

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Lothian Council to close Riverside Primary School and Letham Primary School and replace them with a new school on the Riverside site.

March 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 a proposal from West Lothian Council to close Riverside Primary School and Letham Primary School and replace them with a new school on the Riverside site. 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children 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 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 4 March 2024 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 Letham Primary School and Riverside Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

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 The council undertook the consultation between 22 January and 15 March 2024. The proposal was communicated to stakeholders via the council website, through social media and local press. The consultation paper was made available in the affected schools and other council buildings, and formal notice was given to a wide range of consultees. The headteacher of the two affected schools shared information with young people and parents. West Lothian Council held public meetings at Riverside Primary School and Letham Primary School on 4 March 2024.

These were attended by around 70 members of the community including parents and staff of the affected schools. Also present were members of the Craigshill Community Council and other members of the local community.

2.3 West Lothian Council received one response to their online consultation, from Craigshill Community Council. They raised a number of questions such as the surface condition of the walking routes to school and the capacity of the proposed new school. This response was not an objection to the proposal.

2.4 A few members of the local community expressed their hope that the new school should be able to cope with any further or currently unexpected local increases in population. The proposed new building is intended to be adaptable and can be extended if future needs arise. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors identified important benefits to the local community in combining the two school populations into one new facility.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that there are significant potential benefits to the proposal. In their proposal, West Lothian Council set out a broad range of educational benefits for children, including children with additional support needs (ASN), and for other users of the school's facilities. These benefits include a blend of formal and informal learning spaces for each class, areas designed for science, art and design, access to digital learning and nurture areas designed for small group teaching approaches.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors strongly support the proposal to close Letham and Riverside Primary Schools and open a single new primary school, including a nursery. Riverside Primary School has already had to move to another building due to its original building having been constructed with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Both school buildings are now several decades old. Children, their parents, school staff and members of the wider community are strongly of the opinion that children deserve to have a modern school building that will better meet their needs. All stakeholders are very keen for the new school's facilities and resources to be the best possible.

3.3 Children in both primary schools are enthusiastic about their proposed new school. They are particularly keen to influence the design, resourcing and decoration of the new school. They would like a welcoming, colourful environment which is well-resourced with digital technology. Children from both schools would welcome successful features of their current schools being replicated in their new school, such as 'house' areas and a sensory area. Almost all children would like interesting and engaging facilities to allow them to learn and play outdoors. A few children highlighted the importance of areas in which they could be encouraged to be calm. Children felt that combining the two schools together would give them a wider friend group.

3.4 Parents of children in both primary schools, who met with HM Inspectors, welcome the proposed new school. Almost all parents who met with HM Inspectors are keen to ensure that the new school is well-designed and well-equipped to meet the needs of children with an additional support need. A few parents would like further information about how school and community access to shared facilities will be operated safely.

3.5 All staff who met with HM Inspectors are strongly in favour of the proposed new school. Nursery staff think that a purpose-built space for nursery children would give them greater opportunities for learning and play. All staff are particularly keen for the new school building to be designed to support children with additional support needs support for children with ASN. Staff are

enthusiastic about opportunities to access purpose-built areas for practical learning in science and other facilities such as a kitchen for children to use in their learning.

3.6 Senior leaders highlighted to HM Inspectors the importance of including community facilities to engage and support local families in learning. Older children who will be attending secondary school by the time the new school opens are also enthusiastic about the possibility of a greater range of local facilities available for community use in the new school.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are significant potential benefits from the proposal to close Riverside Primary School and Letham Primary School and replace them with a new school on the Riverside site. The current facilities for both primary schools and their associated nursery are outdated. One school has already had to move to temporary premises due to RAAC. Children's learning would benefit from a more appropriate, flexible and modern learning environment. If implemented, the new school should offer well-equipped and adaptable learning spaces which meet the needs of children. Proposed community facilities should also support family learning and learning of the wider community. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors very strongly support this proposal. As planned, it will continue to be important for the council to listen to and work closely with children, school staff, parents and members of the local community to develop the design of the new school. This will support West Lothian Council to fulfil their aspirational vision for a new primary school for the Craigshill community.

HM Inspectors
March 2024