

APPENDIX D HMIE report

CONSULTATION PROPOSAL BY CLACKMANNANSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by HM Inspectorate of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal to discontinue education provision at St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School on the completion of a new school for Alloa West or as soon as possible thereafter.

1. Introduction

1.1 Clackmannanshire Council proposes to discontinue education provision at St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School on the completion of a new school for Alloa West or as soon as possible thereafter.

Four options were contained within the council's proposal, as follows.

- Option 1 – Refurbishment of St John's Primary School on existing site.
- Option 2 – New build of St John's Primary School on a different site.
- Option 3 – Refurbish and extend Claremont Primary School to accommodate all of St John's Primary School pupils.
- Option 4 – Build a new school to serve the combined catchment areas of St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School.

The building of a new merged school, Option 4, is the council's preferred option. The council outlines in the consultation document that the site for the new merged school would be on Redwell playing fields. The proposed site is close to the current schools, less than half a mile from Claremont Primary School and St John's Primary School.

1.2 The council also published a separate *Technical Options Appraisal Report* that considered a number of options, four of which became the options for consultation. This report included these others, as follows.

- Keeping the status quo. The council decided that this was not a viable option, as St John's Primary School building needed significant work and that Claremont Primary School would require a new heating system and other remedial works, and neither building was fully accessible to those with physical disabilities.
- Building a new St John's Primary School on the existing site. This was considered not to be viable since the site did not meet the minimum requirements for a primary school as set out in the 1967 School Premises (General Requirements and Standards)(Scotland) Regulations.

- Building a new merged school at the Claremont/Old Alloa Academy site. This was considered, but council costings indicated that the value of selling the land along with the St John's Primary School site would realise much more money for the council and result in slightly lower annual costs in the future.
- Altering and extending unoccupied offices to form a new school at the Pavilions, Alloa West was considered and rejected because it is situated in an industrial location.
- Closing St John's Primary School and absorbing the catchment area into that of another of the council's schools, Park Primary School, with the construction of four additional classrooms. This was rejected on the basis that a new building would provide more enhanced educational opportunities for pupils.

1.3 The consultation paper produced four options for consideration and the advantages and disadvantages of each were discussed in the document and at the public meetings.

1.4 The proposal is set within the broader context of the council's need to take a strategic view for the provision of education in Clackmannanshire. A 3-12 Working Group had been set up to review the council's current arrangements and to identify the best options for the future delivery of early years and primary education in the council area. The working group also took into account the council's *Property Asset Management Plan*.

1.5 The report from HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HMIE in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.6 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 10 February 2011 in connection with the council's 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 parents¹ and others;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to Claremont Primary School and St John's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.7 HMIE considered:

¹ Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school, for any other users, for children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper, and for 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 Clackmannanshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 The council received a total of 148 responses to the proposal, which covered the four options contained within the consultation paper.

- Option 1 – Refurbishment of St John's Primary School on existing site – 32 responses indicated this as their preferred option.
- Option 2 – New build of St John's Primary School on a different site – 49 responses indicated this as their preferred option.
- Option 3 – Refurbish and extend Claremont Primary School to accommodate all of St John's Primary School pupils – 11 responses indicated this as their preferred option.
- Option 4 – Build a new school to serve the combined catchment areas of St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School – 52 responses indicated this as their preferred option.

2.3 The council decided, for technical and commercial reasons, that their proposal to construct a new school for either St John's Primary School (Option 2) or one to serve the combined catchment areas of St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School (Option 4) would be built on a site locally known as the 'Redwell site'. Some 114 residents and Alloa Central Community Council objected to a new school being built on the Redwell site for a variety of reasons, including their view that the land was subject to flooding and that there might be problems with traffic management. Other respondents at the public meeting, or who wrote to the council, expressed a preference for Option 2, while others preferred the new school to be built on the Claremont/Old Alloa Academy site as they thought it a safer place for their children.

