

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Lothian Council to close North Berwick Nursery School and re-designate this as Law Primary School Nursery Class.

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 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 East Lothian Council's proposal to close North Berwick Nursery School and re-designate this as Law Primary School Nursery Class. 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 of North Berwick Nursery and Law 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 North Berwick Nursery and Law Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Lothian 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 The consultation process ran from 24 October 2017 until 4 December 2017. Copies of the consultation document and an information leaflet were available on the East Lothian Council consultation website. In addition, paper copies and questionnaires were available in local schools and council buildings. An advertisement was placed in the local newspaper and the council used social media posts to raise further awareness. A public meeting was held at North Berwick High School on 21 November 2017. This meeting was attended by one local resident who wished to express a view about another proposal on which the council was also currently consulting stakeholders. Less formal drop in sessions were also held on 6 November 2017 at Dirleton Primary School and on 9 November 2017 at North Berwick Community Centre.

2.3 Thirty-five written and electronic responses were received by the council with a majority in favour of the proposal and just over 31% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors consider that the proposal has the potential to bring educational benefits. The headteacher of Law Primary School assumed the role of headteacher of North Berwick Nursery School under a shared headship arrangement in August 2013. The current staffing, budget and management arrangements in the nursery reflect the model which is in operation across East Lothian Council. The proposal seeks to formalise this arrangement permanently.

3.2 The formalised arrangements outlined in the proposal will assist the council to respond to the expansion of early learning and childcare from 600 to 1140 hours as part of a range of flexible options. It also contributes to best value with regard to the efficient and effective management of the school estate.

3.3 The proposal has the potential to allow children to benefit from stronger transition between early years and primary with staff and management who know them well. This should lead to improved progression in learning and improved consistency in teaching and learning approaches. The delivery of, in particular, the Early Level of Curriculum for Excellence will be improved through joint professional learning and the deployment of staff from the nursery class and other stages.

3.4 All parents and children who met with HM Inspectors were in support of the proposal. At an earlier stage in the process, some parents had wrongly assumed that North Berwick Nursery would be closing and moving from its current location and this is reflected in the comments they made during the council's consultative

activities. From the evidence collated by the council, stakeholders who agreed with the proposal could see the benefits to children from the closer links. Nursery staff were mixed in their views about the potential benefits. A few expressed concerns over the nursery losing its independent identity and its future share of resources and administrative and management support.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors consider that this proposal has the potential to bring educational benefits to the children and families in North Berwick Nursery and Law Primary School. The proposal formalises the current management and staffing arrangements through the creation of the former North Berwick Nursery as a nursery class within Law Primary School. Improved transitions for children as they progress from nursery to primary school should result from greater opportunities for collaboration and professional learning for all staff. In moving forward with the proposal, the council should continue to work with those nursery staff who are not yet convinced of the benefits with regard to staffing and resourcing in the proposed new arrangements.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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