

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Shetland Islands Council to remove the Secondary 4 stage of education at Mid Yell Junior High School Secondary Department or to discontinue secondary education at Mid Yell Junior High School and to alter the catchment area for Anderson High School to include the current catchment area for Mid Yell Junior High School Secondary Department S4 pupils or S1 to S4 pupils.**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by 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 Shetland Islands Council's proposal to remove the Secondary 4 stage of education at Mid Yell Junior High School Secondary Department or to discontinue secondary education at Mid Yell Junior High School and to alter the catchment area for Anderson High School to include the current catchment area for Mid Yell Junior High School Secondary Department S4 pupils or S1 to S4 pupils. 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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 2 October 2014 in Mid Yell Junior High School 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 sites of Mid Yell Junior High School and Anderson High School, 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 Mid Yell Junior High 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 Shetland Islands Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation period commenced on Friday 19 September 2014 and was scheduled to close on 18 November 2014. However, due to data protection concerns in a previous consultation, the council amended the consultation process and extended the consultation period until 12 December 2014. Public meetings on the proposal were held on 2 October 2014 in Mid Yell Junior High School and on 7 October 2014 in Anderson High School. Both meetings were well attended. The proposed date for the implementation of any agreed proposal is 17 August 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter, given that the completion date of the new Anderson High School is now scheduled for April 2017.

2.3 There was an online questionnaire available for completion on the council's website and people were able to respond by letter to the council. Almost 400 people or interested bodies responded to the consultation through the questionnaire or in writing. Almost all of those who responded were opposed to both proposals. One respondent supported the proposal to discontinue secondary education at Mid Yell Junior High School. One respondent supported the proposal to remove the Secondary 4 stage of education at Mid Yell Junior High School secondary department. Council officers also visited Mid Yell Junior High School to discuss the proposals with staff and young people.

## **3. Educational Aspects of the Proposal**

3.1 Mid Yell Junior High School and nursery are situated on the island of Yell in the Northern Isles of Shetland. They provide all-through education for children and young people from the island of Yell aged 3 to 16 (nursery to S4). The current roll in the secondary department is forty-three. Almost all young people are presented for

National Qualifications at the end of S4. After S4, they can choose to transfer to Anderson High School to continue their school education. In so doing, they travel to Lerwick via buses and a ferry on Sunday evening. They stay in a hostel in Lerwick during the week and return home on Friday evening.

3.2 Shetland Islands Council has identified a number of educational benefits for pupils directly affected by the proposal to discontinue S4 at Mid Yell Junior High School (Proposal A). These included young people having access to a distinct broad general education to the end of S3 with a more coherent senior phase with a wider academic and vocational curriculum to meet their needs. However, the overall benefit would depend upon similar curriculum models operating in Mid Yell Junior High School and Anderson High School. Should the proposal go ahead, it would mean young people having to transfer to Anderson High School at the end of S3 to complete their compulsory education but would avoid a transition during the Senior Phase. The proposal to discontinue secondary education at Mid Yell Junior High School (Proposal B) also has a number of educational benefits. Young people from Mid Yell Junior High School would transfer to Anderson High School at the end of P7 and would avoid another transition during their secondary education. They would experience a continuous and progressive educational experience from S1 to S6 at Anderson High School. If Proposal B goes ahead young people who were expecting to complete their compulsory education in their own community would have to transfer to Anderson High School at the end of Primary 7. They would spend a significant part of their school career staying away from home in a hostel. They would have to travel long distances and be away from their families and local communities. In its final consultation report, the council should give consideration to the effects on the health and wellbeing of the young people should either Proposal A or Proposal B go ahead. Both proposals would enable the council to meet the commitment set out in its Strategy for Secondary Education that transitions during secondary education should be avoided where possible and, if a transition is required, it should not be during the senior phase.

3.3 Other educational benefits for pupils from Mid Yell Junior High School could be realised in Anderson High School under either proposal, including being part of a larger peer group, working with a wider range of teaching staff and experiencing a wider range of learning opportunities. Young people would also be able to have a broader curriculum which has the potential to meet their learning needs better at a range of different levels. The current arrangements also provide some of the benefits identified within Proposal A and Proposal B. For example, young people currently experience a continuous broad general education 3 to 15.

3.4 Some of the potential benefits arising from the proposals are based on the development of the Shetland Learning Partnership. Should either proposal go ahead, young people at Anderson High School may benefit from the educational opportunities offered through this Partnership. It has the potential to improve the number of pathways they have into further education, higher education, employment or training. This partnership will provide for up to 32 S5 and S6 young people to benefit from a coherent vocational learning package, delivered in school, college and local businesses, starting in August 2015. There are plans to increase the capacity to 80 young people and include young people in S4. Stakeholders have pointed out that similar opportunities will be available at Brae High School which is closer to Yell.

The council is seeking to achieve best value for services by making financial savings through each of these proposals which will protect services for pupils across Shetland.

