

Dear Cllr Curran and Executive Committee members

Response to consultation on change of catchment for Hillhead Primary School and closure of Kelvinpark Early Years Centre (KPEYC)

In advance of the vote on the above response proposal on Thursday 22nd January, we are writing to ask you to consider seriously the adequacy of the response for the overcrowding and space issues facing Hillhead Primary school and take the following concerns into account in your decision making. As background, we have also attached the official consultation responses of the Parent Council to the original proposal and to the alternative.

The significant majority of the Hillhead Primary Parent Council share the following serious concerns and would ask you take them into full consideration in your decision making:

The response does not address immediate problems. The children at Hillhead Primary have already been facing serious space constraints for three years. The year after the school opened, GCC allowed 120 children to come into the school in Primary 1, resulting in the immediate loss of the two classroom sized GP rooms which were previously used for art, music and a variety of other purposes. In August 2014, the media suite (not designed as a classroom) was lost in order to use it to teach two Primary 7 classes. This was agreed with the Head Teacher as a one year measure until the consultation process was completed and similar assurances were sought by the PC in meetings. Even with the proposed 75 cap, the media suite will have to be used again as a classroom from August 2015 and the outdoor classroom cannot be used due to a fire regulation limit on numbers for that floor. If the cap rises to 90, this situation will continue for at least another two years. The proposed dance studio does not help to alleviate wider pressures on the school infrastructure or provide the range of classroom and break out spaces which are necessary in order to best deliver the Curriculum for Excellence and support children with additional needs.

Use of KPEYC space. It is not clear why the original proposal to close KPEYC has been taken off the table. Clearly there were understandable objections to its closure from those using the service but the use of this space remains a solution which will provide an immediate answer to the issues of overcrowding, the immediate return of the media suite and an immediate relief on other areas of pressure such as the dining room, toilets and the playground. The original proposal by GCC included the provision of additional nursery places resulting in an overall increase in the area (see 1.7.4, 1.7.5 and 1.7.6 of Committee document) and stated that there “would be no detriment in the quality of learning and childcare being delivered”. This is not currently true of the experience of learning for the 680 children at Hillhead Primary school.

In any discussions about the use of the KPEYC space by the school, the Parent Council has consistently asked for the relocation of the nursery to be considered in order to ensure both adequate infrastructure and facilities for the primary school and also the continued operation, and potential extension, of the KPEYC. Many other respondents also mentioned relocation and the Space for Hillhead campaign petition, with over 1,000 signatures, also asked for relocation.

There are parents with children in KPEYC (including one member of the PC) who would be directly affected but would argue in favour of relocation in the light of the problems facing the primary school. We do not feel that this option has been sufficiently considered and that the arguments, particularly against the use of Anderston, are sufficiently robust. GCC has publicly stated that an extension of early years provision in the west end is something they are aiming for – why could a temporary relocation to Anderston while suitable premises are found and developed in the west end not be a solution?

The cap – space in the school and exclusion of catchment children. GCC has introduced a new proposal to cap Primary 1 intake at 75 as a key component of its solution to the space issues at Hillhead Primary. We are concerned about GCC's ability to maintain that cap and the vulnerable position this leaves the school in terms of capacity and space. GCC stated in their original response document that a cap of 75 would have to be maintained for at least four years for the school to regain its original complement of GP space (although in contradiction to this, section 2.6.3 of the Committee document says a 75 cap is just a short term measure for 2015). If a cap of 75 is not maintained, the issues of space in the school will remain critical for many years to come.

Equally, however, if GCC do maintain a cap of 75, it is likely that this will exclude catchment children (including 'catchment siblings') from attending their local school – something that GCC acknowledge will happen in section 2.6.3 of the Committee document. Not only is it likely that even the reduced catchment will contain more than 75 children, GCC state in their response that "The Council is aware that future house building is a distinct possibility within the proposed new catchment area for Hillhead Primary School". Further, the statistics on placing requests in sections 1.3 and 1.4 are also misleading. The average level of placing requests throughout the school is around 25 percent and many of these are historical from the four individual schools which, pre-merger, were able and required to take a far higher level of placing requests. Since the new school has opened, the trend in the level of placing requests has declined and many of these requests are siblings of families who have had long-term association with one of the four schools. All of this reinforces the likely difficulty of maintaining a cap given that the majority of the intake since the school opened has been catchment children.

The provision of genuinely additional infrastructure for Hillhead Primary through the use of KPEYC space, together with a cap of 90, could tackle both the space and catchment issues and allow local children to attend a properly resourced local school. This would be a more realistic and flexible model for the sustainable long term future of this school and its local community.

