied consistently. It will also ensure parents understand the required documentation for making a

placing request and the checks which may be undertaken by the council of the information provided. In taking forward the proposal, the council should reflect on the feedback from stakeholders including the Archdiocese of Glasgow, relating to the language used to define criteria being clear and understood by all stakeholders. The council should also ensure the order and ranking of criteria is fair and reflects the needs of the local community.

**HM Inspectors
May 2021**