

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to consult on the admissions policy including from primary to secondary.

January 2020

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 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to consult on the admissions policy including from primary to 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; 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 meetings held on 25 November and 3 and 5 December 2019 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
- visits to the site of Bearsden Academy, Bishopbriggs Academy and St Ninian's High School, Kirkintilloch, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The original timescale for the consultation was from 28 October to 6 December 2019. Stakeholders were invited to respond to the council's online questionnaire. Taking into account the level of responses received and issues raised by consultees, the council extended the closing date until 10 January 2020. The original, planned public meeting at Bishopbriggs Academy took place on 25 November 2019. Commendably, in order to update stakeholders of developing issues, the council added a further three meetings. One at Bearsden Academy on 13 November 2019, one at St Ninian's High School on 3 December 2019 and another at Bearsden Academy on 5 December 2019. The numbers attending each meeting were over 360; over 260; almost 70; and around 60 respectively. The council sought to re-assure stakeholders with regard to its response to

emerging issues. These issues related to: distance from home to school; any local school more than five miles from its associated secondary; and the number of places in the specialist provisions.

2.3 There were 2,136 responses to the online questionnaire completed by stakeholders. Of these, just over 11% were in favour and almost 89% against the council's proposals. The council engaged with children from P4-P7 and young people from S1-S6 with regard to the proposal. In total, 3,868 children and young people shared their views. Almost 56% agreed and over 44% disagreed.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that the basis of the consultation is sound in terms of providing clarity to stakeholders in the few instances where insufficient places might be available to children and young people in a delineated catchment area. The proposal will help the council to fulfil its obligation to manage efficiently the school estate and to ensure best value. Providing, as part of the criteria, support for children who have attended an associated primary school aligns with the council's investment in strong cluster working. HM Inspectors agree that effective transitions from primary to secondary schools helps progression in learning in English Medium Education and Gaelic Medium Education (GME). HM Inspectors also note the continuing commitment of the council to support the development of children and young people's talents through the provision of specialist provisions for soccer and music.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders agree that the council is right to seek to provide clarity and transparency in how it will deal with the small number of catchments where there may be more children for admission in a school than places available. However, the majority of stakeholders met by HM Inspectors felt the consultation was rushed. They felt that the council could have undertaken earlier, informal groundwork in order to listen, explore with, and explain to parents relevant issues. More than a few parents believed that this resulted in anxiety and concern among children, young people and parents. They reported a continuing degree of confusion and uncertainty. A few felt that the lack of facility to make comment on the original online questionnaire was not helpful.

3.3 It would be useful for the council to review their contractual obligations with Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs with regard to their respective Football Academies. In doing so, they would be able to provide re-assurance to parents of young people living in delineated catchments for St Ninian's High School and Boclair Academy. Parents and carers expect that young people living in the affected catchments, in all circumstances, would have a higher priority than non-catchment young people attending either of the Football Academies. By formalising the existing tacit agreement with the football clubs, parents and young people would have clarity and re-assurance that this is the case.

3.4 There is limited consensus among stakeholders over the order of priority for admissions that was proposed by the council. For example, in the Bishopbriggs area, distance from the catchment secondary school was seen as unfair. Parents who have children attending primary schools at the greatest distance from Bishopbriggs Academy strongly objected to this criteria.

3.5 The Archdiocese of Glasgow welcomes and supports the council's desire to provide clarity to parents, children and young people with regard to admissions to East Dunbartonshire Schools. It believes that in the case of a higher demand than available places for any denominational school, then Catholic children and young people (as evidenced by a baptismal certificate) living in the catchment area should be given priority over other children and young people.

3.6 Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as a statutory consultee, provided a response to East Dunbartonshire Council. Whilst it is supportive of the intention to provide clarity, it opposes the council's original intention to cap the intake of children and young people wishing to follow GME at Meadowburn Primary and Bishopbriggs Academy. It points out that by capping pupil numbers, the council would not be following Statutory Guidance nor advice in the National Language Plan 2018-23. It welcomes the council's indication that the capping of places will be removed from the final proposal. HM Inspectors also highlight the council's responsibility to follow the Statutory Guidance and encourage continuity across stages, for children and young people following GME, including for those with placements.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the basis of the consultation is sound in terms of providing clarity to stakeholders in the few instances where insufficient places might be available to children and young people in a delineated catchment area. The proposal will help the council to fulfil its obligation to manage efficiently the school estate. Maintaining strong cluster identities supports progression in children's learning as they transition into secondary education.

The lack of pre-consultation work appears to have contributed to confusion for many stakeholders and caused a degree of anxiety that may have been avoided. HM Inspectors recognise that the council has, in these circumstances, allocated more time to the consultation period and attempted to provide clearer, revised information. HM Inspectors welcome the council's indication that it now recognises its responsibility to follow the Statutory Guidance with regard to GME. The council has also worked with the Parent Council of St Nicholas Primary School to find a solution which meets the needs of the families of children who attend that school. The strong opposition from stakeholders, mainly parents responding to the questionnaire, is not matched by the views of children and young people. The majority of children and young people are in favour of the proposal. Substantial numbers of comments received by the council indicate that stakeholders have not fully understood how the council plans to operate its new policies. The council has significant work still to do to explain to stakeholders the likely implications of the proposal, should it go ahead.

HM Inspectors
January 2020