

Consultation proposal by Aberdeen City Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to rezone the Foresterhill Hospital Complex area from Mile End School to Cornhill School and consequently from Aberdeen Grammar School to St Machar Academy.

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

Aberdeen City Council proposes to rezone the Foresterhill Hospital Complex area from Mile End School to Cornhill School and consequently from Aberdeen Grammar School to St Machar Academy.

1.1 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.

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

- 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; and
- visits to the site of Mile End School, Cornhill School, Aberdeen Grammar School and St Machar Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.3 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 Parents, children, young people and staff in all schools affected by the proposal were content with the consultation process. Seven people attended the public meeting organised by Aberdeen City Council and eight people provided written submissions. Most people who expressed a view were in favour of the proposal. Three of the written submissions were not in favour of the proposal as the current arrangements were helpful to doctors and their families moving into Aberdeen. In subsequent meetings with parents, pupils and staff in all schools involved, those who expressed a view supported the proposal.

2.3 Parents, children and staff from Mile End School held the view that the school is already almost at capacity and that there are some children who move into the catchment area with their families who cannot get a place. They felt the proposal was a sensible solution to help the school deal with an increasing roll. Parents had been fully consulted on a range of options and saw the proposal as a way of controlling the roll without affecting any children currently in any of the schools involved.

2.4 Parents, children and staff in Cornhill School, St Machar Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School welcomed the proposal. They saw the benefits brought to all schools involved. Those in Cornhill School and St Machar Academy did not see a slight rise in roll as an issue and welcomed the increased diversity children and young people coming from across the globe would continue to bring. Parents, young people and staff in Aberdeen Grammar School thought a very slight decline in the school's roll was not an issue.

2.5 The council has considered the impact of the proposal on travel to school. They have provided parents and pupils with appropriate information on safe routes to school.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 The area for rezoning comprises short-term accommodation provided by NHS Scotland for families of medics moving to Aberdeen and working in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. There are currently no known families with children or young people planning to live in this zone and attend Mile End School or Aberdeen Grammar School after August 2014. Therefore, there are currently no known children who will be directly affected by the proposal. Pupils currently attending all four schools involved in the proposal will not be required to change their schooling arrangements.

3.2 The educational benefits statement rightly recognises that the proposal may lead to more in-zone children attending Mile End School, increasing their community identity. Both Cornhill School and St Machar Academy have active committees promoting diversity and equality. They are very well equipped to provide effective support for children and young people for whom English is not their first language and to help them settle in to life in Scotland.

3.3 While outlining the impact of the proposal, Aberdeen City Council has not set out what educational benefits will accrue for children and young people who may move into the short-term accommodation as from August 2014. Young people of secondary school age moving into this accommodation will no longer attend Aberdeen Grammar School but will attend St. Machar Academy. Attainment in St. Machar Academy, while improving, is significantly lower than that of Aberdeen Grammar School and continues to be lower than in schools serving young people with similar needs and backgrounds. However, there are many features of the school which benefit young people attending. The educational benefits statement does not outline these features or demonstrate how the authority intends to ensure that attainment in St. Machar Academy continues to improve and support young people to attain as well as they can.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal is strongly supported by parents, pupils and staff across all schools involved. It offers best value for Aberdeen City Council as the education authority seeks to rationalise its school estate and endeavors to provide the most effective education for children and young people across the city. The council has outlined suitable safe routes to school for children attending Cornhill School from the proposed new zone. The council needs to provide more details of the educational benefits for all young people that the proposal will bring. This will help to reassure the very few people who have concerns about the proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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