



East Ayrshire
COUNCIL

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

**SCHOOL OR EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES RATIONALISATION
PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS – STATUTORY CONSULTATION**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated January 2015

This document is intended to assist in the consultation process associated with proposals to rationalise the school estate. It should be read in association with the formal Proposal Document which is published through the Cabinet of East Ayrshire Council and any other relevant documentation published through the Council web-site www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk

Introduction

This leaflet is produced in response to a number of issues that are commonly raised by staff, parents and pupils in consultations which may result in school or early childhood centre closures or amalgamations.

The information is designed to supplement the details provided in the formal proposal document issued by the Council under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act, 2010, as amended.

The topics about which questions are often asked are set out below in alphabetical order.

Additional Support Needs

The Authority has clear responsibilities to individual children under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, as amended. Having assessed a child's needs under this Act then the requirement is that these needs must be met. A rationalisation proposal does not alter these rights or entitlements.

If your child's needs are of a nature that the change may raise particular issues, then the authority has responsibilities to ensure that this is addressed as part of the plan for the move to the new site. Should you have concerns about this then you should not hesitate to discuss this with your child's headteacher or head of centre.

Please note that if your child works with a particular member of staff, it cannot be guaranteed that this colleague will transfer to your child's new school or early childhood centre. However, if your child's needs are of a particular nature, it may be important that this personal relationship continues, in which case the Authority will have due regard to this consideration as part of the transition plans to the new site.

Bullying and Pupil Welfare

Parents and children often express concerns about bullying before the move to the new establishment. Such concerns almost invariably prove groundless. In fact, children at both establishments involved become excited at the prospect of meeting new people and making new friends.

While no guarantee can be given that bullying or poor behaviour will not occur, experience has shown that such events are exceptionally rare.

Class Sizes

School or early childhood centres are staffed in relation to the number of children. Bigger establishments have more staffing. The fact that your child is moving to a bigger school or early childhood centre does not automatically

mean they will be in a bigger class or group. Class sizes have clearly defined legal limits, which cannot be exceeded, as do adult : child ratios in early childhood centres under national regulations.

The only qualification to this is that larger schools are more able to work on a single stream basis. Single stream classes are permitted to be larger than composite classes, with the exception of P1 which also can only have a maximum class size of 25.

Establishment Design

Where a new school or early childhood centre building is being created, East Ayrshire Council seeks to involve staff, parents, children and the community in its design. Our experience is that by so doing, a much better design emerges, and the children in particular can literally think of it as “their” school or early childhood centre

Furniture and Equipment Surpluses

Wherever possible any surplus equipment resulting from the rationalisation is offered to other educational establishments and services. The first offer goes to the school or early childhood centre to which the young people will transfer, and then to other establishments in the same learning community. Thereafter, all other establishments and services are offered what is left. Any residual furniture or equipment that is of possible future use is put into storage.

Heritage Issues

So far as possible where a school or early childhood centre closes or merges with another, the Authority tries to conserve heritage issues. This can involve the transfer of artefacts such as dux boards or war memorials to the new building if possible. Similarly, it is possible that trophies, prizes and bequests move to the new location with the children. Any artefacts that cannot be accommodated, or valuable records such as log books are offered to the Ayrshire Archive, or local museums if appropriate.

If a new school or early childhood centre is being created it is important that a balance is struck between the importance of heritage, which contributes to the ethos of the establishment, and the need to create a modern, 21st Century learning environment.

Managing Transition

The Authority has extensive experience of managing transition.

The date of school or early childhood centre closure and transfer tends to be tied to a holiday and particularly the summer break so that children can start at their new establishment along with the other children. Sometimes this is not possible however, for example if there is a delay in any new building work.

Opportunities are taken for school or early childhood centres to work together prior to the change, for example by:

- Visits of staff and pupils, children and young people.
- Joint sports days.
- Reciprocal invitations to school or early childhood centre shows and fetes.
- Special events involving team work between children.
- Designing a new school or early childhood centre uniform or badge.
- Appointment of buddies and befrienders
- Joint parents events

At time of transition staff carefully monitor how children are socialising.

Parent Councils can play a key role here by working together and ultimately combining to assist children and the staff.

Much work also has to be done to ensure that the transition proceeds easily from the perspective of learning and teaching. Headteachers, heads of centres and staffs will therefore work together to harmonise the curriculum, exchange best practice on learning and teaching methods and plan for best use of educational resources. The records of individual children, with any associated learning plans are also transferred as the basis of planning the young people's experiences.

Name of School or Early Childhood Centre

If the school or early childhood centre is a "new" establishment, that is one that is the result of a merger rather than a closure. Then a new name is necessary. Parents and children from the schools or early childhood centres that are merging are consulted on the new name and involved in the process. The decision on the new name remains however the prerogative of the Council.

Placing Requests

Your right to apply, and to be considered for, a placing request is unchanged by a rationalisation proposal.

Resourcing

School and early childhood centres are resourced according to the number of pupils, children and young people. Indeed the greater availability of resources at a bigger school or early childhood centre should allow the head of establishment to have more flexibility to manage resources for the benefit of children.

Staffing Implications

The Authority consults trades unions and staff on rationalisation proposals. As a major employer, the Council has the flexibility to absorb staffing declared surplus as a result of school or early childhood centre rationalisation. There are different conditions for different groups of staff however:

Unpromoted teachers: the teaching staff of a school is determined by the pupil roll. An enlarged school has a requirement for more teachers and therefore this group of staff tend to move with the children to the new school. This assists transition, but it is not necessarily the case that your child will be taught by the former members of staff of their old school. If the combined roll of the newly created school is lower than that of its predecessors, then there will be a reduction in teaching staff with the possibility of surplus staff being redeployed. Any such redeployments are by individual negotiation with the members of staff concerned under a process agreed with the teachers' unions.

Promoted staff, including headteachers : If a new school, or early childhood centre, is being created then the promoted posts, including those of headteacher or centre manager will be subject to open advertisement for which the present post holders will be welcome to apply. If one school or early childhood centre is closing then promoted staff from that school or early childhood centre may be surplus. In this latter case, or where staff do not secure a post through the open recruitment process in the former situation, then the Authority has a redeployment policy agreed with the trades unions.

Ancillary Staff: similarly, a bigger school or early childhood centre will have an increased requirement for ancillary staffing, but this may be less than the total for the former schools. Some staff will therefore transfer to the new school or early childhood centre, subject to consultation. For staff who do not transfer to the new school or early childhood centre, there is a redeployment policy and individual discussions take place with colleagues.

Transport Entitlement

The Authority's transport policy is universal and is determined by the distance a child lives from the school and the availability of a safe walking route. If there is a safe walking route from your home to school and the distance is less than the Authority policy on entitlement, then transport will not be provided.

Safe Walking Routes

The safe walking routes to school or early childhood centre, including the ones involved in any rationalisation proposal, are assessed by the Road safety section of the Council. To assess the route, colleagues use nationally set criteria. Each route is individually assessed. If you have concerns about the safety of a particular route then you can ask for it to be assessed, and you are entitled to see the results of that assessment.

It is important for you to know that the assessment is based on the young person being accompanied by a responsible adult, and that this approach is established in law.

Uniform

If a new establishment is being created then the opportunity exists to create a new uniform and badge. This is an excellent project for staff, children and parents and helps create the ethos of the new establishment.

If one establishment is going to close, then the uniform of the remaining school or early childhood centre will be automatically adopted. However, the option still remains to create a new uniform.

Where parents have already invested in a uniform of a closing school, then it is perfectly in order for your child to wear this uniform at their new establishment.