

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Angus Council to close Stracathro 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* ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Angus Council's proposal to close Stracathro 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 statutory 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, and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children 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; and

- attendance at the drop-in sessions for members of the public at Lethnot Hall, St. Drostan's Hall Tarfside, Stracathro Hall and Edzell Church Hall during March 2018 and public meeting in Inglis Memorial Hall on 17 April 2018.

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 Stracathro 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*.

2.2 The council undertook the consultation between 26 February 2018 and 20 April 2018. Notices were placed on the council's website and in local newspapers. A formal public meeting was held in Inglis Memorial Hall on 17 April 2018.

2.3 The council received 45 responses to its consultation questionnaire and a few additional written responses. Almost all respondents wanted to keep Stracathro open with only two being in favour of closure.

2.4 HM Inspectors were informed during the consultation period that the council had been made aware of omissions within the original proposal paper and had taken the decision to correct and re-issue the paper and extend the consultation deadline until 11 May 2018. However, at a council meeting on 10 May, Angus Council took the decision to stop the consultation to close Stracathro Primary School.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has stated that the upgraded school building at Edzell will be a significant improvement on the current facilities at Stracathro. The council considers that the upgraded school would provide the opportunity to make available to pupils the most modern standards of school facilities and resources to support the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence, including flexible learning spaces in a fully accessible building. However, insufficient detail is provided to outline how the Stracathro building could be improved as an alternative to closure.

3.2 Overall, HM Inspectors note that stakeholders do not feel they have enough financial information to make an informed choice. Almost all stakeholders are opposed to closing Stracathro Primary School. All children attending Stracathro Primary School wanted the school to remain open.

3.3 Education Scotland received three formal written representations raising concerns about the Stracathro proposal, including one from the local Member of the Scottish Parliament.

4. Summary

Stracathro Primary School is valued highly by the local community. There may be potential educational benefits for learners from a modern, purpose designed learning environment with appropriate facilities, including improved accessibility. However, based on the information available, the council fails to make a compelling case as to the educational benefits of closing Stracathro Primary School and moving children to Edzell Primary School. The financial case is insufficiently clear to provide assurance to the public that closure would make a significant contribution to Best Value.

HM Inspectors note that Angus Council made a decision at their council meeting on 10 May 2018 to stop the current consultation on the closure of Stracathro. In these circumstances, having been notified during the consultation period of omissions and within the context of significant local opposition to the proposal, Angus Council should consider carefully its options in how it frames its final report to elected members and the community in light of its obligations under the 2010 Act.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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