

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Midlothian Council to provide non-denominational capacity for Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School at a new campus on the site of the former Hopefield Primary School in Bonnyrigg and use this additional capacity to provide early level education for all children at nursery and P1 through a new provision to be known as *Burnbrae Early*.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Midlothian Council's proposal to relocate the Early Learning and Childcare and P1 classes at Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School to a new campus on the site of the former Hopefield Primary School. This new provision is referred to as *Burnbrae Early*. 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 a copy of 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 legislative 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 and young people of the Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people 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:

- 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 Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School and the site of the proposed new campus, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Following an extensive pre-consultation through which a number of options were explored, Midlothian Council agreed to consult formally on this proposal as the option which found most favour with stakeholders during the pre-consultation. Midlothian Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 Midlothian Council formally consulted stakeholders between 8 May and 20 June 2017. A public meeting was held at Burnbrae Primary School on 31 May 2017 and was attended by 22 members of the public. Copies of the consultation document were sent to all parents of children attending Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School. Information about the consultation was distributed to other early learning and childcare providers in the surrounding area for distribution to all parents and staff. Separate meetings were held with staff and pupils at Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School. All stakeholders were offered the opportunity to share their views through an online survey.

2.3 Forty-four individual responses to the consultation were received either by email, in writing or through the online questionnaire. Twenty respondents opposed the proposal, eight supported the proposal and the remainder sought clarification on a range of points within the proposal. Consultees raised a number of questions and concerns in their written responses, and at the public meeting. Their main concerns were that:

- the proposal impacts on children who will attend Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School in the future more than on those attending at present and that Midlothian Council had not taken sufficient cognisance of this during the consultation;
- other options had not been sufficiently explored and the reasons for this had not been explained clearly;
- plans for the new school campus have been delayed and this places a significant burden on the current Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School where there is insufficient space for the number of children who attend at present and the number projected to attend over the next two years;
- the proposal would lead to significant drop-off and pick-up challenges for families who would have children attending the proposed *Burnbrae Early* and also children attending Burnbrae Primary School P2-P7;
- splitting the school over two sites some distance apart will be detrimental to the ethos, life and work of the school as single community; and

- time for learning will be lost as a result of the time required for children to travel from one site to another for joint learning experiences.

A few consultees who noted agreement with the proposal stated that they saw this as an opportunity for an innovative and bespoke approach to early level learning for children aged 3 to 5 years. Others expressed that, whilst they believed this to be the best option from the three recently explored, they still had concerns about the impact on families with children who would be attending the two different sites.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal to relocate the Early Learning and Childcare and P1 classes at Burnbrae Primary School to a new campus on the site of the former Hopefield Primary School creating a new provision called *Burnbrae Early*, includes potential educational benefits. There is potential for children who attend *Burnbrae Early* to benefit from an innovative approach which delivers learning across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence from nursery to the end of P1. A new, purpose-designed building could impact positively on children's learning through, for example, improved access to outdoor play, increased use of digital technology and well-planned classroom spaces designed to meet the needs of all children. In particular, the increased space is necessary to accommodate the increasing number of children being enrolled at Burnbrae Primary School and Nursery. The council has not yet developed plans of what the new building might look like so it is difficult for consultees to envisage the extent of this potential benefit. However, this provides an opportunity for stakeholders to be involved at an early stage of the design process. The council has stated that it would like to develop further staff's approaches to planning learning through experimentation and play and increase collaboration between practitioners working across the early level. Whilst a new building is not essential to this, it is clear that the design and space of the current Burnbrae Primary School and Nursery makes it difficult to plan joint learning experiences for nursery and P1.

3.2 For children attending Burnbrae Primary School Nursery, the proposal should provide a seamless transition from nursery to primary education. However, children who enter P1 at Burnbrae Primary School from other early learning and childcare centres will still require support in their transition from nursery to P1. All children will then require support to make the transition from P1 to P2 at the P2 to P7 site. A few consultees have raised this as a concern which the council has not yet responded to sufficiently well. The council has stated that there is an opportunity to further develop family learning and partnership approaches to supporting children and families within the new purpose-built facility. This has the potential to improve early intervention strategies and impact positively on outcomes for children and families in the Bonnyrigg area.

3.3 Co-locating the new early level provision on a joint campus with a new St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School has potential for significant partnership working between the two staff teams which could impact positively on the quality of education all children on the campus receive. However, this aspect of the proposal has not yet been fully explored by staff, parents and children at Burnbrae Early

Learning and Childcare and Primary School. Any plans for shared facilities will need to be agreed with all stakeholders.