2.4 Staff from both schools were supportive of the proposal for the new, merged, purpose-built school.

2.5 Claremont Primary School senior management team, staff, and parents were, in general, supportive of the proposal for the new merged purpose-built school. The senior management team and staff felt the new school would allow staff and children to implement Curriculum for Excellence very effectively by making use of flexible learning areas, indoors and out, and promoting interdisciplinary learning across stages and areas of the school. They also felt that the building would be better equipped for disabled users than the current Claremont building.

2.6 Claremont Primary School parents also felt that the proposal provided the maximum benefit to most children by providing a modern, safe and secure teaching environment. They felt that the larger school could offer facilities and opportunities for pupils that could not be provided by either of the current schools, each of which was smaller than the proposed new merger school. However, a number would prefer the school to be built on the Claremont/Old Alloa Academy site.

2.7 Claremont Primary School pupils expressed mixed feelings about the new school. Many were not positive about the larger merged school, although a number commented on the advantages of a new and bigger school. Some pupils had anxieties about making new friends, not knowing people, including concerns over the school name and uniform.

2.8 St John's Primary School senior management team and staff were welcoming of the proposal for the new, purpose-built, merged school, and felt that it would bring enhanced facilities and opportunities for children.

2.9 St John's Primary School parents were fully aware of the challenges of the current school building and understood the need for a new, purpose-built school. They expressed some concerns in relation to a merged new school, and their preference was for a new 'St John's' to address the challenges of the current building. They felt that the rationale for the new, purpose-built, merged school was not sufficiently clear and that it was based on financial not educational reasons. Their main concerns were in relation to the large size of the merged school, anxieties over class sizes, and the possible loss of the 'family' atmosphere and school community. They also felt that the claim that a larger school could provide enhanced educational experiences for children had not been explained sufficiently clearly. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the site at Redwell, regarding the proximity of a main road and rail line.

2.10 Pupils at St John's Primary School raised a number of concerns about the proposed merged new school, although they felt that there could be a number of advantages to the proposed new school, including having more sports

facilities, the chance to make new friends, particularly before going on to secondary school.

3. The options – further comment on the council’s view

3.1 The refurbishment of St John’s is seen to have some major disadvantages such as the limitations of the building for learning and teaching in the modern world. The cost of refurbishment would not bring value for money and traffic management would remain an issue around the school.

3.2 Building a new St John’s Primary School at Redwell. This was the preferred option of around 45% of respondents and most parents whose children attend the present school. The council believe that this is possible and would provide enhanced learning opportunities as pupils would benefit from access to modern learning spaces and classrooms designed to facilitate learning in a purpose built building. However, the council believes that this situation would mean that other children, from Claremont Primary School would miss out on the opportunity to reap the same benefits. If this option went forward the council would intend to build a school suitable for 400 pupils as an offer for funding from the Scottish Futures Trust is in place and there would be a small capital receipt of £350,000. The council could usefully make this clear in its final consultation report. The council would also need to clarify how it would propose to use the extra space in the future and what would be the future for Claremont Primary School. This option would also mean that Claremont Primary School would have to be refurbished and that there would be no reduction in the size of the school estate.

3.3 Option 3 would mean that there would be some upgrading of facilities and some enhanced outdoor areas but the problems of poor access with limited parking would remain. It would also mean decanting pupils for a period of time and would also be a more costly option for the council.

3.4 The preferred option for the council is building a new merged school at Redwell. This option would benefit pupils at both schools as they would have access to new, purpose-built facilities with enhanced opportunities for outdoor activities. The site is close to the present buildings. Access for disabled users would be improved. The community would also benefit from improved playing fields at the new site.

4. Educational aspects of the proposal

4.1 The council’s proposal sets out a number of potential benefits for pupils of the proposed new merged school. The implementation of the consultation proposal for the new school would improve the facilities for children and staff from St John’s Primary School and from Claremont Primary School, and provide better opportunities for staff to meet learners’ needs. It would be an accessible building meeting the requirements of disabled users.

