

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to review the existing primary school catchment area within the Kintore area.

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 review the existing primary school catchment area within the Kintore area. 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 and 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 12 November 2014 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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

- visit to the site of Kintore 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*. The consultation period ran from 13 October to 12 December 2014. The council put into place a range of approaches to consult with stakeholders, including issuing a copy of the consultation proposal to all parents of pupils currently attending Kintore School. A public meeting was held on 12 November 2014. Meetings were held for staff at Kintore School and staff at Kintore School consulted with the pupils. There was an online survey available for completion on the council's website. The council received 46 responses to this survey and a separate written submission on behalf of the Parent Council at Kintore School. Of these submissions, just over half were in favour of or expressed no preference to the proposal.

2.2 The council consulted in 2013 on building a second primary school in Kintore and this is scheduled to open in August 2016. As part of this exercise, it gave a commitment to consult on the revised catchment areas for both the new school and the existing Kintore School. The educational benefits of the establishment of a new school have been well documented in the previous consultation exercise. This proposal relates to the new catchment boundaries being proposed. Prior to the consultation, the council involved the Kintore Parent Council in an exercise which looked at alternative boundary lines.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has set out a reasonable case for the proposed catchment areas. In arriving at its proposal it gave good consideration to any reasonable alternatives. Currently, Kintore School is operating well over its capacity of 415 pupils, with a roll in August 2014 of 645 pupils. All pupils starting school or moving to the area from August 2016 will attend the school from the catchment area in Kintore within which they live. The Parent Council was broadly in favour of the proposed revised catchment areas.

3.2 The majority of stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors supported the proposal, although a few expressed concerns around specific details. Staff at Kintore School felt that proposal would help alleviate the current pressures of space and resources. Pupils were generally in favour of the proposal and were involved in planning of safe routes to school as part of the consultation process.

3.3 Parents who responded gave mixed views around the proposed catchment boundary changes. Any concerns were largely around specific boundary lines. A small number of children will have reduced or increased travel times if they fall into the new school's catchment area. A few parents from the Castlefields area, which would be zoned to the new school, were concerned about the increased distance that children would need to travel. Overall, changes to travel resulting from this

proposal would be minimal for most families. Should the proposal go ahead, the council indicates clearly that the majority of pupils will be able to walk or cycle to school.

3.4 A few parents questioned the accuracy of the projected rolls for each school set out in the proposal by the council. They were concerned that Kintore School may remain over capacity. However, it is clear that the council has taken reasonable steps to project the future rolls of each of the schools. The projected rolls provided by the council are sound and take reasonable account of any likely planned new housing developments in the area. The council has given an assurance that no child will have to move school unless by choice. Parents supported this position.

4. Summary

The council's proposal is of educational benefit in the longer term. The council will be able to manage the rolls in both schools effectively and efficiently to ensure that both schools operate within their design capacity. In particular, the new catchment area will help release valuable teaching space at the existing Kintore School, which is operating well over capacity. No existing pupils of Kintore School or their subsequent siblings will be required to change school. The majority of stakeholders supported the proposal. In taking forward this proposal, the council should further consider any possible anomalies in the proposed boundaries that have been highlighted by stakeholders. It should also give careful consideration to transition planning and roll projection so that the likelihood of either school being over or under capacity is minimised.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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