

Public Meeting Minutes

### **Statutory Public Consultation**

**Proposal to clarify the catchment area of St David's Roman Catholic High School and to vary the Admissions Arrangements to Denominational Secondary Education.**

**Held at Sacred Heart Primary School on 1 June 2026**

**Present:**

**Alastair Delaney, Independent Chair**

**Michelle Strong, Chief Education Officer**

**Julie Fox, Quality Improvement Manager**

**Magnus Inglis, Service Manager – Acting Up**

**Rachel Tulloch, Principal Officer – Acting Up, Policy, Workforce and Pupil Placements**

**Katy Maclean, Learning Estate Resource Officer**

**Mary Noone, Business Support Officer, Workforce, Policy and Pupil Placements**

**Head Teacher, Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Primary School**

**Head Teacher, St David's Roman Catholic High School**

**His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Scotland Representative**

**Public attendees: 12 members of the public**

Alastair Delaney (AD) welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Council Officers.

AD Introduced himself and outlined the purpose of the meeting.

AD explained the statutory consultation process and the work that would need to be undertaken by the Council in order to adhere to the schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

Michelle Strong (MS) welcomed everyone to the meeting and then outlined the proposals and spoke through the presentation slides.

Q: The word 'local' is used a lot. What does it mean in terms of the proposal?

MS: We mean Midlothian and Midlothian children attending local denominational schools. St David's RC High School is a local school. There is also a long history of children who attend Loretto RC primary school attending St David's and this is recognised through the proposed priority groups. I was asked to enter into negotiations with East Lothian to formalise the arrangement and discussions are ongoing regarding a new agreement.

We've been asked to clarify catchment for St David's and to vary the priority order for entry.

Q: I still don't understand.

MS: In Midlothian we have a number of denominational primary schools that all feed into St David's, our one denominational High School. We want Midlothian to benefit from wider community engagement.

Q: Are children from Loretto part of the catchment?

MS: No.

Q: What is the catchment?

MS: During last year's consultation there was no catchment map for St Davids found, so we sought advice from Kings Counsel. Kings Counsel advice and legislation recommended we needed to clarify St David's catchment area.

Q: But the arrangement has existed for all those years. Are you excluding East Lothian who have attended St David's for many years? Do you classify them as catchment?

MS: No. We can't find a catchment map. Currently, East Lothian provide Midlothian with a list of eligible children for entry to St David's each year, plus their transport requirements. This indicates that neither Council see Loretto as catchment to St David's (MS recognised the historic arrangement and the priority order demonstrates the history). However, regarding catchment, we don't have proof that Loretto is catchment to St David's. If I were to say to East Lothian, we'll redraw the map and Midlothian will take Musselburgh, East Lothian would be unwilling to allow it.

Q: Is there a map?

MS: Yes.

Q: The proposal seems to rip up the historic arrangement, is that right?

MS: No.

Q: Are you dismissing the history?

MS: No, we are having discussions between the two councils as we were asked to form a new agreement.

Q: Are discussions happening?

MS: Yes, they are ongoing between the Executive Directors and Legal. Their job is to enter a new agreement that protects both sides.

Q: Are East Lothian fulfilling their statutory duty to provide secondary education for their catholic children?

MS: I can't speak for East Lothian, they have a number of primary schools but they don't have denominational secondary education provision.

Q: So does that mean that Loretto RC pupils would get in above pupils from other Catholic primary schools in East Lothian?

MS: Yes, we do not have an arrangement with any other denominational primary school in East Lothian.

Q: Do they know as a council they should be providing secondary education for Catholic pupils? I didn't realise East Lothian don't have a Catholic secondary school. We talk about Loretto as the only catholic school in Musselburgh. And what financial contribution is East Lothian making over all these years?

MS: There's been a long-standing arrangement. This coming year is the first year there's been a nominal contribution.

Q: So they haven't paid all these years and don't have a secondary school?

MS: No. To be clear, if there wasn't pressure within our schools we wouldn't be having this conversation. Midlothian is expanding rapidly. We're trying to protect the future in case we get to the point where the school is full and the priority order comes in. Part of why we need a formal agreement, as well as Kings Counsel advice, is that East Lothian is due for extensive housing expansion within the Loretto catchment area.

Q: Will we be accused of discrimination if we can't take any children from Loretto?

MS: No, however we would not want to give a full answer without legal advice.

AD reminded attendees that Midlothian officers cannot speak on behalf of East Lothian.

Public comment: We're a fast-growing community, so some of the burden must fall on East Lothian.

Q: If the changes are approved, my daughter might not get in to St David's RCHS. Has there been a conversation about why East Lothian don't have a catholic school? Should Midlothian be building a second denominational secondary school?

MS: I can't comment on East Lothian's provision. Regarding a second denominational high school, building a new school is incredibly expensive, between 80 and 100 million pounds for a secondary. We won't build unless we absolutely have to. School numbers are increasing but there will be a point in Midlothian where populations settle, and house building slows or stops. We would only build a new denominational school if there was evidence we needed one in the long term. Short term rapid growth would see us look at short term solutions. We're not predicting that though. Challenge is rapid growth is also in East Lothian so future arrangement needs to protect St David's in terms of numbers. For example, we have a Gaelic medium arrangement with the City of Edinburgh. Our small numbers of Gaelic medium children mean we don't have enough children for a Gaelic medium school so we wouldn't build one. We're trying to future proof in case we have to choose who gets in to St David's.

