

## **Consultation proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal to build a new nursery class in the grounds of the existing Fox Covert RC Primary School, Fox Covert Primary School and Fox Covert Nursery.**

### **Context**

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation 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. Introduction**

1.1 The City of Edinburgh Council proposes to build a new nursery class in the grounds of the existing Fox Covert RC Primary School, Fox Covert Primary School and Fox Covert Nursery.

1.2 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 30 January 2014 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and

- visits to the site of Fox Covert RC Primary School, Fox Covert Primary School and Fox Covert Nursery, including discussion with the headteachers of both schools, the head and a member of staff of Fox Covert Nursery, sample groups of staff from both schools, pupils from both schools, parents of children attending each of the two primary schools, parents of children attending Fox Covert Nursery, two Parish Priests and a representative of the Roman Catholic Church on The City of Edinburgh Council's Children and Families Committee.

#### 1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of Fox Covert RC Primary School, Fox Covert Primary School and Fox Covert Nursery, 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

## 2. Consultation process

2.1 The City of Edinburgh Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Of the 37 e-mail responses, two written and two pictorial responses passed on to Education Scotland by The City of Edinburgh Council on completion of the consultation process, 40 were not in favour of the proposal, one was in favour and one did not specify a preference. Of the two additional submissions made directly to Education Scotland, both were against the proposal.

2.3 Almost all parents of children currently in Fox Covert RC Primary School or Fox Covert Primary School who responded to the consultation, expressed considerable concerns about the proposal. Although all acknowledge that there is a need to provide additional nursery places in the west side of the city and welcome the council's attempts to address this, they are opposed to the proposal of building the nursery on the Fox Covert site. They feel that the proposal has not been sufficiently well considered by the council and that the decision to build the nursery on the school site seems to have been made without taking full account of the need to also provide additional capacity for the primary schools in the future. They feel that the council has not fully taken into account the predicted increasing roll, particularly from substantial new housing nearby. They feel that short-term measures planned to reconfigure the internal space at the Fox Covert Primary School will not support the future demand for increased capacity. They also feel that alternative sites should have been considered more fully and that additional potentially appropriate sites were not considered at all. They are disappointed because they feel that, despite requests for information, the reasons why the Fox Covert site is the preferred site had not been explained with clarity.

2.4 Parents feel that there is already a significant volume of traffic and congestion around the main entrance to the school, both at the start and end of the school day. They believe that there are significant health and safety issues associated with the numbers of additional vehicles that would be in the school area should the proposal go ahead. They are also concerned that increased traffic congestion will demean the relationship that the school has with its residential neighbours who already have to be tolerant of the heavy traffic congestion.

2.5 Parents are concerned also about the potential negative impact of the proposed adaptations on the learning experiences of their children. For example, they are disappointed that there would be a reduction in outdoor space for activities. They feel that at a time when childhood obesity levels across Scotland are of concern, a proposal which will potentially reduce the amount of participation in sporting activities or general play using outside space will be detrimental. They feel that this would be further exacerbated should some of the outside space be required for extra classrooms in the future. Parents of children at Fox Covert Primary School are concerned that their children's learning could be disrupted for potentially the next three years through construction of a new nursery and internal reconfiguration of the existing building to accommodate extra classrooms. This would be further exacerbated by changes in leadership with the recent appointment of an acting headteacher and the possibility of this changing again with a permanent appointment being made in the future.

2.6 Parents feel that should the numbers in the existing Fox Covert Nursery reduce to the point where it would no longer be viable for it to continue, the provision of its 31 full-time equivalent places or 62 part-time places would be lost. This would lead to a net gain of only nine full-time or 18 part-time places. Should this be the case, then parents feel that this would not provide best value and would not solve the problem of providing enough much needed additional nursery spaces.

2.7 A few parents feel that the original proposal is misleading and does not contain fully accurate information. For example, they believe that the proposal does not make clear to them that the high-quality outdoor learning which is being promoted as a possible outcome of the proposal is dependent on the educational establishments making successful bids to outside organisations to secure funding for high-quality resources. A few respondents were not confident that the forecast demand figures provided by the council as part of the consultation proposal were accurate, or supported by robust research.

