

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to address primary school capacity and accommodation issues in the South-East area of Aberdeen.

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 address primary school capacity and accommodation issues in the South-East area of Aberdeen. The council consulted on two options:

- To retain the status quo and maintain the existing school zones in the area of the new development at Loirston and Cove; or
- With effect from August 2016, to create a new primary school zone to serve primary education provision in the south-east of the city, including the new housing development in the Loirston / Cove area; to amend the existing Charleston School, Kirkhill School and Abbotswell School zones to contribute to the proposed new school zone; and to rezone an area of the existing Kirkhill School zone, east of the A956 trunk road, to the Loirston School zone.

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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- The likely effects of the proposal for children 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 the 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 Wednesday 25 November 2015 in Charleston School in connection with the council's 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 sites of Abbotswell, Kirkhill, Charleston and Loirston Schools 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 contained 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. A public meeting held on Wednesday 25 November 2015 in Charleston School was attended by five members of the public. The council received six responses to its proposal which were broadly in favour.

3. Educational Aspects of the Proposal

3.1 The council's proposal offers potential educational benefits to children and young people living in the south-east area of Aberdeen affected by the proposal. The main benefits expected are that all primary schools in the area will have sustainable and viable school rolls allowing for continuing delivery of the full breadth of curriculum, effective teacher–pupil relationships, and a clear and distinct community association to help develop strong links for supporting learning. It is reasonable to expect that these benefits would be realised, should the proposal go ahead.

3.2 Almost all of those who spoke with HM Inspectors were in agreement with the aspects of the proposal which relate to the creation of a new zone for the new school and the rezoning of an area of the existing Kirkhill School zone, east of the A956 trunk road, to Loirston School.

3.3 Stakeholders who spoke to HM Inspectors had a number of reasonable concerns. Almost all would like to have been consulted more on possible alternative options to the current proposal, specifically, those relating to the upgrading or expanding of the existing primary school estate in the area. They were not clear why the council believes that this is the most reasonable and viable option open to it. The majority of parents who spoke with HM Inspectors were concerned about the material condition of some of those schools and were uncertain about their long-term

sustainability. Parents were also keen to know whether the council had considered upgrading or expansion of existing schools.

3.4 Almost all parents who spoke to HM Inspectors had reasonable concerns about staffing a new school. They rightly reported that there were already significant issues in recruiting and retaining teachers in the area and were concerned that the addition of a new school would add to existing challenges. They would welcome further information from the council on plans to secure staff for a new school.

3.5 Parents from Charleston School who met with HM Inspectors raised concerns about its capacity to accommodate the projected increase in roll until the opening of the new school. They would welcome clarification about how the council will ensure that all children attending Charleston School will have their learning needs met effectively and equitably during the interim period while a new school is built.

4. Summary

The council's proposal has a number of potential educational benefits. If a housing development is built, a new school will assist in managing long-term capacity pressures within Charleston School in the coming years. The proposal has the potential to ensure that children who will attend the new school will be able to learn in a modern, purpose-built environment which is designed to deliver the key entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence. It is likely to result in viable school rolls which will allow for the continuing delivery of the full breadth of curriculum. The rezoning of an area of the existing Kirkhill School zone will also enhance safety for children who will no longer require to cross the A956 trunk road when traveling to and from school. Stakeholders have a number of reasonable concerns about the proposal. These relate mainly to the material condition of some of the current school buildings, the staffing of the proposed new school and proposed interim arrangements, including how all children affected will have their learning needs met effectively and equitably whilst the new school is being built. In taking forward its proposal the council will need to engage with stakeholders and address these concerns.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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