

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council in relation to St Peter's RC School and Riverbank School.

The council's proposal document contains two options:

Option A - *to construct a new school building on the site of the former St Machar School and former Tillydrone School, to relocate St Peter's RC School to this new building and to create a new shared campus on this site, incorporating St Peter's RC School, a new one-stream non-denominational school, and early education and childcare facilities; to create a new catchment area for this school, and amend the current catchment area for Riverbank School.*

Option B - *to construct a new three stream non-denominational school building with early education and childcare facilities on the site of the former St Machar School and former Tillydrone School, and to relocate Riverbank School to this new building; whilst relocating St Peter's RC School to the current Riverbank School building.*

Both options are proposed to be operational from January 2020, or as soon as possible thereafter.

1. Introduction

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 offer two options in relation to St Peter's RC School and Riverbank School.

1.1 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 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 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 8 December 2016 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 Riverbank School, St Peter's RC School, and discussion with relevant consultees including representatives of the Diocese.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 Aberdeen City Council's proposal relates to the need to address pressure on school rolls at St Peter's RC School and Riverbank School, both of which are either over capacity or nearing capacity.

2.3 The Statutory Consultation Period took place from 24 October 2016 until 9 December 2016. Five public meetings took place on 29, 30 November and 1, 7, 8 December at St Peter's RC School or Riverbank School. Copies of the consultation document were made available to stakeholders and in the affected schools, public libraries in the vicinity of the schools affected, the council offices and posted on the council's website. The council offered an online survey to which 114 responses were received. Twenty respondents (17.54%) supported the proposal Option A (the shared campus, new school and re-zoning of Riverbank); 94 responses (82.46%) did not support this option. Thirty respondents included comments in their response to this question.

2.4 Seventy-nine respondents (69.30%) supported the proposal Option B (relocation of St Peter's RC School to Riverbank and relocate Riverbank School to a new build on the former St Machar School / Tillydrone site), with 35 respondents (30.7%) not supporting this option. Sixty-five respondents included comments in their response to this question.

2.5 Twenty-eight additional responses were submitted by email. Of these 28 additional responses three respondents supported Option A, two respondents

supported Option B and 23 respondents either did not indicate a preference to support either Option A or B, or supported a different proposal. Many comments which were submitted with the survey or separately by email stated that respondents did not agree with either option and that neither option served the needs of both schools satisfactorily.

2.6 A selection of posters and paper submissions from school children were collated and summarised, where children shared mixed views, with overall 24 supporting Option A and 62 supporting Option B.

2.7 During the consultation period parents of St Peter's RC School identified an additional proposed option to the consultation, 'Option C' and undertook a survey of the St Peter's RC parent community. This proposed 'Option C' is for the council to consider building a three stream denominational school on the site of the former St Machar School and Tillydrone School, to include early education and childcare facilities. The responses to their own parental consultation indicate that this additional proposed option has strong support from the parent community of St Peter's RC School. This 'Option C' has not been part of the council's formal proposals and has therefore not been consulted with all stakeholders.

2.8 The submission from the Diocese contains an additional proposal of an 'Option D', to extend the current Riverbank School to become a three stream school and build a new two stream denominational school on the St Machar site.

2.9 The council and stakeholders alerted HM Inspectors that St Peter's RC School and Riverbank School's Parent Councils were planning to convene a joint meeting to consider joint responses to the proposals. These responses were not available at the time of HM Inspectors writing this report.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Overall, each option within the proposal has equal merit and a number of potential educational benefits for current and future learners. Either should lead to important improvements in the quality of learning environments for children, along with improved transitions for children from early learning and childcare settings to P1 at school. Revised school rolls will alleviate current pressures in both schools, particularly St Peter's RC School which is already operating at 130% of capacity, with a current roll of 256 and a working capacity of 198. Additionally, the council have classified this building as category 'C', poor quality. One class in St Peter's RC School is currently operating in a classroom with no natural lighting and no running water. If no changes were made at St Peter's RC School the roll could rise to 322 by 2020. The school's current working capacity is set at 198 pupil places. Option A and B would increase the school's capacity to 420. Riverbank school has a working capacity of 420 pupil places, with the current roll being 386 (92% capacity). If no changes were made at Riverbank School the roll could rise to 593 by 2020. Option A would offer a school capacity of 420 (with part of the catchment being removed to the shared campus) and Option B would offer a school capacity of 651.

