

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to close the existing nursery class within Cowie Primary School and create a new standalone early learning and childcare centre.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments to it contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Stirling Council's proposal to close the existing nursery class within Cowie Primary School and create a new standalone early learning and childcare centre in Cowie by August 2016. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant 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, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where 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 to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the nursery class; any other users; children likely to go to the nursery within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 18 June 2014 in connection with the council's proposal;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, and

- visit to the nursery class at Cowie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Stirling Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. Prior to running the formal consultation under the Act, the council consulted with parents over the future plans for the nursery. Following this exercise, the community expressed a preference for the new nursery to be located in Cowie in the area known as Berryhills. The council responded positively to this and the Berryhills area is the proposed location for the new standalone early learning and childcare centre.

2.2 The formal consultation on the proposal under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* ran from 9 June to 12 September 2014. The council held a public meeting on 18 June 2014. The council took appropriate steps to consult with and talk to children about the proposal, including children in the nursery class. The consultation paper provided a proforma for consultees to represent their views. The council received no responses to the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal to close the nursery class within Cowie Primary School to create a new standalone early learning and childcare centre in Cowie has very clear and significant educational benefits for children. The current nursery class within Cowie Primary School is very well equipped and attractively laid out. It provides a stimulating and positive environment for learning. The creation of a new purpose-built facility with increased capacity has the potential to bring further improvements to the quality of children's learning experiences. These will result from an improved learning environment with increased space for children's learning and the provision of enhanced facilities. The proposal also has the potential to meet children's learning and development needs more effectively, including those aged from birth to three years.

3.2 The current capacity within the nursery class is for 30 children in the morning and 30 in the afternoon. The new standalone centre will have capacity for 64 children in both the morning and afternoon. It will also have accommodation to provide services to families with children aged under three years. The current nursery class is only open during school term time. The standalone early learning and childcare centre will provide a service for extended periods of the day and outwith school term dates. This will help the council meet the requirements of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The proposal has the potential to have a very positive impact not only for young children aged from birth to five years but also for the local community of Cowie.

3.3 Implementation of the proposal will enable the council to make effective and efficient use of its resources and will help the council meet its duty to secure best value in the delivery of its services. The council anticipates that Cowie Primary School will exceed its working capacity by the start of school session 2018. This is largely because of the increased demand created by new housing planned for the

area. Cowie Primary School is currently an eight class primary school. The nursery class uses two rooms within the school building. If the proposal is implemented, this area can be returned to use as classrooms. This will ensure there is sufficient accommodation for the projected increase in the school roll from 2018. The provision of a standalone centre will also enable the council to meet the demand for early learning and childcare provision in Cowie created by the new housing planned for the area.

3.4 HM Inspectors met with representative groups of staff and parents and a small group of children from the nursery. These groups were very positive about the proposal. They felt that the provision of a new purpose built early learning and child care provision within Cowie was of real benefit to the children and the community. Parents particularly welcomed the potential extension of provision to include children aged from birth to three years. Staff felt that extending provision in this way had the potential to assist in the early identification of children's learning and development needs. They felt this would mean children who may require some additional support with their learning and development would have access to this support earlier. In this way, staff felt implementation of the proposal had the potential to improve further the arrangements for meeting the learning and development needs of children who are aged from birth to three years.

4. Summary

The proposal to close the existing nursery class within Cowie Primary School and create a new standalone early learning and childcare centre by August 2016 has the potential to bring significant benefits. It will deliver clear educational benefits for children aged from birth to five years. It also has the potential to bring significant benefits to the local community. The proposal will also enable the council to make effective and efficient use of its resources by addressing potential capacity issues in Cowie Primary School from 2018 onward. All parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors fully support the proposal and wish it to proceed as quickly as possible.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
October 2014**