

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to close the dyslexia units at Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School and provide support for all learners, including those with dyslexia, in their local schools.

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 close the dyslexia units at Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School and provide support for all learners, including those with dyslexia, in their local schools. 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 dyslexia units in Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School 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 4 February 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 sites of Crimond Primary School and Kellands 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 statutory consultation period ran from 6 January 2015 until 26 February 2015. Public meetings were held on 3 February 2015 at Crimond Primary School and on 4 February 2015 at Kellands Primary School. There were 14 written responses to the consultation, the majority of which were from parents of children who attend the dyslexia units. None of the responses supported the closure of the dyslexia units. The council also received 21 responses to an online survey. Of those who responded, 40% thought that children and young people with dyslexia should be supported in their own schools. The remaining 60% felt that there was a place for specialist units such as those at Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School. The council also held direct consultation sessions with children and young people who currently attend, or previously attended, the dyslexia units as well as children and young people from other local schools.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 It is best for all children to have their needs met in their local schools and the proposal has the potential to bring educational benefit to children. *The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000* indicates that education authorities should provide education to school-age children within mainstream settings, unless certain exceptions apply such as where a mainstream school would not be suited to the ability or aptitude of the child. The council proposes a nine area model of enhanced provision across the authority. Existing staff and expertise would be reallocated to enhance the capacity in each of these areas to develop a consistent approach to meeting needs. The council considers that this will provide a fair, transparent and equitable service across Aberdeenshire and allow all children with dyslexia to be educated in their own areas, with tailored support to meet their needs. However, the nine area model of enhanced provision is not described in detail within the proposal and is still under development. In the preparation of its final consultation report, the council should clarify the approach which it proposes will help to meet the needs of learners who currently have places in the dyslexia units.

3.2 The council has not yet clarified the future role of specialist staff currently working in the dyslexia units in the proposal. It proposes that the nine area model of enhanced provision will use existing expertise, such as that of these specialist staff, to increase the capacity of class teachers to meet needs through continuous

professional development. It should agree the future role of specialist staff so that this can be reflected in its final consultation report.

3.3 The council considers that the closure of the dyslexia units and the development of dyslexia friendly approaches will benefit all learners in primary schools. However, it is not clear from the proposal how it will benefit the children who currently hold places in the dyslexia units. The proposed changes have the potential to lead to improved provision in primary schools for many children with dyslexia as teachers become better trained to identify and meet their needs. The nine area model of enhanced provision also has the potential to be a more equitable system for meeting children's needs across the authority. In the preparation of its final consultation report, the council should explicitly state the benefits for children who currently have places in the dyslexia units in Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School.

3.4 Children who attend the dyslexia units in Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School, who spoke to HM Inspectors, are very clear about the benefits of their current provision compared to their previous primary classes. They now feel more confident about their learning and are achieving more in school. They understand their dyslexia better and appreciate the opportunity to discuss it with others who have the same needs. They know that they get more individualised help with their learning and are developing helpful strategies to help them when they move on to secondary school.

3.5 All parents of children who attend the dyslexia units in Crimond Primary School and Kellands Primary School who responded to the consultation or spoke to HM Inspectors were concerned that the current quality of provision for their children will be compromised by the proposal. Whilst they welcome the planned improvement in awareness of dyslexia and appropriate provision across primary schools, they cannot see any benefits for their children through the implementation of the proposal. They have justifiable concerns that the enhanced provision model is not outlined clearly in the proposal. All teaching staff and senior managers, who spoke to HM Inspectors, would also welcome further detail about this model. Parents and teaching staff, who spoke to HM Inspectors, also have justifiable concerns over whether it will be possible to provide appropriate training for teachers in primary schools in time for the proposed implementation date of August 2015 so that equivalent provision is available for children who currently attend the dyslexia units. The council should further consider whether or not the proposed timescale allows sufficient time to ensure that the needs of all children with dyslexia, including those currently placed in the dyslexia units, can be fully met in their local schools and that appropriate transitions can take place in accordance with the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004*.

Summary

4.1 This proposal has the potential to better meet the needs of children, including those with dyslexia, in their local schools. However, the council has not clearly outlined the educational benefits of the proposal to the children who are currently having their needs met in the dyslexia units.

4.2 Parents and staff have justifiable concerns that they do not have enough information about the new enhanced provision model which will replace the dyslexia unit provision for children with additional support needs. They also have justifiable concerns over whether it will be possible to provide appropriate training for teachers in primary schools in time for the proposed implementation date of August 2015 so that equivalent provision is available for children currently in the dyslexia units and that appropriate transitions can take place.

4.3 In its final consultation report, the council should clarify the educational benefits for children in the dyslexia units and give more detail about the enhanced provision model. It should also provide more information regarding the future role of the teachers currently working in the units. The council should further consider whether or not the proposed timescale allows sufficient time to ensure that the needs of all children with dyslexia, including those currently placed in the dyslexia units, can be fully met in their local schools.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2015**