

Final Scottish infant school is mothballed

The final infant school in Scotland closed its doors as the school holidays got under way last week.

Dechmont infant school which taught children up to P3 will be mothballed for the 2024/25 school with its adjoining nursery class. All children will attend primary in Broxburn.

Dechmont is West Lothian's smallest and there would be no pupils joining come August.

A new primary school will be built nearby as part of the redevelopment of the Bangour hospital site- scheduled to open in 2027.- with more than 1,000 new homes.

Earlier this year some parents had expressed anger at the plan, claiming that the council has taken no account of those who do not drive. However only the community council continued to express reservations during the consultation meetings.

At a meeting of the Education Executive last week LIb Dem councillor Sally Pattle joked about chaining herself to the school railings in protest saying: " I just feel it's incumbent to speak up for the final infant school in Scotland.

"I really would like it to be marked in some way that we had the last infant school in Scotland, here in West Lothian. I think it's really sad. It is a sad day."

In March Councilor Pattle had echoed praise of school inspectors for the ways both the infant school and nursery

provided a positive and nurturing culture before the children moved on to Kirkhill Primary in Broxburn.

From August all classes from P1 to P7 will attend Kirkhill being bussed from the village to Broxburn with the youngest pupils being met by staff.

Education officer Andrew Sneddon told the meeting: "At present, there are seven children in attendance at Dechmont Infant School, none in the P1 stage, one in the P2 stage and 6 in the P3 stage.

"By the end of the application process on 31 December 2023, there were no applications for the P1 stage at Dechmont Infant School. No pupil is expected to continue in attendance at any other stage.

"No first choice applications were received for Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class, and no children will continue in attendance. By the start of school session 2024/25, therefore, the roll for Dechmont Infant School and Dechmont Infant School Nursery Class will both be zero."

The mothballing process has to be reviewed each year. Councillors were given assurance that the school building would still be available for use by community groups in the village. The mothballing decision is not being made for financial reasons but for educational ones, councillors were told.

Local ward member Councillor Tony Boyle said he sympathised with Councillor Pattle's feelings but added, that at the consultation meetings, "It was clear from the low turnout from parents that they were quite comfortable with it. There wasn't a great hullabaloo about it."

Chair of the Education Executive Andrew McGuire said the decision had to be viewed in the context of the new school opening in the village in three years time.

He told the meeting: "I attended one of the consultation events. There's a fair amount of excitement in the village about a new school coming along the line. I think we have to bear this decision back to that. We' ll have a new primary school soon in the village."