3.4 Children currently attending Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School will not be affected by this proposal. However, during the consultation and when HM Inspectors visited, children from P1 to P6 were able to articulate some positive aspects of the proposal and some concerns that they had for children who might be affected by this in the future. They understood the need to create more space for their growing school population. Children expressed concern over the poor state of the footpath between the current site and the proposed additional site for their school. It would require some work to make it a safe and pleasant walking route. Children talked at length about the difficulties some families would have dropping-off and picking up children from two different sites. The council will require to engage further with children and families to address these concerns should the proposal be carried forward.

3.5 Parents of children currently attending Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School expressed that their children would not be significantly affected by the proposal. The proposal is of more concern to parents whose children will attend the early learning and childcare and/or primary school in the future. The greatest level of concern is amongst parents who will have children attending both sites. They are concerned about being able to get children to both nursery and school on time and within a reasonable travelling time. The council has stated that it will look to address their concerns through further engagement with parents to ensure appropriate timings for the nursery/school day at each site to allow for drop-off and pick-up. There is a need for the council to work with parents to explore more fully the travel issues which they have raised and find mutually agreeable solutions. If these matters are not sufficiently well addressed, there is potential for increased lateness and therefore lost learning time for children. A significant number of those who rejected the proposal have raised concerns about splitting the school over two sites which are less than one kilometre walking distance apart. The council has stated that regular, combined activities will ensure that all children maintain a sense of belonging to the school community. Moving forward, parents, staff and children will require to be involved in further dialogue about how this will be achieved. The council will need to ensure that time spent moving children between the two sites does not become a regular reduction in time for meaningful learning. The council states that this walk sits well with the desire to encourage physical activity. Whilst such a walk may be part of the school's wider promotion of health and wellbeing, it should not be considered a substitute for high-quality physical education.

3.6 Almost all staff at Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School are in agreement with the proposal. They value the opportunity to be involved in planning the design of the new provision. They see increased opportunities for early intervention and family learning through the bespoke facilities which the council states it aims to create. They also spoke of opportunities to enhance the early level curriculum through partnerships with local businesses and amenities that are closer to the proposed new site than to the current school building. They are very concerned about the proposed timeline for making this happen and would like further clarification on this. Parents also indicated that this was a concern. In the

meantime, there is a need to find appropriate solutions to accommodate the increasing number of children who will enter the Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School classes from August 2017. In particular, the current early learning and childcare space is insufficient for the projected roll for session 2017-18.

3.7 During the consultation period, a few consultees identified a perceived contradiction in the proposal. The proposal consultation document suggests the new building might be open during session 2018-19. However, the note of the public consultation meeting indicates that Midlothian Council expressed that this is unlikely. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate this contradiction. In its final consultation report, the council will need to provide clarity on the timeline.

4. Summary

4.1 For children aged 3-5 years, there are some potential educational benefits to this proposal. A new model of early level which extends opportunities for experimentation and play from early learning and childcare through to the end of P1 could provide a strong platform for children's further learning and development. A purpose built facility will enable planning for partnership working, family learning and early intervention strategies to be embedded from the outset. Children and families could benefit greatly from a strengthened team approach if the educational benefits outlined by Midlothian Council were to be realised. Almost all stakeholders agree that this is the case. However, there is also the risk of losing the overall identity of Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School and that, over time, the two sites become two separate educational establishments with increased transition points for many children. To avoid this, Midlothian Council will need to ensure significant collaboration between all staff and partners and highly-effective leadership of learning at all levels.

4.2 If the proposal is taken forward, Burnbrae Early Learning and Childcare and Primary School would operate on two separate sites. Many consultees raised concerns about this aspect of the proposal, which they feel will impact significantly on family arrangements for getting children to and from school. This is particularly problematic for families with children attending both sites. Some parents, staff and children also raised concerns about children moving between the two sites during the school day and the potential for significant loss of learning time. They also raised the poor state of the main walking route between the sites and limited access to the new site for those travelling by car or public transport. In the consultation proposal paper and at the public meeting, the council indicated how it might seek to resolve these issues but some consultees still have concerns that need to be addressed. Very little consideration has yet been given to the educational benefits

and any issues that might result from a shared campus site with St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School. In taking its proposal forward, the council should engage further with all stakeholders to seek appropriate resolution on the range of issues which consultees have raised.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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