

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to establish a new Early Learning and Childcare setting in the Auchinairn area.

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 contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to establish an Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) setting in the Auchinairn area. 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 a council is proposing to close a school, it needs 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 and young people and families of the ELCC setting; 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
- 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 3 June 2015 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 Auchinairn Primary School and Nursery Class, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 In January 2014, East Dunbartonshire Council made a decision to close Auchinairn Primary School and Nursery Class, Woodhill Primary School and Cleddens Learning and Childcare Centre and establish a new school and ELCC setting on the Woodhill Primary School site. This decision was made following a statutory consultation process. In the course of this consultation, stakeholders suggested that the council's proposal may increase barriers to families in Auchinairn accessing an ELCC setting. In response to these concerns, the council expressed a wish to establish a new ELCC setting in Auchinairn. In May 2014, the Scottish Ministers gave conditional consent to the council's decision. One of the conditions was that the council was required to hold a formal consultation on the establishment of an ELCC setting in Auchinairn. The current consultation fulfils the council's duties in respect of this requirement.

2.3 The formal consultation ran from 11 May 2015 until 25 June 2015. The council posted the consultation document on its website. It issued packs containing copies of the document to identified stakeholders, including local community groups. The packs included a return slip to gather views and comments on the proposal. In addition, stakeholders were encouraged to give their views by telephoning or emailing the council. A public meeting held on 3 June 2015 explained the background and rationale for the proposal and gave information about the consultation process. The council received four written responses to the proposal. All of these were in favour.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal has potential educational benefits for families living in Auchinairn who may access the provision in future and for the community. It will build on the strong community identity that exists within Auchinairn and form an important part of the council's strategy to support the development of the Auchinairn community through the Place approach. It will help families to access early learning and childcare without having to travel the 1.3 miles to the new build school and ELCC setting on the site of Woodhill Primary School.

3.2 The proposal document gives details of how the council will develop the setting over time. Initially, it will put in place 48 three to five year old places and 10 two to three year old places from 8 am to 6 pm, 50 weeks of the year. This will be in accommodation located on the site of the existing primary school. This is a significant improvement on the current ELCC provision in Auchinairn which has 58 places available only during term time.

3.3 The council will then develop a new purpose-built ELCC setting as part of its investment in a new community facility in Auchinairn. As of spring 2018, the ELCC setting will relocate to a new build facility and expand to include a further ten places for young children. This combination of ELCC and community services has the potential to enhance the health and wellbeing of local families. The co-location of services including ELCC, health, family learning and employability will make it easier for families to access the support that they need.

3.4 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors were very positive about the proposal. They felt that the council had listened to their views and had responded appropriately. They considered that an ELCC setting in Auchinairn would be a valuable asset which would help meet the needs of local families as well as helping the community to maintain its strong sense of identity. Staff from Auchinairn Nursery Class were confident that the council would use their knowledge and expertise when developing plans for the new provision.

4. Summary

East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal has potential educational benefits for pupils who may attend the provision in future and the local community. It will improve significantly the current ELCC offer in Auchinairn by providing a 50 week service in place of the current term time facility. On the closure of the current Auchinairn Primary School and Nursery Class in early 2017, it will allow local families to continue to access early learning and childcare without having to travel 1.3 miles to the new build on the site of Woodhill Primary School. It will build on the strong community identity that exists within Auchinairn and form an important part of the council's strategy to support the development of the Auchinairn community through the Place approach. In taking forward its proposal, the council needs to engage with individual families whose children may access the new provision and ensure that appropriate transition plans are in place. It also needs to continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure that their views are heard and taken into account as it develops its plans in more detail.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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