

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to formalise the arrangement for pupils from the Blairs Royal Deeside Housing Development, south of the River Dee Aberdeen, to attend Lairhillock School for primary education and Mackie Academy for secondary education. The proposal also states that new pupils from the Blairs development should be educated at their newly zoned secondary school with effect from August 2018.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (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 formalise the arrangement for pupils from the Blairs Royal Deeside Housing Development, south of the River Dee Aberdeen, to attend Lairhillock School for primary education and Mackie Academy for secondary education. The proposal also states that new pupils from the Blairs development should be educated at their newly zoned secondary school with effect from August 2018. 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 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:

- 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;
- visits to the sites of Lairhillock Primary School and Mackie Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees; and
- telephone discussions with the headteachers from Arduthie Primary School, Bervie Primary School, Catterline Primary School, Dunnottar Primary School, Glenbervie Primary School, Gourdon Primary School, Johnshaven Primary School, Kinneff Primary School, Mill O'Forest Primary School, Carronhill Primary School and Cults Academy.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) 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 Wednesday 28 June 2017 until Friday 29 September 2017. Meetings were organised for staff during the consultation period to discuss the proposals. Opportunities were arranged for pupils within the schools affected to engage in the consultation. Pupil engagement was carried out at Lairhillock Primary School with the majority of pupils agreeing with the proposal. Copies of the consultation proposal were issued to all parents of pupils currently attending Lairhillock School, Mackie Academy, Arduthie School, Dunnottar School, Mill O'Forest School, all the other feeder primary schools in the network, as well as those parents of pre-school aged children living within the network. A copy and details of where to download the proposal document was provided to each member of staff at the primary schools and Mackie Academy secondary school and also their trade union representatives. Copies were issued to the Stonehaven Community Council, the Parent Councils of Lairhillock Primary School and Mackie Academy and local elected members. Stonehaven Library was provided with copies for any interested parties. Wherever possible, the consultation proposal was emailed to consultees as well as paper copies posted to those who either did not have an email address, or where a delivery failure notification from the email address provided was received. An online survey was set up via Survey Monkey to gather responses from parents and interested parties regarding the rezoning proposal. A total of 43 responses were received from the survey. Most disagreed with the proposal with 55.81% strongly disagreeing and 25.58% disagreeing. Details about the proposal and the public meetings were placed in the local press and on social media. There were 12 written responses. Most were not supportive of the proposal. The council held one public meeting at Arduthie Primary School on 7 September 2017 which was attended by six people, who were council officers and local elected members.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal.

3.1 Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal. This proposal to finalise the zoned secondary schools for pupils residing in the Blairs Housing Development would ensure pupils and parents have clarity regarding their zoned schools. The proposal has the potential to enhance children's transition arrangements and help provide continuity for their learning and progress when they move from primary to secondary education. Staff would be able to liaise with Mackie Academy to help plan continuity in children's learning, including enhanced transition arrangements for any who have additional support needs. Pupils from the Blairs Housing Development would be entitled to free school transport to and from Lairhillock Primary School and Mackie Academy as per Aberdeenshire's Council policy. Providing clarity regarding their zoned schools reduces the risk of children experiencing discontinuity in their learning as a result of transition to a school outwith the council. The proposal has the potential to enhance pastoral support for children and help ensure further continuity in their curricular experiences when they move from primary to secondary education. Children are more likely to have increased educational and social opportunities throughout their school life to work collaboratively with children from other schools within the Stonehaven cluster. There still remains a small area where there is dual zoning. The council may want to reflect on this in the future to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged in terms of equity.

3.2 Staff who spoke with HM Inspectors during visits to Lairhillock Primary School and Mackie Academy did not have any issues regarding the proposal or feel that the schools would be affected by the proposal. However, a few staff commented on the challenges which they face when planning transition programmes to different secondary schools in different council areas and the impact which dual zoning could have on existing friendship groups for those pupils who had this option. These staff felt that having one zoned secondary school to which all pupils transferred at the end of P7 would help address these issues. The majority of secondary-aged pupils who had previously attended Lairhillock Primary School did not feel that the proposal was fair as there will still be an area where there is dual zoning for some pupils to either Mackie Academy or Cults Academy. They commented that this could lead to some pupils having more choices than others living in adjacent areas. A few young people were of the view that they should have a choice in which secondary school they attend. Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors raised reasonable concerns regarding this dual-zoned aspect for some pupils in terms of equality of opportunity. Pupils were also concerned about transport arrangements with the increased number of pupils and length of time they would have to spend on buses due to a longer route on country roads. No parents took up the invitation to meet with HM Inspectors. School staff were of the view that this may have been on account of the fact that their children would still be able to attend either Mackie or Cults Academy: this having been agreed at a previous consultation in 2015 and that as a result they had no issues with the council's proposal.

4. Summary

Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal to finalise the zoned secondary schools for pupils residing in the Blairs Housing Development and for new pupils from the Blairs development to be educated at their newly zoned

secondary school with effect from August 2018. The proposal would ensure pupils and parents have clarity regarding their zoned schools. This has the potential to enhance continuity for children's learning. The proposal would support staff to develop further their pastoral and curricular arrangements within the Stonehaven Cluster to help ensure continuity in children's progress between primary and secondary education. In taking forward this proposal, the council should continue to engage with stakeholders to help address any perceived concerns over inequality of opportunity for children and young people who reside in areas where there is still dual-zoning to either Mackie Academy or Cults Academy.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
November 2017**