

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to create a new school building for Stoneywood School, which will be operational with effect from the start of the 2017/18 academic session in August 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter; further to locate the new Stoneywood School building on ground to be confirmed following the completion of this statutory consultation exercise; further to re-zone ground to the north of the A96 trunk road which is currently within the Brimmond School zone to Stoneywood School, with effect from August 2015.**

## **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 a new school building for Stoneywood School, which will be operational with effect from the start of the 2017/18 academic session in August 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter; further to locate the new Stoneywood School building on ground to be confirmed following the completion of this statutory consultation exercise; further to rezone ground to the north of the A96 trunk road which is currently within the Brimmond School zone to Stoneywood School, with effect from August 2015. 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 school; 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 5 March 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;
- visits to the sites of Stoneywood School and Brimmond School, including discussions with staff, parents and children; and
- visit to the site of the former Bankhead Academy and playing fields.

## **2. Consultation Process**

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*. The statutory consultation period ran from 6 February to 27 March 2015. The council held two public meetings on 4 March 2015 at Stoneywood School and 5 March 2015 at Brimmond School. The council received 17 written responses to the proposal. Almost all of the responses supported the proposal for the creation of a new school building for Stoneywood School and for the rezoning of the catchment area to include ground north of the A96 which is currently in the Brimmond School catchment area. Almost all responses supported the location of the proposed new Stoneywood School being at the site of the former Bankhead Academy. Pupils in each class of Stoneywood School were consulted. Most children were in favour of a new school building for Stoneywood.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 The proposal to create a new school building for Stoneywood School has clear educational benefits. The current school is located in two buildings and is not in a good condition. The proposal has the potential to deliver Curriculum for Excellence within modern, purpose-built accommodation creating a more positive environment with more flexible learning spaces. The proposed new school building for Stoneywood School will be larger than the current school. This has the potential to broaden the range of curriculum opportunities for children, including the opportunities to interact with a wider range of peers, both educationally and socially. The proposal has the potential to provide a larger number of teaching staff with a wider range of skills and interests and the opportunity to share and develop practice. The proposal for a new building for Stoneywood School has the potential to support best value to benefit children and young people across the council. The council has indicated that significant capital investment would be required to keep the current Stoneywood School buildings operational and that the proposal would support freeing up of resources to improve the council's school estate.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders who submitted written responses and almost all staff, parents and children who met with HM Inspectors were strongly in favour of the proposal for a new building for Stoneywood School. They felt a new school building would have a positive impact on children's learning. Some parents and staff raised concerns regarding the move to a larger school, including losing the identity of 'Stoneywood'.

3.3 Some stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors raised perceived concerns about potential traffic management at a new school as there are already traffic problems in the area surrounding the current school. In taking forward the proposal the council needs to ensure that current challenges in terms of traffic management outside the school, parking and drop-off areas and safe road crossings are addressed in planning for a new school building.

3.4 Almost all of the stakeholders who met HM Inspectors preferred the former Bankhead Academy site as the possible location for the proposed new Stoneywood School building. This is the site of a former school and has many potential advantages, including being located in a residential area and on a public transport/bus route. The proposal to re-zone ground to the north of the A96 trunk road which is currently within the Brimmond School zone to Stoneywood School, with effect from August 2015, will alleviate the issue of having to cross the A96 trunk road to attend Brimmond School. This also supports pupils from Stoneywood and Bankhead areas attending the same school.

3.5 Some stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors were concerned about the placing of siblings of children who are currently attending Brimmond School, who would be re-zoned to attend Stoneywood School should the proposal go ahead. In its final consultation report, the council needs to clarify plans for siblings of current Brimmond School pupils who live in the area affected by the proposed re-zoning.

3.6 The council proposes to make changes to the catchment areas for Brimmond School and Stoneywood School with effect from August 2015, and, as a result, there may be a very short notification period to families who may be affected by the proposed re-zoning from Brimmond School to Stoneywood School. The council will need to address concerns regarding the proposed timescale and ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place which support continuity in learning; it also needs to clarify arrangements for siblings of pupils who currently attend Brimmond School and may be affected by the re-zoning.

3.7 Some stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors queried the numbers indicated for the new housing area and school roll, along with the proposed additional area from the re-zoning from Brimmond School. Concern was that the new Stoneywood School may not be big enough for the number of houses being planned for the area. If the proposal goes ahead, the council should ensure clear communication with stakeholders to alleviate concerns about projected rolls.

3.8 During the consultation period an alleged inaccuracy in the proposal was identified relating to maps being outdated. The council responded to this query during the consultation, updating the maps on their consultation website. 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**

4.1 The proposal to create a new school building for Stoneywood School is of clear educational benefit. The proposal has the support of almost all parents and staff and most children. The current school is located in two buildings, with several sets of stairs in each, and is not in a good condition. The proposal has the potential to improve the quality of the curriculum and deliver Curriculum for Excellence within modern, purpose-built accommodation, creating a more positive environment for effective learning and teaching. Implementation of the proposal has the potential to support best value to benefit children and young people across the council. The council has indicated that significant capital investment would be required to keep the current Stoneywood School buildings operational. If this proposal is taken forward the council should ensure that there is clear communication with stakeholders regarding projected rolls and capacity in the new Stoneywood School.

4.2 The proposal to re-zone ground to the north of the A96 trunk road which is currently within the Brimmond School zone to Stoneywood School, with effect from August 2015, will alleviate the issue of having to cross the A96 trunk road to attend Brimmond School. This also supports pupils from Stoneywood and Bankhead areas attending the same school. It is not clear from the proposal paper how this will apply to siblings of current pupils of Brimmond School. In its final consultation report, the council will need to clarify plans for siblings of current Brimmond School pupils who live in the area affected by the proposed re-zoning. The council indicates the proposal will be implemented from August 2015. The council will need to address concerns regarding the proposed timescale and outline transition arrangements for those children affected by the proposal. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address alleged inaccuracies notified to it.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
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