

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Ayrshire Council to relocate Garnock Valley Early Years Centre to St Bridget's Primary School Early Years provision in Kilbirnie.

March 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of North Ayrshire Councils proposal to relocate Garnock Valley Early Years Centre (GVEYC) to St Bridget's Primary School Early Years provision in Kilbirnie. 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 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 statutory 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 settings; any other users; children likely to become pupils 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 5 February 2019 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 GVEYC and St Bridget's Primary School Early Years Provision in Kilbirnie, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 North Ayrshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 23 January 2019 until 8 March 2019. A public meeting was held on 5 February 2019. One member of the public attended. A number of concerns were expressed. These included: too many children being housed in one playroom and adults accessing the facility via the infant playground at school break times. The council posted the consultation document on its website. Interested parties were invited to comment. Hard copies were also made available at St Bridget's Primary School Early Years Class, GVEYC, Education

and Youth Employment HQ, the local library, local community centres and health centres. A total of 131 summary proposal documents and 30 full proposal documents were issued to interested parties.

2.3 The council received 11 responses in total to the proposal. These included seven online surveys, one email response and three paper responses. Of these, eight were not supportive of the proposal, one was supportive and two did not indicate a preference. The main areas of objection raised were: the location of the extension and entrance, the safety of four to seven year olds should have access to the facility be via the infant playground, the proposed loss of transport for existing GVEYC users and the impact of locating all pre-school children in one room.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 GVEYC is located within a dedicated, stand-alone building in the grounds of St Bridget's Primary School in Kilbirnie. It has the capacity to provide 600 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC) provision for 15 two to three year old children and eight birth to two year old children. Currently 25 eligible two to three year olds attend GVEYC. In June 2018 North Ayrshire Council approved a proposal to cease provision of ELC for all children aged birth to two years in North Ayrshire Council Early Years Centres and direct all referrals to the council's Day Carer Service. This will mean that the number of children attending GVEYC will gradually reduce until 2020 when there will be no children in this age group attending. GVEYC currently provides a transport service for children who attend the centre. This service is unique to GVEYC as North Ayrshire Council does not provide transport for any other early years child unless the child has an additional support need. St Bridget's Primary School Early Year's Class exists within St Bridget's Primary School in Kilbirnie. It is located less than 50 metres from GVEYC. It has the capacity to provide 600 hours of ELC provision for 40 three to five year olds per session. There is currently no two year old provision at St Bridget's. The council is committed to delivering 1140 hours per annum of ELC for all eligible children by 2020 in line with the Scottish Government's Early Years Strategy.

3.2 The council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. The council states that there will be a number of educational benefits if the proposal goes ahead. These include pre-school children learning in a modern, well-resourced environment, access to improved dining and social areas, access to wider learning opportunities available including improved outdoor areas and across the school as a whole. Collegiate, collaborative working will be enhanced. Transition into the primary school stage will be improved. More effective staff sharing of information should improve progression in children's learning. The proposal will assist the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources as it will not incur costs for running GVEYC. The removal of transport will save money and ensure equity of provision across the authority. The proposal will enable the council to deliver 1140 hours per annum of ELC for all eligible children by 2020 in line with the Scottish Government's Early Years Strategy.

3.3 Parents and staff from GVEYC who met with HM Inspectors did not support the proposal. Parents and staff did not agree that there would be any educational benefits for either parents or children. Concerns were expressed about the perceived loss of the inclusive, supportive environment the children currently experience and a reduction in the level of service. Parents were concerned about a reduction in the much valued support they receive including provision of transport to and from the facility and their access to wider support services. Staff, including support staff, expressed concerns about the limited level of detail shared, their lack of engagement in the process and the impact on their own employment status.

3.4 Staff from St Bridget's Primary School Early Year's Provision who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They saw a number of benefits. Early Years children would

benefit from being part of the whole school community, from the school's wider community links, have access to facilities such as the gym hall and to wider staff expertise including music specialists. Transition to primary would be improved. However, as staff have not seen detailed plans, they were unclear about the detail of how the proposal would progress. A number of concerns were expressed namely: how space will be maximised to accommodate two to three year olds without detriment to existing three to five year olds, the location of the dedicated entrance and the proposed staffing complement. No parents from St Bridget's Primary School met with HM Inspectors.

3.5 The representative from the Catholic Church who met with HM Inspectors was supportive of the proposal. She saw the proposal as offering improved continuity for children as they progress from early years education to primary. All children would benefit from the improved resources should the proposal proceed.

4 Summary

North Ayrshire's proposal to relocate GVEYC to newly refurbished provision at St Bridget's Primary School Early Years Class has a number of possible educational benefits. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. The removal of transport will save money and ensure equity of provision across the authority. The proposal will enable the council to deliver 1140 hours per annum of ELC for all eligible children in line with the Scottish Government's Early Years Strategy. Pre-school children from two to five will learn in a modern, well-resourced environment. They will have access to improved dining and social areas, and access to wider learning opportunities. Transition into the primary school stage will be improved. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to involve fully parents and staff from both establishments in the final design of the refurbished Early Years resource. In particular, it should address the concerns raised in this consultation in terms of the allocation and layout of space, location of a secure entrance, maintaining support to parents and engaging with staff regarding their employment status.

HM Inspectors
March 2019