

**HMIE**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdadh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HMIE addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to discontinue education at Kinneff School, which is currently mothballed, and reassign its catchment to either Bervie School or Catterline School.

March 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from HMIE has been prepared by His 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 a proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to discontinue education at Kinneff School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment to either Bervie School or Catterline School. 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's consultation report should include 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children 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 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 4 February and 3 March 2026 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 site of Catterline, Bervie and Kinneff Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees. An online meeting was also held with the headteacher of Mackie Academy.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 Kinneff 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 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 Aberdeenshire Council took the decision to mothball the school from August 2024, following the school roll falling to eight children. The council also carried out an options appraisal survey in 2025, and invited stakeholders to submit their views including alternatives to closure. The public consultation ran from 12 January to 6 March 2026. Copies of the proposal were made available to stakeholders and on the council website. Two public meetings were held, one online and the other at Kinneff and Catterline Village Hall. Eighteen people responded to the council's public consultation. Most were either parents or community members. The majority of respondents support the closure of Kinneff School and most think the catchment area should be allocated to Catterline School rather than Bervie School. A few respondents cited the historical links that already exist between Catterline and Kinneff Schools and that it would make sense to align the catchments.

2.3 During the public consultation, the council engaged with children in both Catterline and Bervie Schools. Although there were mixed views regarding reassigning the catchment area, the majority of children agreed that Kinneff School should close permanently.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council believes that re-opening Kinneff School with a reduced number of pupils from a greater age range would result in increased challenges to ensure that all children can develop the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. It also states that a small roll made up of a few year groups significantly diminishes the viability of the school and may result in a negative impact on children's educational and social development. They believe that a larger primary school helps pupils develop wider relationships and friendships that will better prepare them for moving to a larger secondary school in future. HM Inspectors agree with aspects of the educational benefits laid out by the council in their proposal. It is clear children are settled in Catterline School and enjoy learning alongside side peers their own age. They agree attending either Catterline or Bervie School has potential to support transition to secondary school. HM Inspectors recognise that this proposal may provide additional opportunities for social development in either of the two alternative schools. HM Inspectors acknowledge the challenges of very small school rolls. However, a small school will not necessarily diminish children's educational and social development.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors agree with the proposal to close Kinneff School permanently. HM Inspectors agree that the long-term viability of Kinneff School is unlikely to be sustainable given that no local families have indicated an interest in their children being educated there.

3.3 The council's proposal to re-align the catchment to Catterline School best reflects the wishes of parents who have already chosen this option and the stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors. Staff, parents and pupils at Catterline School think that the catchment area should be re-assigned to it rather than Bervie School, which is much larger. They strongly believe that the more rural nature of Catterline School will help maintain the already strong community links with

children living in Kinneff. They believe that as all eight children transferred to Catterline School rather than Bervie School, indicates that parents may value a smaller rural school. Almost all stakeholders at Bervie School also support the proposal to close Kinneff School permanently. Whilst they feel that they would also provide a positive educational experience for children, they recognise that parents from Kinneff may prefer a smaller school. However, as Bervie School offers an after-school provision, staff and parents thought this may appeal to some parents living in Kinneff.

3.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 November 2024, the council conducted two online surveys for parents, carers and staff at Catterline School to gauge feedback on the mothballing arrangements. The council's options appraisal explored in some detail, the various options to the permanent closure of Kinneff School. They cited a number of alternatives including re-opening Kinneff School, continuing the mothballing arrangements or re-zoning the catchment. Following feedback from stakeholders, the council considered the only viable option was to move to permanent closure and re-align the catchment. HM Inspectors agree with this view, noting that the council made efforts to seek views from a wide range of stakeholders. The council also suggests that the longer Kinneff School remains mothballed, the higher the likelihood that the building will deteriorate further. It also considers that removing the uncertainty about the future of Kinneff School will give clarity to the community about their children's education.

3.5 During the consultation, the future status of the building was raised should the council move to permanent closure of Kinneff School. A few respondents to the online survey suggested possible alternative uses for the building, as did some of the children who met with HMI Inspectors. It would be helpful once the final decisions are made, that the council engages with stakeholders to seek their views about the future of the building.

3.6 Only those pupils enrolled at Kinneff School at the time of mothballing are entitled to transport to Catterline School. Given the distances involved, there is very limited impact on the travelling time to either Catterline or Bervie Schools. There were no zoned pupils at the time of mothballing who moved to Bervie School. However, in the event of the closure of Kinneff School, all pupils in the catchment will be entitled to school transport should they attend their reassigned school of either Bervie or Catterline.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors support the council's proposal to close permanently Kinneff School. Those children who have transferred to Catterline School have settled well and are positive about their experience. Parents and staff are also positive about the potential educational benefits of the current and future arrangements. As a result, HM Inspectors support the proposal to re-align the catchment to Catterline School rather than Bervie School. Following the decision about the proposed closure, the council could helpfully engage with local groups, such as the community council, to discuss the future options for the building.

HM Inspectors
March 2026

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland