

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by North Lanarkshire Council on the reconfiguration of early learning and childcare and primary education in the west area of Cumbernauld.

January 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 a proposal from North Lanarkshire Council to reconfigure early learning and childcare and primary education in west Cumbernauld. 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 consultation report. The council’s consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal. This should include a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council’s response to them. The council has to publish its consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow the additional 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 and young people learning through Gàidhlig (Gaelic) and English in the schools; 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 meetings held on 27 and 30 November 2023 in connection with the council’s proposal;
- 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/carers and others;
- consideration of further representations made directly to HM Inspectors on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Baird Memorial Primary School, Baird Primary Additional Support Needs Nursery Provision and Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The council undertook the consultation between 6 November and 18 December 2023. The proposal paper was available on the council website and at various locations within the council's area. North Lanarkshire Council held public events at Baird Memorial Primary School on 2 November 2023 and Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait on 30 November 2023. The council received 917 responses to the online consultation. They received 322 emails about the proposal. Almost all of these communications expressed concerns about the reconfiguration for Baird Memorial Primary School. Almost all respondents for Gàidhlig supported reconfiguration to create a standalone school for Gàidhlig Medium Education. These stakeholders are a smaller proportion of the total responses, due to the size of the Gàidhlig sector. The council consulted children at both schools. Only a few children at Baird Memorial Primary School agreed with the proposal. About half did so at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. Falkirk Council use the services for Gàidhlig Medium Education at North Lanarkshire Council. They have not responded to this consultation.

2.3 The public event at Baird Memorial Primary School was attended by 75 parents/carers, 18 members of staff at the school and three elected members. The public event at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait was attended by 43 parents/carers, nine members of staff at the school, two elected members and Comann nam Pàrant. Almost all attendees at both public meetings were in support of a new standalone school for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Attendees at both public meetings raised a number of concerns about the proposal. They highlighted that there was no pre-consultation, specific to the proposal, to consider and resolve issues. Attendees at both meetings are concerned about the timescale for implementing changes, should the council go ahead with the proposal. They feel parents/carers, children and staff need more time than August 2024 to plan and deliver a smooth transition. Attendees want more consultation with the council.

2.4 Attendees at Baird Memorial Primary School public forum were not clear why the proposal has been put forward and what other options, if any, have been explored. Attendees felt that the proposal was complex with important long-term implications. Parents recognised the educational benefits from a standalone Gàidhlig Medium school, but not the benefits for children in English Medium. They suggested that educational benefits be categorised for children attending the early learning and childcare setting, the early years support unit, Baird Memorial Primary School, and children learning through Gàidhlig and English at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. Parents also raised a number of concerns in relation to facilities in each school, and the condition of Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait.

2.5 Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a statutory consultee for consultations impacting on Gàidhlig Medium Education. They welcome the setting up of a standalone school and improved arrangements for sgoil-àraich (nursery). Bòrd na Gàidhlig highlight that the educational benefits of the proposal would be strengthened by leadership and staffing able to support total immersion within Gàidhlig Medium Education. They highlight the importance of establishing a full promotion structure with a specialist headteacher to support retention of specialist staff for Gàidhlig Medium Education.

2.6 Comann nam Pàrant, both national and local, responded in a similar way to Bòrd na Gàidhlig in the consultation. They agree with Gàidhlig Medium Education moving to Baird Memorial Primary School, with the necessary building adaptations to enable total immersion learning for children in P1-3. Comann nam Pàrant would also support Gàidhlig Medium Education staying at Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait, with the necessary building improvements. They stress the importance of the council continuing to prioritise the establishing of a standalone school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 North Lanarkshire Council has initiated a proposal to reconfigure early learning and childcare, and primary education in west Cumbernauld. This impacts on learning through the medium of English and Gàidhlig. It also impacts on a support unit for early years. HM Inspectors agree that some reconfiguration is required to better meet educational needs in west Cumbernauld. Both primary schools are close to each other. There is 0.4 miles walking distance and 0.6 miles driving distance between the two school buildings. Both schools are associated with Greenfaulds High School. The council has presented some educational benefits from their proposal. There are still significant considerations for the council to take forward in presenting compelling educational benefits for all those impacted by their proposal.

3.2 The council's rationale for their proposal entails taking forward statutory duties to promote and grow Gàidhlig as part of their Gaelic Language Plan. Currently, the council only has three provisions in total that deliver Gàidhlig Medium Education. In west Cumbernauld, the focus of this proposal, Gàidhlig Medium Education is available at sgoil-àraich (early learning and childcare setting) and primary at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait and Greenfaulds High School as the associated secondary school. These schools deliver Gàidhlig and English Medium Education in the same school. The council have another sgoil-àraich at Tollbrae Primary School, which is out with west Cumbernauld. However, the children at Sgoil-àraich Tollbrae Primary School transition to the Gàidhlig Medium Education primary and secondary schools in west Cumbernauld. The council's proposal would enable a specialist standalone provision at sgoil-àraich and primary stages. This would meet the request of parents in Gàidhlig Medium Education. HM Inspectors agree that a specialist standalone provision should be established in Gàidhlig Medium Education. However, the council needs to create better conditions for taking this proposal forward, given the extent of objection received to aspects of their proposal. The council needs to state more clearly the importance of qualified speakers of Gàidhlig, including a headteacher, in realising the educational benefits for Gàidhlig Medium Education.

