

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

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

March 2023

## 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 Blairmore 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 27 February 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; and
- visits to the site of Blairmore Nursery 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 Blairmore 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 All Saints Primary School under the leadership of the headteacher or to become a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre. The pre-consultation survey had 46 respondents with half in favour of the option to become an ELC.

2.3 The council carried out a formal consultation on the option to become a standalone ELC in accordance with statutory guidance. A public meeting was held at All Saints Primary School on 27 February 2023. No stakeholders attended this meeting. An online survey generated 41 responses, 31 partial responses and 10 complete. Most of the partial responses answered yes or no as to whether they were in agreement with the proposal. Across all the responses, 29 were in favour, four were not and four were undecided. The majority of survey respondents are in favour of the proposal. 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 Blairmore Nursery School in line with other ELCs in Inverclyde. Blairmore Nursery School and one other are the only establishments operating as nursery schools. Other ELCs offer more flexibility for age ranges and more flexible hours. However, it should be noted that a change to the operating hours of the centre is not part of this consultation. The council also notes that whilst primary teachers can undertake the role of Head of Centre, there are decreasing numbers of available teachers, which affects recruitment.

3.3 Parents who met with HM Inspectors value the helpful and respectful relationships they have with staff in the nursery rooms. Blairmore Nursery School is very much part of the community. Parents highlighted the importance of continuity of the provision for their children and do not wish this to change. 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 and enjoy circle time. Well established relationships with staff are important to them.

3.4 Blairmore Nursery School staff who met with HM Inspectors expressed differing views. A few do not agree with the proposal. They stated that they would prefer to be led by a headteacher as this would best support the delivery of the nursery school curriculum, particularly for literacy and numeracy. A few staff members welcome the opportunity to be led by an early years professional who has a good understanding of their sector and thought that this will support and improve planning. All staff agree that it is important to have good links with teaching staff to support transitions from nursery to school. Although not part of this consultation, should the proposal go ahead, staff raised concerns regarding the potential for changes to their hours of work. All staff welcome the opportunity to develop links with wider catchment primary schools and becoming part of a wider network of early years providers in Inverclyde.

## 4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal allows for continuity of the education provision within a standalone ELC. Children who attend Blairmore Nursery School and their families will continue to benefit from support and well established relationships with their peers and staff. A new Head of Centre will have the opportunity to build on the strengths of the current staff team. Inverclyde Council should ensure that there are ongoing links with teaching staff to continue to support the ongoing development and delivery of the curriculum and opportunities for professional learning.

**HM Inspectors**  
**March 2023**