

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Ayrshire Council to establish an early childhood centre at Mount Carmel Primary School.

July 2022

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010 \(Modification\) Regulations 2017](#). This removed the requirement to carry out a statutory consultation on proposals to establish a new nursery school or new nursery class and proposals to establish a new nursery school or nursery class under the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). Despite this, East Ayrshire Council wanted to consult on this proposal in the same way as the statutory consultations being run in conjunction with it. HM Inspectors provide this report on that basis.

The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Ayrshire Council's proposal to establish an early childhood centre at Mount Carmel Primary School. 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. The council's final consultation report may 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; 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 25 May 2022 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
- virtual visit to the site of Mount Carmel Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The proposal to establish an early childhood centre at Mount Carmel Primary School was one of three consultations grouped together. All three proposals form part of East Ayrshire's bid for funding from the Learning Estate Investment Programme.

2.3 The consultation process ran between 25 April 2022 and 9 June 2022. Notification of the commencement of the consultation was advertised in the local press and on social media. A copy of the council's proposal document was posted on the council's website. Separate virtual public meetings were held for each of the three proposals. The public meeting specific to establishing an early childhood centre at Mount Carmel Primary School was held on 25 May 2022. Ten interested parties attended. Those in attendance were generally in favour of the proposal. Discussion focused on the process to secure funding and the capacity and design of the proposed early childhood centre. The council received eight online responses in relation to the consultation. These indicated overall support for the proposal. Those who responded regard the proposal as a positive investment in Mount Carmel Primary School and of benefit to children and families. They raised several points for consideration should the proposal be successful. In particular, they do not want the addition of the early childhood centre to be detrimental to the primary department. They seek further information about the distribution of grant funding, the rationale behind the proposed retrofit and the design process. East Ayrshire Council has also consulted with children attending Mount Carmel Primary School. Children welcome the proposal and feel it will improve their school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 East Ayrshire Council identified the need to increase its capacity for early learning and childcare within north west Kilmarnock. The establishment of an early childhood centre within Mount Carmel Primary School would provide additional capacity. This will help meet the increased requirement for early learning and childcare places in the local area. The roll of Mount Carmel Primary School has fallen over the past few years. As a result, there is available accommodation within the school building to accommodate the addition of this new facility. The school also benefits from expansive grounds, which would support the provision of outdoor learning.

3.2 HM Inspectors believe that the addition of an early childhood centre to Mount Carmel Primary School has the potential to bring considerable educational benefits to the school community. All parents, children and staff who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They identified a number of clear benefits should the proposal be successful. The opportunity for children to transition from nursery to primary within the same establishment is seen as a significant benefit. Staff and parents feel this will help establish relationships, improve continuity in learning and improve attainment. They also believe it will help stabilise the school roll. Staff see opportunities to strengthen approaches to learning and teaching across the early level. It will expand the range of expertise across the staff team and provide a range of additional opportunities for professional learning. Children welcome the potential to be buddies and work alongside younger children. Parents of children at both pre-school and primary stages will benefit from having their children attend a single establishment.

3.3 The proposal will result in a retrofit of Mount Carmel Primary School. Staff and parents appreciate that children currently benefit from a range of additional accommodation and space across the school building. While supporting the proposal, they are keen to ensure that it is not to the detriment of children in primary classes. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should liaise closely with staff and parents to inform the design process.

3.4 Representatives from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Galloway are in favour of the proposal. They believe it will strengthen children's transition into primary school, build capacity within the school community and strengthen the school as a whole.

4. Summary

The council's proposal is of clear educational benefit. All children, parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors are in favour of the proposal. The council's proposal, should it proceed, should see children benefit from strengthened transition between early years and primary. It will increase opportunities to strengthen learning and teaching across the early level. An improved school environment has the potential to support further the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence and improve outcomes for all learners. In taking the proposal forward, the council would benefit from involving staff and parents in the final design and layout of the proposed retrofit.

**HM Inspectors
July 2022**