

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to rezoning of Balmedie school catchment at Blackdog.

January 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 rezoning of Balmedie school catchment at Blackdog. 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.

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 10 November 2022 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 Scotstown Primary School and Balmedie Primary 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 14 October 2022 to 6 January 2023. Copies of the proposal were made available to stakeholders including parents of children at the affected schools and residents of Blackdog. A public meeting was held on 10 November 2022. Seven members of the public, including five parents, attended. Discussions at the meeting included parents seeking reassurance that existing pupils at Scotstown could continue to attend that school and that school transport would be available for their children. Officials confirmed this. Children who live in Blackdog also took part in consultation discussions at both Balmedie and Scotstown schools. They had mixed

views about the proposal. The majority were concerned about the effect on their school buses. Almost all attending Scotstown school disagreed with the proposal, they felt it would be sad if children from Blackdog didn't have the chance to go to their school. However, children could see benefits, such as having the same school holidays as their friends in the same village.

2.3 Sixty people completed an online survey about the proposal run by the council. Of these 45 were parents, with 41 with children attending Balmedie school and one attending Scotstown school. Thirteen of the respondents live in Blackdog. Of the respondents who answered the question, 35 agree with the proposal and 23 disagree. The majority agreed that it makes sense for all of the village of Blackdog to be zoned to one school that is within their council area. However, a variety of concerns were expressed, these included worries about the capacity of and traffic around Balmedie school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council has set out a clear rationale for rezoning all children living in the Blackdog area to Balmedie School. The educational benefits are limited, as the educational offer at both schools children currently attend are similar. However, HM Inspectors agree there are some potential social and educational benefits to children from a small village being able to attend the same school. For example, in regard to after school activities and in building friendships. There is also an advantage in that children from the village currently attending Balmedie School through placing requests will be entitled to school transport.

3.2 The stakeholders HM Inspectors spoke to are largely in agreement with the proposal as long as existing arrangements, including school transport, continue for children currently attending Scotstown school. Children at both schools talked about how they like travelling on the small buses to school and almost all enjoy attending their current school. Most did not think children from the village of Blackdog going to more than one primary was a problem and felt choice was important. They could see potential advantages in building friendships from the proposal. A few were concerned about some children being overwhelmed when attending a big primary school such as Balmedie.

3.3 The main concern stakeholders expressed is about capacity at Balmedie school. Balmedie School has a capacity of 484. Its current roll is 398 but is projected to grow each year, with its roll exceeding capacity on the council's projections in 2025. Stakeholders acknowledge that this proposal currently only affects a small number of children, so does not have a significant impact on this growth. However, both parents and children want to know how the council will address this capacity issue as housing developments in Blackdog and the wider school catchment area are built. HM Inspectors agree that the increasing roll has the potential to create educational challenges for Balmedie School. Stakeholders are also concerned about increasing traffic around Balmedie School as the roll increases. The council will need to work with stakeholders to further consider how these challenges can be addressed.

4. Summary

Overall Aberdeenshire Council sets out a clear rationale for rezoning all of the Blackdog area to Balmedie School. The arrangements to ensure that children who currently attend Scotstown School will be able to continue to do so and receive school transport are reassuring to parents, carers and children. However, stakeholders have significant concerns about the capacity at Balmedie school as new houses continue to be built across its catchment area, including at

Blackdog. There will be a need for the council to continue to work with stakeholders to consider how this can best be addressed.

HM Inspectors
January 2023