
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	22 April 2025
Report By:	Ruth Binks Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/28/25/MR
Contact Officer:	Michael Roach Head of Education	Contact No:	01475 712891
Subject:	Outcome of Statutory Consultation Regarding Future Leadership Model – Newark Nursery School		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 ☒ For Decision ☐ For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to update members on the outcome of the statutory consultation process relating to the future leadership model of Newark Nursery school.
- 1.3 The Education Service carried out a pre formal consultation process with key stakeholders on the future leadership and status of Newark Nursery School in Port Glasgow during November and December 2024. It was agreed at the January Education Committee meeting to move to a statutory consultation taking one proposal from the pre-consultation forward i.e., that of changing Newark from a school to an Early Learning Centre.
- 1.4 The statutory consultation process ran from 23 January until 10 March 2025, with a public meeting held on 20 of February 2025.
- 1.5 Education Scotland then began their work to engage with the service and stakeholders, with HM Inspectors making a visit to Newark Nursery on 12 March 2025. HM Inspectors also attended the public meeting.
- 1.6 In fully considering the feedback received from all stakeholders during the statutory consultation process, it has been determined that whilst there is a majority view that Newark should remain as a separate entity as a school, a large number of respondents also feel that a change to a standalone Early Learning Centre would be best. Education Scotland's report (Appendix 1) also concurs that there are education benefits from the Education Service's proposal. Given Officer's experience and knowledge of the of the challenges in recruiting for a Head teacher of a Nursery School, officers continue to recommend that the proposal to change Newark Nursery School to Newark Early Learning Centre is made.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Education and Communities Committee is asked to:

- approve that Newark Nursery School becomes a standalone Early Learning Centre under the leadership of a Head of Centre. The name shall be Newark Early Learning Centre.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 Newark Nursery School is located in upper Port Glasgow. It shares a campus with Newark Primary School. The school provides Early Learning and Childcare for 80 children aged 3-5 years. Family support services are provided within the school and the community.
- 3.2 The service provides high quality care and learning. This is evidenced by internal self-evaluation processes, education service quality assurance processes and external evaluations such as the recent Care Inspection visit, reported to the Education Committee in January 2025.
- 3.3 The current Head teacher retires in April 2025 allowing the service to consider, with the community, the best way forward for the leadership of the school.
- 3.4 Across Inverclyde there are a variety of models of Early Years establishments, however there is now only on nursery school i.e. Newark, with all others established as standalone early years family and children's centres and nursery classes as part of primary schools.
- 3.5 The Education Service identified that the option of the nursery school becoming a standalone Early Learning Centre under the leadership of a Head of Centre, should be taken to a statutory consultation after an informal pre-consultation held in November / December 2024.

Consultation process and outcome:

- 3.6 The statutory consultation process ran from 23 January until 10 March 2025. This included a public meeting which was held on Thursday 20 February 2025 from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm at Newark Primary school. Nobody attended the meeting other than a representative from Education Scotland.
- 3.7 A survey link was shared widely during this time period with 31 people responding to it. Details of the survey are outlined below.

3.8	Total number of respondents	31
	Number of respondents agreeing with the proposal to move to Newark becoming an Early Learning Centre (ELC) with its own Head of Centre	11
	Number of respondents disagreeing with the proposal to move to Newark becoming an ELC with its own Head of Centre	19
	Number of respondents undecided	1

3.9	Respondents included:	
	Inverclyde partner childminder	1
	Member of staff at an early years' setting	2
	Member of staff at primary school	2
	Member of staff at secondary school	1
	Member of the public	1
	Outreach officer	1
	Parent/carer of a child at primary school	8
	Parent/carer of a child at nursery school	14

Key Points and Themes of those agreeing with the proposal:

- 3.10 **Flexibility for Working Parents:** Some respondents believe that a standalone ELC could offer more flexible hours, which would benefit working parents. However, there is no proposal to change anything other than the leadership structure / posts going forwards.

- 3.11 **Focused Leadership:** A few comments suggest that having a dedicated head for the ELC could ensure focused attention on early years education.
- 3.12 **Maintaining standalone status:** Some respondents want the nursery to remain as a separate entity to Newark Primary School and see ELC status with a separate Head of Centre as the best option.

