

Consultation proposal by The City of Edinburgh Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal for the establishment of a nursery class at Wardie Primary School

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 establish a nursery class at Wardie Primary School, through the addition of a new nursery building.

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 27 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;
- visits to the site of Wardie Primary School and the existing Wardie Nursery, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of Wardie Primary School, any other users 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 The capital funding required to deliver the new nursery was approved by The City of Edinburgh Council on 2 May 2013. The consultation process formally began on 16 December 2013 and ended on 12 February 2014, with the outcome of the consultation scheduled to be reported to full council on 1 May 2014.

2.3 The City of Edinburgh Council received 44 written responses to the consultation. Of these, only one of the responses supported the proposal in its entirety. Although the capital investment by the council in expanding nursery provision was recognised as a positive step, within the other written responses several concerns were consistently highlighted.

2.4 Many 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. Those who also attended the public consultation meeting were dissatisfied with the responses from council officers when challenged on the accuracy of the figures they were using.

2.5 Almost all respondents highlighted the loss of green space for Wardie Primary School pupils and the negative impact that might have on their potential to further benefit from outdoor activity. Many commented that the proposal was yet another 'ad hoc' addition to the Wardie Primary School estate, similar to expansions in the recent past. Respondents suggested that a more strategic approach by The City of Edinburgh Council for the further development of the Wardie Primary School estate is required.

2.6 A significant number of respondents highlighted concern around the safety of an already busy drop-off period for the existing primary pupils, with the addition of nursery children potentially using an already busy pupil entrance. This risk would be exacerbated by the inadequate parking for cars on the main road to the primary school.

2.7 Whilst council officers suggested that other options for the location of the new nursery provision had been considered, these have not been shared with stakeholders.

2.8 The existing Wardie Nursery, is a registered charity, run as a voluntary organisation by a management committee, and is a partner provider with The City of Edinburgh Council. Wardie Nursery has concerns about their continued viability if the new nursery is established just 150 metres away from them. They currently have spaces available in their nursery and have concerns about how robust the increased demand figures forecast by the council are.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Based on the demand data provided by the council, this increase in provision through a new nursery will provide educational benefits to the area. The proposed nursery class within Wardie Primary School will increase the capacity across the city by providing 40 full-time places, or 80 part-time places. The nursery will be provided in a new building, which will be purpose-built and will link to the primary school via a corridor.

3.2 Whilst the council say in their proposal document that there are no proposals to reduce other pre-school provision locally, there can be no guarantees for the partner providers locally. To date, partner providers have not been fully involved in the considerations around the benefits or otherwise of the proposal. Stakeholders more generally are not sufficiently confident in the council projections.

3.3 The nursery building will provide an exciting learning environment, a separate room for meetings, parent groups and other activities, as well as a separate outdoor learning and play area.

3.4 The new building will cause the primary school to lose some of the existing playing fields. However, children are only allowed on these playing fields in the summer weather, when it is dry. Regardless of the nursery development, the headteacher and staff of Wardie Primary School recognise that better use needs to be made of this green space. The reduction in space still leaves considerable potential.

3.5 The staff of Wardie Primary School are very supportive of this development. They recognise the potential benefits to transition for children from nursery to primary this would bring. There will also be more potential for joint working across nursery and primary classes. Staff also regard the development of a nursery class as a good professional development opportunity for them.

3.6 During the consultation, issues were raised about the increased traffic congestion and concerns for children's safety with the increase in numbers of children at peak times. The headteacher and staff of Wardie Primary School are confident that these concerns can be managed to minimise concerns and the risks to children. For example, consideration could be given to staggering the start times for some children.

3.7 Representatives of the Wardie Primary School Pupil Council who spoke to HMI during the consultation process, had been informed of the development of the nursery class and the new building relatively recently. They had recent discussions with the headteacher about the implications. Children were enthusiastic about the addition of a nursery to their school and were keen to explore the potential to work closely with nursery children as buddies and on joint projects. They recognised that some of the green space around their school would be lost, but did not regard that as a major problem. The use of the current space is significantly limited by the weather.

4. Summary

- The council has outlined relevant educational benefits of its proposal.
- In progressing this proposal further, the council needs to clarify the uncertainty around their projections of increased demand for nursery places in the Wardie area.
- The council needs to involve more fully stakeholders in the further development of the proposal, particularly the parents of Wardie Primary School pupils who are concerned about the loss of green space.
- The headteacher, staff, parents and council need to work together to ensure best use is made of the remaining green space for all children.
- The management committee of the existing Wardie 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.
- Concerns around congestion and children's safety caused by increased traffic need to be managed carefully by the council and other agencies to ensure that the safety of children is paramount. This will include further consideration of staggered start times.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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