

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to relocate St Peter's RC Primary School to the existing Riverbank School building with effect from August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.

April 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 Aberdeen City Councils proposal to relocate St Peter's RC Primary School to the existing Riverbank School building after the new replacement Riverbank School has opened, with effect from August 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter. 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory 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 of the school; any other users; and children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper;
- 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 4 March 2019 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 St Peter's RC Primary School and Riverside School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The number of pupils attending St Peter's RC Primary School currently exceeds the capacity of the building and the roll is forecast to remain over capacity until at least 2024. The condition and suitability of the school building are both rated as C (poor).

2.3 The consultation ran from Monday 4 February 2019 to Friday 22 March 2019, representing 32 school days. Public meetings were held on Monday 4 March 2019 in St Peter's RC Primary

School, Tuesday 12 March 2019 at Riverbank School, and on Wednesday 13 March 2019 in St Columba's Church, Bridge of Don. Overall, 20 members of the public attended these meetings. The council placed documents relating to the consultation on a dedicated area of its website and invited interested parties to respond to the consultation through the online Consultation Hub. Comments were also encouraged by email or by post. Thirty-four written responses were received from members of the public. Of these, 16 supported the proposal and 18 were against the proposal. A group of children from P3 and P4 visited Riverbank School on Thursday 14 March 2019 and reported back to the rest of the school at assembly.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 A number of educational benefits would result from proceeding with its proposal to relocate St Peter's RC Primary School to the existing Riverbank School building.

3.2 Children will benefit from a more flexible, modern and healthy learning environment. The condition and suitability of St Peter's RC Primary School buildings are both rated as C (poor), whereas Riverbank School is currently rated as B (satisfactory) and the council proposes investment works which would improve it to A (good) before the proposed relocation. The improved Riverbank School will provide a significantly improved education environment for children from St Peter's, with the potential for flexible use of space which is not possible in their current establishment. This includes provision for meeting additional support needs, as the Riverbank building has dedicated areas for this purpose. The greater flexibility also has the potential to allow the curriculum to be enhanced through increased space for activities and group work. There are clear educational benefits relating to the improved learning environment and provision for children with additional support needs. There are potential educational benefits for the curriculum.

3.3 There will also be improved outdoor learning spaces with opportunities for physical education. There is significantly more outdoor space available around the Riverbank building, with more than ten times the amount of hard landscaping and nearly 80 times more soft landscaping than is available at the St Peter's site. Where St Peter's has a multi-purpose gymnasium, Riverbank has an assembly hall, which is also used for dining, and a separate games hall, doubling the available area and increasing the opportunities for physical education. There are potential educational benefits related to improvements in health, wellbeing and fitness due to this increase in available space.

3.4 There will be a further benefit to having early learning and childcare facilities on site, leading to smoother transitions from nursery into primary. St Peter's RC Primary School is currently the only primary school in Aberdeen City Council without provision for early learning and childcare closely associated with the mainstream P1 to P7 provision. School staff currently link with at least 12 city nurseries every year to make appropriate transition arrangements for children who will subsequently be attending St Peter's. An onsite nursery will enable the school to develop earlier relationships with parents and help children to become familiar with the school buildings. It will also improve opportunities for joint working between the nursery and P1 classes. There are clear educational benefits for transitions from nursery into primary.

3.5 Children from St Peter's RC Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors would welcome the increased space and improved condition in the Riverbank School building. Those who had visited Riverbank were impressed with the indoor and outdoor facilities which they felt were a significant improvement on what is currently available to them. They have some concerns about the change in travelling distance for some children and about safe routes to the proposed new school. Overall, they would welcome the implementation of the proposal.

3.6 Parents who spoke to HM Inspectors are clear that the Riverbank building has better facilities than are available at St Peter's RC Primary School, but that their support for the proposal is dependent upon the renovation work taking place to improve the Riverbank building to category A. They have concerns about the move to a different area of the city and the distance that some children might have to travel to get there. They would also have preferred a new-build replacement for St Peter's, which was previously consulted upon. They feel that the council should have a plan to support parents, pupils and staff through a managed transition to the proposed new building. They are also keen to be involved in discussions about facilities and renovation should the proposal be approved.

3.7 St Peter's staff who spoke to HM Inspectors see many advantages to the proposed relocation but strongly believe that the renovation work to improve the Riverbank building to category A outlined in the proposal paper needs to take place before a move to the Riverbank building. They have some concerns about the change in travelling distance for some children and about safe routes to the proposed new school, noting that it is more than one mile away and takes over 20 minutes to walk to. They would like to be involved in decisions regarding how the new school building is laid out, organised and refurbished.

3.8 The Diocese of Aberdeen is generally in favour of the proposal, as long as it is adopted in its entirety, including the improvements to be made to the Riverside School building. Its preference would be for St Peter's RC Primary School to receive a new building, given the quality and suitability of facilities available to pupils and staff over a number of years which have been rated as 'poor' by the council. However, it understands that there is not currently funding available for a complete new-build and is of the view that the proposal should provide a significant improvement in both facilities and available space.

4. Summary

This proposal has clear educational benefits for children who currently attend St Peter's RC Primary School and who would have access to a more flexible, modern and healthy learning environment, with improved outdoor learning spaces and early learning and childcare facilities on site.

In preparing its final report, the council should address the issues raised by children, parents and staff relating to changes in travelling distances and safe routes to school. In taking its proposal forward, an effective communication strategy and an action plan will be essential for the council to keep all stakeholders informed and engaged, given the length of the project. The council should include details of these in its final report.

HM Inspectors
April 2019