

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility, serving both schools.

January 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 The Highland Council to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools. 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 6 November 2024 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 Caol Primary School and St. Columba's Roman Catholic Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The formal consultation process to discontinue the nursery classes at Caol Primary School and St Columba's RC Primary School, replacing them with a single pre-school facility serving both schools, ran from 30 September to 29 November 2024. The proposal paper was made available to a wide range of stakeholders including parents and carers within the school

catchment areas and on council website. Interested parties were invited to respond to the statutory consultation by letter or electronically. There were three written responses. Two responses were in favour of the proposal and one sought clarification on operational matters for the new nursery, should the proposal go ahead. The council held a public meeting, which one member of the public attended. Overall respondents were in favour of the proposal and would welcome more information about the new nursery, for example who would assume responsibility for its management.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits detailed in the proposal.

HM Inspectors consulted senior leaders, staff, parents and children in both schools who showed strong support for the proposed single nursery provision for both schools. Should the proposal go ahead, current arrangements where children attend the same nursery would be maintained. This would provide clarity and longer-term certainty for parents with the end of the mothballing arrangement for St Columba's RC Nursery.

3.2 Since the nursery class at St Columba's RC Primary School was mothballed, all nursery aged children from the shared campus currently attend the nursery at Caol Primary School. Senior leaders and staff at both schools welcome the proposal as it would bring certainty to the current arrangements. They recognise the importance of quality early learning experiences and the value of children being together in a larger group. Senior leaders and staff at St Columba's RC Primary School feel that a new, shared nursery facility would provide clarity for parents and allow them to make more informed choices about where their child will start P1. This has the potential to increase the number of children attending St Columba's RC Primary School through equal promotion of both schools. They would also like to be involved in decisions about how spaces previously used for the nursery within St Columba's RC Primary School will be utilised to their full potential to increase educational benefits for children. Staff in both schools would welcome clarity about who will manage the new nursery should the proposal go ahead. This is creating considerable uncertainty for individuals.

3.3 Children from both schools recognise benefits of the proposal. They recognise young children would have increased opportunities to make friends within a larger peer group. Children from both schools identify that there are two distinct schools as part of the Caol campus and are proud of their individual school. They recognise the sense in sharing a nursery in a similar way that the dining hall and school gym are shared within the campus. Most children recognise the importance of having a separate uniform for nursery children to help them identify with the nursery and not a particular school. A few children would like to be consulted about how spaces previously used for the nursery at St Columba's RC Primary School are utilised should the proposal go ahead. Parents in both schools also recognise the benefits of a shared nursery facility. They suggest that this may help the nursery have its own identity. They also feel that a new, shared nursery facility may enhance opportunities for the schools to work together. Should the proposal go ahead, parents would welcome clarity about transparency in decision making about who would manage the new facility, and involvement in deciding a new name.

3.4 Although all nursery provision is non-denominational the parish priest who supports St Columba's RC Primary School is supportive of the proposal. The view is that should the proposal be accepted, nursery children and parents will have an increased understanding of St Columba's, and this may support the sustainability of the school roll.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined in this proposal. The larger number of children in the one nursery would provide increased opportunities for social interaction and the forming of age-appropriate relationships. The proposal would provide a shared facility within an already shared campus. A shared nursery could support equal promotion of each primary school rather than children progressing automatically from Caol Nursery to Caol Primary School. This has the potential to increase the roll of St Columba's RC Primary School. Should the proposal proceed, The Highland Council should work with all stakeholders to address uncertainties about important issues raised by stakeholders as a matter of priority. These include who has management responsibility of the new nursery, children's uniform, the name of the nursery and potential uses for spaces previously used for St Columba's nursery class.

HM Inspectors
January 2025