

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to close Cordyce School permanently.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (as amended) (the 2010 Act)*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeen City Council's proposal to close Cordyce School permanently. 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 young people of the school; young people 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 20 September 2017 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 The Foyer, St Machar Academy, St Nicholas Pupil Support Centre and Aberdeen City Council Headquarters, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Act 2010*.

2.2 The consultation ran from 30 August until 13 October 2017. The council announced the consultation in local press and information, including the proposal paper, was placed on the council website and in council buildings. Copies of the proposal were made available in all Aberdeen City Council secondary schools. Stakeholders were invited to respond to the proposal through a comment form. A public meeting was held on 20 September 2017. Fewer than ten stakeholders attended. The council made appropriate arrangements to consult with stakeholders. During the consultation period the council received 25 responses from stakeholders including parents. Three were in favour of the permanent closure of the school and 21 opposed the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Cordyce School provides secondary education for pupils with additional support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Young people have previously attended the school from all areas of Aberdeen City. Over time, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of young people attending the school. Fewer than ten young people were on the school roll for session 2016/17. Since August 2017 there have been no young people enrolled at the school. The Cordyce building is rated C (poor) for both its condition and its suitability for use as a school. It also has an energy performance rating of G (very poor).

3.2 HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has educational benefit. The council outlines clearly the educational benefits which it believes will be brought about by the permanent closure of Cordyce School. The Continuum of Provision, designed by the council, has merit and will provide appropriate alternatives for young people who may have attended Cordyce School. HM Inspectors noted that work on the satellite hubs around the city, as an element of bespoke pathways for young people, are at an early stage of development. In its final paper, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the alternatives to full-time mainstream provision will be designed in consultation with them and with the aim of ensuring successful outcomes for young people. The council has established a number of successful partnerships with other organisations which offer young people valuable support and alternative placements, including work experience.

3.3 Most stakeholders who responded to the consultation directly are opposed to the proposal. They feel that the council has not yet delivered suitable, robust alternatives for the most vulnerable young people. They would welcome greater clarity about the viability of the range of alternatives proposed by the council. Stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors are in favour of the proposal. They feel young people will be better served by a range of alternative, bespoke pathways

which have the potential to meet their needs more effectively. They would also welcome greater clarity about aspects of the proposal. In particular, arrangements for young people who have the greatest needs. In its final report, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the needs of the most vulnerable young people can be met effectively through a well-coordinated continuum of provision across the city.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors believe the proposal has educational benefit. We are assured that the council is working toward a range of inclusion strategies as alternatives to Cordyce School. The educational benefits statement provides clear evidence of this. For young people who may have become pupils of Cordyce School, the council has set out a range of appropriate alternatives. However, in its final paper, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the alternatives which the council asserts will bring about successful outcomes for the most vulnerable young people will do so.

The council notified HM Inspectors on 14 November 2017 that the school building had been destroyed by fire. This was prior to the publication of both Education Scotland's report and the council's final consultation report.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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