

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Inverclyde Council to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone Early Learning Centre (ELC) under the leadership of a Head of Centre.

March 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 Inverclyde Council's proposal to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone Early Learning Centre (ELC) under the leadership of a Head of Centre. 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 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 20 February 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 Newark Nursery School and Newark Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The proposal to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre is the preferred option of Inverclyde Council following a pre-consultation process. During the pre-consultation process, stakeholders were asked to consider three options. These were: to maintain the nursery as a school and seek a replacement headteacher; to incorporate the nursery into Newark Primary School under the leadership of its headteacher; or to become a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre. The

pre-consultation survey had 141 respondents with 54 respondents in favour of maintaining the nursery school and seeking a new headteacher, 40 respondents in favour of incorporating the nursery into Newark Primary School and 47 respondents in favour of Inverclyde Council's preferred option of the nursery becoming a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre.

2.3 Inverclyde Council carried out a formal consultation on the option to become a standalone ELC in accordance with statutory guidance between 23 January and 10 March 2025. A public meeting was held at Newark Primary School on 20 February 2025. Notice of this meeting was shared with stakeholders through parental emails, local newspapers and online. No stakeholders attended this meeting. An online survey generated 31 responses. Across all the responses, 11 were in favour, 19 were not and one was undecided. A minority of survey respondents are in favour of the proposal. Those in favour were generally in favour of the ELC being a standalone establishment. Those against were generally in favour of the current standalone nursery, and were very concerned with the thought that an ELC may lead to a change in hours and an increase in the number of children in attendance. The council did not receive any other direct communication in relation to the proposal.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that this proposal allows for continuity of educational provision. The change from a nursery school to an ELC will be implemented through the recruitment of a Head of Centre instead of a headteacher. This is the only change proposed within this consultation. As a result, children attending the nursery school should not experience any disruption to their learning.

3.2 As the council have stated, the implementation of this change will bring Newark Nursery School in line with other settings in Inverclyde. Newark Nursery School is the only establishment still operating as a nursery school in Inverclyde Council. The well-regarded current headteacher is due to retire in April 2025. Following a positive Care Inspectorate inspection, stakeholders are keen to ensure that the new leader is as effective, regardless of their position as a headteacher or a Head of Centre. The council notes that whilst primary teachers can undertake the role of nursery headteacher, there are decreasing numbers of available teachers interested in such a post. This lack of availability poses challenges for recruitment and therefore effective continuity of the centre. This consultation does acknowledge that ELCs are able to change operating hours or expand the range of children attending such a centre. However, these changes are not planned as part of this consultation.

3.3 Children attending the nursery school enjoy being able to play indoors and outdoors. They have access to a varied range of activities to support learning. Well-established relationships with staff are important to them. Parents who met with HM Inspectors value very highly the helpful and respectful relationships they have with staff in the nursery, including the headteacher. Parents highlighted the importance of continuity and the nature of the provision for their children and are very clear that they do not wish this to change. Parents who met with HM Inspectors are particularly concerned that changing the nursery to an ELC may bring further associated changes to the hours and age range of the centre. Parents fear this would have a negative impact on their children. Parents are seeking further reassurance from the local authority that the opening hours and age ranges will not change. If the proposal is implemented, Inverclyde Council staff should engage further with parents to discuss their concerns.

3.4 All Newark Nursery School staff who met with HM Inspectors felt, no matter what the centre's leadership structure was like, their working practice and processes would not change. All staff were aware of the headteacher's upcoming retiral. They are happy to remain as a standalone establishment, either as a nursery or an ELC. A few staff expressed an understanding of existing

recruitment pressures, which may make a switch to an ELC more practical. All staff agree that it is important to continue to have good links with teaching staff to support transitions from nursery to school and did not see that this proposal would change that. All staff felt that they would benefit from greater reassurance and clarity with regard to the number of staff and the proposed structure of the team. Newark Primary School and St Francis Primary School staff who met with HM Inspectors also expressed a confidence that work with the centre would continue as an ELC.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal allows for continuity of the education provision within a standalone ELC. Children who attend Newark Nursery School and their families will continue to benefit from support and well-established relationships with their peers and staff. It will be important to continue to engage with parents to reassure them that this proposal does not include changes to the population or timing of the standalone ELC. A new Head of Centre should have the opportunity to continue with the strengths of the current nursery. Inverclyde Council should ensure that ongoing links with teaching staff in primary schools continue, supporting the ongoing development and delivery of the curriculum and opportunities for professional learning.

HM Inspectors
March 2025