

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to transfer the management of St Eunan's Early Learning and Childcare Centre to St Eunan's 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's proposal to transfer the management of St Eunan's Early Learning and Childcare Centre to St Eunan's 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 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 20 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 St Eunan's Early Learning and Childcare Centre and St Eunan's 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 St Eunan's Primary School on 20 September 2016. An Archdiocesan church representative was the only person who attended the meeting. A council online survey about the proposal resulted in 49 responses from members of the public and council staff. Forty-three 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 St Eunan's Early Learning and Childcare Centre to St Eunan's Primary School does have educational benefit. The headteacher of St Eunan's Primary School has had temporary overall governance of the centre since 2015. In the past year, access to a teacher for children at the centre has increased through regular collaborative work with the school's P1 teacher. 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 states that greater collaboration between staff has 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 Stakeholders who responded to the online survey oppose the proposal, overall. They expressed genuine 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 learning experiences of children would be diminished by the proposal. However, a visit carried out by Education Scotland indicated that 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 in the last year. 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.

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 measurable gains to children's learning experiences and transitions as a result of the post. Staff would also like clarification about career progression and professional development 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. The council will need to provide reassurance to them about managerial structures, workload and professional development 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.

3.4 The Archdiocese of Glasgow supports the proposal in relation to the educational benefits it will bring to the children who will become pupils of St Eunan's Primary School. However, they have raised two issues about which they request further information from the council. Firstly, they wish to raise the possibility of the council providing additional managerial staffing for the school to allow quality management of the Early Learning and Childcare Centre. They also request consideration for the provision of additional support staff for the school to allow for additional office and administrative duties resulting from an additional 100 part-time children.

4. Summary

Overall, West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to place the management of St Eunan's Early Learning and Childcare Centre under the headteacher of St Eunan's 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 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 arrangements at the early level, career progression, the professional development of staff and the manageability of the workload for the headteacher and administrative staff.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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