

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to replace the existing Markethill Primary School with a new school building which will be located at Meadowbank Road, Turriff.**

## **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 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to replace Markethill Primary School with a new school building which will be located at Meadowbank Road, Turriff. 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.

### **1.1 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.

### **1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:**

- 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 Markethill Primary School and of the proposed new school building, 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 formal consultation ran from 30 March 2015 until 29 May 2015. The council placed a notice in the local newspaper and posted the consultation document on its website. It issued copies of the document to all parents of pupils currently attending Markethill Primary School and to local community groups. Further copies were made available in Turriff library. A public meeting held on 20 May 2015 was attended by ten stakeholders. The council made arrangements to gather children's views about the proposal. The council received one written response. Prior to the statutory consultation the council held stakeholder engagement events to inform residents of Turriff about the rationale for the proposal. Stakeholders have been involved in identifying the site for the proposed new school.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to replace the existing Markethill Primary School with a new school building located at Meadowbank Road, Turriff has clear educational benefits for current and future pupils of Markethill Primary School and the local community. The existing school building has a capacity of 360 pupils and the current school roll is four hundred and fifty-six. The school roll has remained high over the past decade and is forecast to continue to grow as the population of the town increases as a result of approved housing developments.

3.2 The existing building is rated poor for suitability. There are insufficient core facilities and some children are being taught in temporary accommodation units. There is insufficient social, cloakroom, storage or outdoor learning space. The school finds it challenging to deliver the entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence within the existing building, for example it is not possible to provide two hours of high-quality physical education for each of the 17 classes. Activities of local groups, including a nursery support group and a toddler group which currently use the school for community purposes are restricted through lack of space.

3.3 The capacity of the proposed new school building is five hundred and five. This takes account of allocated housing development sites within the local plan. The new school will also have provision for a four classroom extension, should this be required in future. There will be more space per pupil than at present. Plans include a sports hall and pitches and an outdoor learning and play area which will enhance children's health and wellbeing. All classrooms will have direct access to outdoor areas. The new building will provide increased social spaces which will support active learning and collaboration between groups of children. Accommodation will include spaces for family learning and will facilitate more coordinated early years and childcare provision within the town of Turriff by providing different services at the

same location. The new building will include up to date information and communications technology equipment which will enhance learners' experiences.

3.4 Children, parents, staff and members of the local community who met with HM Inspectors were very positive about the prospect of a modern purpose-built primary school building for the town. They were well-informed about the proposal and keen for matters to progress without delay. Children are looking forward to having more space for learning and being able to have physical education lessons within the school and in well-designed modern outdoor games areas. They thought that the improved facilities would lead to a greater variety of out-of-school sports and activity clubs for them to join. Parents were optimistic about the potential of the proposed new school to increase opportunities for them to be involved in their children's education as a result of the availability of small break-out rooms and activity rooms within the new building. Members of the community were very positive by the potential of the new school to act as a community hub providing high-quality sports facilities and opportunities for better coordinated early learning and child care provision for local families. Stakeholders were confident that the council would make suitable arrangements to manage the anticipated increase in the volume of traffic in the residential area adjacent to the site of the proposed new school.

#### **4. Summary**

Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to replace Markethill Primary School has clear educational benefits for current and future pupils of Markethill Primary School and the local community. It has very strong support from stakeholders and will provide opportunities to enhance family learning and parental involvement in children's education. It will help the school to overcome the challenges of delivering the entitlements of Curriculum for Excellence within restrictions of the existing accommodation. The community will benefit from valuable sports facilities and from opportunities to develop well-coordinated early learning and child care provision for local families by providing different services at the same location. The council is aware that in taking forward this proposal, it will need to put suitable traffic management arrangements in place around the site of the proposed new school.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
June 2015**