

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to merge Fraserburgh North School and St Andrews School within a new primary school in Fraserburgh.

March 2023

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 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to merge Fraserburgh North School and St Andrews School within a new primary school in Fraserburgh. 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 public meeting held on 1 February 2023 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Fraserburgh Academy, Fraserburgh North School and St Andrews School, 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 The consultation ran from 12 December 2022 to 24 February 2023. Copies of the proposal were made available to stakeholders including to all pupils and parents of children at school in Fraserburgh. A public meeting was held on 1 February 2023. One member of the public, as well as a number of school staff and local elected members, attended this meeting. Ninety-one

stakeholders completed an online survey. The largest group of stakeholders who completed the survey, almost half, were staff and teachers. Of all those who completed the survey, around half are in favour of the proposed merger with a third being against it and a smaller group having no preference. However, a majority of the parents and carers, 15 out of 25, who completed the survey are against the merger of the two existing schools into one new one.

2.3 Stakeholders commented on the potential benefits to the proposal, for example, in providing better spaces and resources to meet additional support needs and more modern learning facilities. Many stakeholders are positive about the opportunities a merged school presents in terms of taking forward the best practices in both existing schools. However, stakeholders have a variety of concerns. They include the need for the council to ensure safe routes to school. Stakeholders, especially those from Fraserburgh North School, have concerns about how well the individualised support available at the existing schools will be able to continue at a new, larger school. Stakeholders commented on the need to consider how current school buildings and sites will be used if the proposal is agreed. A few stakeholders question the capacity of the planned site to hold sufficient and separate learning, play and sport facilities for the primary and secondary, including if the new school role is greater than anticipated.

2.4 Meetings were held with staff and pupils at Fraserburgh North School, St Andrews School and Fraserburgh Academy to gather their views. In addition, a small number of stakeholders emailed and wrote to HM Inspectors. Understandably, some staff expressed worry about the proposal's potential impact on their remits and roles. If agreed, the proposal will mean that senior leadership roles will change. This aspect will need to be carefully managed so leaders at both existing schools are well supported through this process. Many children are looking forward to making new friends with pupils from the other primary. However, children and young people expressed concern about potential negative effects on children at primary school being on a shared site with Fraserburgh Academy. They have fears about the potential of children being bullied or influenced by young people with negative behaviours such as smoking.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that the proposed new school should provide an enhanced environment for delivering teaching and learning and that this is of educational benefit. The existing sites and building of both Fraserburgh North School and St Andrews School present some challenges that have the potential to be addressed with a new building. This includes enhanced accessibility and improved accommodation for inclusive practice. Fraserburgh North School currently has one of two additional support needs bases in the school cluster and staff there can see the potential a new school could present for specialist support spaces. St Andrews School currently has to adjust how years move round the school as it cannot provide access to the upstairs classroom for a few children with mobility differences. St Andrews School is also a split site with the lower school being across a busy road from the upper school. Staff have experienced security and littering challenges in how their school grounds are accessed and used by those not involved with the school.

3.2 HM Inspectors agree that the proposed new school has the potential to enhance outdoor learning and play facilities. At both St Andrews School and Fraserburgh North School, playground spaces are primarily hard surface and limited in their capacity for outdoor learning. Stakeholders are positive about the potential opportunity a new school would present for having a space large enough for whole school assemblies and events. A few stakeholders also noted the need to have space in the new school to provide support and family learning opportunities for parents and families.

3.3 Stakeholders that HM Inspectors met with, raised some worries and suggestions about the proposed merger of St Andrews School and Fraserburgh North School. Children would like lots of opportunities to meet children and staff from the school they do not attend before any merger. A few children have transferred between these schools as the different approaches and ethos in one or other suited them better. If the proposal is agreed, particular care will need to be taken to the transition of these children to a new merged school. Stakeholders at Fraserburgh North School are concerned about how well children who are used to attending a small school will adjust to a larger, potentially noisier school and playground. If the proposal is agreed, the council will need to ensure that stakeholders of both existing schools feel they have an equal say in the planning around the merger. This will include in regard to how the new school can best support every child's needs. Almost all stakeholders would like to be involved to the design of the new school and play facilities and in developing transition plans. A minority of stakeholders spoke about the issue of current school catchment areas in Fraserburgh needing to be addressed. They are aware this will be the focus of a further school consultation by Aberdeenshire Council.

3.5 The stakeholders that HM Inspectors met expressed a range of concerns about the site of the proposed new school being beside Fraserburgh Academy. Young people are worried they could be seen to be negative role models for children. They also have concerns about noise from the primary playground during exams. Parents and a few children said they are worried about the potential for bullying of children by young people. Stakeholders want the council to ensure the way that the primary and secondary schools are separated on the site is sufficient to help address these issues. A minority of stakeholders could see potential benefits of the new school being beside the secondary. They think there is potential for young people to become positive role models. For example, young people could support and increase the learning, sporting and cultural opportunities the children at the new school would have. Stakeholders stated that the site already has traffic and parking issues especially at the start of the school day. They are worried that this will be exacerbated when a second school is located there. If the proposal is agreed, the council will need to work with stakeholders to look at traffic and options for locations of parking both on site and in the wider area.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agreed that there are potential educational benefits to this proposal. The current accommodation in both St Andrews School and Fraserburgh North School presents challenges in regard to inclusion and delivering aspects of the curriculum, especially outdoor learning. The proposed new school should have improved and more inclusive play and learning facilities indoors and outside. Stakeholders are concerned about both the merger of the two schools and the proposed location of a new school beside Fraserburgh Academy. If this proposal is agreed, it will be important that stakeholders are involved in transition arrangements. These need to include multiple opportunities for staff, parents and children in the two existing primary schools to meet. It will also be important to ensure that the views of stakeholders from both schools are equally heard and valued. Consideration should be given to how the location of a new school beside Fraserburgh Academy can become of benefit rather than a challenge in regard to young people being role models for children. Finally, if the proposal is agreed, the council should work with stakeholders to address traffic and parking issues at the site and in the surrounding area.

**HM Inspectors
March 2023**