Opposition to the Proposal:

- 3.13 **Status quo:** Many respondents believe the current setup is effective, has resulted in high quality early years experiences for their children and see no need for change.
- 3.14 **Value of Current Leadership:** Several comments highlight the exceptional leadership of the current Head teacher, and express concerns about losing this leadership. However, it should be noted that any change of leadership, whether it be a Head teacher or Head of Centre will not mean that the same leadership can be maintained as the current Head cannot be replaced as they are.
- 3.15 A few respondents suggest that current staff should take over from the current Head teacher. Currently the staff in the Nursery are all non-teachers i.e. the current Head teacher is the only qualified teacher within the establishment. In order for existing staff to be considered for the leadership of the nursery the status of the school would need to change to an ELC.
- 3.16 **Smooth Transition:** Parents appreciate the smooth transition from nursery to primary school under the current system and fear this might be disrupted.
- 3.17 **Impact on Quality:** There are worries that the quality of care and education might decline if the nursery becomes a standalone ELC. Some respondents shared concerns that becoming an ELC would mean more children, including 2-year-olds, would join the nursery. The consultation document made it clear that the only change being proposed was that of the leadership model, and so there would be no increase to the numbers of children attend nor any change to the age range e.g. the introduction of 2-year-old places.
- 3.18 **Staffing and Continuity:** Concerns were raised about potential changes in staffing and the impact on children's routines and relationships with key workers. The proposal would see no change to the staffing other than that of a new Head of Centre and the introduction of a Depute Head of Centre post. There are no plans to change the timings of the day, nor the routines of the running of the nursery.
- 3.19 **Nursery class option:** a number of respondents (5) did not agree with the proposal because they believe that the nursery school should become part of the primary school thus allowing for smoother transitions and closer parentship working than already exists.

4.0 PROPOSALS AND SUMMARY

- 4.1 Despite more respondents not agreeing with the consultation proposal than agreeing, it should be noted that 5 of those who did not agree, actually proposed another alternative i.e. that of the nursery being part of the primary school; this was an option shared in the pre-consultation and put to the side as it was the least preferred option. Given this, the numbers in full agreement are 11 and those not agreeing is 14, if those who voted no but proposed another alternative i.e. the nursery class and taken out of the overall count.

- 4.2 It is clear that the overall feeling remains that Newark Nursery should remain a separate entity from the school, whether it be as a school or ELC.
- 4.3 The Education Scotland report on the consultation (Appendix 1) found that *“HM Inspectors agree that the proposal allows for continuity of the education provision within a standalone ELC. Children who attend Newark Nursery School and their families will continue to benefit from support and well-established relationships with their peers and staff. It will be important to continue to engage with parents to reassure them that this proposal does not include changes to the population or timing of the standalone ELC. A new Head of Centre should have the opportunity to continue with the strengths of the current nursery. Inverclyde Council should ensure that ongoing links with teaching staff in primary schools continue, supporting the ongoing development and delivery of the curriculum and opportunities for professional learning.”*
- 4.4 As above in 4.3, the education service has already engaged with staff post the formal consultation and through the handover to the Acting Head of Newark, to ensure that the focus remains on the quality of the existing provision and over the summer period i.e. a focus on transitions as above. Whatever the outcome we will continue to link with parents to communicate the outcome of the consultation and any subsequent reassurances that are required.
- 4.5 It is clear that some of those respondents who voted against the proposal, were unclear as to the detail of the proposal i.e. that the changes would be more than just the leadership roles including changes to opening hours and that this influenced their decision.
- 4.6 The Education Service remains of the view that the best option for Newark is to become an ELC. This option maintains the status of a separate entity that most parents want. Some parents who have voted against the proposal actually want the current staff to take over the leadership and this is not possible as they are not qualified teachers.
- 4.7 The challenge the service will have is to recruit a Head teacher. Within Inverclyde all staff who work within early years settings, whether they are standalone, or nursery classes are non-teachers. All of the Deputies we have within Inverclyde are non-teachers. There are no middle leader teacher roles within our structures e.g. Principal teachers (PT) and Deputy Head teachers (DHT) of early years and not all PTs and DHTs have a remit for early years such as a Nursery class or even work in school setting that has one. This would make it difficult to recruit a teacher with relevant Senior Leadership ELC experience.
- 4.8 When trying to recruit an acting Head teacher to cover the leadership of the nursery for the summer term 2024/25, we were unable to appoint an acting Head teacher and so have had to appoint an acting Head of Centre, who is currently a Deputy Head of Centre in an ELC.
- 4.9 A move to an ELC, would retain the separate entity status of Newark, ensure that we can recruit a Head of Centre to lead it as such. We have other standalone ELCs, where the quality of the education experience is similar to that at Newark i.e. very good evaluations across all QIs from the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources	X	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)		X
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

The proposed change to a standalone ELC would save approx. £17k.

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
Newark Nursery School	Employee costs	April 2025	(£30,931)	N/a	This is the salary differential between a Head teacher and a Head of Centre – if the change is taken forward.

5.3 Legal/Risk

Any proposed proposals to discontinue permanently a school (this includes special schools and nursery schools) or a stage of education in a school (this includes years in a secondary school or all nursery classes in a primary school or a special class in a mainstream school or where the council proposes to discontinue Gaelic medium provision); are subject to statutory consultation through the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010. This process has been followed.

5.4 Human Resources

As above.

