

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

1. Introduction

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's proposal to transfer the management of Gavinburn Early Learning and Childcare Centre to Gavinburn 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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school and early learning and childcare centre; 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.

1.2 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; and
- visits to the site of Gavinburn Early Learning and Childcare Centre and Gavinburn 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 13 March 2017 and ran until 5 May 2017. During this period, a public meeting was held in Gavinburn Primary School on 21 March 2017. The meeting was attended by six stakeholders, three of whom were members of staff. A council online survey about the proposal resulted in eight responses from members of the public and council staff. The majority 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 over 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 Gavinburn Early Learning and Childcare Centre to Gavinburn Primary School does have sound educational benefits. The headteacher of Gavinburn Primary School has had temporary overall governance of the centre since October 2016. Since then, she and her school colleagues have been highly visible and accessible to parents. The proposal will continue to enhance transitions for children and their families. These arrangements have improved significantly since the centre became part of the school. The council rightly outlines its aspiration for greater collaboration between staff having the potential to continue to improve the continuity of learning and teaching across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence for children in the centre and at P1.

3.2 Only a small number of stakeholders responded to the questionnaire. The majority who responded to the online survey oppose the proposal, overall. They expressed concern about the additional workload for a headteacher who runs a busy 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 the centre and the quality of learning experiences of children could be diminished by the proposal. However, a visit carried out by Education Scotland indicated that a number of aspects of the quality of the centre had improved as a result of being part of the school. Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors indicated strongly that the quality of transitions, children's access to school resources and the collaboration of staff have all improved since October 2016. However, a few nursery parents were concerned that members of the school management team might not be as readily accessible on a daily basis as the council moves forward with the new arrangement. They also expressed a justifiable need for more information about the permanent arrangements for enhanced staffing allocations for the school which are indicated within the proposal.

3.3 Staff in the centre and primary school who met with HM Inspectors are positive, overall, about the proposal. They can see benefits for children in working seamlessly across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. They would like

more clarification about the arrangements for the enhanced staffing allocation within the school. A temporary arrangement is in place at present and staff feel this has brought about gains to children's learning experiences and transitions. Staff would also like clarification about career progression and professional learning as the proposal will bring about changes to the management structure within the centre. The council will need to provide reassurance to them about management structures, workload and professional learning within the final proposal. Children who met with HM Inspectors are very positive about the proposal. They spoke enthusiastically about the improvements for young children, with regard to transition arrangements, involvement in wider school activities and the use of school resources. They also highlighted the benefit to parents of having earlier contact with school staff and how this could help with family engagement and children's learning.

4. Summary

Overall, West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to place the management of Gavinburn Early Learning and Childcare Centre under the headteacher of Gavinburn Primary School is of sound 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 respondents to the consultation was very low. However, the concerns raised by staff and other stakeholders are justified. Within its final proposal and in moving forward, the council should provide reassurance and clarification to these stakeholders over the arrangements for enhanced staffing at the early level, career progression, the professional learning of staff and the manageability of the workload for the headteacher and administrative staff.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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