

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Midlothian Council to close Lasswade High School Childcare Service.

February 2025

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 by Midlothian Council to close Lasswade High School Childcare Service. 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received 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, including 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. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include 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 setting; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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 16 January 2025 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 Lasswade High School Childcare Service, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The council undertook the consultation from 29 November 2024 to 24 January 2025. The council published the proposal paper on their website and copies of the proposal paper were made available to stakeholders. Midlothian Council held a public meeting at Lasswade High School on 16 January 2025, which three stakeholders attended. The council received 62 responses to their online consultation. Almost all respondents are opposed to the closure of Lasswade High School Childcare Services. A minority of respondents were from parents or carers

who had children currently attending the nursery or may have in the future. Other respondents include community members and staff. Almost all parents or carers expressed concerns over the loss of onsite affordable and flexible childcare, and the likelihood of long waiting lists if they needed to find an alternative childcare provision. A few respondents were supportive of the proposal. They noted the financial implications connected to running the childcare provision. They also recognised the ongoing issues with fully staffing the nursery during staff absence.

2.3 The council facilitated consultation sessions with a few young people in the senior phase from Lasswade High School to discuss the proposal. The majority of which agreed that the proposal to close the childcare service was a good idea. The young people noted the low numbers attending the provision and that there was alternative provision nearby. They also noted that Lasswade High School has reached its capacity and that should the proposal be approved, the space may be available for use by the high school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council's proposal set out three alternative options and other implications, which were considered for the Lasswade High School Childcare Service prior to consulting on the proposal to close the setting. These are to continue the setting as is, to change it to a standalone setting and to close the setting. Option three to close Lasswade High School Childcare Service and for the children to be offered places at other settings in the local area is the council's preferred option.

3.2 The council has set out educational benefits to closing Lasswade High School Childcare Service. These include to provide adequate and efficient provision of early learning and childcare (ELC) in the area and best value in the delivery of services. The council recognises that the current learning environment at Lasswade High School Childcare Service creates barriers to learning. For example, staff access to resources to plan appropriate learning experiences and limited opportunities for children to develop digital skills of lifelong learning. HM Inspectors agree that it is important that spaces used to provide ELC must be suitable for supporting children to learn and progress. If the site is to remain open the council will need to ensure it provides a suitable learning environment. These enhancements would include improvements to the indoor and outdoor spaces to ensure they are appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children. Should the council decide to consider other options further, then HM Inspectors recommend that the council provide more details on what upgrades would be required and their associated costs.

3.3 Almost all staff and most parents that met with HM Inspectors recognise the educational benefits set out in the proposal. All staff acknowledged the challenges to their professional learning and development, due to being based within a secondary school setting. They noted the potential advantages of working within an alternative nursery, which may be attached to a primary school. For example, improved arrangements for transition to primary school and access to an up to date indoor and outdoor learning environment, where children can learn and play with others at early level. Senior leaders in the high school felt that ELC staff would benefit from leadership from qualified ELC professionals. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal provides educational benefits and should ELC staff be deployed to an alternative nursery, there is potentially increased opportunities for their professional learning and leadership.

3.4 A few staff and most parents that met with HM Inspectors also noted that these educational benefits could be realised through enhancement to the current setting and an increase in fees. Parents are concerned about the potential negative impact closing the childcare service will have for working parents and their ability to meet current work patterns. For example, those parents who work in the high school commented on the potential negative impact this will have on their

capacity to support after school groups. They indicated that they may need to leave earlier to travel to pick up their children from other services. Should the proposal be approved, the council should work with stakeholders to ensure that appropriate support and transition arrangements are in place.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has educational benefits. These could include the potential for better transition arrangements. Staff may benefit from improved access to leadership from ELC professionals, should they move to provision in a nursery or primary school setting. Children should benefit from appropriate spaces that facilitate the delivery of high quality ELC where they will learn and play with other children at early level. However, there may be potential to achieve this through enhancing the current setting. Should the proposal be approved, the council will need to support staff and families to transition to other provision.

HM Inspectors
February 2025