

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to build a new Hazlehead Academy Campus and alter secondary school catchment areas for Hazlehead, Countesswells and Kingswells.

May 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 a proposal by Aberdeen City Council to build a new Hazlehead Academy Campus and alter secondary school catchment areas for Hazlehead, Countesswells and Kingswells. 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act.

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 meetings held on 20, 21 and 26 March 2024 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 site of Countesswells School, Kingswells School, Hazlehead Academy and Bucksburn Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The public consultation ran from 26 February until 22 April 2024. Copies of the proposal were made available to stakeholders and on the council website. Three public meetings were held in Countesswells School, Kingswells School and Hazlehead Academy. These were attended by 63 stakeholders in total. An online survey gathered 156 responses, most of which were from parents. Six email written comments were also received. In addition, notes were gathered from a discussion at Kingswells Parent Council about the consultation. Of the online survey responses, 75 agree and 81 disagree with the proposal. Most parents from Kingswells and Countesswells Schools and the majority of parents from Bucksburn and Hazlehead Academies who completed

the survey disagree with the proposal. The proposal is a change to the council's original plans to build a new secondary school in Countesswells. The council state this is due to a reduction in housing developments in the area. Stakeholders acknowledge a change in the speed of housing developments. However, many are concerned that the number of children in the area may grow faster than council predictions. Therefore, that the capacity of a new Hazlehead Academy may be exceeded within a few years of it being built. A minority of respondents questioned whether two smaller schools, at Hazlehead and Countesswells, would still be better than one larger school.

2.3 During the public meetings, and in their written and online responses, stakeholders raised a number of other queries. Several stakeholders expressed concern about how large the new catchment area for Hazlehead Academy will be if the proposal is agreed. Stakeholders asked questions about school transport arrangements and whether the new school should still be called Hazlehead Academy. A few parents are worried about the potential additional costs of young people moving secondary school, such as buying a second school uniform. Several stakeholders queried what will happen if the new build does not run to schedule. A few stakeholders suggested wider school catchment changes. It may be helpful for the council to provide further information in its consultation report to help address questions and queries. For example, showing the full current catchment areas for both academies and information about the contingency plans for any delay in the build.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree there are educational benefits to this proposal. There are growing pressures on the school roll at Bucksburn and Hazlehead Academies. Increasing the capacity of Hazlehead Academy and adjusting the catchment area to include Kingswells School will help to address these issues. The proposed new school should also provide an enhanced learning environment, such as having more digitally enabled and accessible spaces. It also provides the opportunity to expand the area available for the two city-wide provisions that are held in the school. These are for Gaelic Medium Education and the Scottish Football Association programme. The council should confirm that the proposed arrangements take account of there being suitable and sufficient capacity for immersion education for Gaelic. This would be for the city-wide catchment area that has been established. In so doing, they should consult Bòrd na Gàidhlig as required by the 2010 Act on a change of arrangement for Gaelic.

3.2 Almost all stakeholders, that met with HM Inspectors, agree that a new school building would be of benefit to young people attending Hazlehead Academy. Children and young people are clear about the need for the new school to be welcoming and inclusive. They suggest that a new school should include aspects such as quiet spaces for those who may struggle to learn within larger classes and adequate outdoor space for both sports and socialising with friends. Staff at Hazlehead Academy who spoke to HM Inspectors are positive about the opportunities that a new school building would open up, such as increased space to support young people with additional support needs (ASN). Extending the catchment of Hazlehead Academy may increase the numbers of young people who have barriers to learning and require additional support to reach their potential. If the proposal is agreed the council will need to ensure that there is the correct level of accommodation and staffing to support this and to meet the duties in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act. A few stakeholders are concerned about safety and noise, given the proposal for the new school to be built near the existing school. Stakeholders would welcome the council providing further details about the school design. All stakeholders, who spoke to HM Inspectors, would like to be consulted on the designs for the new school should this proposal be accepted.

3.3 Children at Kingswells School, who spoke to HM Inspectors, have mixed views about the proposal to rezone their school from Bucksburn Academy to Hazlehead Academy. Those who

have older siblings who are currently at Bucksburn Academy are not sure if they would prefer to go to the same school as them, or move with their friends. They are aware that the council state that if the proposal is accepted then all young people from the Kingswells catchment already attending Bucksburn Academy will be able to continue to do so. Also that their younger siblings will be able to choose to go to Bucksburn Academy. Young people and their parents are clear that for young people to be able to do this, the school transport currently used to get to Bucksburn Academy would need to continue.

3.4 Parents who spoke to HM Inspectors at Kingswells School raised concerns about the travel arrangements to school if this proposal is agreed. There are active travel routes for young people to use between Kingswells and Hazlehead. These include crossing a busy roundabout and main roads. Parents are aware that part of the Kingswells area will be eligible for free school transport. They would like the council to consider widening the eligible areas to include the whole village. They also questioned if public transport could be improved to support young people getting to school and attending out of school activities. If the proposal is agreed the council will need to review the travel arrangements to make sure there are safe routes to school for all young people.

3.5 Headteachers and staff at all four schools, that met with HM Inspectors, are confident in delivering effective transition arrangements for young people moving from primary school to either of the secondary schools. The headteacher and staff at Hazlehead Academy are also confident they can provide effective transition from the existing school building to a new school site. Stakeholders, that spoke to HM Inspectors, are concerned about arrangements if the new Hazlehead Academy opens part of the way through the school year. In particular, they are worried that young people could start S1 at Bucksburn Academy and then move to Hazlehead Academy. HM Inspectors agree this may be stressful for the young people, as well as challenging for both academies. HM Inspectors suggest that, if possible, this should be avoided by the council.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree there are educational benefits to this proposal. If it is agreed, the change to school catchments and a new, larger Hazlehead Academy will help to address secondary school capacity issues in the area. The new school should provide an enhanced learning environment. It also offers the opportunity to provide more suitable accommodation for the city-wide programmes which run at the school, and for those young people with ASN. However, the council will need to continue to liaise with relevant stakeholders to address their concerns. This includes the potential for longer term capacity issues across the wider area, travel and transition arrangements. If this proposal is agreed, the council will need to work with Hazlehead and Bucksburn Academies to ensure the transition for those at Kingswells School is well supported and straightforward. The council should continue with their plans to involve stakeholders in the design and development of any new school.

**HM Inspectors
May 2024**