

Consultation proposal by Aberdeen City Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to re-zone the Grandholm Village area from Braehead School to Danestone School and consequently from Bridge of Don Academy to Oldmachar Academy with implementation from August 2014.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aberdeen City Council proposes to re-zone the Grandholm Village area from Braehead School to Danestone School and consequently from Bridge of Don Academy to Oldmachar Academy with implementation from August 2014.

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

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 28 January 2014 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Braehead School, Bridge of Don Academy, Danestone School and Oldmachar Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; 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
- 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 Aberdeen City Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.
- 2.2 Children and young people at all four schools did not have strong views either way on the proposal.
- 2.3 Parents and staff had mixed views about the proposal. In general those at Danestone Primary School and Oldmachar Academy were broadly supportive of the proposal.
- 2.4 Parents of children and young people who live in Grandholm Village and currently attend Braehead Primary School had mixed views about the proposal. A few were supportive of the proposal and a few were against the proposal, particularly those that have children currently in school and younger siblings who are not yet attending nursery or school.
- 2.5 Parents at Bridge of Don Academy could understand the proposal for the primary school re-zoning with Danestone School being physically closer to Grandholm Village. However, regarding the secondary they were unsure as to the benefits of the proposal, stating that Bridge of Don Academy is closer to Grandholm Village than Oldmachar Academy. There is no mention of distance to schools in the consultation paper.
- 2.6 Staff at Braehead Primary School and Bridge of Don Academy were unsure of the rationale behind the proposal and the evidence regarding the educational benefits. Although they understand that Danestone School is physically closer to Grandholm Village than Braehead Primary School, particularly by foot, both schools have capacity, and they were concerned at the longer term effect of losing pupils from their school rolls.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

- 3.1 Aberdeen City Council states that implementation of the proposal would ensure a coherent, continuous three to 18 education for children/young people in the Grandholm Village area and that it would also improve the quality of transition arrangements between primary and secondary schools for children living in the area. However, the overall educational benefits set out in the proposal are not fully evidenced. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out more detailed benefits for the children that will accrue from implementation of the proposal.
- 3.2 The rationale for the proposal is not fully clear. It states that this would formalise Aberdeen City Council's current zoning arrangements which reflect current parental choice for children/young people living in the area of the proposal. However, the number of pupils involved who attend the schools are split relatively evenly between the two primary schools and two secondary schools, all of which are operating under capacity. This is particularly the case for staff of Braehead School and Bridge of Don Academy, or for families who have children currently in either of these schools.
- 3.3 The council has stated that this proposal is one element of a coordinated approach to manage the pupil numbers at Braehead and Danestone Schools and other schools across the city. Given that both primary schools in the proposal are operating under capacity and the proposal states that there are no major housing developments planned for either of the catchment areas for the primary schools, it is not sufficiently clear how the coordinated approach to manage pupil numbers has any significance.
- 3.4 The proposal states that enrolments of pupils currently attending any of the schools would not be effected by this proposal. Parents at Braehead School reported that the proposal does not provide clarity or certainty for their children currently in the nursery or primary classes at Braehead School, particularly regarding which secondary school they would attend and potential disruption to friendship groups. Families with pre-nursery aged children and those who have children currently in nursery, primary and secondary could be particularly challenged if the proposal is implemented and their children are placed across different catchment areas. Children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper may be affected as above where they have siblings at either of the primary or secondary schools. However, those who do not have siblings at either school will not be affected in the future. The council needs to be clear and provide reassurance for parents as to how their children will be affected if the proposal is implemented.
- 3.5 Parents of pre-school and primary aged children at the schools are very concerned about the timing for the proposal. With the decision on the proposal not being made until mid-June, and a planned implementation of the proposal in August, the council has set a challenging timescale to take forward the proposal. Parents are particularly concerned about appointment of places for nursery-aged children and the potential for having children in

either two or three schools at the one time. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to clarify the timeline for implementation of the proposal.

- 3.6 Parents at Bridge of Don Academy understandably reported their concern that this is the second proposal for re-zoning of part of their catchment area in a very short space of time which is causing a feeling of unease in Bridge of Don Academy. They are anxious that, although in the short-term and with small numbers, there is no significant impact in the school from this proposal, the longer-term effect has a potentially negative impact on their school roll.
- 3.7 Parents who live in Grandholm Village reported many issues and concerns relating to the current plans for the creation of a bridge adjacent to Grandholm Village which may make it longer or shorter to get to school. They had uncertainties with regard to the plans and the impact of the new bridge on journeys to any of the four schools mentioned in the proposal. There is no reference to the journey time to school or to the bridge in the proposal. However, in order to assist parents the council needs to share relevant information regarding any changes to school journeys as a result of the impact of the new bridge.

4. Summary

- 4.1 The number of pupils involved who attend the schools are split relatively evenly between the two primary schools and two secondary schools, all of which are operating under capacity, and the proposal states that there are no major housing developments planned for either of the catchment areas for the primary schools, therefore the rationale for the proposal is not fully clear.
- 4.2 It is not sufficiently clear how implementation of the proposal will bring clear educational benefit to children and young people. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out more detailed benefits for the children that will accrue from implementation of the proposal.
- 4.3 In taking forward the proposal, the council will need to clarify the current timeline for implementation to ensure it provides sufficient time for effective consultation and communication with parents, staff and children to alleviate their concerns. This is particularly important for children currently in nursery or primary or pre-nursery aged siblings, who are directly affected by this proposal. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to ensure that it provides sufficient time to consult and communicate effectively with parents, staff and children to alleviate these concerns.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2014**