

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council for the redistribution of the primary school catchment areas in the Peterhead network.

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 of 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 for the redistribution of the primary school catchment areas in the Peterhead network. This involves Boddam, Buchanhaven, Burnhaven, Clerkhill, Dales Park, Longhaven, Meethill, Peterhead Central, Port Errol and St Fergus Primary 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 Boddam, Buchanhaven, Burnhaven, Clerkhill, Dales Park, Longhaven, Meethill, Peterhead Central, Port Errol and St Fergus Primary Schools; 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 2 October 2014 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 Boddam, Buchanhaven, Burnhaven, Clerkhill, Dales Park, Longhaven, Meethill, Peterhead Central, Port Errol and St Fergus Primary Schools, 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 period took place between 1 September 2014 and 17 October 2014. A public meeting was held on 2 October 2014 and 42 stakeholders attended. The council also held meetings for staff, children and parents in each of the primary schools affected by the proposal. An online survey questionnaire was issued to stakeholders during the consultation period. The council received 311 responses to the survey. The majority of respondents across all schools were in favour of the proposal. The largest number of written responses from those not in favour of the proposal was received from stakeholders associated with Burnhaven and Meethill Primary Schools.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council proposes that the existing primary school catchment areas within the Peterhead network should be amended with effect from 17 August 2015. From this date, all new children attending Boddam, Buchanhaven, Burnhaven, Clerkhill, Dales Park, Longhaven, Meethill, Peterhead Central, Port Errol and St Fergus Primary Schools will attend their newly zoned school. Children already attending primary school will continue education at the school they currently attend. Changes to the catchment areas will ensure a more even allocation of school places across the area. This will relieve pressure on those schools working at, or near to full capacity, thereby providing better physical environments for learning. Currently, some schools require additional temporary premises to accommodate all children within its catchment area. For those schools operating significantly below capacity, the proposal will ensure an increase in the school roll. This will provide children with opportunities to socialise and learn with more children of different ages and stages. The proposal has the potential to help promote more peer learning and encourage children to participate in more team activities.

3.2 Buchanhaven and Burnhaven Primary Schools will benefit most from the proposed changes to the catchment areas by reducing demands on dining and physical education facilities. This has the potential to help the school to deliver physical education more effectively and develop children's skills in health and wellbeing better.

3.3 The council's proposal will help it secure best value as there will be little change to current costs, ensuring the sustainability of the school estate across the Peterhead network, thereby preserving communities and ensuring future provision for children moving into the area.

3.4 Almost all stakeholders who responded to the consultation and spoke to HM Inspectors in Boddam, Buchanhaven, Clerkhill, Dales Park, Longhaven, Peterhead Central, Port Errol and St Fergus Primary Schools were in favour of the proposal. Parents, staff and children felt that the proposed changes to the catchment areas would ensure the sustainability of the ten schools across the Peterhead network and would even out the current anomalies in school rolls across the area.

3.5 Parents, from Burnhaven and Meethill Primary Schools who attended the public meeting, spoke to HM Inspectors and responded to the online survey questionnaire sent out by the council were concerned that those children living in some areas would be disadvantaged by the proposal. They felt that because of where the zone began and ended, a few children living in the same street would be zoned for different schools. They were also worried about children's safety crossing the A950 and A982 roads. The council is aware of the road safety concerns and are looking at how to manage a safe route to school to minimise risks.

3.6 During the consultation period, the council was notified of an alleged inaccuracy in the school roll for Buchanhaven Primary School contained within the proposal paper. The council addressed this inaccuracy and amended and re-issued the proposal with the correct data.

4. Summary

Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to change the catchment areas for the Peterhead network of primary schools is of overall educational benefit to children. The proposal will allow the council to distribute more evenly the allocation of places across schools in the area. This will enable it to achieve best value by maintaining all ten schools at more viable capacities. Small schools will gain by having more children and therefore more opportunity for quality peer learning and participation in team games. Schools which are reaching over capacity will have more space. This has the potential to enable them to improve provision in some areas of the curriculum such as physical education. The council will need to ensure it addresses parents' concerns about safe routes to school for children who will attend Burnhaven and Meethill Primary Schools.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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