

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Angus Council to close Lethnot Primary School and to amend the Edzell Primary School Catchment Area.

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 Angus Council's proposal to close Lethnot Primary School and to amend the Edzell Primary School catchment 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 of Lethnot Primary School and Edzell Primary 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 meetings held on 13 March, 15 March, 20 March, 21 March and 17 April 2018 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;

- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Lethnot and Edzell Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Lethnot Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Angus 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 formal consultation initially ran from 26 February 2018 until 20 April 2018. Due to severe weather conditions in March the consultation period was extended to 27 April 2018. On 30 April 2018 an omission from the consultation document was identified. As a result the consultation period was further extended until 11 May 2018. Public meetings were held on 13 March, 15 March, 20 March, and 21 March 2018. Due to demand from stakeholders regarding the nature of the earlier public meetings, an additional public meeting was held on 17 April 2018. The public meetings covered the Lethnot Primary School closure proposal alongside proposals relating to the closure of Tarfside Primary School and Stracathro Primary School. Two parents with a child under two years and one member of the public attended Lethnot Hall public meeting held on 13 March 2018. Whilst there was a recognition that the school was not viable due to reduced numbers of children, there was a suggestion the school building could be used either as a nursery or to promote rural education.

2.3 The Lethnot consultation was advertised in the local and regional press, on the Angus Council website, Facebook page and Twitter feed, and via posters in the local library, health centre and community campus. Emails were sent to parents and Parent Councils of neighbouring schools. Education Scotland, the Care Inspectorate, Members of Parliament, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) and the Community Council were also informed. The council received two online responses to the proposal. One was in favour of Lethnot Primary School remaining open with the possibility of it being used as a nursery. The other response was against the school remaining open on the basis that money would be spent on the upkeep of an empty building without children.

2.4 A formal written representation raising concerns about the Lethnot proposal was submitted to Education Scotland by the local MSP. This was received after the public consultation period was closed. Concerns were expressed regarding the accuracy of proposed savings in relation to staffing costs.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Lethnot Primary School is a non-denominational school located in Glen Lethnot which is to the north west of Brechin between Glen Clova to the west and Glen Esk. There is a nursery within the school. The school is situated at Bridgend which is approximately five miles west of the village of Edzell. The school was mothballed in 2016. It has had no pupils since 2015-16. Since 2016 there has been no community use. There is no physical education hall in Lethnot School. When the school was in operation physical education was delivered at Edzell Primary School. Lethnot Primary School is currently rated 'B' (satisfactory) for building condition. In May 2014 it was assessed as 'B' for educational suitability. Lethnot Primary School has not been in use since 2016. Based on the number of children within the catchment area who are currently under three years of age, there will be insufficient numbers of children attending the school to make it viable. There are currently no children from the Lethnot catchment area attending Edzell Primary School or Stracathro Primary School.

3.2 The council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. The council states there will be a number of educational benefits for children if the proposal goes ahead. These include improved social interaction opportunities from attending a larger school among children of their own age. This will also help children develop important mental, social, physical and emotional skills. Larger year groups will increase the opportunity for collaborative working with children of a similar age and stage of development. Opportunities to engage in a wider range of activities which enrich the curriculum will be increased. The proposal will assist the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources as it will not incur the costs of maintaining a mothballed building.

3.3 Staff from Edzell Primary School who met with HM Inspectors, whilst sad about the potential loss of the Lethnot community as a whole, were positive about the prospect of formalising the current arrangement whereby Lethnot children attend Edzell Primary School. They were able to clearly articulate the benefits of Lethnot children attending Edzell Primary School. Benefits included: improved interaction, better socialisation, more effective transition and increased opportunities to participate in peer group activities at the appropriate level. Staff saw no negative impact on Edzell Primary School arising from the proposal. A current expansion planned for Edzell will ensure capacity.

3.4 Children at Edzell Primary School, including those from the mothballed schools who met with HM Inspectors supported the proposed closure of Lethnot Primary School. They had more children to talk to and work with of a similar age. Through the pupil council, children had been actively involved in discussing the proposal. They felt Edzell Primary School better met their needs. They valued the opportunity to engage in activities such as a recent joint musical show with Stracathro Primary School. Being at a bigger school meant children felt more confident in transferring to secondary school. The children viewed the increase in housing in Edzell as having a bigger impact on the school than the closure proposal. The children recognised that the proposal would lead to an increase in journey time for children from Lethnot. However, they saw this as reasonable.

3.5 No parents from Lethnot Primary School met with HM Inspectors.

3.6 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. In arriving at its proposal the council has clearly assessed the likely benefits to children and in doing so has given consideration to any reasonable alternatives. These included reviewing the catchment area and refurbishing Lethnot Primary School. Due to insufficient demand these were not seen as viable. There are currently no Lethnot children attending Edzell Primary School. The very small numbers of children anticipated in Lethnot in the future are likely to limit opportunities for children to develop a broad range of skills. The current school building is not used for community activity. It is not fit for future use as it currently stands. Future travel arrangements are reasonable. The proposal does not impact negatively on children and young people at Edzell Primary School.

4. Summary

Angus Council's proposal to close Lethnot Primary School and to amend the Edzell Primary School catchment area has clear educational benefits. Lethnot children will have access to greater learning opportunities, wider experiences and increased socialisation through being part of a larger school at Edzell. Lethnot Primary School has not been in use since 2016. There are currently no children from the Lethnot catchment area attending Edzell Primary School or Stracathro Primary School. The current number of children within the catchment who are under three years of age is insufficient to make the school viable. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. In taking forward the proposal, the council should clarify the actual savings in staff costs and consider how the vacant school might be used to the benefit of the local Lethnot community.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
May 2018**