

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to amend the catchment areas of Kellands Primary School, Strathburn Primary School and Uryside Primary School.

September 2019

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 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to amend the catchment areas of Kellands Primary School, Strathburn Primary School and Uryside Primary School with effect from August 2020. 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 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.

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 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 29 August 2019 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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 Kellands Primary School, Strathburn Primary School and Uryside Primary School including discussion with relevant consultees.

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 proposes to amend the catchment areas of Kellands Primary School, Strathburn Primary School and Uryside Primary School with effect from August 2020. The council undertook consultation on its proposal between 5 June and 6 September 2019. Copies of the proposal document were made available to consultees and posted on the council's website. A public meeting was held on 29 August 2019 at Inverurie Academy where large scale maps were displayed to enable attendees to view options within the council's proposal. Staff and pupils at the schools affected were provided with opportunities to discuss the proposal. Prior to the formal

consultation, Aberdeenshire Council undertook informal engagement sessions at each of the three primary schools affected by the proposal and undertook an online survey of local residents.

2.3 Aberdeenshire Council included three proposals within its consultation. The first proposal was to make changes to the catchment areas of Kellands Primary School, Strathburn Primary School and Uryside Primary School. In addition, it sought the views of stakeholders as to which schools four additional mapped areas within the Inverurie community should be zoned. The second proposal was to make the changes in proposal one but rezone part of the Kellands Primary School catchment to Strathburn Primary School. This proposal also sought stakeholders' views on options for four additional mapped areas. The third proposal was to retain the status quo with no changes made to the catchment areas.

2.4 Aberdeenshire Council's online survey sought stakeholders' views on their preferences for each of the three schools in separate consecutive questions and a fourth overview question. The survey also included an additional four questions seeking stakeholders' views for the zoning of four mapped areas. Of those who responded by stating a preference, a majority chose proposal two.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The main potential educational benefit arising from Aberdeenshire Council's proposal is that it could enable more children to attend the geographically closest school to their home within Inverurie. Currently, a large number of families from homes now zoned to Uryside Primary School are submitting placing requests to Strathburn Primary School and Kellands Primary School. Changes to the catchment areas would consolidate what is currently happening in practice through placing requests. When Uryside Primary School was opened it incorporated the catchment area of the former Market Place Primary School which was centrally located within the town. The distance from homes within the town centre of Inverurie to the recently built Uryside Primary School is significantly greater for many families than both Kellands Primary School and Strathburn Primary School.

3.2 Aberdeenshire Council's educational benefits statement states that the proposed changes address the capacity issues to a large extent and over time will provide the additional learning space for pupils at all three schools. However, the council's own roll forecasts that under proposal one, the number of children attending Kellands Primary School would exceed the school's capacity between 2020 and 2023 and that under proposal two the number of children attending Strathburn Primary School would exceed its capacity by 2022. The council's proposal document acknowledges that under proposal two Strathburn Primary School may require capital investment by means of an extension or a reconfiguration to support the additional pupil numbers. No similar undertaking is given in the proposal document to outline how the council would address capacity at Kellands Primary School under proposal one. The council should clarify this in its final proposal document.

3.3 The council's educational benefits statement states that some of the schools are operating close to capacity and that this results in less space being available for pupils and imposes restrictions in delivering the curriculum. However, the council does not make it clear through examples what restrictions result. It is not obvious how either proposal one or proposal two will address these restrictions since, according to roll forecasts both proposals could result in schools exceeding their capacity. The council should clarify how it will ensure that it will minimise the risk of restrictions on delivering the curriculum in its final proposal document. The council should provide more specific detail on the steps it will take in both Kellands Primary School and Strathburn Primary School to ensure sufficient space is made available.

3.4 Overall, the council's educational benefits statement lacks specific detail. It does not include information on how its proposals could improve learners' experiences and the learning environment in each of the three schools. It is therefore not possible to state with confidence, overall, that the council's proposals are of educational benefit. The council should address this in its final proposal document.

3.5 Parents, staff and children from all three schools who spoke with HM Inspectors saw some merit in the council's proposal. They thought that enabling more children to attend the school closest to their home without having to make a placing request would be a positive and necessary change. However, many parents felt that the council's proposal document was confusing and that it had been difficult to identify proposed school catchment boundaries from the maps provided. Parents were concerned about walking distances and safe routes to and from Uryside Primary School. Parents and staff at all three schools had concerns about the equity of educational provision across the cluster since the space available for teaching and learning and the quality of facilities differed considerably amongst the three schools.

3.6 At Kellands Primary School staff, parents and children who spoke with HM Inspectors had concerns about the school's capacity to cope with existing numbers of children and felt the school overall was in need of capital investment to facilitate appropriate space, including space for school dining arrangements. Parents and staff were concerned that the council's proposal document made no reference to the need for capital investment at Kellands Primary School if the school roll rose to exceed its capacity. The council should consider this in its final proposal document.

3.7 At Strathburn Primary School staff and parents were concerned about the potential for overcrowding if the school roll were to exceed its capacity. They found that the reference in the council's proposal document to a possible extension or reconfiguration to support the additional pupil numbers was vague and lacking in specific detail. They were concerned about the possible loss of outdoor learning and playground space. The council should provide reassurance to stakeholders in its final proposal paper.

3.8 At Uryside Primary School staff, parents and children recognised that the school has spare capacity and that the new building provides an attractive and modern learning environment fit for purpose. However, parents and staff thought that the distance of almost two miles from Inverurie town centre to the school on a path alongside a busy road was a significant issue. The council's proposal paper continues to include homes close to the Inverurie town centre in its catchment area. Parents felt that better school or public transport would improve children's access to Uryside Primary School from Inverurie town by bus. In its final report it would be helpful for the council to outline any steps it has taken with local transport providers to improve children's access to Uryside Primary School from Inverurie town by bus.

3.9 During the public meeting held in connection with the council's proposal a stakeholder pointed to an omission in the council's proposal document. The council had included a paragraph related to proposal two indicating the possible need for capital investment or reconfiguration at Strathburn Primary School to deal with its pupil roll rising above its capacity. However, a similar paragraph relating to Kellands Primary School had not been included in the report to deal with the same issue under proposal one. The council should rectify this in its final proposal document.

4. Summary

Aberdeenshire Council's proposal has the potential to be of educational benefit by enabling more children to attend schools closest to their homes. It could enable more parents to secure a place for their children at their local school without having to submit a placing request. The council should improve its educational benefits statement by giving sufficient consideration to educational

factors, particularly information on how its proposal could result in potentially improved experiences and outcomes for children. It should ensure that stakeholders can have confidence that, overall, its proposal has the potential to be of educational benefit.

In its final proposal document the council should provide reassurance to stakeholders that both Kellands Primary School and Strathburn Primary School will have the capacity to deal with the increased number of children forecast including more detail on the possible need for capital investment at those schools. The council will need to address the omission of a paragraph related to potential requirements for capital investment at Kellands Primary School to deal with capacity and roll forecasts under proposal one. The council should provide information on what scope it has to discuss with local transport providers potential improvements to bus transport to Uryside Primary School in its final proposal document.

HM Inspectors
September 2019