

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to merge Foveran School and Tipperty School.

January 2025

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 Aberdeenshire Council to merge Foveran School and Tipperty School. 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children 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 5 December 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the site of Foveran School and Tipperty School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural schools, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Foveran School and Tipperty School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

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 statutory public consultation ran from 14 October to 13 December 2024. Prior to the public consultation, the council undertook pre-engagement sessions with stakeholders at Foveran School and Tipperty School. During the public consultation council staff visited the Toddler and Baby group at Foveran Community Hall to gain the views of those who may be affected within the next two years. The proposal was made available on the council website and provided to key stakeholders. A letter with the link to the proposal was sent to all residents in the Foveran and Tipperty catchment areas. A public meeting was held on 5 December 2024 in Foveran Community Hall. The council recorded 35 attendees. A survey run by the council received responses from 72 people. The council received written comments by emails from a few stakeholders and from local organisations. Foveran Parent Council ran their own survey and shared the results with the council. Those responding to the council survey were split with around half agreeing and half disagreeing with the proposal. During the public meeting, through the survey and in emails stakeholders raised a range of questions and concerns. Stakeholders queried how the council will decide on which children attend each building and what the transport arrangements will be. A minority suggested the council consider an extension to the Foveran School building to accommodate the increase in roll, rather than a merger.

2.3 Staff at both Foveran and Tipperty Schools discussed the proposal with the children in their schools to gather their views. Children are positive about the potential for making new friends and increasing the opportunities to learn alongside peers their own age. However, they have a range of concerns, including that existing friendship groups and siblings may be split up between the two sites. They are also sad that older pupils will not be around every day to be buddies to younger pupils.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The school roll at Foveran School has increased substantially over the last few years. This is putting pressure on space within the school. Over a similar period, the school roll has declined at Tipperty. The school roll at Foveran School has already exceeded its capacity and is projected to increase to over 80 children by 2029. This has resulted in the only general purpose space, which is also the dining hall, being used as a classroom. Physical education is held in the local hall and park. This reduces the time available to children to undertake high-quality physical education programmes, in line with national expectations. Tipperty School has a capacity for 50 pupils and had ten children attending in September 2024, its roll is predicted to decrease. HM Inspectors agree that this proposal had potential educational benefits. That using the two school buildings as one merged new school addresses the current accommodation issues in Foveran School. If the council agree to move forward with the merger, children may benefit from more suitable spaces to support children's learning and play. It should also mean that children at Tipperty School have increased opportunities to work collaboratively and learn alongside peers of a similar age. The two headteachers and staff that met with HM Inspectors at both schools support the proposal. They are confident that a split site school could work well, supporting staff to provide appropriate learning opportunities for the children in both current catchment areas.

3.2 Children who spoke to HM Inspectors have mixed views about the proposal. Children at Tipperty School see the potential to work with more children their own age and for having enough peers for sports teams. Children at Foveran School are enthusiastic about the increased resources and space Tipperty provides, such as a library. However, children from both schools are concerned about losing the positive attributes and identities of their school. This includes aspects

like leadership opportunities and school logos. Children at Tipperty School are also concerned that they could be overwhelmed by the larger numbers of children that would come from Foveran School. At both schools, children would like opportunities to meet staff and children from the other school several times before any merger. If the proposal is agreed, the council should work with school staff to enable children to contribute to its development.

3.3 All parents who met with HM Inspectors would like more detail on how the new school would operate if the proposal is agreed. They would appreciate further engagement around aspects such as opening times and who will be entitled to school transport. Parents at Tipperty School are concerned that their children may miss the attention they get from being part of a small school. Parents at both schools expressed worries about the planned timescale. They are concerned there is insufficient time for children, staff and parents to get to know each other and develop a new school approach before August 2025. Staff and parents are also concerned about staff having sufficient time to set up classrooms before the new school starts. HM Inspectors recommend that if the proposal is agreed the council work with parents and staff to address their queries and plan transition arrangements.

3.4 All stakeholders agree that should the council move forward with the merger proposal, it will be very important for senior leaders and staff to build in regular and frequent opportunities for children to come together and build a sense of school community. Parents at both schools asked if the council could make a firm commitment to fund the planned travel for whole school sessions arrangements as mentioned in the proposal in the longer term. HM Inspectors agree that it will be important to ensure ongoing connection between the two sites to support the development of a whole school ethos and culture.

3.5 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of two rural schools, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. If the proposal is agreed, the existing school buildings and sites will be used to create a new school across two sites. HM Inspectors agree that the council explored an appropriate range of alternative options as outlined in their proposal. The alternative of capping the school roll at Foveran School would likely mean most children from the area would be allocated to Tipperty School when starting P1. HM Inspectors agree that this could lead to an imbalance in the make-up of Tipperty School whilst also raising similar travel issues to those raised by a merger. Many parents at Foveran School do not consider that the council has sufficiently considered alternatives to merging the two schools. They would prefer that Foveran School is extended or a new school built to accommodate the increasing school roll. A few are worried that the proposal to run a two-site school will reduce how attractive the community is for families. The council state in their proposal that they have no capital funding for a new build and that there is no suitable space to extend the site. Other parents remain positive that a new school, although over a split site, allows both communities to continue to have a school within their communities.

3.6 The proposal is that children in the younger stages will be based in the Foveran site and older children at the Tipperty site. As a result, if the proposal is agreed, it will increase the number of children requiring transport to school and the time children spend traveling to school. It will also decrease the number able to walk or cycle to school. HM Inspectors recommend that the council engage with stakeholders to address their concerns over practical travel concerns and ensure safe travel to and from school is prioritised. For example, how operating hours and arrangements for entering the school buildings can support families that have children at both school sites.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agreed that the proposal to merge Foveran and Tipperty Schools has the potential to provide educational benefits. The merger should help to address the challenges that the changes to rolls in both schools are creating. It should enable appropriate and sufficient learning and play spaces for all the children. However, stakeholders have raised reasonable concerns, including around travel, transportation and ensuring the creation of a cohesive school community. If the proposal is agreed, the council should work with children, staff and parents to address their concerns. It will be important that stakeholders in both Foveran and Tipperty Schools are equal partners in contributing to the new school's plans, policies and cultures. Should the proposal be agreed, HM Inspectors recommend that the council quickly progress their plans to develop a well-planned transition process so that children, parents and staff have sufficient support to be ready for a new merged school by August 2025.

HM Inspectors
January 2025