

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Renfrewshire Council to review its admissions to schools and placing request policy.

May 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 Renfrewshire Council's proposal to review its admissions to schools and placing request policy. The proposal consulted on four changes to the existing policy. Proposal 1, change to primary 1 registration dates; Proposal 2, revise primary 1 registration allocation of catchment places; Proposal 3, revise transfer from primary to secondary allocation of catchment secondary places; and Proposal 4, revise allocation of placing request places. 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; 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;
- an offer was made to all Renfrewshire Council Parent Council chairs and headteachers to discuss stakeholders' views about the proposals: and
- discussions with council officers and a representative of the Diocese of Paisley.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Renfrewshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the 2010 Act. The consultation process ran from 27 January to 31 March 2020. Public meetings were held on 5, 18 and 19 February 2020. In total, 44 members of the public attended these meetings. Despite the fact that Renfrewshire Council's schools closed on 20 March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability to respond to the proposal continued to the end of the original planned consultation period. The period from 27 January 2020 until Renfrewshire schools closed on 20 March 2020 included 36 days when schools were open. This is in line with expected duties under the Act.

2.2 In total, the council received 191 responses from stakeholders including children and young people. From those that responded 67% agreed with the proposal and 33% disagreed. Additionally, the council asked schools to engage with groups of children and young people in order to hear their views. Nineteen school groups returned responses. The children and young people were strongly in favour, with 89% of groups in favour and 11% against.

2.3 The council's consultation processes were more than sufficient. However, a few stakeholders found the proposal paper long and difficult to understand. As a result, it has committed to producing a more reader-friendly document. The council has also indicated that it will take steps to review information within the final proposed policy document to include clearer information with regard to prioritising medical and additional support needs. It will also demonstrate how it intends to take account of length of time of attendance at associated primary schools. The council may have gained a more comprehensive picture of stakeholder views by allowing respondents to indicate their support or otherwise for each individual part of the proposal within its online response form rather than just an overall indication of support or disagreement.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council outlines a number of educational benefits. HM Inspectors agree that the revised allocation of places for primary and secondary schools and arrangements for placing requests has the potential to provide greater clarity for parents. This should avoid large numbers of parents with an uncertain and random outcome with regard to placing requests determined through a balloting process. The council is right to highlight the importance of good community links and opportunities for children and young people attending its local schools. It also correctly outlines the greater opportunities for continuity and progression as children and young people make the transition between catchment primary and secondary schools in both the denominational and non-denominational sectors. The cluster working in each sector should support both of these entitlements.

3.2 A minority of parents expressed concerns about aspects of the proposal. For example, a few had misgivings over bringing the dates for enrolment for primary 1 forward given their child's level of maturity at an earlier stage. However, other parents recognised the advantage of earlier planning for families and the council. A few parents welcomed the inclusion of having a sibling attending a school as a factor considered in the revised policy in the event of over-subscription. A few stakeholders recorded their objections to consideration of religious beliefs as a factor in school entry.

3.3 The Diocese of Paisley supports the revised proposals. It acknowledges that Renfrewshire Council is required to formally plan for education within the council area including the right of Catholic parents to select a Catholic education for their children. It regards the linking of enrolment in primary 1 of the local denominational primary school to transition to the local denominational high school as important. It values the progression from denominational primary schools to denominational high schools in linked catchment areas. Consequently, the Diocese welcomes the guarantee that Catholic children will have access to denominational schools throughout their school experience from P1 to S6.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors' agree that the revised policy has the potential to bring educational benefits. Children and young people should gain from continuity and progression in transitioning between associated schools in the local clusters. Parents will maintain their rights to submit a placing request to the council. In the event of demand for places exceeding the availability of places at any particular school, there is now a clearer process for dealing with excess demand. HM Inspectors

understand that earlier enrolment allows more time for the management of school places and associated resource implications. HM Inspectors welcome the council's commitment to producing a parent-friendly leaflet to reflect any final policy decision and for their pledge to communicate with the school groups which participated.

HM Inspectors
May 2020