

Consultation proposal by North Lanarkshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to close Redburn School Nursery Class and expand Baird Memorial Primary School Nursery Class.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. As the council is proposing to close a nursery class, it will need 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 the opportunity for representations to be made to Ministers.

1. Introduction

1.1 North Lanarkshire Council proposes to close Redburn School Nursery Class and expand Baird Memorial Primary School Nursery Class.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- 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 site of Redburn School Nursery Class and Baird Memorial Primary School Nursery Class, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the nursery class; 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 North Lanarkshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Parents of children currently attending Redburn School Nursery Class who would be affected by the proposal accept the council's argument. For the few parents who have concerns, the council has provided individual support through one-to-one meetings and visits to Baird Memorial Primary School Nursery Class to view facilities and meet staff. This has provided reassurance for these parents regarding levels of support, quality of provision and staff and quality of resources available. No parents took up the invitation to engage with Education Scotland in person or by phone to discuss any concerns or issues related to the proposal.

2.3 Parents of children currently attending Baird Memorial Primary School Nursery Class who would be affected by the proposal accept the council's argument. For the few who have concerns, the council has arranged one-to-one meetings with staff to allow them to gain reassurance regarding staff-child ratios, availability of resources and levels of personal support planned within the new arrangements should the proposal be implemented. No parents took up the invitation to engage with Education Scotland in person or by phone to discuss any concerns or issues related to the proposal.

2.4 Staff in Redburn School Nursery Class accept the council's proposal. They support the council's position regarding meeting children's needs most appropriately within a sustainable value for money framework. They feel they have been fully consulted during the process.

2.5 Staff at Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class are excited by the opportunities offered by the council's proposal. They welcome the opportunity to work with a wider range of children, within a larger team with more of a range of skills and experience. They believe that the children coming in from Redburn will benefit from meeting new friends but also provide new friendship opportunities for the Baird Memorial children. They feel that should the decision be taken to approve

the proposal, this should be acted upon as promptly as possible to allow full transition arrangements to be put in place to welcome and integrate the new children as smoothly as possible.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 North Lanarkshire Council's proposal paper outlines a number of clear educational benefits. These include increased opportunities for inclusion and wider range of curricular and social experiences. Children will also benefit from access to better quality facilities and resources with increased access for primary aged children to attend Redburn School. The council makes a good case for children benefitting from more opportunities to mix with children in a mainstream setting. Children currently attending Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class already have regular opportunities to mix with children from the mainstream primary classes. This is not available within Redburn School where all children have additional support needs of some kind.

3.2 The council makes an effective case for their proposal providing wider-ranging curricular experiences for the children transferring from Redburn School Nursery Class. The low roll limits experiences for the children in terms of learning and relationships with peers. Further, the larger staff team will bring benefits for children in terms of a wider range of skills, experience and talents to share with the children. The larger staff team will also allow greater flexibility to meet individual learning needs through targeted deployment.

3.3 The council makes a strong case for their proposal providing children with access to better facilities and resources. The space available and the arrangement of that space within Baird Memorial Primary School nursery wing is superior to the current arrangements within Redburn School Nursery Class. Throughout the Baird Memorial Primary School nursery wing, there is a great deal of space indoors and outdoors. This would allow children in chairs and buggies to move around freely and access resources easily. Children will have access to more space and access to a variety of different spaces which will allow more tailored learning or support and their needs met more effectively. The outdoor learning areas at Baird Memorial are well developed and resourced already. The outdoor area at Redburn is at an early stage of development and access is problematic.

3.4 The council makes a sound case for making best use of available resources. The underutilisation of the Redburn School Nursery Class space means it could be better used to meet the rising demand for primary places at the school. This can be achieved whilst providing improved experiences for nursery children transferring to Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class. This does not restrict access or opportunities for children not yet old enough to attend nursery when they become old enough nor of choices or options available for primary-aged children who have complex support needs.

3.5 The council has taken account of possible adverse impact arising from their proposal. Children involved will qualify as before for council transport. Staff will be redeployed in line with council policies and appropriate new staff recruited for the

Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class as required. The council has been sensitive and responsive in working closely with parents who have raised concerns over the proposal to provide reassurance.

4. Summary

North Lanarkshire Council has set out their proposal to close Redburn School Nursery Class and expand Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class well. They have made a sound case for making best use of available resources whilst still meeting children's needs as appropriately as possible. They have worked well with stakeholders and shown sensitivity in working with concerned parents in particular. They have made a strong case for the educational benefits of their proposal, notably in offering wider curricular and social opportunities to children from the Redburn School Nursery Class and the existing Baird Memorial Primary Nursery Class. This would be through the increased size and variety of the nursery group and of the enlarged staff team. They have laid out accurately the increased opportunities for all children that the Baird Memorial Primary School nursery wing offers as a facility. North Lanarkshire Council now needs to ensure that all parents of children affected by the proposal are kept well informed of transition arrangements for moving children from Redburn to Baird Memorial should the proposal be approved.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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