Q: Regarding the priority order, and what is local, some Midlothian children are at the very bottom of the list. Should they be put higher in the list to protect more Midlothian children? If St David's is meant to cater for Midlothian children, my logic is Midlothian children should always be above anyone from East Lothian. East Lothian could extend one of their schools and find a solution outside of Midlothian.

MS reminded attendees that we're at the consultation stage and a decision is yet to be reached by elected members. MS advised attendees they can also respond to the survey.

Public Comment: I hear what you're saying and understand everyone is fighting for their own interests.

Q: Regarding a permanent change, how permanent is permanent?

MS: We have to follow the legal process for statutory consultations to make the change. When a proposal is agreed by elected members, the change is implemented. If, in future, we need to make a further change, we would need to go through another statutory consultation.

Q: Do you know the current capacity of St David's s and how many Loretto children attend each year? Are they taking the places of Midlothian children?

MS: Described Dalkeith High School / St Davids campus set up. Caveat is St David's has a complex needs provision. The provision has smaller classes and that has brought the capacity down. St David's capacity is currently 890 children and the roll of the school is 750.

I don't have the exact figure to hand but the number of Loretto children at St David's currently is around 120. We have 31 transitioning in August. This year's Loretto cohort is large, but it fluctuates year on year.

Q: My son is not baptised – where would he fall other than 'all remaining Midlothian children'? Can you add another group of people who attend catholic school but are not baptised? We chose a Catholic school for its spiritual beliefs, but baptism can be tricky. Has another grouping been considered?

MS: The priority groupings took a lot of time and thought to pull together. We recognise families choose a faith-based school for many reasons, and children are not always baptised. It wasn't possible to have a grouping for every situation. We're trying to respect the past and look to the future.

MI: There was a lot of discussion about that and we included a couple of questions on the questionnaire to get your views.

RT: Reiterated the proposal has not yet been agreed and the survey could still be filled in with any views about the priority groups, which would then be considered.

Q: Can the deadline be extended?

AD: No. We have to follow 6-week consultation period in line with legislation.

Public comment: It seems very unfair that we only have a short time between this meeting and the end of the consultation if we want to fill survey.

Q: I'm new to the area. The current arrangement doesn't include Loretto – is that because you couldn't find an agreement?

MS: We don't have evidence that Loretto is part of St David's catchment area. We have a long-standing arrangement with East Lothian, who provide us with a list of children for attendance at St David's each year. So, there's been an association but not as a catchment school.

AD: Midlothian want to formalise the arrangements.

Q: If an East Lothian Roman Catholic family were to send their kids to St David's, do they have to be in Loretto primary school?

MS: If they were attending Loretto RCPS and eligible for St David's they'd be on the list from East Lothian. If they were attending another school in East Lothian, they would need to submit a placing request. There are two ways baptised children can attend St David's if they live in East Lothian.

RT: The families must attend and live in catchment area for Loretto RC Primary School. Otherwise, they would need to make a placing request.

Q: My baptised son has non-baptised friends, and they have gone through enhanced transition this year. What happens if they go through all of that and then their placing requests don't succeed? It adds another layer of fear and anxiety for parents and children. It's very unsettling.

MS: That's why we're going to consultation so we can clarify for people what the future looks like. We appreciate that it is horrible to not know if you have a place or not. The national statutory deadline of 15 March is quite late to make decisions but unfortunately that is the timeline we have to follow.

Q: Which schools do East Lothian children attend currently?

MS: Some will attend denominational primary schools and choose non-denominational secondary schools. Some will make placing requests for Holyrood in City of Edinburgh or St David's.

Q: How are the Midlothian Gaelic medium children funded? How does funding work in general for children's school education in Scotland?

MS: Some finance is from Scottish Government re. Gaelic medium places. We pay transport costs. Funding is based on census figures. There's a fee per head but it doesn't cover the total cost, such as for digital devices, or additional support. The allocation of cash is based on pupil numbers and the Council tops up the additional funding need. Midlothian Council tops up more that they are given by the government.

Q: Will we get link to submit a response?

MS: Highlighted details on slides.

Public comment: When I first heard about the change, I understood St David's was a progression school for Sacred Heart. My son isn't baptised, but he loves it here. I did some research and I saw variation in enrolment numbers and a lot of the schools are near capacity in Midlothian and across the other local authorities. I understand the history of Loretto and I think the priority order is pretty good based on all my research. It's important to prioritise Catholic children and Midlothian's children. We chose a catholic school for spiritual reasons. We have mixed families here who have made that choice and I think that's lovely. I found lots of local authorities don't have Catholic high schools.

AD: It's difficult to come up with a proposal that suits every individual circumstance.

AD closed the meeting and thanked attendees for their participation.