Catchment concerns. There continues to be concern about the split of the Woodlands community into three parts following its exclusion from the Hillhead catchment. There is also concern as to why some houses which border Kelvingrove Park and therefore have a safe and easy route to Hillhead Primary have been brought back into the catchment area whereas others have not. The PC welcomes the inclusion of the agreement to treat siblings of those children at Hillhead Primary who are currently in the catchment but would no longer be after the changes as having the same right of entry as catchment children.

Inadequacy of car park conversion space. Although investment in Hillhead Primary school is obviously welcomed, there remain concerns about the lack of detail in relation to the proposed flexible GP space in the car park. As noted in sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 of the Committee document, the use of this space was discussed with the Parent Council nearly a year ago but GCC dismissed it due to the nature of the space (lack of natural light, low ceilings) and practical issues of use and access. The opposition to other proposals does not change these factors but this conversion now appears to be considered viable. While it is understood that that building and planning regulations would be adhered to in any conversion, the difficulties are more to do with the practical use. If a covered entrance to the car park space is not provided, children (sometimes in gym kit) will be walking outside the building in all weathers to access the space. There is no current provision for toilets in the car park area and, if children have to exit the building to re-enter the school, all doors can only be opened with a staff fob for security reasons. This means that an additional member of staff will be required for each class in the event that a child needs the toilet. The Parent Council have had assurance that they will be involved in the design process before any submission to planning and that, critically, so will the Head Teacher and senior management (who have had no say to date). However, the lack of detail and the timescales proposed for the planning and conversion remain a cause for scrutiny.

The confusing nature of the consultation process which has resulted in confusing conclusions. Section 1.10 of the Committee document states that “In effect, this resulted in the consultation covering 3 related proposals” – this is true but only one response was possible covering both of the first two proposals (catchment and KPEYC). This meant that respondents could be in a position where they supported one of the proposals but opposed the other but could only tick a single for/against box with the option of making additional comment. When the alternative proposal was put out, it was not clear whether one or both should

be completed or whether comment on the first proposal could be made in the second.

The resulting data analysis in Appendix M of the report is confusing and includes errors of documentation. Only one Parent Council 'interest' response is noted, for example, when at least two Parent Councils are known to have responded. Another example is the HMIE statement: "Twenty nine percent of those responding on behalf of Hillhead Primary School supported the first option". In Appendix M, there is no differentiation made between Hillhead Primary and Hillhead Secondary responses – they are put together as a single statistic. This makes it impossible to see where the 29 percent statistic came from, does not allow differentiation of responses and skews the statistics as the secondary school respondents would have had different interests to the primary school ones. Further the inclusion of two separate proposals in the first option means that it is not clear whether the 29 percent are against the catchment proposal or the EYC closure. It is extremely difficult to draw clear conclusions from such broad and confusing statistical bases. Many respondents who supported the relocation rather than closure of the EYC (but still its removal from the Hillhead site) are unsure how their voice/voting intention has been documented.

Three parents on the Parent Council (from a total of 24 members) who have children at KPEYC are supportive of the consultation response. Their view is that the use of the EYC rooms would exacerbate the school's problems by increasing the school capacity by 50 pupils and that additional classroom space will make the cap harder to defend and rooms available for non-statutory GP use less likely. They state that financial investment in the school infrastructure through the creation of flexible space to be used for music, art, drama and dance will go a long to alleviating the current lack of GP rooms, that current toilet provision is compliant with regulations and that further toilets could be added with additional investment in infrastructure.

We would urge the Executive Committee to question robustly the proposal which is being put forward for consideration. Hillhead Primary is Glasgow's largest primary school with a current roll of 682 – over 100 percent capacity. It was a flagship school and was agreed by Councillors presumably to provide an environment for the best possible education and delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence. However, within a year, with the admission of five Primary 1 classes, the school was already operating with space and infrastructure capacity issues. The school management and staff are constantly required to operate with virtually no flexibility of space and the building operating at its absolute maximum.

In 16 months of talks with GCC on how to address these problems, GCC has always maintained a two pronged approach of increased infrastructure and a

catchment change/cap would be necessary adequately to address the problems. It may appear that this is what is being offered. However, as the concerns above illustrate, the Parent Council are deeply concerned that the response simply will not be enough either to tackle the immediate problems or the longer term issues and that any resolution of space constraints remain reliant on a GCC cap which has not proved to be robust in the past. We are not looking for additional extras – the Scottish Government guidelines on the provision of GP space in schools (October 2014) state that a school of this size should have at least four GP rooms. We are asking for a solution which provides the school in the long term with both a degree of flexibility in capacity and an infrastructure which is properly designed to give the staff the facilities they need to maximise teaching excellence for the benefit of all the children.

Hillhead Primary Parent Council