

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Shetland Islands Council to remove the Secondary 4 stage of education at Whalsay School Secondary Department or to discontinue secondary education at Whalsay School Secondary Department and to alter the catchment area for Anderson High School to include the current catchment area for Whalsay 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 Whalsay School Secondary Department or to discontinue secondary education at Whalsay School Secondary Department and to alter the catchment area for Anderson High School to include the current catchment area for Whalsay 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 30 September 2014 in Whalsay 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 Whalsay 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 the closure of Whalsay School Secondary Department, 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 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 30 September 2014 in Whalsay School and on 8 October 2014 at Anderson High School. 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 scheduled for April 2017.

2.3 The council accepted responses to the consultations in written or typed formats as well as providing an online response system. There were 350 responses to the consultation, four of which did not express an opinion. Of those who expressed an opinion, three supported the proposal to discontinue S4 at Whalsay School and 343 opposed the proposal. None of those who responded supported the proposal to discontinue secondary education at Whalsay School. Council officers also visited Whalsay School to discuss the proposals with staff and young people.

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

3.1 Whalsay School is located in Symbister on the island of Whalsay, which is situated to the east of mainland Shetland. The school provides education for children and young people through early years, primary and secondary education up to the end of S4. Many young people are presented for national qualifications during S4. At that point, young people who wish to continue secondary education in S5

transfer to Anderson High School in Lerwick on mainland Shetland. They are accommodated in halls of residence each week during term time from Sunday evening until Friday evening when they are able to return home to their families. The journey from Whalsay to Lerwick involves a 30 minute ferry crossing from Symbister to Laxo on mainland Shetland followed by a 40 minute journey by road.

3.2 Under Proposal A, education at Whalsay School would end after young people had completed their broad general education in S3. All young people would then be required to transfer to Anderson High School from S4 to complete their statutory education, including presentation for national qualifications. This would require young people to be accommodated in halls of residence during term time and involve a weekly return journey from Anderson High School to Whalsay. Under Proposal B, education at Whalsay School would end after children had completed P7. All children and young people would then be required to transfer to Anderson High School from S1 to complete their statutory education, including presentation for national qualifications. This would require young people to be accommodated in halls of residence during term time and involve a weekly return journey from Anderson High School to Whalsay.

3.3 Proposal A creates the opportunity for young people from Whalsay School to experience the broad general education to the end of S3 in their local community and then maximise opportunities through an uninterrupted senior phase from S4 to S6 in Anderson High School. However, this would depend upon similar curriculum models operating in Whalsay School and Anderson High School. Proposal B offers the educational benefit for young people from Whalsay School to experience a seamless secondary education from S1 to S6 at Anderson High School. 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.

3.4 If Proposal B is accepted, young people from Whalsay would be at Anderson High School in Lerwick for the whole of their secondary education and there would be a significant impact on them and their families. The council acknowledges that it would be necessary for pupils to travel to the Anderson High School halls of residence early on Sunday evening each week, returning home early on Friday evening. This would necessarily restrict family life for all secondary-aged pupils living on Whalsay to these two days. Families may have several children in this position. If Proposal A is accepted, all young people from Whalsay would be at Anderson High School for S4 and, if they choose, S5 and S6. The impact on young people and their families would be less than that from Proposal B but still additional to the status quo. Parents and young people are concerned that implementation of either proposal could lead to a reduction in the use of the leisure facilities on Whalsay which are currently very popular with young people in secondary education. Some or all of these young people would be accommodated in the halls of residence at Anderson High School during the week and would therefore make much less use of the Whalsay facilities. Staff are concerned that families will begin to move away from the island to be closer to their child's school so that they can spend more time together. Parents are further concerned about the safety of younger pupils on ferries, should the proposal go ahead. They are seeking reassurance that young

people will be appropriately accompanied and that ferries will have appropriate safety procedures in place to deal with all eventualities. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need to ensure that these concerns are addressed.

3.5 Other educational benefits for young people from Whalsay 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 should also be able to access a broader curriculum which has the potential to meet their learning needs better at a range of different levels. However, some of the stated educational benefits could already be achieved under existing arrangements, such as the opportunity to remain educated in their local community until the end of S3 and to experience a seamless broad general education from 3-15.

3.6 The Shetland Learning Partnership is an example of an opportunity which young people could benefit from if they attend Anderson High School, but not if they remain at Whalsay School. Currently, the 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 business, starting in August 2015. The Partnership is at an early stage of development and is likely to be more advanced if either proposal was agreed and implemented. For example, there are plans to increase the capacity to 80 young people and include young people in S4. However, it is not yet clear what opportunities will be available if and when either proposal was implemented, nor how many young people will be able to gain access to them. Stakeholders have pointed out that the Shetland Learning Partnership will also be accessible from Brae High School, which is closer to Whalsay than Anderson High School.

3.7 In discussion with HM Inspectors and in written response to the consultation, children and young people from Whalsay School expressed concerns about the meetings which had been held with council officers about the proposals. They did not feel that their points of view had been listened to or taken seriously. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need to ensure that these concerns are addressed.

3.8 In discussion with HM Inspectors, staff, parents, children and young people at Whalsay had 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 which will be available to young people. In written consultation responses and in discussion with HM Inspectors, staff, parents and young people expressed concerns that some young people who move to Anderson High School have found the transition difficult and have been unable to maintain the placement because they are not coping well with the new school or with being away from their family. The council indicated at the public meeting on 30 September 2014 that it will offer individual learning packages to young people in this situation who need to return to Whalsay. Parents would appreciate clarification regarding how these individual learning packages will be designed and implemented for young people who do not successfully complete a transition to Anderson High School. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need to ensure that these concerns are addressed to alleviate the concerns of stakeholders.

3.9 In discussion with HM Inspectors and in written response to the consultation, stakeholders from Whalsay 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 Whalsay School and can choose to continue their education in Anderson High School, in a training programme or at college or move directly into employment on the island. Under Proposals A and B all young people from Whalsay will need to complete their statutory education at Anderson High School. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need to ensure that these concerns are addressed.

3.10 Children and young people in Whalsay School benefit from staff who know them all well. Staff work successfully across primary and secondary sectors and run a number of clubs and out of school activities. Stakeholders feel that any decline in the size of the school, as outlined in the proposals, has the potential to diminish these benefits through an increase in part-time peripatetic staff. They feel that peripatetic staff who work in several schools will not be as dedicated to Whalsay School as permanent staff are and that the overall quality of young people's education could be affected. Should either proposal go ahead, the council will need reassure children and young people to address their concerns.

3.11 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 would meet the General Teaching Council for 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. If Whalsay 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.

3.12 As the proposal could lead to the discontinuation of a stage of education in 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 clearly identified its reasons for formulating the proposal and explored reasonable alternatives to the proposals before beginning consultation on them. However, the council did not establish which option it felt was the most reasonable before beginning the consultation process. The council now needs to set out clearly its preferred option, including the option of 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.

3.13 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 Whalsay. 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 these findings in the study.

3.14 Whalsay School 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 Whalsay 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 available to them. However, this would depend upon similar curriculum models operating in both Whalsay School and Anderson High School. Proposal B would allow children from Whalsay School to experience education until P7 in their own community and then to experience seamless secondary education from S1 to S6 at 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. Either proposal would further restrict family life for more, or all, secondary-aged pupils living on Whalsay to two days per week in term time.

4.2 Stakeholders do not support the proposal. 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 preparing 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**