

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Angus Council to change provision of education in the Birkhill area through the relocation of Birkhill Pre-school Class to a specified location within the current Birkhill Primary School.

1. Introduction

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 Angus Council's proposal to change provision of education in the Birkhill area through the relocation of Birkhill Pre-school Class to a specified location within the current Birkhill 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. 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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people 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 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.

1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 5 February 2015 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 sites of Birkhill Pre-school Class and Birkhill Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Angus 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 Angus 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*. Angus Council's proposal is to change provision of education in the Birkhill area through relocating Birkhill Pre-school Class to a specified location within the current Birkhill Primary School and for the new arrangements to come into effect in October 2015. The consultation process ran from 14 January 2015 to 20 March 2015. During this period, the council held one public meeting on 5 February 2015. The council received only two written responses to the proposal. Both were seeking more information on the proposal. During the consultation period, the council consulted with parents, pupils and the wider community on proposed plans for the school.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Angus Council's proposal to change provision of education in the Birkhill area through the relocation of Birkhill Pre-school Class to a specified location within the current Birkhill Primary School from October 2015 has clear educational benefit. It would enable children to access school facilities on a more regular basis. It would make it easier for staff to liaise and work together on a more regular and on-going way to develop children's learning and curricular experiences, particularly across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. Birkhill Pre-school Class is currently located 0.7 miles away from Birkhill Primary School. Young children have to walk along the main Dundee to Coupar Angus Road to Birkhill Primary School to access school facilities or attend whole-school events. The pre-school class is housed currently in a building which needs significant refurbishment to support staff fully in delivering Curriculum for Excellence. A new, purpose-built setting would also ensure access for all users in accordance with current disability legislation.

3.2 Relocating to a new purpose-built pre-school setting has the potential to provide greater continuity and progression in learning, including on-going access to learning outdoors, across the age range 3 to 6 years. There would be increased opportunities to enhance and extend existing transitional arrangements for both pre-school and primary-aged children. There would be much more scope to allow primary-aged children to work more with pre-school aged children, for example through buddying arrangements. Staff would have greater flexibility in how to organise space, enabling them to meet children's learning needs in a more focused and planned way. Moving Birkhill Pre-school Class has the potential for children, parents and staff to be more fully integrated into school life. Children would have

easier access to resources such as the gym. The proposal should improve day-to-day management arrangements, including more regular access and support from senior managers for both staff and parents.

3.3 The council plans to implement the proposal from October 2015. All stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors have justified concerns over some practical arrangements, including traffic management and parking facilities, on account of the increased number of cars. They are also concerned about children's health and safety during building works to the school. Staff working within the pre-school provision are also concerned about outdoor storage and removal arrangements in October. However, they are aware that additional storage has been promised and costed into plans. In its final consultation report, the council needs to address concerns regarding the move and make clear how the transition arrangements for children, parents and staff would be managed so as not to have a detrimental impact on children's health and safety and their learning and development.

3.4. All staff, children and parents who met with HM Inspectors were positive and saw the benefits of the proposal. All parents, who met with HM Inspectors, felt the proposal would ensure that their children had better access to the school building from an earlier age and would be an advantage in establishing early links for themselves and their children's learning. They thought it would be a good idea if their children could in some way be involved in the design of the building. Staff were excited at the prospect of the proposal and would welcome more advice and guidance on how to make the most of the new provision in enhancing children's learning. All primary-aged children who met with HM Inspectors were very enthusiastic about the proposal. However, they raised questions about the amount of outdoor space, their play equipment and were worried that access to school from houses at the rear of the school might be affected due to building works.

4. Summary

Overall, Angus Council's proposal to change provision of education in the Birkhill area through the relocation of Birkhill Pre-school Class to a specified location within the current Birkhill Primary School has clear educational benefit in terms of continuity and progression for children's learning. The proposal has the support of all stakeholders. If implemented, the proposal would help to integrate more fully, children, staff and their parents into whole-school life on a daily basis. In taking forward the proposal, the council should take account of points raised in this report and in particular, provide reassurance to stakeholders over the arrangements for managing the increased traffic-flow at the school. The council needs to work with staff to support any interim arrangements during the building works to assure itself of children's safety.

It should provide more information to stakeholders on how the council will handle transitions, including practical arrangements for moving resources from the pre-school class to the new setting in the primary school.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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