

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2002

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION – TOWNHEAD NURSERY SCHOOL AND MAISONDIEU
PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report proposes the amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a notes the contents of this report; and
- b instructs me to take forward the proposed amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School on the basis of consultation and discussion with key stakeholders

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Townhead Nursery School first opened in 1975. At that time, it was seen very much as blazing a trail for what was expected to be a significant expansion in Nursery Education shortly thereafter.
- 2.2 The late 1980s and the early 1990s did indeed see an expansion of Nursery Education, although that expansion took place at a time when significant surplus capacity existed in primary schools across Tayside and therefore all new nursery provision in that period took the form of nursery classes which were managed as an integral part of the primary school buildings in which they were housed (and continue to be housed).
- 2.3 In more recent years, expansion has progressed apace in the Nursery sector and here in Angus we have moved from having operated nursery classes in only 16 primary schools in September 1995 to now operating a nursery class in each of 50 primary schools.
- 2.4 Maisondieu Primary School in Brechin is one of only 10 primary schools in Angus which does not have a nursery class as an integral part of the school.
- 2.5 Although for many years Townhead Nursery School was the single nursery for the whole of Brechin (as well as serving a specialised purpose across Angus), the opening of the nursery class in Andover Primary School (and indeed in a number of small rural primary schools around Brechin) has meant that – increasingly – local children who go to Townhead Nursery School are those who reside within the delineated area of Maisondieu Primary School and who will transfer on to Maisondieu Primary School once their Nursery Education is complete.

- 2.6 The current head teacher of Townhead Nursery School has been in post now for 9 years. She has held that post with some distinction, but has recently intimated her intention of retiring at the end of the current school session. The imminent retirement of the Townhead Head Teacher makes it inevitable that the Council must take some sort of decision as to whether or not it maintains Townhead Nursery School as a separate establishment, or whether it decides to amalgamate Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School.

3 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 There are arguments in favour of retaining the status quo, all of which can be summarised by reference to the deservedly high reputation which Townhead Nursery School has established.
- 3.2 On the other hand, nursery provision in other classes across Angus are equally well regarded and there is absolutely no reason to assume that an amalgamation would in any way diminish the excellent nursery provision which is currently available.
- 3.3 Townhead Nursery School is the only Nursery School in Angus and – as such – its staff can at times find themselves in a more isolated situation than is ideal. Although every attempt is made to overcome any potential disadvantage which may accrue from this unique position, nonetheless it is one which does pose a little concern.
- 3.4 Similarly, Maisondieu Primary School is the only medium or large primary school in Angus which does not have a nursery class which forms an integral part of it, and once again the unique position in which the school finds itself is one which cannot be considered ideal.
- 3.5 The two buildings – Towhhead and Maisondieu – are on adjacent campuses. Similar arrangements currently pertain in a small number of other nursery classes attached to primary schools, and the way in which nursery and primary playgrounds are normally separated in any case would suggest that the current locations of the existing buildings are perfectly compatible with an amalgamated school.
- 3.6 On balance, and in all the current circumstances, the logical step would appear to be to amalgamate Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School.

4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

- 4.1 Townhead Nursery School currently makes provision for pupils across a wide area of Angus who have Special Educational Needs.
- 4.2 Amalgamating the Nursery School with the adjacent primary school would not in any way prejudice existing arrangements. At some point in the future, some consideration may be given to SEN provision for primary children within Maisondieu, but this would be very much a matter for the future and would not alter in any way the provision which is currently being made or planned for nursery or primary children of whose existence the Council is already aware.

5 DETAILED STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 At present, Townhead Nursery School has a Head Teacher.
- 5.2 If the two schools were to be amalgamated, the post of Nursery Head Teacher would not be filled, but instead the amalgamated school would qualify for an additional promoted member of staff, currently at the level of Assistant Head Teacher. Eventually, in terms of the McCrone Agreement, this would mean that the amalgamated school would have one Head Teacher and three Depute Head Teachers, although in the short-term – for the

next year or two – the nomenclature would remain as one Head Teacher, one Depute Head Teacher and two Assistant Head Teachers.

- 5.3 It is envisaged that one of the three senior staff working under the Head Teacher would be designated in charge of what would effectively become a Nursery Unit. This member of staff would have day-to-day responsibilities for overseeing the work of staff in the Nursery, of liaising with parents and – most importantly – of managing the learning experiences of three and four year old pupils in the Nursery.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is important to stress that the principal thrust behind these proposals is not a financial one.
- 6.2 In the medium to long-term it is possible that the effects of the proposed amalgamation may be broadly cost neutral, although the principal variable is likely to be promoted post salaries which have yet to be “job-sized” according to the National McCrone Agreement.
- 6.3 In the short-term, a small annual saving (approximately £3,000) is likely.

7 HUMAN RIGHTS

- 7.1 There are no Human Rights implications arising directly from approval of the recommendations contained within this Report.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 On balance, there is logic in moving to amalgamate Townhead Nursery School with Maisondieu Primary School.
- 8.2 In so doing, it will be important to acknowledge any natural anxieties which staff, pupils and parents may hold and to work with these key stakeholders to ensure that any anxieties which they do have will be ill founded.
- 8.3 As far as possible, arrangements for session 2002/2003 should be very similar if not identical to those which have pertained in previous school sessions, and any subsequent changes which the amalgamation brings should be allowed to take place gradually and naturally.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

Jim Anderson
Director of Education

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/CJ