2.8 Parents of children currently in the existing Fox Covert Nursery who responded to the consultation expressed considerable concerns about the building of a new nursery on the Fox Covert site. They have a strong and very positive view about the quality of education and care provided by the well-established staff team. They are very happy with the current provision for their children and feel that it provides children with very good opportunities to play and learn together. Parents are concerned that the existing Fox Covert Nursery would lose children to the new nursery and this would impact negatively on its viability. They feel that the existing nursery staff had kept them as well-informed as they could but they had not been adequately informed or consulted by the council.

2.9 Children from both Fox Covert primary schools in sample groups spoken to by the HM Inspector, had mixed feelings about the proposal. All think that it is a good

idea to offer more nursery places as they are aware of waiting lists. Approximately half, expressed concerns about possible reductions in playground areas. A few are concerned about losing some of the trees in the area that the nursery would be built on and green space which they enjoy playing on when the weather is suitable. A few value current access to two football pitches and are concerned that they may lose one. A few are concerned about increased traffic congestion in an already congested area. They are concerned that there would be an increase in the number of lorries during the time of construction, particularly when lorries are already causing congestion as they travel to and from the neighbouring building site. Children hope that if the proposal goes ahead that the council could organise for the building work, as much as possible, to be carried out during school holiday periods.

2.10 The headteachers and staff in the focus groups of Fox Covert RC Primary School and Fox Covert Primary School are generally in favour of the proposal. They are positive about a new build and shared site, including enhanced opportunities for early level working and enabling continuity in learning through transition arrangements. They welcome the additional opportunities this would bring for further professional learning opportunities and sharing good practice with early years staff. They welcome the opportunity to extend children's involvement in whole school groups such as the pupil council and eco committee. They feel also that should the proposal go ahead, children at the primary stages will have further opportunities for developing skills for learning, life and work. For example, primary children would have improved opportunities for activities such as buddying. The only concern that staff have is around increased traffic congestion.

2.11 The head of centre and staff of Fox Covert Nursery are not in favour of the proposal. They feel that they have provided a high-quality service in the area for a number of years and fear that they may have to close if the proposal goes ahead. They operate within a tight budget and they feel that losing children could have a seriously detrimental effect on viability. They are disappointed with what they feel has been a lack of communication and consultation with them.

2.12 The Roman Catholic Church is in favour of the proposal. Representatives felt that this would help provide much needed nursery places. They thought that the site was geographically appropriate being situated between two parishes.

### **3. Educational aspects of the proposal**

3.1 Higher birth rates in Edinburgh are resulting in greater demand for early years provision. In particular, the number of three and four year olds in Edinburgh has increased in the last five years. There is also ongoing building work in the Fox Covert catchment area which is attracting families with young children into the area. These factors, coupled with the fact that local authority and partner provider nurseries in the west area of the city are running at full or almost full capacity, has resulted in centres operating waiting lists. Taking this into account along with the requirement to extend free nursery provision from August 2014 to 600 hours a year for all three and four year olds and two year olds who are, or have been at any time since turning two, looked after or subject to a kinship order as set out in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill*, has resulted in a high demand for additional nursery provision in the geographical area. To meet this demand, the council proposes to build a stand-alone nursery on the Fox Covert site to provide 40 full-time or 80 part-time places. It is proposed that this nursery will be open for August 2015.

3.2 At the time of the visit by an HM Inspector, there were no specific designs or plans for the new building. However, it is planned that the new build will offer state of the art nursery facilities. The information and communications technology infrastructure would be enhanced to support learning. Outdoor learning is a key feature of learning for children in the nursery, including access to natural resources. The proposed grounds at the new site have the potential to support this. The new building will provide disabled access and accommodation will be designed to ensure space and flexibility. It is planned that the new building will have two additional rooms to support work with 0-3 year olds and their families, thereby improving access to early years provision for children and their parents in the area.

3.3 It is planned that the nursery will be managed by one of the headteachers of the Fox Covert Primary Schools which will help make efficient use of resources. However, although the new nursery is not catchment based, this arrangement has the potential to be perceived in the community as being affiliated to the primary school managed by the joint headteacher. The council should consider how best to avoid this. Building at the proposed location would provide opportunities for seamless transition for nursery children and for development of the curriculum across the early level. It would facilitate sharing of resources and promote shared learning experiences between the educational establishments on site. Close proximity has the potential to impact positively on professional development through increased opportunities for collegiate and varied professional activity. Children should benefit from this increased professional development.