5.5 Strategic

N/A.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

Y	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required. This will be produced after the consultation process.
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

Y	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

Y	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
N	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
N	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 This report outlines the outcome from the formal consultation process as above.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 The related Education Scotland report is attached as Appendix 1.

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Inverclyde Council to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone Early Learning Centre (ELC) under the leadership of a Head of Centre.

March 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Inverclyde Council's proposal to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone Early Learning Centre (ELC) under the leadership of a Head of Centre. 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 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 statutory 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 the setting; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 20 February 2025 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 site of Newark Nursery School and Newark Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Inverclyde Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The proposal to change the current Newark Nursery School to a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre is the preferred option of Inverclyde Council following a pre-consultation process. During the pre-consultation process, stakeholders were asked to consider three options. These were: to maintain the nursery as a school and seek a replacement headteacher; to incorporate the nursery into Newark Primary School under the leadership of its headteacher; or to become a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre. The

pre-consultation survey had 141 respondents with 54 respondents in favour of maintaining the nursery school and seeking a new headteacher, 40 respondents in favour of incorporating the nursery into Newark Primary School and 47 respondents in favour of Inverclyde Council's preferred option of the nursery becoming a standalone ELC under the leadership of a Head of Centre.

2.3 Inverclyde Council carried out a formal consultation on the option to become a standalone ELC in accordance with statutory guidance between 23 January and 10 March 2025. A public meeting was held at Newark Primary School on 20 February 2025. Notice of this meeting was shared with stakeholders through parental emails, local newspapers and online. No stakeholders attended this meeting. An online survey generated 31 responses. Across all the responses, 11 were in favour, 19 were not and one was undecided. A minority of survey respondents are in favour of the proposal. Those in favour were generally in favour of the ELC being a standalone establishment. Those against were generally in favour of the current standalone nursery, and were very concerned with the thought that an ELC may lead to a change in hours and an increase in the number of children in attendance. The council did not receive any other direct communication in relation to the proposal.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that this proposal allows for continuity of educational provision. The change from a nursery school to an ELC will be implemented through the recruitment of a Head of Centre instead of a headteacher. This is the only change proposed within this consultation. As a result, children attending the nursery school should not experience any disruption to their learning.

3.2 As the council have stated, the implementation of this change will bring Newark Nursery School in line with other settings in Inverclyde. Newark Nursery School is the only establishment still operating as a nursery school in Inverclyde Council. The well-regarded current headteacher is due to retire in April 2025. Following a positive Care Inspectorate inspection, stakeholders are keen to ensure that the new leader is as effective, regardless of their position as a headteacher or a Head of Centre. The council notes that whilst primary teachers can undertake the role of nursery headteacher, there are decreasing numbers of available teachers interested in such a post. This lack of availability poses challenges for recruitment and therefore effective continuity of the centre. This consultation does acknowledge that ELCs are able to change operating hours or expand the range of children attending such a centre. However, these changes are not planned as part of this consultation.

3.3 Children attending the nursery school enjoy being able to play indoors and outdoors. They have access to a varied range of activities to support learning. Well-established relationships with staff are important to them. Parents who met with HM Inspectors value very highly the helpful and respectful relationships they have with staff in the nursery, including the headteacher. Parents highlighted the importance of continuity and the nature of the provision for their children and are very clear that they do not wish this to change. Parents who met with HM Inspectors are particularly concerned that changing the nursery to an ELC may bring further associated changes to the hours and age range of the centre. Parents fear this would have a negative impact on their children. Parents are seeking further reassurance from the local authority that the opening hours and age ranges will not change. If the proposal is implemented, Inverclyde Council staff should engage further with parents to discuss their concerns.

3.4 All Newark Nursery School staff who met with HM Inspectors felt, no matter what the centre's leadership structure was like, their working practice and processes would not change. All staff were aware of the headteacher's upcoming retiral. They are happy to remain as a standalone establishment, either as a nursery or an ELC. A few staff expressed an understanding of existing

recruitment pressures, which may make a switch to an ELC more practical. All staff agree that it is important to continue to have good links with teaching staff to support transitions from nursery to school and did not see that this proposal would change that. All staff felt that they would benefit from greater reassurance and clarity with regard to the number of staff and the proposed structure of the team. Newark Primary School and St Francis Primary School staff who met with HM Inspectors also expressed a confidence that work with the centre would continue as an ELC.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal allows for continuity of the education provision within a standalone ELC. Children who attend Newark Nursery School and their families will continue to benefit from support and well-established relationships with their peers and staff. It will be important to continue to engage with parents to reassure them that this proposal does not include changes to the population or timing of the standalone ELC. A new Head of Centre should have the opportunity to continue with the strengths of the current nursery. Inverclyde Council should ensure that ongoing links with teaching staff in primary schools continue, supporting the ongoing development and delivery of the curriculum and opportunities for professional learning.

HM Inspectors
March 2025