

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to replace Inverurie Market Place School with a new school to be located at Uryside.

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 replace Inverurie Market Place School. 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 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 24 June 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 Inverurie Market Place 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 Aberdeenshire Council formally consulted stakeholders between 1 June and 4 September 2015. A public meeting was held at Inverurie Market Place School on 24 June 2015 and was attended by approximately 50 members of the public. Copies of the consultation document were sent to all parents of children attending Inverurie Market Place School and parents of pre-school children who would be zoned to attend the school. Separate meetings were held with staff and pupils. Three written responses to the consultation were received. They all opposed the proposal. Questions raised by consultees in written responses and at the public meeting included the need for safe walking routes to the proposed new school; arrangements for children with additional support needs, including those with hearing impairment; the timescale for commencing building works; and whether the roll capacity of the new school would be sufficient in relation to new housing development in the area.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to replace Inverurie Market Place School with a new school to be built at Uryside has the potential to be of clear educational benefit. Owing to new housing development, the roll of Inverurie Market Place School is forecast to rise beyond the current building's capacity of 279 pupils to 421 pupils by August 2018. Options for extending the existing building are limited, resulting in considerable pressure on use of existing space. Aberdeenshire Council therefore proposes to discontinue educational provision at Inverurie Market Place School in 2016/17 on completion of a new school at Uryside.

3.2 The proposed new building will have the potential to provide much improved accommodation and facilities and a higher quality learning environment. The existing accommodation at Inverurie Market Place School includes temporary classroom units and the original Victorian building. Parts of the building, including the dining and gym areas, are difficult to manage well due to the insufficient space and ageing nature of the facilities. The council proposes that the new school will include enhanced sports, physical education and outdoor learning space, increased dining area capacity, more and better space for children's learning and improved digital technology. The proposed building of a new school has the potential to support the delivery of a modern curriculum and accommodate the forecast increases in the school roll.

3.3 In considering the educational benefits of the proposal, HM Inspectors met with representative groups of children, parents and staff at Inverurie Market Place School. Almost all children, parents and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the proposal but had a number of concerns about the details. They

recognised the unsuitable nature of the existing school building and welcomed the potential move to a new building fit for purpose.

3.4 Stakeholders were concerned about the timescale for building the new school. Aberdeenshire Council's proposal is to discontinue education provision at Inverurie Market Place during the 2016/17 school session. However, no specific date has yet been given for the commencement of building work. Stakeholders were concerned about the delays in securing the site and commencing building works and the lack of specific information on progress. They want to know the details of alternative plans, should the timescale of 2016/17 prove unachievable. They were also concerned that moving during the school year could be a disruptive experience for children and staff. If Aberdeenshire Council decides to implement its proposal it will need to provide clear information to reassure children, staff and parents on timescales and on contingency plans should the new building not be completed by 2016/17.

3.5 Stakeholders who attended the public meeting and those who spoke to HM Inspectors raised concerns about transport and safe walking routes to the proposed new school. If Aberdeenshire Council decides to implement its proposal it will need to produce a detailed travel plan including identifying safe walking routes to school. The council will need to reassure parents that all reasonable steps will be taken to mitigate risks associated with road crossings and other hazards.

3.6 Concerns on the impact of the proposal on children with additional support needs were raised by parents at the public meeting, in written responses and in discussion with HM Inspectors. This included the concern that children with hearing impairment benefited from the relatively small classroom size at Inverurie Market Place School and would be disadvantaged if they moved to a larger building with potential for more noise. Overall, the council's proposal has the potential to improve provision for children with additional support needs including through providing full access for those with mobility problems and through better, more modern facilities. If it decides to implement its proposal, Aberdeenshire Council will need to reassure parents through providing specific and detailed information on how its proposal will result in improved provision for children with additional support needs, including those with hearing impairment.

3.7 The council's proposal document does not provide specific details on design and layout. Stakeholders wanted to receive more detailed and specific information and to be involved in further discussion so that the views of the school community can be taken into account and influence decisions where possible. If Aberdeenshire Council decides to implement its proposal it will need to provide more specific details on building design and outline how the school community will be engaged in the process of implementation.

4. Summary

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to build a replacement Inverurie Market Place School by 2016/17 has the potential to be of significant educational benefit. The existing school building is not capable of accommodating increases in the school roll and its facilities are out of date. The proposed new school has the potential to provide more space and better, modern, purpose-built facilities fit for

purpose. As a result, the proposal has the potential to offer children an improved experience of learning, consistent with the aims of Curriculum for Excellence.

4.2 During the consultation, consultees expressed concern on the timescale for implementing the proposal and the contingency plans should the implementation be delayed. The council will need to clarify its timescale and plans if taking forward its proposal.

4.3 During the consultation stakeholders raised questions concerning road safety, specific details of building design and facilities for children with additional support needs. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to ensure safe routes to the new school. It will also need to work with stakeholders on the details of plans in order to achieve the potential educational benefits outlined in the proposal.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
September 2015**