

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Lothian Council to: establish a new denominational school at Winchburgh; review admission arrangements in order to establish the catchment area for the new school; review admission arrangements arising from alterations to denominational secondary school catchments areas at St Margaret's and St Kentigern's Academy; and review transition arrangements from primary to secondary school.

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 West Lothian Council's proposal to establish a new denominational secondary school at Winchburgh. 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 meeting held on 27 November 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- visits to the sites of Holy Family, St Nicholas and St Joseph's Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- discussion with representatives of the Archdiocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 Following a decision of the Education Executive Committee of West Lothian Council on 10 September 2019, the council carried out four pre-consultation meetings on the proposals in September 2019. This was followed by three public meetings in November and December 2019. Consultation also took place with the Roman Catholic Church as a statutory consultee. The council also sought the views of local groups and community organisations. Eleven electronic

responses from the public were received by the council. Most of these were positive and supported the council's proposals. The council were also keen to seek the views of children who will be impacted by the proposals. As a result, children in the three primary schools are being consulted about the name for the new school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council sets out its proposals in terms of the new secondary school being well equipped to deliver the full breadth of Curriculum for Excellence. To this end, the new building designed around the needs of children and young people should help achieve this. Transition arrangements from primary to secondary across West Lothian are well established and should continue. More flexible learning spaces and access to outdoor learning facilities should help enhance the curriculum offer. The initial smaller cohorts should help the young people adapt to their new setting and help shape the ethos of the school. The strong focus on involving children and young people in the development of their new school is welcomed.

3.2 The current arrangement whereby families wishing to attend a denominational secondary school in West Lothian due to lack of capacity is under growing pressure. The proposed changes to school catchments should help to address this. Transport arrangements should also be more straightforward and some children from Winchburgh village will now be able to walk to school.

3.3 The majority of stakeholders are in favour of the proposals outlined by the council. Almost all parents felt that the council had kept them well informed about progress. Assurances from the council that those young people already at St Margaret's or St Kentigern's Academies will not require to move schools is appreciated. However, there are a few concerns from parents about siblings having to attend two different secondary schools as the new school will not open until 2023. This view was also reflected in feedback as part of the council's consultation process. The council need to take account of this and seek to minimise any concerns that parents in particular may have. Similarly, HM Inspectors were made aware of a few concerns about the proposed opening date for the new denominational school. At present this is planned for one year later than the other non-denominational secondary school on the campus. Several parents questioned why this was the case. Others expressed concern about the phased nature of the opening of the school and the proposal to have an S1 intake only in 2023. The council needs now to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed about the planned dates for opening and the rationale behind their plans for the development of the new school.

3.4 The planned proposals are broadly welcomed by representatives from the Archdiocese. They recognise the need to an additional denominational school in West Lothian. They feel the new school in Winchburgh will be good for the community as it will have sporting and cultural facilities that are not currently available. They echoed the concerns about the opening dates of the two secondary schools being different and the phased introduction of year groups resulting in young people from the same family having to attend two different secondary schools.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors share the council's view that the provision of a new non-denominational secondary school will support the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. The new building should provide a flexible and inclusive learning environment. It will be designed around the needs of the young people and there is a willingness on behalf of the council to involve young people in its development. The council's plans also take account of the necessity to address the capacity issues at St Margaret's and St Kentigern's Academies. Whilst the vast majority of parents and other stakeholders are in favour of the council's proposals, HM Inspectors are of the view that the legitimate concerns raised through the consultation should be addressed. Parents need to be

reassured that the rationale for opening the new denominational school at a different time from the non-denominational school are clear. Similarly, disruption for families with siblings at two different secondary schools should be minimised where possible. The council should ensure that they continue to have regular communication with parents and other stakeholders as the proposal progresses.

HM Inspectors
January 2020