

Consultation proposal by South Ayrshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to make use of the existing space within Struthers Primary School to create a nursery class for three and four year old children.

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.

1. Introduction

1.1 South Ayrshire Council proposes to make use of existing space within Struthers Primary School to create a nursery class for three and four year old children. If agreed the council proposes that the nursery would open in August 2014.

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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 18 February 2014 in connection with the council's proposals;
- 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 Struthers Primary School and Meadowgreen Nursery, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school; 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 South Ayrshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a public meeting.

2.2 Almost all stakeholders who responded to the consultation were in favour of the council's proposal.

2.3 Parents of children at Struthers Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were in favour of the proposal. They recognised that there was not sufficient provision for pre-school children in the local area. Parents welcomed the opportunity for their children to attend the proposed nursery as they felt that it would ease transition into the primary school. They were aware that they would need to enrol their children at another nursery if the proposed timescale of August 2014 for the new nursery was not being met. They sought reassurance from the council that they would be informed timeously about any delays.

2.4 A few parents were concerned about the increase in traffic around the school. They felt that there might be potential disruption to pupils whilst adaptations were being made to accommodate the nursery, if the work was not completed on time. They were concerned that the addition of the nursery might make the school over-capacity, if the school roll increased as a result of housing developments.

2.5 Children welcomed the opportunity for pre-school children to be accommodated in the primary school. They felt that they would be able to support them as 'buddies' and would be near their younger brothers and sisters.

2.6 Staff of Struthers Primary School were very positive about council's proposal. They welcomed the opportunity to develop further the transition from nursery to P1 and to work together with nursery staff to build upon children's prior achievement.

2.7 Staff and parents of Meadowgreen Nursery, a partner provider located near to Struthers Primary School, recognised the need for more pre-school places in the local area. They were aware that the proposed location of the nursery at the primary school might affect their roll.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 South Ayrshire Council has recognised the need to provide more pre-school places in Troon. In recent years demand for places has increased and the council are operating at near capacity in most nurseries in the Troon area. If the proposal goes ahead, the provision will assist in meeting a projected increased demand for nursery provision in the Troon area through higher birth rate. If adopted, it would assist in building capacity to address a key national priority to increase nursery entitlement to 600 hours per annum for pre-school children, as set out in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill 2013*.

3.2 Struthers Primary School has capacity for a roll of 402 pupils. Currently the school is operating at 41% capacity. The council proposes to allocate two classrooms for the nursery. The school could continue to operate effectively without requiring the use of the two additional classrooms.

3.3 Staff of the primary school are confident that the nursery could also utilise the gym hall for physical activity without any adverse effect on the provision for primary-aged pupils. The council proposes to provide the nursery with access to a secure outdoor area, which would have potential to enhance children's learning experiences.

3.4 The provision of a nursery class within the primary school would provide opportunities for staff to plan together to build upon children's prior achievement. There would be potential to develop further the arrangements for transition from nursery to P1. Staff would be able to develop further their links and share practice with other nurseries in the local area.

3.5 The council's proposal does not clarify how it intends to minimise any adverse effects that may arise, for example to the education of the primary-aged pupils, while the adaptations are being made.

3.6 The council is committed to reviewing the school's travel plan to ensure pupil safety and traffic management, should the proposal go ahead.

4. Summary

4.1 The council's proposal to create a nursery class for three and four year old children at Struthers Primary School is of clear educational benefit. It will assist in addressing the need for pre-five provision in the Troon area. The provision of a nursery class within the school has potential to provide further coherence in children's learning. Staff from the nursery class and primary school would be able to work together to plan the curriculum at the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. There would be potential for further collaboration among staff in easing the transition from nursery to P1.

4.2 Struthers Primary School already has established arrangements for the transfer of children from Meadowgreen Nursery to P1. There would be potential to build upon this relationship to share practice in providing education for pre-school children.

4.3 Parents, staff and children of Struthers Primary School are very positive about the council's proposal. They recognise that the school's accommodation has capacity for a nursery. They welcome the inclusion of pre-five children within the school.

4.4 Some parents are concerned about potential disruption to the school if the building works are not completed during the school holidays. The council needs to clarify how it intends to minimise any potential disruption to school-aged pupils if there are any delays.

4.5. If the proposal is accepted, the council will need to take forward its plans for a review of traffic management at the school.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2014**