

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to relocate provision for primary pupils with special educational and behavioural needs to an enhanced nurture base at Oxbang Primary School.

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 East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to relocate provision for primary pupils with special educational and behavioural needs to an enhanced nurture base at Oxbang 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.

1.2 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.

1.3 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;

- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Oxgang Primary School and the current primary social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBN) base, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Dunbartonshire 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 statutory consultation period ran from 6 February 2015 until 24 March 2015. A public meeting was held on 24 February 2015 at Oxgang Primary School. There were 20 written responses to the consultation, all of which were from parents of children who attend Oxgang Primary School. Of those who responded, five were in favour of the proposal and 15 were against it. The council also held consultation sessions with children who attend Oxgang Primary School as well as staff groups from both Oxgang Primary School and the current SEBN primary provision in Kirkintilloch.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal would provide children with an opportunity to have their learning needs met within a mainstream setting and increase inclusion through planned opportunities. Currently, children with social, emotional and behavioural needs from across the council receive outreach support within their local base schools. In addition, a few attend school part-time at the SEBN primary base which is situated in temporary hatted accommodation in Kirkintilloch. The council is proposing to relocate this provision to an enhanced nurture base in Oxgang Primary School and extend the provision to provide a small number of full-time placements. Currently, Oxgang Primary School is significantly under capacity in terms of occupancy rates and the layout of the school means there is scope to provide the provision without making significant adaptations. In addition, Oxgang Primary School has already significant experience of meeting children's learning needs using a nurturing approach. The enhanced nurture base would be managed by a dedicated manager and existing specialist staff.

3.2 The council's proposal has a number of important educational benefits. Children who require full-time SEBN placements would benefit from having a dedicated and purpose-designed space to meet their learning needs whilst also benefitting from the resources and facilities of the mainstream school such as dining hall and physical education facilities. In addition children who attend the nurture base will benefit from being part of a larger peer group in the mainstream primary with which they could be integrated if and when was appropriate. The council makes it clear that any such integration would be done through a needs based, individual approach and risks assessed accordingly. Such planned integration is likely to enhance the already highly-inclusive and welcoming ethos of Oxgang Primary School. However, it is not clear from the proposal if or how children will maintain

existing links with their base schools, which may be some distance away from Oxgang Primary School. Given that this provision would accommodate children from across the council, it would be important for the council to ensure that children who attend the base have opportunities to maintain links with their local school. In its final consultation report, the council should be more explicit about how it will achieve this aspect of the proposal.

3.3 Parental responses to the consultation were mixed. A group of parents from Oxgang Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were strongly against the proposal. They felt that the proposed nurture base could be detrimental to those children who already attend Oxgang Primary School. This was also the view of a number of parents who provided written submissions. They had a number of questions around details of the proposal, including parking, security arrangements and the potential negative effect some children's behaviour may have on others. Other parents were more in favour of the proposal. They expressed the view that, following initial concerns, questions had been answered by the council at the public meeting relating to such matters as numbers and security arrangements. They felt that following further planning, the proposal would have clear benefits for inclusive working.

3.4 HM Inspectors spoke to a number of staff and children regarding this proposal. Staff from Oxgang Primary School were in favour of the proposal. They regarded it as a positive opportunity to further develop the inclusive and welcoming ethos of the school. Children were excited at the prospect of making new friends and sharing their welcoming school ethos with others. Staff from the SEBN provision largely supported the proposal in principle but had rather more mixed views about the potential educational benefits. They felt that the current arrangements of providing part-time placements for children in conjunction with outreach support at their base school already meets the learning needs of children well. They would welcome further clarity about how children will maintain links and integration with their local school.

3.5 A few parents, who responded in writing and met with HM Inspectors, were critical of the consultation process. Some reported that they had not received letters by e-mail and had to rely on word of mouth to receive information. They were unhappy that the date for the proposed start of the nurture base had been communicated in error in the first letter. The council took reasonable steps to address these concerns during the period of consultation, including reissuing letters by e-mail and via the school.

3.6 A few parents and staff had reasonable concerns about the proposed implementation date of August 2015. They felt the time scale proposed did not leave sufficient time for appropriate transitions to take place. In its final consultation report, the council will need to address concerns regarding the proposed timescale and provide more information about arrangements for transitions to ensure children's learning needs are met.

3.7 During the consultation period parents identified an alleged inaccuracy in the proposal. Correspondence issued to consultees indicated a commencement date of August 2016. This was an error and during the consultation period the council amended this to August 2015 and issued revised letters.

4. Summary

The council's proposal has a number of educational benefits. It has the potential to better meet the needs of children with significant emotional and behavioural needs in the context of a base within Oxbang Primary School. Children attending the provision on a full-time basis will benefit from learning in a purpose-built setting within a mainstream school. In addition, the proposal has the potential to benefit the provision at Oxbang Primary School by enhancing its already inclusive ethos. A number of stakeholders have reasonable concerns around details of the proposal. These include operational details such as parking and security and how children will maintain links with their base schools. In taking forward the proposal the council needs to address these concerns. The council should further consider whether or not the proposed timescale allows sufficient time for appropriate transitions to ensure that the learning needs of all children are met.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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