

Consultation proposal by Aberdeen City Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to remove dual zoning of the former Victoria Road School zone and define Tullos and Walker Road Schools' zones.

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

1.1 Aberdeen City Council proposes to remove dual zoning of the former Victoria Road School zone and define Tullos and Walker Road Schools' zones. Victoria Road School was closed in 2008.

1.2 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on Monday 19 May 2014 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; and
- visits to the site of Walker Road and Tullos Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 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 proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Very few formal written responses were received by Aberdeen City Council. Parents, children and staff from both schools who spoke to HM Inspectors were broadly in favour of the proposal. They recognised the need for the council to address school roll and capacity issues in the area and believed the proposal would provide a short-term solution to rising school rolls. They raised a number of additional concerns on the proposal and the details for its implementation.

2.3 Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors were concerned about the council's policy on siblings and were concerned that a situation could arise where siblings would have to attend different primary schools. The council has stated in response to questions raised, that priority would be given to brothers or sisters when parents apply through a school placing request. Parents wanted a stronger level of reassurance. Parents at Walker Road School who spoke to HM Inspectors were also concerned that those parents who used Walker Road Nursery might be under the impression that their children would gain the right to a place at Walker Road School. They felt that the council needs to communicate clearly with parents of nursery children to enable them to make appropriate decisions on where to place their children at nursery stage.

2.4 Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors and representatives of Torry Community Council who attended the public meeting were concerned about the longer-term investment in education in Torry and the potential need for another primary school in the area to cope with rising rolls in the future. They were aware of potential for further housing development and were of the view that the council was potentially underestimating pupil numbers in school roll forecasts. They were concerned that the council, in working together with partners to tackle social and economic deprivation in Torry, should give greater priority to a positive long-term plan for improving primary education in Torry.

2.5 Staff at both schools who spoke with HM Inspectors were concerned about the potential impact of rising school rolls on class sizes and use of accommodation. They were keen to ensure that refurbishment of the schools was undertaken as planned to enable a positive approach to delivering all aspects of Curriculum for Excellence, including outdoor learning. In Walker Road School, detailed plans to improve the playground area are in place and new equipment has been ordered. Staff felt it was important to avoid the need for temporary classroom units as a means of addressing the rising roll. Staff who met with HM Inspectors were not aware of recent building surveys or timescales for refurbishment of buildings.

2.6 Children who spoke to HM Inspectors at both schools were well informed about the proposal. They had no major concerns. They valued their schools and wished to continue to attend their school with their friends. They were reassured that the proposals will not impact on children currently attending schools.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Aberdeen City Council has provided a clear rationale for its proposal. If implemented it will result in more clearly defined school zones and provide greater certainty for parents and children in the former Victoria Road School zone. School rolls are rising and there is a need to avoid overcrowding at Walker Road School.

3.2 Parents raised the need for greater certainty on the position of siblings attending different schools. If the council implements its proposal it will need to provide more information on how it will allocate places to siblings of those children currently attending each of the schools affected.

3.3 If implemented, the proposals will require joint planning between Tullos School and Walker Road School, particularly in the transition from nursery to primary stages. The council will need to ensure it provides clear information to parents of nursery children about the catchment areas for each school to enable them to make informed choices.

3.4 Staff, parents and representatives of Torry Community Council expressed a need for a longer-term plan to address rising school rolls in the area and the council's approach to improving educational provision in the future. If the proposals are implemented, the council will need to work closely with stakeholders on its longer-term plan and vision for education in the Torry area. Aberdeen City Council officers agreed to accept a late written submission from Torry Community Council. The council will need to consider this submission in preparing its final report.

4. Summary

A limited number of responses were made to Aberdeen City Council on its proposal. Parents, staff and children who spoke to HM Inspectors thought the proposal made sense in addressing school capacity and rising school rolls in the area. In its final consultation report, the council needs to address the concerns raised by stakeholders and consider the submission from Torry Community Council.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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