

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to scope out nursery provision at Drymen Primary School and consult on the closure of Croftamie Nursery.

August 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 Stirling Council's proposal to scope out nursery provision at Drymen Primary School and consult on the closure of Croftamie Nursery. 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 school; 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:

- 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 sites of Croftamie Nursery and Drymen 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](#).

2.2 The council carried out an options appraisal for Croftamie Nursery, linked to its roll-out of the expansion of early learning and childcare and to the planned local housing growth. Three options were identified. Option 1 was for nursery provision to remain in the existing Croftamie Nursery building and remodel it to meet needs as far as possible. The projected cost for this work was estimated at £550,000. Option 2 was an alternative new-build in Croftamie. The projected cost for this work, including land acquisition, was estimated at £1,058,000. Option 3 was for the nursery provision to be co-located with Drymen Primary School and for the Croftamie Nursery building to be closed. The projected cost for this work was estimated at £868,000. The

council concluded that its preferred approach to be consulted upon was Option 3. Of the 38 children attending Croftamie Nursery in 2018-19, 23 (61%) live in Drymen. Drymen Primary School is 1.9 miles away from Croftamie Nursery.

2.3 The council carried out pre-consultation activity with staff and parents at Croftamie Nursery, Drymen Primary School, Croftamie Community Council and Drymen Community Council. The consultation on the proposal was scheduled to run from 26 April 2019 to 7 June 2019 and was extended by the council to 28 June 2019 to allow more time for responses. The consultation was advertised on the council website and the proposal paper was sent to all parents in the school and the nursery. Paper copies were also available in the school and the nursery for members of the public. Local community councils were encouraged to share the proposal with other interested groups. A public meeting was held on 22 May 2019 in Croftamie Nursery School. This was attended by council officers, councillors and 48 members of the public. People were encouraged to respond to the consultation by giving their views on the online platform on the Stirling Council website or by writing directly to the Chief Education Officer. Sixty-eight respondents provided written comments on their views about the proposed permanent closure of Croftamie Nursery. Thirty-seven of the 68 respondents (55%) were in favour of the closure, whilst 28 (41%) disagreed and a further three respondents had mixed feelings.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council believes that implementing the proposal will enhance opportunities for joint planning and working between nursery and primary school staff. Staff are very clear that they would welcome greater opportunities to learn from each other and to work more closely together and they see that co-location would be a very positive step towards this. This will be a clear educational benefit to nursery and primary children.

3.2 The council thinks that transition between nursery and primary will be improved if the nursery is co-located with Drymen Primary School. Staff, parents and pupils agree that there would be a significant improvement in transition, as transporting nursery children to the primary school at present requires much forward planning and opportunities are therefore limited. The co-location will enable many other opportunities for transition activities and joint learning across the year. This will be a clear educational benefit to nursery and primary children.

3.3 The council believes that nursery children will benefit from direct access to the facilities available in Drymen Primary School, particularly the well-equipped multipurpose hall. Whilst Croftamie has impressive access to outdoor learning opportunities, the current building has significant limitations, including a lack of space for indoor exercise, minimal kitchen facilities and no area for staff preparation. Access to modern, purpose-built facilities will be a clear educational benefit to nursery children.

3.4 The council thinks that implementing the proposal will improve children's wellbeing in a number of ways. This includes the opportunity for families with nursery aged children who live in Drymen to walk to school instead of having to drive. Older primary children have been involved in mentoring and supporting nursery children and implementing the proposal will make it possible for this to take place on a much more regular basis. This will be a clear educational benefit to nursery and primary children.

3.5 The council also feels that there will be educational benefit to children and their families through better access to the local community for learning opportunities. Croftamie Nursery sits on a very busy road and it is not possible for children to walk to access community facilities such as shops or libraries and to practise relevant life skills in an appropriate setting. Many of these

opportunities will be available to them if the council's proposal is taken forward. This will be a clear educational benefit to nursery children.

3.6 Staff at both Drymen Primary School and Croftamie Nursery who spoke to HM Inspectors are very enthusiastic about the proposal to close the nursery building and create new nursery provision at Drymen Primary School. They are keen to work more closely together and feel that the children will benefit from a wider range of educational opportunities and better access to community facilities.

3.7 Parents of children who attend Croftamie Nursery who spoke to HM Inspectors appreciate the advantages for parents with children of nursery and primary age only having a single drop off to do every morning. If the proposal goes ahead they would not want provision to be diminished in any way, particularly with respect to the outdoor facilities and access to out of hours care. Parents of children who attend Drymen Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors are also keen to see out of hours care established for primary children and hope that provision supported by recent parent fundraising will not be compromised by any new building work. They also highlighted several groups which currently use the Croftamie Nursery building for meetings and noted the local community concern about losing the last facility in the village.

3.8 Children at Drymen Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors would welcome the nursery children to their school and would like to be involved in the redesign of the school building to ensure that everyone has enough space. They can see advantages in greater opportunities for transition and for older children mentoring nursery children more regularly.

4. Summary

Stirling Council's proposal to close Croftamie Nursery and replace it with nursery provision at Drymen Primary School has clear educational benefits for nursery children. Parents, children and staff are generally agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders, including children, their parents and staff, in relation to the specification, design and location of the new nursery provision. It should also ensure that local community groups which currently meet in Croftamie Nursery building are supported in exploring alternative options.

**HM Inspectors
August 2019**