

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to create new primary and secondary school zones in the Countesswells area and to include the zone of Kingswells School within the zone of the new secondary school from the time of opening of the secondary school. The proposal also includes interim arrangements for educational provision in the area until the new primary and secondary schools are operational.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeen City Council's proposal to create new primary and secondary school zones in the Countesswells area with effect from August 2016, and to include the zone of Kingswells School within the zone of the new secondary school from the time of opening of the secondary school. The proposal also includes interim arrangements for educational provision in the area until the new primary and secondary schools are operational. 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 a copy of 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 legislative 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 and young people of the schools affected by the proposal; 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
- 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 24 November 2015 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 schools affected; and
- visits to the sites of, Airyhall School, Cults School, Hazlehead School, Kingswells School, Bucksburn Academy, Cults Academy and Hazlehead Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The formal consultation on the council's proposal ran from 30 October 2015 to 18 December 2015. Notices about the proposal were issued to a wide range of stakeholders and were also placed in local libraries and other council buildings and on the council's website. Public meetings were held on 24 and 26 November and 1 and 2 December 2015. The council received over 70 completed comment forms, emails and written responses to its proposal. Most of these responses expressed concerns related to Airyhall School and how it may be affected by the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 This proposal offers educational benefits to the children and young people living in the western areas of Aberdeen affected by the proposal. Significant increases in the actual and projected school rolls in the area will result in the primary and secondary school capacity becoming insufficient to meet likely demands. The establishment of a new primary school and secondary school has the potential to provide flexible and sufficient capacity to meet these demands. The proposal also has the potential to ensure that children and young people who will attend the new schools will be able to learn in modern, purpose-built environments which are designed to deliver the key entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence. By reducing the numbers of children and young people who would otherwise attend the existing schools in the area, the proposal should reduce overcrowding and resulting loss of space for learning and social activities.

3.2 Parents, children, young people and staff who met with HM Inspectors are supportive of the proposed building of new schools to meet increasing demand for places. However, in some school communities, there are considerable and reasonable concerns over the proposed interim arrangements prior to the opening of the new primary school (2019) and new secondary school (2022).

3.3 Parents and staff at Airyhall School are not clear whether children from the new development will be accommodated initially in the Airyhall building or in Braeside School as an annex. As a matter of urgency, the council needs to clarify and share its plans. In doing so, it needs to provide greater detail about how it will ensure that all children on the Airyhall roll will have their learning needs met effectively and equitably. The council should also seek to reassure parents and children about the quality of resources and educational accommodation which would be available to any users of Braeside School.

3.4 Several parents, young people and members of staff, from a number of schools, who met with HM Inspectors feel that the consultation process did not provide them with sufficient opportunities to discuss any concerns they may have or to make suggestions for alternative proposals. These proposals include: developing Hazlehead Academy as a possible alternative to a new, separate secondary school; consideration of using other primary schools for the interim accommodation of children from the Countesswells development; considering other models of accommodating children from the Countesswells development at Airyhall School. In taking forward this proposal, the council should clarify whether it has considered these, and other alternative, relevant suggestions from stakeholders and on what grounds it pursued, instead, the proposals in the proposal document.

3.5 Parents and young people at Hazlehead Academy, and parents at Hazlehead School, who met with HM Inspectors did not feel that the proposal offered significant educational benefits for young people at Hazlehead Academy. It is their view that any increases to the school roll would add further pressure to the school's existing accommodation and condition and leave them no better off once the new school is operational in 2022. Parents' and young people's views about the quality of their existing learning environment are reasonable. The proposal does make provision, in 2022, for a reduction in roll and over-capacity and this will be educationally beneficial. The council now needs to clarify how its proposal will maximise the educational benefits for pupils attending Hazlehead Academy as stated in the proposal document.

4. Summary

Aberdeen City Council's proposal to create new primary and secondary school zones in the Countesswells area prior to opening new schools in 2019 and 2022, respectively, offers important benefits to children and young people in the western area of Aberdeen. The proposal will reduce issues of overcrowding in existing schools in the area and provide two new, purpose-built schools, designed to support Curriculum for Excellence and meet the needs of learners. The proposal to create the new schools is popular with most stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors. However, views on the proposed arrangements for the interim period before the new schools are operational are more mixed. The council needs to provide clarity for the parents and children at Airyhall School regarding how it intends to accommodate children from the new housing development. Once this is clearer, the council should provide more detailed arrangements for how it will ensure that all children's learning needs are met effectively and fairly, especially during any transitions. The council needs to provide reassurance to all stakeholders that their views and alternative suggestions have been, or will be, considered carefully. Finally, in taking forward

this proposal, the council should provide further detail about how the proposal will maximise the educational benefits for pupils attending the existing schools in this area, including Hazlehead Academy.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2016**