

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to amend primary catchment areas within the town of Banchory.

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 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the existing primary school catchment areas within Banchory with effect from August 2015. These changes will predominantly affect pupils moving into the new houses at Lochside of Leys once they are built. 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 Banchory Primary School and Hill of Banchory Primary 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 18 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; and

- visits to the site of Banchory Primary School and Hill of Banchory Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire 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*.

2.2 The consultation took place between 4 March and 30 April 2015. A public meeting held on 18 March 2015 was attended by six members of the public. The council received 80 responses from stakeholders. An online survey on the council's website received 72 responses, of which most agreed with the proposal or had no preference. The council also held meetings for staff and children at each of the schools concerned.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the catchment areas of Banchory Primary School and Hill of Banchory Primary School from August 2015 will alleviate anticipated capacity issues within the two schools which will arise as a result of the planned housing development at the Lochside of Leys site. The proposal sets out a clear case of educational benefit by ensuring current and future children across both schools will have sufficient and appropriate accommodation for learning. The proposal will reduce the potential for overcrowding at Hill of Banchory Primary School.

3.2 The majority of stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors supported the proposal. Staff at Hill of Banchory School felt the proposal provided educational benefit by addressing the pressure on their accommodation for children to learn across the curriculum. During the consultation period parents identified alleged inaccuracies in the proposal with regard to the long-term roll predictions for Banchory Primary School. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate these alleged inaccuracies. Most children who met with HM Inspectors at both schools agreed with the proposal. A few stakeholders questioned safe walking routes to Banchory Primary School for children who may live on the Lochside of Leys site. The council will need to clarify how it will address these concerns.

3.3 The majority of parents who responded to the consultation were in favour of the proposal. They welcomed the council's assurances that it would not have any adverse effect on the placements for children currently attending the schools or their siblings. A few expressed concern about accommodation at Banchory Primary School. In particular, the potential for congestion in the playground if the school roll rises.

4. Summary

Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend primary catchment areas within the town of Banchory is reasonable and is of educational benefit to future children who may attend either school. The proposal will enable the council to manage the accommodation within the Banchory Network more efficiently. There will be no impact on placements for existing children or their siblings as a result of the amendment to the catchment areas. The majority of stakeholders support the proposal. The council should seek to reassure parents regarding their concerns for potential congestion in Banchory Primary School playground. 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. It will also need to work with stakeholders to address their concerns related to safe walking routes for children who may in future live on the Lochside of Leys development.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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