

APPENDIX D
HMIE report
Consultation proposal by Clackmannanshire Council

Report by HM Inspectorate of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal for education provision at Park Primary School and Tower Nursery School to be merged and managed by the headteacher of Park Primary School. Tower Nursery will be renamed 'Park Primary School Nursery Class'.

Introduction

1.1 Clackmannanshire Council proposes to merge Tower Nursery School and Park Primary School and that the headteacher of Park Primary School should manage the new Park Primary School and Nursery Class. The council proposal includes two options: either to relocate the nursery within the existing Park Primary School with appropriate improvements to the building, or retain the existing Tower Nursery School building as the site for the Park Primary School Nursery Class with minor improvements to the boundary fencing and gated access. Clackmannanshire Council supports the second option. The distance between the two schools is 50 metres from the rear of the primary to the perimeter fence of the nursery.

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

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

- 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 information on all schools affected; and
- visits to Park Primary School and Tower Nursery School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HMIE considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools, for any other users, for children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper, and for 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 Clackmannanshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Parents at Tower Nursery School are appreciative of Clackmannanshire Council's response to their initial concerns, proposed at an earlier budget engagement meeting, about relocating the nursery within the existing Park Primary School building. The council has now provided a second option to keep the nursery in its original building. Parents strongly believe this is a very effective learning environment for their children. Staff and children in Tower Nursery School unanimously share this view.

2.3 There is concern over the proposed change of name. Tower Nursery School has children who transfer to different primary schools in the area and changing the name, parents believe, could cause confusion. They feel that some parents may mistakenly assume that attendance at Park Primary School Nursery Class compels transfer to Park Primary School. The present Tower Nursery School could lose children in future years, parents suggest, as families choose other nursery classes believing that they will then have their first choice primary school.

2.4 Parents at Tower Nursery School feel that the present staffing provision is very effective in supporting both the nursery children and parents. Staff are available when parents feel they need to visit the nursery to raise a concern or seek advice or support. Parents feel that this is a strength of Tower Nursery School and that the nursery provides a service for the community, which is an area of severe deprivation. Staff in Tower Nursery School strongly support this view. Nursery children feel well nurtured and supported in their learning and development. Parents and staff within Tower Nursery School do not yet feel reassured about Clackmannanshire Council's intentions for managing and staffing the proposed Park Primary School Nursery Class once the present acting headteacher's post is terminated.

2.5 Parents and staff at Tower Nursery School are not yet fully aware of the council's proposed improvements to the boundary fencing and gated access to allow safe movement between the two buildings. They believe that a single campus with a clear perimeter and appropriate secure access would be the best option. They would benefit from more information from the council on this part of the proposal.

2.6 Parents and staff at Park Primary School strongly support the retention of the Tower Nursery School building should the two establishments merge. They also appreciate the council's willingness to listen to alternatives to relocating the nursery within the Park Primary School building. Children at Park Primary School are positive about both options, seeing advantages in each and expressing no strong preference.

2.7 Parents and staff in Park Primary School are concerned about the implications for the management of the new Park Primary School Nursery Class. They express concerns about the future workload of the headteacher in Park Primary School and the time required to lead and manage the nursery class effectively through the proposed merger while continuing with

existing responsibilities. They express concerns about the impact this will have on the management of Park Primary School. Parents and staff would benefit from further reassurance as to how the new merged establishment will be staffed and managed.

2.8 All stakeholders at Park Primary School do not feel fully informed about how the council intends to improve the boundary fencing and access between the two buildings to create a safe and secure single campus. They believe that the creation of a single campus is an important signal for future cohesion.

2.9 In both Tower Nursery School and Park Primary School, non-teaching staff currently employed in duplicated roles are uncertain as to the implications of the proposal on their future employment. The council has not yet fully explained in enough detail how non-teaching staff may be affected and any resulting issues resolved.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Clackmannanshire Council believes that a series of benefits will accrue from the proposed merger. The majority of benefits relate to the children in Tower Nursery School rather than current Park Primary School children.

3.2 Certain aspects of the predicted future improvements as described by the council are already progressing well through the strong partnerships that currently exist between Tower Nursery School and Park Primary School. It is therefore reasonable to suggest, as the council does, that children would gain increased benefit from arrangements for transition being enhanced further by the merger and the identification of individual needs at the earliest possible stage.

3.3 The council proposes that children would benefit from closer staff collaboration and collegiate professional development. This would provide increased opportunities to develop a shared understanding of Curriculum for Excellence, notably the Early Level, and for enhancing learner's experiences through joint topic work, shared resources and increased continuity. This reflects current good practice as noted by HMIE in other parts of Clackmannanshire and across Scotland and should contribute to the outcomes the council describes.

3.4 The merger would establish a single management team across the primary school and nursery class and thereby provide opportunities for implementing a single vision of what the new establishment could achieve. This would be an effective means to incorporate the main points for action from the Tower Nursery School inspection by HMIE, published in November 2009, notably for children to be more closely involved in planning their own learning and for an increased emphasis on self-evaluation. It makes sound sense for such work to be through continued implementation of Curriculum for Excellence.

3.5 Progress in the areas outlined within the educational benefits statement would mean that children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper would benefit from the result of such work across the nursery and primary. They could reasonably be expected to have a more consistent, continuous, challenging and supported education from age 3-12 and beyond.

3.6 The likely effects of the proposal on other users and on other children and young people would be minimal.

3.7 The council's proposal will result in the loss of the headteacher's post in Tower Nursery School and is likely to impact on staffing in other areas of work where there may be duplication across the two establishments. The council has outlined how it will manage these staffing changes but has not yet done so in enough detail to allay parental and staff concerns. There is currently a high level of satisfaction expressed by nursery staff and parents that key Scottish Government policies such as Getting It Right For Every Child and Early Years Framework are well supported. These can have a significant positive impact on children's educational progress. There is need to provide reassurance that this level of service will be at least maintained and possibly improved by the merger.

3.8 The council recognises the merger would require improvements to the boundary fencing and secure access between the two establishments. The educational benefits statement describes greater movement between the buildings as school and nursery children interact more regularly. Such improvements require to be outlined in more detail to give all stakeholders further reassurances about children's safety and security.

3.9 In September 2007, Clackmannanshire Council approved the recommendations of an independent commission set up to review of the provision of education 3-12. One of the recommendations of the commission was to move to provide early years' education within the campus of primary schools wherever possible. This is one of the major aims of the council's Schools Estate Management Plan for the period to 2015. The proposal, therefore, sits comfortably within council policy and Scottish Government guidance.

4. Summary

Clackmannanshire Council has set out a sound case for its proposal to merge Tower Nursery School with Park Primary School. Overall, the proposal is likely to lead to educational benefit, particularly for children in the nursery class. There is the potential for the children to benefit from a more continuous and consistent range of curricular opportunities. There is also the potential for an increased level of collaborative staff development and shared understanding in respect of implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and broader whole school improvement. The proposal also achieves the council's aim of ensuring that early years' education is provided within the campus of a primary school wherever possible. It would also represent best value for the council in achieving this aim. There is a significant saving in keeping Tower Nursery School in its current building rather than relocating it. From April 1 2011, Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils will implement a joint service to deliver education. In taking forward the proposal the new joint head of education needs to ensure that arrangements are set out more clearly for the staffing and management of the nursery class and the improvements to the perimeter of the new campus and secure access within and between the two buildings.