

Consultation proposal by Aberdeenshire Council

Report by Education Scotland, addressing educational aspects of the proposal to rezone the catchment areas for Mintlaw Academy and Ellon Academy, should the proposed closure of Ardallie School result in the extension to the Stuartfield School catchment area.

Context

This report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act. The purpose of this report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of the council's consultation proposal. Section 2 of this report sets out the views expressed by consultees during the initial consultation process. Section 3 sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal and the 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 it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 Aberdeenshire Council proposes to close Ardallie School and rezone its catchment area. This could result in the extension to the Stuartfield School catchment area. This would result in the extension of the zone boundary of Mintlaw Academy and reduction in the zone boundary for Ellon Academy. In addition, current and future academy pupils living within the extension to the Mintlaw Academy zone will attend Mintlaw Academy instead of Ellon Academy with effect from 18 August 2014.

1.2 This proposal will only go ahead if the proposal to close Ardallie School and rezone part of its catchment area to Stuartfield School is approved. The educational benefits arising from the proposed closure of Ardallie School are clearly set out in a separate report by Education Scotland.

1.3 The report from Education Scotland is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.4 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- 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 Ellon Academy, Mintlaw Academy and Stuartfield School including meetings with consultees.

1.5 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people; 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 relevant catchment areas;
- 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
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

2.2 Overall, young people from both Ellon Academy and Mintlaw Academy were supportive of the proposal to close Ardallie School and amend catchment zones. From their perspective the impact would be minimal. Young people thought the zoning options presented by the authority were reasonable. They recognised the benefits to young people and that any savings could be redeployed more widely. Mintlaw Academy pupils would be happy to welcome any new pupils to their school. They felt the school had spare capacity, offered a welcoming environment with access to good community leisure facilities. Ellon Academy young people felt the direct impact on them of rezoning would be minimal. Young people in both schools expressed concerns about the length of time young people, particularly from south of Ardallie might spend traveling to Mintlaw Academy, and any possible extension to journey times of existing Mintlaw Academy pupils. Another concern was the separation of families where children rezoned for Mintlaw Academy had older siblings at Ellon Academy. They were strongly of the view that families should not be split up.

2.3 Parents of children who had been attending Ardallie School or will be directly affected were not in favour of options involving Stuartfield School. They were of the strong opinion that there should be no changes to the existing secondary catchment areas. Parents, including former Ardallie residents, expressed a firm view that as there are already strong links with Ellon any rezoning should be within the Ellon Academy catchment area. Parents were clear they wished to see their children attend Ellon Academy. In some instances, this had been a key factor in moving to the area. Concern was expressed about the negative impact rezoning to Mintlaw Academy would have on families with children already at Ellon Academy. Increase

in travel time for young people was also raised as an issue. Parents at Mintlaw Academy would be happy to welcome young people to their school. They had no concerns about the school being able to accommodate additional young people. Existing links with Stuartfield School are strong.

2.4 Staff at Mintlaw Academy and Stuartfield School were happy to support the proposal. They saw any negative impact to be minimal and that both schools had enough capacity to accommodate additional numbers. Mintlaw Academy has very strong curricular links with Stuartfield Primary and effective transition arrangements in place. Staff at Ellon Academy felt that any negative impact on the school would be minimal as the numbers involved are low. However, staff expressed concern about the impact on families with children already attending Ellon Academy and the potential to split families up.

2.5 Community facilities are currently available in the towns of Ellon and Mintlaw. This will continue to be the case. The proposed changes would have a minimal impact on the local community.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 This proposal will only go ahead if the proposal to close Ardallie School and rezone part of its catchment area to Stuartfield School is approved. The educational benefits arising from the proposed closure of Ardallie School are clearly set out in a separate report by Education Scotland.

3.2 Both Ellon Academy and Mintlaw Academy provide quality education for their respective pupils. There would be no negative impact on existing transition arrangements between Stuartfield School and Mintlaw Academy.

3.3 Changes to the academy zones would have a minimal impact upon the respective school rolls. Projections for secondary school rolls suggest that there will be ample spare capacity at both Ellon Academy and Mintlaw Academy for potential families moving into the Ardallie area.

3.4 All children who live out with two miles of their zoned secondary school are eligible for free transport to their new school from Ardallie. However, the authority needs to manage the concerns about the impact on the length of the school day or on existing children who travel.

4 Summary

4.1 HM Inspectors are of the view that if the closure of Ardallie School is approved then the proposal to rezone the catchment areas for Mintlaw Academy and Ellon Academy offers a reasonable solution. As the subject of a separate proposal, Aberdeenshire Council has made a strong case for the closure of Ardallie School. The proposal to rezone the catchment areas for Mintlaw Academy and Ellon Academy as a result of an extension to the Stuartfield School catchment area offers no negative impact on young people's learning. Mintlaw Academy offers a welcoming environment, access to established transition arrangements and

community facilities. Mintlaw Academy has ample capacity to accommodate additional numbers of young people.

4.2 The authority needs to consider the impact of travel times for both new and existing pupils to ensure journey times are manageable.

4.3 The authority has done much to consult with a wide range of stakeholders and will continue to do so. However, existing Ardallie parents continue to have concerns about the potential the proposal has to split families between academies. Throughout the consultation parents have expressed a clear preference that they wish to remain within the Ellon Academy catchment area. The authority may wish to take these views into account accordingly.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2014**