

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to amend the Cults Academy catchment area to exclude ground to the south of the River Dee currently within the Cults Academy zone, with effect from August 2016.

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 amend the Cults Academy catchment area to exclude ground to the south of the River Dee currently within the Cults Academy zone, with effect from August 2016. 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; 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:

- 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 representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Cults Academy and Lairhillock School, 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 consultation period lasted from 19 February 2015 until 2 April 2015. A public meeting to explain the proposal to stakeholders was held in Cults Academy on 10 March 2015. The meeting was very well attended by a range of stakeholders. Pupils and staff from both schools were not directly consulted. The consultation proposal documents were available on Aberdeen City Council's website. Hard copies were available in various locations across the city. A total of 93 responses were received, including responses from the Parent Councils of both schools and from Aberdeenshire Council. During the consultation an officer of the council met with members of the Lairhillock School Parent Council to discuss their concerns. Two responses were in favour of the proposal. Ninety-one responses were against the original proposal.

2.3 After the consultation period closed, the council took into consideration the concerns expressed in submissions and, in discussion with Aberdeenshire Council, officers of Aberdeen City Council decided to amend its proposal. It decided not to alter the current Cults Academy catchment area for pupils from Lairhillock School. Any new housing developments, including those currently under construction, will be rezoned at a future date to an Aberdeenshire Council secondary school.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The amended proposal means that pupils from Lairhillock School, who live in the current Cults Academy catchment area, will continue to attend the same secondary school as their siblings and more easily benefit from the support of their whole family. Rezoning new housing developments will help the Cults Academy roll to remain below its operational capacity of 1141 pupils, supporting young people to learn effectively. The amended proposal will assist Aberdeen City Council to deliver education in schools which are not overcrowded.

3.2 All pupils, parents and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors were positive about the amended proposal. They saw it as an effective compromise which allowed siblings to be educated in the same secondary school while ensuring the roll at Cults Academy remained at a sustainable level. A few parents would like clarification regarding the position of children who live in the Lairhillock School catchment area but are educated in another primary school within the Cults Academy catchment

area. In finalising its consultation report, the council needs to continue to work with stakeholders to clarify aspects of the amended proposal.

3.3 During the consultation period the council was notified of alleged inaccuracies in the proposal. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate these alleged inaccuracies. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies notified to it.

4. Summary

The amended proposal has a number of educational benefits. Young people attending Cults Academy will continue to benefit from a positive learning environment within its operational capacity. Children attending Lairhillock School will still be able to attend the same secondary school as their older siblings. In its final consultation report, the council needs to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies notified to it. It also needs to continue to work with stakeholders to ensure they are clear about all aspects of the final proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
April 2015**