

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a new 3 to 18 community campus on the site of the existing Tain Royal Academy comprising Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Gaelic Medium provision to replace all other local authority education provision within Tain, including the existing Tain Royal Academy building and Community Complex.

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 of the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to establish a new 3 to 18 community campus on the site of the existing Tain Royal Academy comprising Early Years, Primary, Secondary, ASN and Gaelic Medium provision. This will replace all other local authority education provision within Tain, including the existing Tain Royal Academy building and Community Complex. 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 15 September and 8 October 2014 in connection with the council's proposals; and
- 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 Tain Royal Academy, Tain Craighill Primary School, Tain Knockbreck Primary School and St Duthus Special School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The Highland 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*. In 2010, The Highland Council undertook a review of its school estates, it then used an independent consultant to carry out an options analysis. In 2012, revisions were made to the options in light of funding arrangements made available from Scottish Government. The Tain 3-18 campus met the funding criteria and following stakeholder consultation it was agreed the Tain Royal Academy site would be the preferred location for the replacement school. As part of the consultation process two public meetings were held on 15 September and 8 October 2014. The council issued letters to relevant stakeholders and placed details of the formal consultation on their website. The consultation ran from 1 September to 29 October 2014. The council received 12 responses of which eight supported the proposal. Some stakeholders criticised the council's communication arrangements. They felt they received insufficient information regarding the dates and times of the public meetings. The council did not consult children and young people about the proposal during the formal consultation period.

2.2 It is not clear from the consultation documentation if The Highland Council consulted with Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and, in taking forward the proposal, the council needs to consider Bòrd na Gàidhlig's view.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal by The Highland Council to create a 3-18 campus which will retain the separate identities of the schools concerned offers considerable educational benefits for children and young people. These include improved transitions for children and young people at key points in their learning journey. The existing school buildings at Craighill Primary School, Knockbreck Primary School and St Duthus Special School have deteriorated to such an extent that they are no longer fit for purpose. The proposal would also resolve the current situation of education provision being spread across four sites. It would bring together Gaelic and English Medium Education from 3-18 on the one site. Working in this way has the potential to improve progression in pupils' skills. There is scope in a modern

purpose-built campus to better meet the specific needs of children and young people, including those with severe and complex needs currently attending St Duthus Special School. Should the proposal go ahead, the council will need to reassure the staff and parents from all education establishments that the design of the building can support the diverse range of needs of children and young people from 3-18.

3.2 Implementation of the proposal will help the council make better use of its resources and meet its duty to secure best value in the delivery of its services. The provision of a 3-18 campus also has the potential to support learners from the Tain Royal Academy Associated Schools Group and the wider community. Thus spreading and sharing the benefits of a new purpose-build school and community facility more widely.

3.3 HM Inspectors met with groups of staff, parents, children and young people from all of the schools concerned. There was considerable support from each of the groups for the council's proposal to improve the quality of school accommodation across Tain. Almost all parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors were fully supportive of a 3-18 campus. A few staff, parents and community representatives expressed concern that the site would not be large enough to accommodate all the facilities outlined in the proposal document. They raised concerns over how the site would cope with the volume of traffic at peak times of the day. While the council has set out clearly the actions it will take with regards to the future leadership and management of the new campus, a few stakeholders felt the council had not provided sufficient detail on the possible leadership and management structure. Staff working with children in Gaelic Medium classes supported the proposal and hoped that children would have access to dedicated play areas. Staff and parents from St Duthus Special School highlighted the complex range of needs of the children and young people and stressed the importance of safe surroundings and appropriate resources to help support children and young people in their learning. Children and young people were looking forward to accessing high quality sporting facilities and modern technology to support their learning. A few did not have any understanding of how a 3-18 campus might operate. The Highland Council in its proposal addresses well many of the concerns raised, including information on what actions they will take if the proposal is accepted. The council now needs to provide further information about the management structures. Should the proposal go ahead the council should ensure all concerned are fully involved in discussions to develop and work towards a final design for the 3-18 campus.

4. Summary

The proposal to establish a 3-18 campus on the existing site of Tain Royal Academy has the potential to bring about significant educational benefits within a modern high quality learning environment. There is also the potential to improve educational provision across the Tain Royal Academy Associated Schools Group. The proposal will enable the council to make better use of its resources and to secure best value. Overall, the council has set out well the actions it will take to ensure safe routes to school and develop an appropriate management structure should the proposal go ahead. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to involve fully parents, staff, children and young people and the wider community in the final design and layout of the proposed 3-18 campus.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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