

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Angus Council to close Hayshead Nursery and St Thomas' Nursery Classes.

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 Angus Council's proposal to close Hayshead Nursery and St Thomas' Nursery Classes and establish a new Abbey View Early Learning and Childcare Centre (ELCC). 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 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 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 of the settings; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper;
- 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 8 November 2023 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and;
- visits to the site of Abbey View Campus, which includes Hayshead and St Thomas' Nursery Classes and Hayshead and St Thomas' Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The proposed closure of Hayshead and St Thomas' Nursery Classes, if approved, will result in the creation of one new Abbey View ELCC. Currently both classes operate from a shared space on the same site as Hayshead and St Thomas' Primary Schools. The proposal, if implemented, will bring the current staff teams together, led by one manager. The consultation period ran from 30 October to 15 December 2023. Formal notification of the consultation was provided to relevant stakeholders including parents and carers, staff, elected members and the Diocese of Dunkeld. Angus Council published the proposal in paper and electronic form and distributed to local sites in Arbroath, including Abbey View Campus. Angus Council received 19 responses to their online consultation. There were no attendees at the public meeting on 8 November 2023. The council received two email responses to the consultation. One of these was in favour of the proposal and the other focused on concerns raised by staff.

2.3 The majority of respondents to the online consultation are not in favour of the proposal. Most written responses suggest that the council should continue with separate provision. The minority view, in favour of the proposal, is that there are opportunities for improved working together and shared use of resources.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Angus Council states that this proposal involves the administrative closure of Hayshead Nursery and St Thomas' Nursery Class. The newly established Abbey View ELCC will remain in the same location as the current settings. The proposed new management structure will allow children to continue to have access to high quality early learning and childcare and enhance capacity for taking forward school improvement. Staff in both nursery classes already strive to work well together on a daily basis. Positive relationships with parents in both nursery classes are well established. Hayshead Nursery Class is substantially larger than St Thomas' Nursery Class. As a result, the staff to child ratio for St Thomas' Nursery Class is higher than that of Hayshead Nursery Class. The proposal, if implemented, offers the opportunity for further sharing of resources and shared learning experiences for all the children. The council has rightly identified continuity as an important benefit for the children and their families. If implemented, the council should consider how relationships are maintained and nurtured through the change process. HM Inspectors agree that the opportunity to have one staff team, working together towards a shared vision, will improve the educational experience for children. This will bring a shared vision to an already shared space, providing clarity for children, families and staff.

3.2 Children who engaged with HM Inspectors value the friendships they make at nursery. They think it is important to have friends from both primary schools as well as at home and in clubs. Young children are enjoying a range of activities in both nursery classes. There are many opportunities to play together across the whole space. Relationships with kind, supportive nursery staff are important. Primary school children who met with HM Inspectors agree with the proposal. They think it is important for children to have the opportunity to play and learn together and make friends, regardless of which school they go to. Older children reflected that they are all likely to attend the same secondary school and knowing people from different schools helps their transition.

3.3 Parents who met with HM Inspectors agree with the proposal. They see the value in having one shared resource and staff team. They think that this will improve the play and learning opportunities for their children. Parents from St Thomas' Nursery Class would like assurance that current opportunities to join St Thomas' Primary School in religious observance will continue. Parents value the relationships that they have with nursery staff and want to see this continue. All parents agree that a supportive transition to primary school is very important. They want to ensure that, if implemented, the new nursery will continue to build on relationships with both primary schools.

3.4 Staff from both nursery classes and both primary schools expressed a range of views. The majority of staff understand the benefits that the proposal could bring. For example, through a shared approach to curriculum delivery, peer learning opportunities and improved use of the nursery room and resources. Nursery staff know their children and families very well. All staff wish to ensure that these positive relationships continue. They are committed to ensuring that the transition from nursery to school is beneficial for all children. Staff from St Thomas' Nursery and Primary School wish to ensure that the identity of the primary school is maintained. There is a concern that less parents will choose St Thomas' Primary School as a result of this proposal. Staff from Hayshead Nursery Class and Primary School are concerned that they would lose connection, as result of the new standalone nursery. As the site is on a shared campus, senior leaders would like to ensure that there are clear procedures in place for the operational management of the building and resources allocated to the proposed nursery.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the education benefits outlined by Angus Council in this proposal. The new nursery and new management structure with one staff team has the potential to improve the overall delivery of the early years curriculum with better use of the space and resources. Children will benefit from enhanced opportunities to play and learn together. This can be achieved without disruption to the current cohort of children attending both nursery classes. If implemented, the council should ensure that important relationships between parents and nursery staff are maintained. Children should continue to be well supported in their transitions through strong relationships between the primary schools and nursery staff. Parents of St Thomas' Nursery wish to maintain the link their children have with St Thomas' Primary School for religious activities. The council should consider further engagement with staff and parents from St Thomas' Nursery Class and Primary School to implement this within the new setting.

HM Inspectors
January 2024