

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Lothian Council to close and re-designate Levenhall Nursery School to Pinkie St Peter's Primary School and Nursery Class.**

## **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 East Lothian Council's proposal to close and re-designate Levenhall Nursery School to Pinkie St Peter's Primary School and Nursery Class. 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 centre and 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:

- 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 Levenhall Nursery School and Pinkie St Peter's Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 East Lothian Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) 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 ran from 1 March until 26 April 2017. A public meeting was held in Musselburgh Grammar School on 21 March 2017 in connection with the proposal. Three members of the public attended the meeting. A drop in session was arranged at Pinkie St Peter's Primary School on the afternoon of 8 March 2017 which provided an additional opportunity for stakeholders to hear about the proposal and ask questions. Members of the council staff also met with a group of children from Pinkie St Peter's Primary School and a group of staff from Levenhall Nursery School and Pinkie St Peter's Primary School to discuss and gather their views about what the council was proposing. Adverts pertaining to the proposal were placed in local print media and notices displayed in relevant council buildings. The proposal document was distributed to a range of key consultees, published on the council website and made available at educational establishments. There were 20 responses to the consultation, with 18 being in favour, one against and one with no particular view. Those stakeholders in favour considered that as the nursery had moved to the current site at the school two years ago, the proposal did not represent a significant change. They welcomed the commitment to build a new facility and thought the move made sense. It would make the drop-off of children easier and safer, would provide greater opportunities for integrating children with the primary pupils and would support stronger transitions for them into P1 at school. Stakeholders considered that the move would provide better access to outdoor spaces and the natural environment supporting improved learning. However, they did not consider a separate facility to be the best solution and preferred a new nursery which adjoined the existing primary school building. They recognised that the existing Levenhall Nursery building was no longer suitable or fit for purpose. The one response that disagreed with the proposal considered the move away from a stand-alone nursery to be a backward step and represented a lack of investment by the council in the early year's sector.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 The existing Levenhall Nursery building is no longer fit for purpose and has been graded as category D - economic life expired. The site is difficult to access being located in the middle of a housing estate at the end of cul-de-sac. A new purpose-built, modern nursery will better support learning in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scotland. A sustainable and energy efficient new build on the same campus as the primary school represents best value in terms of the council's resources. Such a move formalises the existing temporary management arrangements which have been in place for the past two years. It will strengthen pastoral and curricular transitions for children aged 3 to 6 years supported by staff who know children well. It has the potential to provide better continuity and progression across the early level of learning within the Curriculum for Excellence framework. It also has the potential to provide a more accessible facility for all users which will better support out-of-hours learning and leisure opportunities and activities for the local community. It will

provide additional capacity to help meet the growing demand for places locally and in response to government policy expectations.

3.2 In considering the educational benefits of the proposal as outlined, HM Inspectors believe that there are significant potential educational benefits for children in the closure and re-designation of Levenhall Nursery School to Pinkie St Peter's Primary School and Nursery Class.

3.3 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors are very positive about the proposal overall. Staff considered the move to the new site would support greater access to the school facilities and outdoor spaces to support a richer learning experience and environment. They were very much looking forward to having new purpose-built facilities. They were keen that the new nursery was built adjoining the existing school building to ensure there was easy and safe access for both staff and children from the nursery to the school. This would encourage even greater integration of children in the nursery and school and easier and ready access to school facilities and events. They considered the interim arrangement where the nursery had been operating from the school building for almost the last two years had worked well overall. It had supported stronger links and improved planning across the early level curriculum pathway from nursery into P1. It had supported many more interactions between staff and children from the nursery and the school providing mutual benefit. The proposal, should it go ahead, would allow this good work to be built on further. Parents are pleased with the proposal in that it would reduce children's anxieties in transitioning to primary school and would support greater integration of nursery and primary children, including with older siblings. They too would prefer that the new nursery was built as an extension to the school building. Children understand the need for the move as the old Levenhall building was unsuitable and the move to the new site would allow children from the nursery to join whole school events including assemblies more easily and often. It would also allow nursery children to meet older pupils on a more regular basis and to become more acquainted with the way the school operated and the layout of the building. They recognised that relationships between children and staff in the nursery and school would be strengthened and that this would make for a happier learning and working environment for all.

3.4 During the consultation period the council was notified of alleged inaccuracies and omissions in the proposal. The council has taken the necessary steps to address these inaccuracies and omissions through the release of further information in the form of an amended proposal.

#### **4. Summary**

East Lothian Council's proposal to close and re-designate Levenhall Nursery School to Pinkie St Peter's Primary School and Nursery Class is of clear educational benefit. The council outlines the benefits for children very well. The proposal is welcomed by key stakeholders. A new purpose-built nursery has the potential to better support the delivery of a higher quality and richer learning experience for children across a range of important dimensions. It has the potential to provide staff with a much improved working environment in which to support children's learning. It will help staff to liaise more effectively and more regularly with a wider group of professionals

to strengthen planning and transition arrangements across the early level educational experience. In taking the proposal forward the council should consider further stakeholders' clear desire to have a linked and not separate facility to further strengthen the educational benefits. The council should also provide clear opportunities for stakeholders to input to the design of the new facility in line with their plans for the introduction of a user reference group.

In its final consultation report, the council will need to, once again, set out the actions it has taken to address the inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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