

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the two proposals by Aberdeenshire Council to implement its model for enhanced provision.

Proposal 1: To relocate the Newtonhill Primary School enhanced provision centre to Portlethen Primary School.

Proposal 2: To establish a new enhanced provision centre at Mill O'Forest Primary School, Stonehaven.

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 Aberdeenshire Council's two proposals shown above to relocate the Newtonhill Primary School enhanced provision centre to Portlethen Primary School and to establish a new enhanced provision centre at Mill O'Forest Primary School, Stonehaven. 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 proposals, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposals. 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 proposals, it has reviewed the initial proposals, 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 proposals 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 papers; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposals;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposals; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposals, 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 14, 16 and 22 June 2016 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposals, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the sites of Newtonhill, Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 10 June until 16 September 2016. The council posted the consultation documents on its website. It issued copies of the relevant document to pupils and parents in the catchment areas of Newtonhill, Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools and to the Parent Councils of those schools. Further copies were available to pupils attending the enhanced provision at Newtonhill Primary School as well as to all schools in the Portlethen and Stonehaven clusters and community groups. The council made appropriate arrangements to gather the views of children attending Newtonhill, Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools. The council placed copies of the proposals in local libraries and the Council Headquarters. The meetings held for Proposal 1 on 14 and 16 June 2016 were attended by ten and 19 stakeholders. The meeting held for Proposal 2 on 22 June 2016 was attended by 20 stakeholders. Overall, the majority of stakeholders were supportive of Proposal 1. With regard to Proposal 2 to create the enhanced provision at Mill O'Forest Primary School, the strength of feeling was more positive with most stakeholders in favour. Less than ten written communications were received in response to the proposals. There were 46 respondents to the online questionnaire for Proposal 1, with the majority in favour of the proposal. There were less than ten responses to the online questionnaire for Proposal 2, all of which were in favour of the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of the Proposals

3.1 The proposals to relocate the enhanced provision from Newtonhill Primary School to Portlethen Primary School and to establish an enhanced provision at Mill O'Forest Primary School have the potential to bring educational benefits to the children in the Portlethen and Stonehaven clusters. The council is striving to provide a fairer and more equitable service to children and young people in these clusters.

3.2 **Proposal 1:** If Proposal 1 goes ahead, more children in Portlethen Primary School will have access to the provision. The learning environment there will be improved through the establishment of a designated quiet space, a sensory room

and a life skills area which will better meet the wide range of needs of children accessing the provision.

3.3 Proposal 2: If Proposal 2 goes ahead in Mill O'Forest Primary School, a quiet space and sensory room will add to the existing nurture room to provide for a wider range of needs. The council has begun to make adaptations to allow improved access for wheelchair users in Mill O'Forest Primary School. However, most stakeholders feel the pace of this work has been too slow. Both proposals will, overall, reduce travel time and improve access to the enhanced provision. In terms of Proposal 1, this will allow greater numbers of children easier access.

3.4 With respect to Proposals 1 and 2, all parents from Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools who met with Inspectors were supportive of the proposals. They could see the potential benefits this would bring to all children in their schools, not only for the children accessing the enhanced provision. They thought that the establishment of an enhanced provision in their schools was long overdue.

3.5 In terms of Proposal 1, parents from Newtonhill Primary School were opposed to the proposal to move the provision from Newtonhill to Portlethen Primary School. The whole school community, including parents, is proud of the inclusive ethos which has been developed partly due to the location of the base. They fear that this might be lost in the future. They are concerned that the children already attending the provision in Newtonhill Primary School will be able to continue to access this within Newtonhill for the remainder of their primary education. In particular, they would like to be reassured that the same level of support will be provided over the next four school sessions until all children in the provision have moved through the school.

3.6 In terms of Proposal 1 and 2, overall, all children from Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools who met with HM Inspectors were in favour of the proposals. In terms of Proposal 1, the children from Newtonhill Primary School opposed the proposal, with around a third suggesting the provision should be available in both Portlethen and Newtonhill. For both Proposals, children from all three schools talked positively about the benefits to the whole school community as well as individual children accessing the provision. They recognised the importance of having a better understanding of the needs of others and for embracing an ethos of inclusion within their schools.

3.7 Almost all staff in all three schools were in favour of the proposals. They recognise the need for the enhanced support from which children have the potential to benefit educationally and socially. For Proposal 1 and 2, all staff in Portlethen and Mill O'Forest Primary Schools are keen to do the very best for the children who will attend should the proposals be approved. However, they are concerned that they should have the right combination of skills and expertise to provide that support. In order to be confident, they feel that more targeted professional learning should be available to all teaching staff and pupil support assistants.

3.8 At the start of the consultation period the council identified inaccuracies in the electronic links provided in Proposals 1 and 2. The council took action to investigate

and rectify these inaccuracies. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address these inaccuracies.

4. Summary

The proposals to relocate the Newtonhill Primary School enhanced provision centre to Portlethen Primary School and to establish a new enhanced provision centre at Mill O'Forest Primary School, Stonehaven have the potential to bring educational benefits to children in the Portlethen and Stonehaven clusters. Greater numbers of children will access the enhanced provision centres creating the potential for improved educational and social benefits. In taking Proposal 1 forward, the council should make clear to parents how they intend to offer the same level of support to children currently attending the Newtonhill enhanced provision centre for the remainder of their time in primary school. With regard to Proposal 1 and 2, the council will also, if they wish to realise their aspiration for the right support, in the right place at the right time, need to be clearer about how and when staff will have access to appropriate professional learning. Staff are not yet clear about how they will be supported to be confident and equipped to meet the needs of all children attending the enhanced provision centres.

In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies in its proposals.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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