3.5 In discussion with HM Inspectors, children and young people from Mid Yell Junior High School were concerned that meetings which had been held with council officers about the proposals had not been helpful. They did not feel that their points of view had been listened to or taken seriously. The council will need to ensure that these concerns are addressed in its final report.

3.6 In discussion with HM Inspectors, staff, parents, children and young people at Mid Yell Junior High School have reasonable concerns that they have unanswered questions about what the implementation of the proposals will look like in practice, such as the structure of the senior phase and the learning options available to young people. At the public meeting on 2 October council officials explained that if young people did not transfer successfully to Anderson High School, packages would be put in place to enable them to return to and learn in their own communities. Parents would appreciate clarification regarding how individual packages will be designed and implemented for young people who do not successfully transfer to Anderson High School but return to Mid Yell Junior High School. In its final consultation report, the council will need to ensure that clarification is provided to alleviate the concerns of stakeholders.

3.7 In discussion with HM Inspectors and in written responses to the consultation, stakeholders from Mid Yell Junior High School and from Anderson High School have concerns that implementation of either proposal is compromising educational choice for young people. Young people currently complete their statutory education at Mid Yell Junior High School and can choose to continue their education in Anderson High School, in a training programme, at college or move directly into employment on the island. Under Proposals A and B all young people from Mid Yell Junior High School will need to complete their statutory education at Anderson High School. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need to address these issues to alleviate the concerns of stakeholders.

3.8 In discussion with HM Inspectors, parents and staff have reasonable concerns that the proposed staffing for Mid Yell Junior High School's Secondary department under Proposal B is not an improvement on the current situation. Currently children and young people benefit from some teachers who have sufficient time in the school to provide a range of clubs and out-of-school hours activities. This will be much more difficult for teachers who have limited time in the school and parents at Mid Yell Junior High School have reasonable concerns that the overall quality of young people's education could be affected. In its final report, the council will need to ensure that these issues are addressed to alleviate the concerns of stakeholders.

3.9 In considering its final proposal, the council needs to consider its capacity to be able to provide suitable placement opportunities for secondary probationer teachers which meet General Teaching Council of Scotland expectations. Probationers are expected to have as full a spread of classes as possible across the year groups to experience the breadth of the curriculum, including certificated courses. If Mid Yell Junior High School no longer offers certificated courses then the

experience available is likely to be too narrow. In its final consultation report, the council needs to clarify whether the implementation of the proposals would affect its capacity to offer appropriate placements for probationer teachers in its secondary schools.

3.10 As the proposal to discontinue secondary education at Mid Yell Junior High School will lead to the closure of a stage of education within a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The council identified a number of reasons in line with local plans and decisions of the Education Committee for formulating the proposal. It considered three alternatives to the two proposals within this consultation. For each of the alternatives identified the council assessed clearly the likely educational benefits. However, the council did not establish which option it felt was the most reasonable option, including maintaining the status quo, before beginning the consultation process. The council now needs to set out clearly its preferred option, including maintaining the status quo, and explain why the council considers implementation of its chosen option is the most appropriate course of action open to it.

3.11 In 2013, a socio-economic study was commissioned to assess the likely impacts of the proposed options for the future of secondary education in Shetland. This identified potential impacts of school closures across Shetland, including the community of Yell. A range of possible short term impacts were identified, including families relocating closer to a secondary school; older people having increased care needs as families moved away; and reduced support for community initiatives and amenities. Parents and young people agree with the findings in the study. A voluntary organisation had reasonable concerns that if Proposal B goes ahead the organisation would no longer be able to function, as it relies on the support of young people of secondary school age who would not be on the island at the appropriate times. If Proposal B goes ahead parents are worried that it will lead to an increase in the number of much younger pupils using the ferries unaccompanied by adults. The council should consider these issues in their final report.

3.12 Mid Yell Junior High has been the subject of a number of school consultations over the last ten years. As a result, parents, staff and children have faced uncertainty over future education provision. All stakeholders expressed a desire for the council to make a clear decision and provide a substantial period of stability.

## **4. Summary**

4.1 There are potential educational benefits of both options within the proposal. However, the council has not identified whether Proposal A or Proposal B is the more viable and should do so. Proposal A would allow young people in Mid Yell Junior High School to experience a complete broad general education within their own community. They would then have a single transition point to the senior phase, all of which would be experienced within a single setting, maximising the choice of options and progression pathways available to them. However, this would depend upon similar curriculum models operating in both Mid Yell Junior High School and Anderson High School. In its final report, the council should give more consideration to the health and wellbeing of those children and young people who currently expect

to complete their statutory education in their own communities and to the impact of the proposals on their families and the wider community.

4.2 Almost all of those who responded were opposed to both proposals. Parents, pupils and staff would like clearer information on what the proposals would mean for their children's education, with examples and opportunities to have alternatives discussed. It will be important for the council to take account of all of these views in finalising its final consultation report. The council now needs to take account of the need to eliminate uncertainty for pupils, staff and parents by deciding on its course of action.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
January 2015**