

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to close Dales Park and Meethill Primary Schools and replace these with a new primary school in the Peterhead Community Campus.

March 2021

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 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to merge Dales Park and Meethill Schools within the Peterhead Community Campus. 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 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 virtual public meeting held on 3 February 2021 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
- virtual visits to the site of Dales Park School, Meethill School and Peterhead Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 Aberdeenshire Council formally consulted stakeholders between 7 December 2020 and 26 February 2021. Copies of the consultation proposal were made available to statutory consultees. Copies were also made available at local public buildings (subject to Covid-19 arrangements) and on the council's website. In terms of pre-consultation, engagement visits for staff and children were provided. Fourteen parents of pre-school children attended evening workshops held on 29 and 30 January 2020. Taking account of public health concerns, a virtual

public meeting was held on 3 February 2021 and was attended by approximately 40 people. Details of the public meeting were advertised on Aberdeenshire Council's website, social media platform and through electronic and written communication to statutory consultees. A frequently asked questions document (FAQ) was produced and addressed at the public meeting. This document was populated with questions raised through written responses and consultation engagement activities. Aberdeenshire Council offered a further meeting to Dales Park and Meethill Parent Councils following the virtual public meeting. Representatives of Meethill Parent Council attended this meeting. Five hundred and fifty four consultees responded to the online survey. The majority (73%) of Dales Park parents who responded to the online survey support the proposed move to the new Peterhead Campus. In contrast, 82% of Meethill School parents who responded to the online survey do not support the proposal. Overall, 71% of those responding to the online survey do not support the proposed merger of Dales Park and Meethill Schools.

2.3 The council received three online responses representing Meethill parents and the local community. All three raised objections in respect to the inclusion of Meethill School in this proposal. Key areas of concern included: the increased travel distance, road safety concerns, the size of the new school, the loss of the sense of community currently provided by Meethill School, and concerns relating to the future use of the Meethill School building and grounds should the school be vacated.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council propose to discontinue education at the existing Dales Park and Meethill Schools with effect from July 2025 and provide education for existing and future pupils of these schools within the new Peterhead Community Campus located at Kinmundy Road, Peterhead from August 2025. The Kinmundy site is within the Dales Park School catchment and is approximately one mile from both Dales Park and Meethill Schools. Roll forecasts between 2020 and 2027 indicate a significant and sustained increase to the roll at Dales Park School. The roll of Meethill School is expected to fluctuate slightly then fall over this period of time. The proposal to provide 600 places in the primary school in the new community campus is sufficient to meet the projected combined rolls of both schools should they merge. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources.

3.2 The council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. There will be a number of potential educational benefits for children and staff should the proposal go ahead. These include the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging, engagement and ownership for all pupils and staff across an inclusive campus. The provision of a modern, purpose built campus offers an improved learning environment designed to suit the demands of a 21st century curriculum. Flexible learning spaces will encourage staff to work collaboratively, provide more opportunities for children to work cooperatively and allow a range of teaching and learning approaches including, active, interdisciplinary and outdoor learning. The inclusion of new community sports facilities on the campus will significantly enhance opportunities for physical education and related activities. The new campus will offer greater flexibility for a range of school activities, including before and after school.

3.3 Pupils from Meethill School will benefit from a range of resources not currently available to them, including a sensory room and life-skills area as well as easier access to specialist classrooms on the campus grounds. Both schools will benefit from dedicated nurture spaces which support individual and small group work. Dales Park pupils will benefit from increased circulation space and additional space to support collaborative activities. Dining facilities for both schools will be improved.

3.4 The proposal identifies potential benefits for staff, including an improved working environment and access to modern resources and facilities. Being part of a larger professional community, including primary, secondary, special school and enhanced provision will promote opportunities for joint professional learning and increased opportunities for leadership development. There will be a broader range of staff expertise and allow for better sharing of good practice, materials and resources. Staff will be able to work more collaboratively and effectively on improving professional reflective practice and self-evaluation.

3.5 The children, staff and parents from Dales Park School who met with HM Inspectors recognise the potential benefits of the proposal. They like the idea of working in a modern building that is designed to promote accessible and inclusive learning. Staff and parents felt this will be particularly beneficial to children with additional support needs, including those who attend the Enhanced Provision currently based in Dales Park School. They recognise the proposed flexibility of learning spaces and identified the potential to work more collaboratively with colleagues. Staff recognise the potential benefit for children transitioning to Peterhead Academy if the primary was on the same campus. Children saw the proposed merger as an opportunity to make new friendships, meet new teachers and have more space in which to learn. Access to improved physical education accommodation and facilities were seen as attractive.

3.6 The staff and parents from Meethill School who met with HM Inspectors feel that Meethill School is still fit for purpose and see limited benefits to the proposal. They are not supportive of the inclusion of Meethill School in the proposal. They do, however, recognise the benefits of the new campus for the other schools involved. Staff and parents acknowledge that Meethill School would require some upgrading should it remain open. Key areas of concern are the proposed campus being too large and impersonal, children of different ages being on the same campus, increased travelling distance and road safety concerns. Parents and staff feel that Meethill School is the heart of the local community and that this would be lost should the school close. They also have concerns about what will happen to the Meethill School site should it be vacated. Children from Meethill School were more positive about the proposal. They were excited about the prospect of improved facilities, such as a bigger library and sports facilities.

3.7 Representatives of the Anna Ritchie and Peterhead Academy schools including staff, young people and parents were in favour of the proposal. They believe the shared campus will encourage greater collaboration between children and young people across the campus. They think transitions for children will be enriched and that a better understanding of diversity and attitudes to inclusion will be improved.

4. Summary

4.1 Aberdeenshire Council has undertaken this consultation as the proposed 'merger' of Dales Park and Meethill Schools. HM Inspectors shared with the council their view that this consultation is seeking views about a proposed closure of the two primary schools with the establishment of a new school, rather than a merger. The council should make this clearer in their final proposal paper.

4.2 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at the existing Dales Park and Meethill Schools has potential educational benefits. The council's proposal, if it goes forward, would see children benefit from a new building that supports learning and teaching styles of the 21st century. The larger professional community created will promote opportunities for joint professional learning and increased collaboration. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources.

4.3 Parents and staff across the two primary schools hold significantly different views about the educational benefits of the proposal. Most stakeholders oppose the inclusion of Meethill School in this proposal. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders to address their concerns. This includes addressing stakeholders' legitimate concerns about road safety and safe walking routes to the proposed new school. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should continue to consult and communicate effectively with staff, children and parents and the wider community in engaging them fully in the future planning and design stages of this proposal.

HM Inspectors
March 2021