3.4 Fox Covert RC Primary School and Fox Covert Primary School share a joint campus on the west side of the city. Fox Covert Primary School is operating at full capacity with Fox Covert RC Primary School operating at 80% capacity. The schools occupy a large site with generous outdoor space. Condition surveys of both have rated them as adequate and a suitability assessment has rated them as good. They share road access through a residential and heavily congested area. Parking space at the site is limited.

3.5 Fox Covert Primary School is to undergo internal reconfiguration for the start of the 2014-15 session to accommodate an increase in roll due to higher birth rates and children requiring places from ongoing house building in the catchment area.

3.6 There will be a reduction in outdoor space available for use by children at both Fox Covert Schools should the proposal go ahead. However, there would still be ample outdoor space. The council should fully take into account the predicted possible increase in roll in both Fox Covert Primary Schools in future planning. There may be a necessity in the future to extend the primary school building and this would further reduce available outdoor space.

3.7 The Fox Covert Primary School buildings are used for after school provision and for a Girl Guide's group. The proposed nursery will not affect these activities. The two football pitches are used every Saturday for Soccer Sevens. There will be some disruption to these activities during the construction phase should the proposal go ahead. The council plans ongoing communication and to carry out much of the construction work during the school holiday period to minimise disruption. It plans a reconfiguration of the two football pitches so that there is no net loss for users.

3.8 Fox Covert Nursery, a private partnership nursery, currently exists on the Fox Covert site and has done so for many years. This is a non-profit organisation and has charitable status. It is currently registered for 31 full-time or 62 part-time places. It has received positive reports from the Care Inspectorate and HMIE (as the organisation was known in 2009 at the time of the most recent inspection).

3.9 The City of Edinburgh Council's plans to provide an additional 40 full-time, or 80 part-time nursery places as outlined in this proposal is dependent on Fox Covert Nursery continuing to operate. Should the existing nursery become unviable, the proposal would only result in nine full time, or 18 part-time additional places and would not significantly address the need for additional nursery places. For this proposal to achieve this aim, the council should work closely in partnership with the existing Fox Covert Nursery to support it in maintaining its roll.

3.10 There is a possibility of the community becoming confused over two nurseries on the same site. The council should consider how it will best minimise possible confusion should the proposal go ahead. For example, giving careful consideration to the name of the new establishment.

3.11 The council's proposal does not explain how access to the new nursery, including traffic management and congestion, would be dealt with to ensure the safety of all users of the school and to lessen the impact on local residents. Currently the access roads to the schools are heavily congested with vehicles. Staff and parents expressed significant and reasonable health and safety concerns in relation to this issue.

#### **4. Summary**

- HM Inspectors found that the council has set out its case clearly for the need for a new nursery in the west area of the city. It has outlined the benefits of a new-build with high-quality facilities and the possibility of an improved service by extending accommodation to children aged 0-3 years and their families. The new nursery should provide a service for children from across the city.
- The council has outlined benefits of the nursery being situated on the site of the existing primary schools. This includes shared headship to help ensure efficient use of finances and the opportunity for enhanced curriculum development across the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. There is significant opposition from parents to the nursery being built on the Fox Covert site and they remain to be convinced or understand why the council believes this to be the most suitable location for the new-build. The council needs to make clear its reasons for choosing this as the preferred site and ease parental concern. It should share with parents how it is going to address future increased demand for primary provision as the rolls for Fox Covert primary schools continue to increase.
- The council will only realise its aim of providing 40 full-time or 80 part-time additional nursery places as a result of this proposal should the existing Fox Covert Nursery partnership establishment continue to operate. The management committee of the existing nursery need to be included in further discussions as the proposals progress to ensure that the perception that this is currently a threat to their provision is managed, and potential opportunities for greater partnership working are fully explored.

- The council needs to explain clearly how it is going to fully consider and manage significant health and safety implications from an increased volume of traffic in an already heavily congested residential area.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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