4.2 Children who attend Claremont Primary School are taught in a relatively modern building, which is on different levels and which also includes

a separate external hutted area hosting a library and music or general purpose room. The school has been categorised by the council as being on the borderline between satisfactory and poor in terms of the condition of the building, and satisfactory in terms of its suitability for purpose. St John's Primary School is a traditional building which was built in 1908. The building has many educational shortcomings, with the council categorising the building as poor in terms of its condition and borderline between satisfactory and poor for its suitability for purpose. Neither of the schools is currently fully accessible to disabled users. Each school has a nursery class which has been adapted from former classrooms or huts.

4.3 The preferred option will bring financial benefits to the whole community, as some savings will be made over the years due to the selling of the land and the annual running costs of the new school being lower than the current running costs of the two existing schools. The council states that the community will also benefit from the improved sports facilities on the Redwell site.

4.4 Pupils from both primary schools attend the same secondary school so there would be no impact on primary–secondary transition. The council has stated that the distance between the current two schools is 0.43 miles. A one mile radius from the proposed new school on the Redwell site would include all of the catchment area currently zoned for both schools.

4.5 Through the public meeting of 22 February 2011, the council responded to stakeholder concerns about the Redwell site being located so closely to the railway line. For example, some parents voiced concern about the possibility of dust and other pollutants falling from the trains. The council's response was that, because of the small number of train movements along the line, the effect on air quality would be insignificant. However, it also stated that no monitoring of potential pollution from the trains had been carried out. If the proposal comes to fruition, staff in the new school will need to ensure that pupils are made aware of the dangers of trespassing on railway lines and continue be taught about road safety.

4.6 The council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal by indicating that pupils, parents, staff and the community should be consulted about the design of any new building. The council intends that there should be a sufficient lead-in time so that pupils and staff have time to get to know each other. It also intends to carry out a consultation on the name and identity of the new school.

4.7 There a number of educational benefits which will result from the implementation of the council's preferred option, including the following.

- Pupils, staff and parents would have access to a state-of-the-art school building which is fully equipped and designed to meet pupils' needs and to help staff implement Curriculum for Excellence.
- Pupils presently in St John's Primary School and Claremont Primary School and future pupils from the catchment areas would benefit from

enhanced facilities in the new building. Facilities would include a music room, gym, library, state of the art technology, full sized sports pitches, and the pupils would benefit from access to learning spaces and classrooms designed to facilitate up-to-date learning.

- They would have access to high quality areas for play and for learning indoors and out.
- Staff would have opportunities to benefit from working closely together and learning with a wider range of teaching colleagues in the same school.
- Some parents felt that there could be a loss of identity and 'family atmosphere' which is currently present in St John's Primary School and in Claremont Primary School. However, staff in the new merged school will have opportunities to create a caring atmosphere and positive ethos among staff and pupils.
- Parents also expressed concerns about the size of the school and the effect it could have on their child's education. The education authority and school staff need to work together to allay these fears as they prepare for the move to the new school if the consultation outcome is that the merged school is to be built.

The council has indicated that, subject to the outcome of a consultation exercise, funding has been secured for this new proposed merged school, though the Scottish Futures Trust.

5. Summary

5.1 The implementation of the consultation proposal for the merged new school would improve the facilities for children and staff from both St John's Primary School and from Claremont Primary School and provide better opportunities for staff to meet learners' needs. Access for disabled users would be improved.

5.2 Overall, the proposal has the potential to bring benefit to a large number of children from the two schools involved and for those who will attend in the future. However, the council should consider what further reassurance it can provide in response to stakeholders' concerns about the educational benefits, the size of the proposed merged school, and potential safety factors due to the proximity of the new school site to road and rail traffic.

5.3 Pupils from both schools attend the same secondary school; therefore there would be no impact on primary–secondary transition.

5.4 Clackmannanshire Council has conducted a consultation process which has allowed children, young people, parents, staff and other stakeholders to express and have their views considered. Overall, the proposal takes good account of the condition and suitability of the current two

primary school buildings and facilities concerned and the cost of delivery of education across the authority for the greatest number of pupils.

5.5 The proposal to build a new merged school will help to ensure that the council is meeting its statutory duties, including those relating to provision of adequate and sufficient school places whilst securing best value in the efficient and effective use of its resources.

HM Inspectorate of Education
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