3.3 To achieve the proposal's objectives, the council intends to reconfigure the education provision within two primary school buildings. The council have determined the future purpose of their school buildings by pupil capacity. The larger building, Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait, is suggested for English Medium. Baird Memorial Primary School is suggested for Gàidhlig Medium Education. HM Inspectors agree that reconfiguring is part of an ongoing strategy in managing school estate to ensure that the council meets best value objectives and the purposes of education. However, this must be based on sound consultation, consensus and decision-making. The council, in their consultation report, must provide assurance to stakeholders on their use of buildings' pupil capacity for the reconfiguration of education in west Cumbernauld. Stakeholders need to be clearer of how and why the council is using the total pupil capacity at each school to support the proposal. The council should clarify further the impact any potential increases in school rolls might have. They should explain further their use of data from placing requests and its potential impact on this proposal. The council should calculate further projected rolls of Gàidhlig Medium Education. This needs to recognise that standalone schools for Gàidhlig Medium Education generally attract more parent interest in selecting these schools for their children. The council also needs to ensure that all possible projected capacity is considered at Baird Memorial Primary School. They need to clarify if their proposal includes the capacity of Baird Memorial Primary School Early Years Support Unit.

3.4 HM Inspectors engaged with a range of stakeholders as part of the consultation process. They met with senior leaders of each school, five focus groups of parents, three focus groups of children, two groups of teachers and support staff and two groups of early years staff for English and Gàidhlig Medium, and additional support needs. These stakeholders identified potential

benefits to the proposal. However, they also raised a range of significant concerns. Parents presented HM Inspectors with a petition opposing the proposal. The petition had 2,717 signatures.

3.5 Parents and almost all other stakeholders for Gàidhlig support establishing a standalone school for Gàidhlig Medium Education. This is of significant importance to them in securing even higher quality education. Children will accrue fluency in Gàidhlig and the benefits of bilingualism. Almost all stakeholders for Gàidhlig support the move to Baird Memorial Primary School. Parents have been working with the council for about ten years to establish a standalone provision. They express the view that a specialist provision is long overdue. The parents in Gàidhlig Medium Education, like the parents in English Medium Education, would have also welcomed the option to retain Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait as a specialist school for immersion in Gàidhlig. However, they do not wish to jeopardise a specialist provision being available to them. Stakeholders for Gàidhlig strongly support that Gàidhlig Medium Education needs to remain located in west Cumbernauld. HM Inspectors support the view that current evidence of demand for Gàidhlig Medium Education is in west Cumbernauld. This location has shown successful implementation of Gàidhlig Medium Education. Parents describe Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait as the home of Gàidhlig Medium Education in North Lanarkshire Council. They recognise staff’s contributions to these successes.

3.6 This proposal attracted some hostility and misconceptions about the purpose of reconfiguration and about the Gaelic language. The council should help schools and the community build relationships and act on these misconceptions. In realising the resultant educational benefits, the council should also ensure that, in the long-term, the curricula of schools build on Gaelic as a context. This would assist children build their knowledge as part of equity, equality, diversity, belonging and inclusion. All children impacted by this proposal live and learn in the community, with almost all of them transferring to Greenfaulds High School.

3.7 The council’s proposal involves children moving schools to create two separate schools for English and Gàidhlig Medium Education. Parents at Baird Memorial Primary School strongly oppose that their children will have to move to Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait for this configuration. HM Inspectors have evidenced substantial opposition to children at Baird Memorial Primary School being moved to Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. This opposition has been expressed in a range of ways. HM Inspectors are of the view that the council should consult further on aspects of their proposal as it impacts on Baird Memorial Primary School. The council has not engaged in sufficient consultation to build a rationale and understanding to promote their proposal as it impacts on Baird Memorial Primary School. Parents require fuller discussions and for more options to be part of the proposal. HM Inspectors do not agree that viable alternatives have been provided in suggesting the status quo or that Condorrat Primary School is closed. Parents did not find the council’s consultation meetings and activities to be sufficiently productive. They have outstanding queries that need resolved. HM Inspectors agree that the educational benefits need to be articulated further for parents/carers at Baird Memorial Primary School. This also impacts on equality and children’s rights and wellbeing impact assessments. Parents are also concerned about the first milestone set by the council for the proposal to be enacted in August 2024, or, if required, to be adjusted by 12 months. HM Inspectors are of the view that August 2024 is not feasible in ensuring sufficient collaboration with stakeholders on the proposal and having thorough transition arrangements in place for all children. HM Inspectors are concerned that parents in Gàidhlig Medium Education have been discussing their request with the council for ten years. The council needs to ensure a brisk and realistic pace of change in establishing a specialist, immersion standalone provision for Gàidhlig Medium Education. HM Inspectors consider that the council should aim to achieve their second suggested date of August 2025.

