

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to replace the following schools, Tain Royal Academy, Craighill Primary School, Knockbreck Primary School and St Duthus Special School, with a new 3-18 campus on one of two possible sites, either the Tain Royal Academy site or the Craighill Primary site.

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 The Highland Council's proposal to replace the following schools, Tain Royal Academy, Craighill Primary School, Knockbreck Primary School and St Duthus Special School, with a new 3-18 campus on either the Tain Royal Academy site or the Craighill Primary School site. 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 Tain Royal Academy, Craighill Primary School, Knockbreck Primary School and St Duthus Special School; any other users; children and young people in Gaelic Medium Education (GME); 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:

- 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, Craighill Primary School, 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(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 A previous statutory consultation exercise proposing the merger of the schools undertaken in 2015 specified the new campus should be built on the existing Tain Royal Academy site. This proposal was approved by The Highland Council on 12 March 2015 and by Scottish Ministers in May 2015. As a result of concerns raised by the community during the pre-planning application consultation process regarding the suitability of the existing academy site for the campus The Highland Council agreed to commence a new site selection review. Two possible sites were identified: the existing Tain Royal Academy and Craighill Primary School.

2.3 The formal consultation ran from 5 June 2018 to 4 September 2018. Copies of the proposal were made available electronically on The Highland Council website and in paper format at the four schools directly affected and also Tain Public Library. A public meeting was held on 18 May 2018 at Tain Royal Academy. A notice announcing the public meeting was placed in the Ross-shire Journal and on the council's Facebook page. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as statutory consultees on changes to GME provision, were invited to respond to the consultation. They did not provide a response to the consultation.

2.4 The council took appropriate steps to consult children and young people. A pupil survey was carried out across all four affected schools. Children and young people were, overall, supportive of the proposal. Pupils were asked to express their view on the proposed 3-18 campus and also preferred location for the sites offered. Overall, 249 pupils were supportive of the proposed 3-18 campus, 81 were against and 50 did not know. In terms of a preferred site 331 were in favour of the Craighill Primary School site with 324 in favour of the Tain Royal Academy site. The majority of primary pupils favoured the Craighill site. The majority of young people from Tain Royal Academy favoured the existing Tain Royal Academy site. Pupils from St Duthus Special School did not submit a response.

2.5 The council received 55 responses including 11 anonymous responses to an online survey and one written response from a local MSP on behalf of a constituent. Almost all the submissions stated a preference for the Craighill Primary School. Key reasons were that the Tain Royal Academy site was too small. The Craighill site was seen to have the space and capacity to meet both current and future needs.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 As stated in the Education Scotland report dated November 2014 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 all educational provisions within the one site. This includes GME, English Medium Education and specialist additional support. Working in this way has the potential to improve progression in children and young people's skills, while adhering to the distinctive approaches to GME. 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. This should include meeting the statutory definition of GME.

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, community representatives and children and young people from the schools concerned. Almost all were supportive of the 3-18 campus and the potential benefits it, along with co-located community facilities would bring. These included: improved accommodation, more attractive learning environment, access to modern technology and improved disability access. Almost all stakeholders of GME felt that the proposed 3-18 campus could facilitate the sharing of staffing and resources for Gaelic to enhance the delivery of the GME curriculum. Opportunities for senior young people to take on leadership and mentoring roles across the whole campus will be improved. Almost all staff, parents, community representatives and children and young people expressed a preference for the Craighill Primary School site. This site was seen to offer the space to best meet the current and future needs of all the children, young people and families. The Tain Royal Academy site was seen as too small with the potential to limit any future developments.

3.4 Staff, parents, community representatives and children and young people raised a number of concerns. The potential impact of increased traffic and congestion in and around the Craighill site was a key issue. Views were also expressed that children in the other Tain Royal Academy Associated School Grouping (ASG) primary schools should not be disadvantaged and that plans should be put in place to ensure they also benefit from the Campus development. The proposed Campus management structure was as yet unclear. The relocation of the

library out of the town to the Campus was of concern to the community representatives.

4. Summary

The council's proposal is of clear educational benefit. The majority of stakeholders who submitted responses were supportive of the 3-18 campus with a clear preference expressed for the Craighill site. The council's proposal, if it proceeds, would see children and young people benefit from a well-located, well-resourced single site which retains capacity to meet any future needs as they arise. The single site offers more effective use of resources, reduces duplication and travel costs. Opportunities for senior young people to take on leadership and mentoring roles across the whole campus will be improved. The Craighill Primary School site offers scope for the 3-18 campus to be part of a 'community hub' building mutually beneficial links with other service providers such as Health. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to set out how it will ensure safe routes to school addressing potential vehicle access/congestion issues. They should also seek the view of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. 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. This should include discussions with parents and relevant Gaelic organisations on ensuring that the campus enables the delivery of effective GME and immersion practice as laid out in statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. In doing so it has to ensure that children from the Tain Royal Academy ASG fully benefit from the 3-18 campus development.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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