

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a new primary school to serve the Ness Castle and Ness-Side housing developments and to amend the catchment area of Holm Primary School.

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* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to establish a new primary school to serve the Ness Castle and Ness-Side housing developments and to amend the catchment area of Holm Primary School. 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 a copy of 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 legislative 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 affected; 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:

- 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 sites of Holm Primary School, Lochardil Primary School and Aldourie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The council proposes to establish a new primary school in Inverness to serve new housing developments at Ness Castle and Ness-Side. Its consultation paper contains three different options for the catchment area of the new proposed new school headed Option A including a variation Option A(i), and Options B and C.

2.3 The council undertook the consultation between 23 October 2017 and 1 December 2017. Copies of the proposal document were distributed to stakeholders and placed in local schools and in Inverness Library. Notices were placed in the local press and on the council's website. Children of the affected schools were given the opportunity to provide their views and complete questionnaires in meetings led by school staff. A public meeting held on 8 November 2017 was attended by 20 members of the public. The council received five written responses to the consultation.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 A new primary school is required to meet a growing pupil population arising from new housing developments in the area. Children attending the new school would benefit from a modern, purpose designed learning environment with appropriate facilities. The council's proposal paper provides a strong case for a new school and outlines the clear educational benefits which will result. The outline design brief for the new school includes provision for 16 classes and a four class nursery wing, community spaces and a multi-use games area. The actual size and proposed roll of the school by 2030/31 would depend on options chosen for the school's catchment area ranging from 588 for Option A, 574 for Option B and 343 for Option C.

3.2 The council estimates a three-year timescale to build the proposed new school. It proposes to establish a Stakeholder Group to enable communication on specific details during the implementation phase. It will be important that the council engages with stakeholders on the details of its plans and timeline for transition from existing arrangements to establishing a fully operational school.

3.3 Existing schools are already operating over capacity and a substantial rise in school rolls is forecast. Holm Primary School has a permanent capacity of 244 and a current roll of 281. Temporary modular units have been installed to provide additional accommodation. Options A and B within the council's proposal would bring the pupil roll of Holm Primary School well within its capacity. Option C would result in the projected pupil roll at Holm Primary School rising to 357 by 2030/31. It is not sufficiently clear from the council's proposal paper how this would be managed.

3.4 The impact of the council's proposal on other neighbouring schools is minimal. Lochardil Primary School is currently operating at capacity and has been capped for the past three years. Option A(i) would result in a small portion of its current catchment area moving to the new school. A separate review of provision for the Slackbuie area of Inverness is to be considered which could result in alterations to Lochardil Primary School's catchment area. There are no major implications for Aldourie Primary School which currently operates as a two class small rural school. All schools being considered within the proposal currently work together as part of the Inverness Royal Academy Associated Schools Group.

3.5 Parents, staff and children from all three schools who spoke with HM Inspectors fully supported the proposal to establish a new school. They expressed a variety of views on the council's approach to catchment area options. Parents and staff at Holm Primary School were of the view that the council needed to consider catchment area options within the wider context of total housing development and educational provision in the area. They felt that further changes would be needed over time and that the full picture required clearer consideration. The council will need to consider these views in its final paper.

3.6 Parents, staff and children at Holm Primary School were concerned about current constraints on space in the school and on the implications of the three year timescale envisaged to establish a new school. Holm Primary School roll is forecast to rise significantly during that period. The council proposes to address this by installing additional temporary modular accommodation. Parents felt that this could have a negative impact on the quality of the learning environment for children during the three year period. Space for common areas including the playground and dining area was already difficult to manage. The council will need to reassure stakeholders that additional pupils and temporary accommodation can be managed without detriment to children's learning experiences.

3.7 Parents, staff and children from all three schools expressed concerns about traffic management, road safety and safe walking routes around the site proposed for the new school. Those at Holm Primary School had concerns about the safety of children making the journey from the new housing development to Holm Primary School within existing arrangements. The council will need to address these in its final proposal paper.

4. Summary

4.1 The Highland Council has set out a clear case for a new school in the area. The capacity of existing schools is insufficient to meet the forecast rise in pupil numbers. Those attending the new school would benefit from a high quality learning environment in a modern, purpose built facility.

4.2 The council will need to consider stakeholders' views on the proposed changes to school catchment areas. The educational benefits of Option C for Holm Primary School are not sufficiently clear. Should the council decide to proceed with this option it will need to clarify the educational benefits and provide details of arrangements for accommodating the additional number of children at Holm Primary School.

4.3 The council will need to provide reassurance to stakeholders on arrangements during the three-year period proposed to build the new school. It will need to ensure that the temporary arrangements for accommodating additional pupils at Holm Primary School can be delivered without negative impact on children's learning experiences. The council should provide details for its plans for the transition from existing arrangements to establishing a fully operational new school.

4.4 The council will need to address concerns raised by stakeholders about road safety and safe walking routes to the new school and to Holm Primary School from the new housing developments.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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