

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by South Lanarkshire Council to relocate the Early Learning Unit from its current location on Carlisle Road, Hamilton to Hope Street, Hamilton.

1. Introduction

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 South Lanarkshire Council's proposal to relocate the Early Learning Unit from its current location on Carlisle Road, Hamilton to Hope Street, Hamilton. 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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the Early Learning Unit; any other users; 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.

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

- 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;

- visit to the Early Learning Unit to meet with focus groups of managers, staff, parents and a representative of South Lanarkshire Council; and
- visit to the site of the proposed new location.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 South Lanarkshire 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 The consultation process ran from 3 October 2016 to 18 November 2016. During this period, the council held one public meeting on 26 October 2016 with a total number of 17 attendees. Thirteen were staff members from the Early Learning Unit, one member of the public, one parent, one elected member and one local resident from Woodburn Park. The council received 33 written responses to the proposal. Thirty-two were in favour of the proposal, one was undecided. During the consultation period, the council consulted with parents, children and the wider community on proposed plans for the Early Learning Unit. Notification of the consultation was provided to existing parents of children attending the Early Learning Unit (approximately 105 families), and an advert appeared in the Hamilton Advertiser on 22 September 2016 giving details of the consultation, including the public meeting and how to access necessary documentation and the details of the public meeting. A press article also appeared in the Hamilton Advertiser on 15 September 2016. Forty-eight statutory consultees were also provided directly with a copy of the consultation proposal document.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 South Lanarkshire Council's proposal to relocate the Early Learning Unit from its current location on Carlisle Road, Hamilton to Hope Street, Hamilton has clear educational benefit. It would enable children to access improved facilities. It would make it easier for staff across the Early Learning Unit to work even better together to develop further children's learning and curricular experiences, particularly for those children who have more complex learning difficulties in an inclusive learning environment. The proposal offers purpose-built facilities which would enhance children's learning experiences. The Early Learning Unit is housed currently in a building which needs refurbishment to support staff further in delivering Curriculum for Excellence in an inclusive learning environment. A new purpose-built setting would ensure access for all users in accordance with current disability legislation.

3.2 Relocating to a new purpose-built early learning and childcare setting has the potential to provide greater continuity and progression in learning, including on-going and improved access to learning outdoors. There would be increased opportunities to enhance and extend existing transitional arrangements for all children, including those who have additional support needs. There would be greater scope to allow primary and secondary-aged children from nearby schools to work more with staff and young children. Staff would have greater flexibility in how to organise space, enabling them to meet all children's learning needs in ways which would support individual need but also promote further inclusion. Other staff, including health staff,

would have better facilities to support children and family needs. Any reviews of children would be able to be held in the new location rather than moving to other buildings due to lack of space within the current facility. Moving to a new location within a purpose-built setting has the potential for parents to be involved further with staff in a variety of ways which could benefit their children and their families. For example, through accessing parent facilities to support parenting and potentially any training and development needs.

3.3 Children would have easier access to resources, including outdoors, through free-flow movement between the indoor and outdoor environment. There is also the possibility of improved community links through, for example, working with local groups via forest school initiatives. As the proposed new site is located nearer the bus and rail stations, there are better transport links for parents. Plans for improved parking will improve significantly the traffic flow. Current arrangements for parking are difficult and are a major cause for concern for parents and staff on account of the lack of space and proximity to the busy road. In terms of health and wellbeing, the proposal should improve day-to-day arrangements for moving and handling those children who require specialist equipment through the necessary hoists and toilet resources being made available in playrooms.

3.4 In taking forward the proposal, it is important that as more detailed plans are developed, these are discussed with stakeholders to ensure that the design of the new setting meets the needs of children, families and staff. At the time of the consultation, HM Inspectors saw early sketches of the site proposal.

3.5. All staff and parents who met with HM Inspectors were enthusiastic, positive and saw the benefits of the proposal. All parents, who met with HM Inspectors, were very positive about what staff did for their children in the current provision. However, they all felt the proposal would enhance further their children's learning experiences in a new purpose-built provision. They thought it would be a good idea if their children could continue to be involved in the forest school initiative in the new location. They were pleased that there would be much improved parking facilities and closer links to local amenities and public transport. They liked the idea of parent facilities within the proposed design. Staff were excited at the prospect of the proposal and welcomed better resources for supporting children's health and wellbeing. They liked the idea of having easier access to outdoors and also better arrangements for inclusion through improved building design. They would now like to see plans for the design of the building. Children's views were also being taken into account. For example, children wanted windows where they could look out at the birds.

4. Summary

Overall, South Lanarkshire Council's proposal to relocate the Early Learning Unit from its current location on Carlisle Road, Hamilton to Hope Street, Hamilton has clear educational benefit. The proposal has the support of stakeholders. If implemented, the proposal has the potential to enhance children's learning experiences and integrate families further into the life of the Early Learning Unit. In taking forward the proposal, the council should take account of points raised in this report and in particular, provide staff and parents with further information on the

design plans to reassure them over the arrangements, for example, in managing the traffic-flow, parental facilities, access to outdoors and the overall learning environment. It would be important for all stakeholders to be involved in discussions in the design process.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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