

Consultation proposal by South Ayrshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to relocate Tarbolton Primary School and Nursery School and close and re-designate Tarbolton Nursery School to Tarbolton Primary 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 school, 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 South Ayrshire Council proposes to consider the potential relocation of Tarbolton Primary School and Nursery School to an alternative central site within the village of Tarbolton to be part of a new community campus, and to close and re-designate Tarbolton Nursery School as a Nursery Class.

1.2 This proposal follows an appraisal exercise in 2009 and a meeting with the Tarbolton community to consider the options for creating a community campus bringing together primary and nursery provision, community facilities, sports, leisure and health facilities and the village library. In 2013, a number of place-making workshops in the village of Tarbolton were conducted by South Ayrshire Council in partnership with the Scottish Futures Trust.

1.3 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 19 March 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 Tarbolton Primary School and Tarbolton Nursery School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.5 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; 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.

1.6 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural nursery school as defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of:

- viable alternatives to the closure of Tarbolton Nursery School;
- the likely effect on the local community with regard to sustainability and on the community's access to the buildings, grounds and facilities if the school were to close, and
- the likely effect of different travelling arrangements on the environment and on children and young people and other school users occasioned by the closure.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The council received 214 responses from staff, parents and interested parties. The results show that there is strong feeling against the potential relocation of the school and of the plans to re-designate the nursery school as a nursery class. Staff who responded are in favour of a potential relocation of the school but do not support the proposal to re-designate the nursery school as a nursery class.

2.3 The council received ninety three responses from pupils at Tarbolton Primary School to the question about the potential relocation of their school. Seventy five per cent (75%) were in favour of this part of the proposal. Ninety three responses were received in response to the proposal to close Tarbolton Nursery School and re-designate it as Tarbolton Nursery Class. Seventy six per cent (76%) were against this part of the proposal. Overall, children feel that the selection of the site of the new school is very important. They like the current site and are strongly in favour of protecting the football pitches for community use. They expressed agreement that it will be good to have all of the school in the same building rather than the current arrangement of two separate buildings. Children feel that nursery children will be better served by keeping the school and nursery separate.

2.4 Views of the parents of children attending Tarbolton Primary School and Tarbolton Nursery School are strongly against both proposals. They feel that as the site for the new Tarbolton Primary School building has not yet been finalised, they cannot comment on the proposal. They held strong views that the location for the school should not result in the potential loss of green space which is used currently by the school and community for recreation purposes. Parents commented on the importance of the new site having appropriately safe road access

2.5 With regard to the nursery school, parents do not agree that a nursery class will provide any benefit or enhance the service they currently receive from Tarbolton Nursery School. They do not feel that transition arrangements will be enhanced as they feel the nursery school is already recognised for sharing strong arrangements with Tarbolton Primary School. Parents also wanted reassurances that the council would maintain places for all children, including the service for children aged two to three years of age as they see this as vital to the community. Parents are very unhappy should the proposal result in a reduction in staffing and budget for the nursery class as they feel this would have an impact on the quality of the nursery.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The proposal from South Ayrshire Council is that children from age two to 12 will be educated within a new community campus early into 2016. A new building and well designed, secure outdoor areas have the potential to be of significant benefit to children and staff. This includes through the creative use of the learning environment and new technologies. Tarbolton Primary School currently has a C rating for the condition of its buildings. Children at P1-P3 are housed in the original school built in 1875 and P4-P7 are housed in the annex built in 1959. Both

buildings are in need of repair. The suitability of the buildings as a school overall has been given a B rating and South Ayrshire Council have identified important aspects which can be improved through a new building. The current split site results in a loss of teaching time when children have to be moved around the site despite the efficiency with which teachers undertake this task. Internet connections can be intermittent. The access road from the main road is narrow. The nursery school building, built in 1966, is in need of significant improvement. It has a C rating and is in poor condition externally. Outdoor play areas are secure but are in need of repair and protection from vandalism. The proposal to create a community campus has the potential to enhance joint working between the school and community. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to provide parents with more information about how they will ensure a safe environment for children while providing access to the community.

3.2 South Ayrshire Council has yet to finalise the site and design for the new campus. The lack of information provided has caused parents and children anxiety. The council recognises the exact location of the campus will be crucial to its success. It has indicated it will appoint architects to identify the most suitable site. Should the proposal be accepted, the council needs to continue to seek views of parents, children and staff on the location and design of the campus.

3.3 The council indicates that the re-designation of Tarbolton Nursery School as a nursery class will support children's continuity and progression in learning. It also highlights children will benefit from a seamless transition between pre-school and primary with staff and management who know them well. Currently, Tarbolton Primary School and Tarbolton Nursery School are managed by the same headteacher. There are already strong arrangements in place for transition. The council will need to continue to work with parents and staff to ensure current arrangements to support children's continuity and progression in learning are built upon and enhanced further. The council's proposal refers to revised staffing arrangements. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to provide more information on the revised staffing arrangements. It also needs to provide reassurance to parents that any reduction in staffing will not impact on the quality of children's learning.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural nursery school as defined in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. As the headteacher of Tarbolton Primary School is also head of the nursery school, implementation of the proposal will formalise this arrangement. Although the nursery school will be closed it will be re-designated as a nursery class. There would be minimal impact on the community with regard to the building, facilities and travelling arrangements. The current nursery school building needs to be replaced and the new campus will be re-located within walking distance of the original.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal by South Ayrshire Council to relocate Tarbolton Primary School and Nursery School to an alternative site as part of a new community campus and re-designate Tarbolton Nursery School as a Nursery Class has the potential to bring clear educational benefits. The council's vision for a new community campus is of merit and has the potential to be of significant educational benefit for children and the wider community. The council has clear intentions to invest significantly in the sustainability of education, health and leisure services within the village of Tarbolton. However, there is significant opposition to the proposal from stakeholders. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to continue to work closely with stakeholders, including involving them in the location and design of the new campus. Parents are very happy with the current nursery provision within Tarbolton Nursery School. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to provide more information about leadership, staffing and budget allocations of the new nursery class. They need to reassure parents that re-designating Tarbolton Nursery School to Tarbolton Primary Nursery Class will be of educational benefit.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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