3.8 The condition of Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait building is assessed as of a lower quality than Baird Memorial Primary School. Stakeholders have concerns over water leaks and asbestos at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. Parents presented HM Inspectors with a recent report on asbestos within Condorrat Primary School and Nursery. The council needs to look at equity of provisions in the conditions that all children and staff learn and work, should they take forward the proposal. Parents at Baird Memorial Primary School also felt that the area for outdoor learning and play is better at their school than Condorrat Primary School and Nursery – Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. The council should give more detail in their consultation report on educational benefits of what key features constitute quality learning and play in the outdoors. They could also make more use of the wellbeing indicators as part of impact assessments.

3.9 The council has suggested a catchment area for English Medium, should the proposal go ahead. They should also set a catchment area around the proposed school for Gàidhlig Medium Education and clarify the process of placing requests. The council has recently revised their arrangements for providing free transport to schools. Parents have concerns about the impact of these revisions, safe routes to school and parking around schools. In its consultation report, the council needs to clarify how they have worked with parents, the community and children to resolve these issues. They should also clarify for parents of Gàidhlig Medium Education the council's policy on free school transport given that all children across the council will continue to travel to west Cumbernauld for Gàidhlig Medium Education, should the proposal be implemented.

3.10 HM Inspectors agree that the council's proposal for establishing standalone English and Gàidhlig early learning and childcare provisions has educational benefits. However, the council needs to clarify further their arrangements for the early learning and childcare provision for children with additional support needs. Currently, both the English and Gàidhlig Medium early learning and childcare provisions are located in Condorrat Primary School - Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. The current early learning and childcare provision operates all year round to deliver separate free 1140 hours of early learning and childcare through the medium of Gàidhlig and English. The current lack of playroom accommodation is restricting parental choice for timings of sessions. It does not support enough of parents' work patterns. Stakeholders feel that enrolments in Gàidhlig and English for early learning and childcare, and continuation into P1, would increase as a result of the council's proposal. Currently, numbers in both Gàidhlig and English are declining at Condorrat Primary School and Nursery - Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait. The council, in its consultation report, should expand on more of the benefits from its proposal for early learning and childcare in increased enrolments and for securing children's progress, language fluency and in meeting national priorities. Additionally, for future children in Gàidhlig Medium Education, the benefits from increased total immersion. Should the council proceed with this proposal, they should ensure that children who are vulnerable, and benefit from support all year in the early learning and childcare settings, continue to do so. The council should also develop a strategy for retaining staff who have appropriate qualifications, fluency in Gaelic and/or service for the council.

3.11 HM Inspectors agree that some further consultation is required on the council's proposal for children attending the provision for additional support needs at Baird Memorial Primary School. The council's paper does not use the provision's title, Baird Memorial Early Years Support Unit. This is registered with the Care Inspectorate for 40 children but does not have a separate SEED number (a unique seven-digit number assigned by the Scottish Government to every Scottish school). The council should confirm if this accommodation is included in its calculations for pupil capacity and part of the proposal. Current parents recognise that the council's proposal enables a phased approach so that those enrolled in the nursery for additional support needs complete this stage of their education at Baird Memorial Primary School. This accords with children's support plans, which will include transition from the Unit to P1. The council has stated that future

arrangements for children will be located closer to their homes in Family Learning Centres. They have confirmed that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the children at the Family Learning Centres. Stakeholders are seeking further clarification from the council that these future arrangements offer the correct level of specialist additional support. In their consultation report, the council should clarify future provision and why their proposal does not have an option for the additional support needs nursery to continue within the proposed arrangements for Condorrat Primary School and Nursery - Bun-sgoil agus Sgoil-Àraich Chondobhrait.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that reconfiguration of education services is required in west Cumbernauld to establish a standalone provision for Gàidhlig Medium Education. We also agree that the proposal, if implemented, has educational benefits for early learning and childcare through the medium of Gàidhlig and English. The council has still to address very strong opposition from stakeholders who do not see the educational benefits for children currently at Baird Memorial Primary School. The council should ensure that the educational benefits statements in its consultation report, and associated impact assessments, apply to all groups and individuals impacted by the proposal. The educational benefits statements also need to clearly address each of the proposed changes in this proposal. The council should also clarify further clear arrangements for those in the Early Years Support Unit. They should use the correct naming convention for this provision. The council needs to address the concerns of stakeholders. These include continuing to engage with stakeholders on providing a standalone school for Gàidhlig Medium and another for English Medium, the conditions of buildings, travel and transport arrangements and restoring positive relationships. The council should ensure that they receive the views of Falkirk Council on this proposal.

In its consultation report, the council needs to make clear how parents make future requests for establishing further Gaelic Medium Education provisions as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

HM Inspectors
January 2024