

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to transfer the management of Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre to Gartocharn Primary School.

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 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to transfer the management of Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre to Gartocharn Primary School. 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 of the early learning and childcare centre and primary school; 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 21 September 2016 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 Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre and Gartocharn Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West 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 The consultation period began on 5 September 2016 and ran until 28 October 2016. During this period, a public meeting was held in Gartocharn Primary School on 21 September 2016. A very small number of members of the public attended along with a group of staff. A council online survey about the proposal resulted in 33 responses from members of the public and staff. Twenty-nine of the respondents opposed the proposal for reasons including, alleged cost-cutting by West Dunbartonshire Council, additional workload for the primary school headteacher and concerns about the quality of experience for children under five years of age.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to transfer the management of Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre to Gartocharn Primary School does have educational benefit. The proposal will continue to enhance transitions for children and their families. These arrangements have improved further since the centre became part of the school. Access to a teacher for children in the centre has increased and should continue to do so through regular collaborative work with the school's P1 teacher. The council rightly states that greater collaboration between staff has the potential to improve the continuity of learning and teaching across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence for children in the centre and at P1. Whilst the council outlines well the educational benefit for children across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence, arrangements for children under three years of age and their families are less clear. In its final consultation, the council needs to outline what the arrangements are for the youngest children.

3.2 Stakeholders who responded to the online survey oppose the proposal overall. They expressed their genuine concerns about the additional workload for a headteacher who runs a busy, small school. The council will need to provide stakeholders with reassurance about the manageability of this workload within its final proposal. Stakeholders also expressed a view that the management of Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre and the quality of children's learning experiences could be diminished by the proposal. Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors believe that the quality of transitions, children's access to school resources and the collaboration of staff have been enhanced since the headteacher assumed interim responsibility for the management of the early learning and childcare centre. However, they expressed a justifiable need for more information about the permanent arrangements for enhanced staffing allocations for the school which are indicated within the proposal. They would also like reassurance that

administrative duties for the early learning and childcare centre will not create additional responsibilities for the staff during teaching time.

3.3 Staff from the school who met with HM Inspectors do agree with the educational benefits within the proposal for children across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. Staff from the centre are less positive. They agree with the educational benefits for children at the early level. However, they are not clear about the educational benefits for children under three years of age. Staff would also like clarification about career progression as the proposal will bring about changes to the managerial structure within the centre. A few staff are concerned about the potential for additional workload that could arise from this proposal, in particular, with regard to administrative arrangements. The council will need to give reassurance to them about provision for children under three, managerial structures, workload and professional development within the final proposal. Children who met with HM Inspectors expressed enthusiasm for the proposal. They spoke about improvements, for young children, with regard to transition arrangements, involvement in wider school activities and the use of school resources.

4. Summary

Overall, West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to place the management of Gartocharn Early Learning and Childcare Centre under the headteacher of Gartocharn Primary School is of educational benefit in terms of continuity and progression for children's learning. If implemented, the proposal will increase children's access to a teacher and, importantly, continue to improve and enrich the quality of transitions for children and their families. Proportionately, the number of respondees to the consultation was low. However, the concerns raised by staff and stakeholders are justified. In its final proposal and in moving forward, the council should provide reassurance and clarification to staff and stakeholders about enhanced staffing arrangements at the early level, arrangements for children under three, potential workload issues, career progression and arrangements for administration of the early learning and childcare centre.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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