3.2 Senior Managers, staff and representative pupils who met with HM Inspectors at St Peter's RC School were positive about Option A of the proposal (shared

campus). Parents were strongly opposed to Option A and Option B, citing their preferred proposed alternative 'Option C' of a new three stream denominational school, about which they had undertaken their own consultation and had received strong support from their school community. Parents shared that, at pre-consultation meetings, council officers had proposed four different options for possible locations for a new St Peter's RC School; however they were disappointed that none of these options were contained within this proposal. Stakeholders at St Peter's RC School shared concerns that Option B would discourage children and families from attending St Peter's RC School if it were to move to the current Riverbank School location, as it is too far away from their current site, particularly for families in the Seaton area.

3.3 Riverbank School is a merger of the former Donbank and Tillydrone Schools from eight years ago. Senior managers and representative parents from Riverbank School who met with HM Inspectors were positive about Option B of the proposal. Staff and pupils shared mixed views about Option A or B. Stakeholders shared strong concerns regarding the splitting of the Tillydrone community if Option A were to go ahead and their catchment area was split. Stakeholders shared experience of the challenges of their merger of two former schools and the amount of work undertaken with the school community over the last eight years, to now become one school community and are proudly one of the very few schools in Scotland to have achieved Level 2 Rights, Respecting School status for the second time.

3.4 Considering the two options in the consultation document, the preference of the RC Diocese of Aberdeen is 'Option A', the shared campus. However, the submission from the Diocese contains an additional proposal of an 'Option D', to extend the current Riverbank School to become a three stream school and build a new two stream denominational school on the St Machar site, which they feel would be equally acceptable. With this proposal, the Diocese outline that Riverbank School could remain on its original site as one increased capacity school, whilst providing a new St Peter's RC School.

3.5 The council identified that in an early version of the consultation report there was an error in the table for the school roll and capacity of St Peter's RC School (Table 2). In the original document the roll was stated as 296 instead of 256 and the capacity as 150% instead of 130%. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address this inaccuracy.

4. Summary

- Overall, the options provided by the council within the proposal are of equal merit and have strong educational benefits. Either option should lead to important improvements in the quality of learning environments for children, along with improved transitions for children from early learning and childcare settings to P1 at school. Revised school rolls will alleviate current pressures in both schools, particularly for St Peter's RC School. However, the alternative options put forward by stakeholders during the consultation have added further complexity and stakeholders have not had time to provide HM Inspectors with full evidence.

- In the best interests of stakeholders, the council needs to contemplate taking more time to consider other proposals put forward during the consultation and provide stakeholders with a preferred option for consideration. For example, during the consultation period parents of St Peter's RC School identified an additional proposed option to the consultation, 'Option C' for the council to consider building a three stream denominational school on the site of the former St Machar School and Tillydrone School, to include early education and childcare facilities. The submission from the Diocese contains an additional proposal of an 'Option D', to extend the current Riverbank School to become a three stream school and build a new two stream denominational school on the St Machar site. In addition to this, the council and stakeholders alerted HM Inspectors that St Peter's RC School and Riverbank School's Parent Councils were planning to convene a joint meeting to consider joint responses to the proposals. These responses were not available at the time of HM Inspectors writing this report. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to consider all of the responses in its final report and work with individual school communities to clarify its reasons for believing the current options in the proposal are the most reasonable and viable options open to it.
- In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any inaccuracies from earlier versions of the consultation proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
December 2016**