

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to relocate St Andrew's School to the new Inverurie Community Campus.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to relocate St Andrew's School to the new Inverurie 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 a copy of 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 legislative 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 St Andrew's School and of Inverurie Academy; 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 2017 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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 St Andrew's School, Inverurie Academy and the proposed site of the new Inverurie Community Campus, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 Aberdeenshire Council formally consulted stakeholders between 9 January and 24 February 2017. A public meeting was held at Inverurie Academy on 1 February 2017 and was attended by approximately 40 members of the public. Copies of the consultation document were sent to all parents of children attending St Andrew's School. Information about the consultation was emailed to other schools in the Kemnay, Westhill and Inverurie clusters for distribution to all parents, staff and pupil councils. Information was sent to St Andrew's School and Inverurie Academy for circulating to all staff and to the chairs of Parent Councils and pupil councils. Separate meetings were held with staff and pupils at Inverurie Academy and with staff and the Parent Council at St Andrew's School. All stakeholders were offered the opportunity to share their views through an online survey.

2.3 Fourteen written responses to the consultation were received. Five directly opposed the proposal, one supported the proposal and the remainder sought clarification on a range of points within the proposal. One hundred and twenty-one people responded to Aberdeenshire Council's online survey. Fifty per cent of the survey's respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with the proposal. Thirty-eight per cent either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal. Consultees raised a number of questions and concerns in their written responses, through the online survey and at the public meeting. Their main concerns were that:

- other options had not been sufficiently explored and the reasons for this had not been explained clearly;
- plans for the new St Andrew's School within the campus do not take enough account of the wide ranging needs of children and young people aged 3 to 18 who attend St Andrew's School;
- pupils of St Andrew's School might be subject to bullying from pupils at Inverurie Academy;
- sharing the campus spaces between St Andrew's School, Inverurie Academy and the wider community will impact negatively on teaching and learning for all children and young people on the campus; and
- the educational benefits for children and young people currently attending St Andrew's School would not be greater than within their current establishment.

Consultees who noted agreement with the proposal stated that they saw this as an opportunity for greater inclusion and for children and young people with additional support needs to benefit from being educated in a new school with modern purpose built spaces for care and learning and new resources.

2.4 During meetings with HM Inspectors, almost all stakeholders expressed agreement with the proposal to relocate St Andrew's School to the new Inverurie Community Campus. They supported the concept of an inclusive school campus and the opportunity to develop a new fit for purpose St Andrew's School. However, staff and parents from both schools separately expressed concerns over the current architectural plans for achieving this. They stated their view that the plans for a new St Andrew's School had simply been added to the existing plans for the new Inverurie Academy. They expressed the view that full consideration had not been given to the particular needs of the children and young people who attend St Andrew's School. Many also felt that the planned addition of St Andrew's School would reduce space originally planned for Inverurie Academy and this would impact negatively on young people of that school. Pupils at Inverurie Academy were positive about the learning opportunities offered by the proposal. They spoke positively about the potential for building a more inclusive learning environment.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal to relocate St Andrew's School to the new Inverurie Campus offers an opportunity to create an inclusive learning community through the co-location of mainstream and specialist provision on the same campus. There is potential for all children and young people educated on the new campus to benefit through a deepened, shared understanding of children and young people's varying needs and how these can be met. The council has stated that access to shared learning spaces can further promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference. Whilst this may be the case, it must not be at the expense of learning and teaching or the requirement to meet the physical, social, emotional and learning needs of all children and young people on the campus. Consultees have raised concerns about the current plans for shared and separate spaces within the campus. These include the time and physical challenges of transitioning children and young people with severe and complex needs to and from shared areas, less flexibility in access to areas such as the swimming pool and school halls and significantly reduced access to outdoor space which is an important sensory learning environment for those who attend St Andrew's School. It is not clear to all stakeholders how the shared spaces, for example, classrooms and dining areas will meet the diverse needs of all children and young people aged 3 to 18. In taking its proposal forward, the council is conscious of the need to take account of these concerns before finalising plans for the new campus and work with all stakeholders to agree solutions.

3.2 The proposal offers children and young people attending St Andrew's School, Inverurie Academy and other pre-school, primary and secondary schools in the Kemnay, Westhill and Inverurie clusters, access to purpose built, fit for purpose and future-fit facilities for learning. This includes classroom bases and play and specialist therapy spaces with a range of modern resources and equipment. Children and young people could potentially benefit from greater sharing of specialist expertise across the two schools including through increased collaboration between

school staff and with NHS staff and other partners. Staff and parents in St Andrew's School and Inverurie Academy and partners working with the schools are unclear as to how this can be achieved within the current plans for the campus. In taking the proposal forward, the council will need to ensure arrangements for sharing facilities and the expertise of partners between St Andrew's School, Inverurie Academy and with other pre-school, primary and secondary-aged pupils across the area, are well understood, agreed and managed appropriately. Pupils are likely to benefit from an improved wireless enabled learning environment allowing greater use of digital technology to meet their varying needs.

3.3 The proposal includes the opportunity to further enhance learning experiences for all children and young people alongside extending the curriculum and raising attainment and achievement for children and young people. A few secondary pupils from St Andrew's School currently access learning facilities at Inverurie Academy. There is potential to increase and widen this experience through opportunities available across the wider campus. For a few young people, attainment might be increased through participation in courses and programmes alongside Inverurie Academy pupils and/or through working with Community Learning and Development partners on the campus.

3.4 The proposal includes the opportunity for those pre-school and primary aged St Andrew's pupils who would benefit from it to access mainstream provision in a nearby primary school or enhanced provision. In taking the proposal forward this requires to be scoped further with all stakeholders.

4. Summary

4.1 The proposal to relocate St Andrew's School on the new Inverurie Community Campus has potential to significantly enhance the education of children and young people currently attending St Andrew's School and those who may attend the school in the future. The current St Andrew's School building which has been given a category B rating (satisfactory) provides a rich learning environment in a range of well-planned areas and includes a swimming pool, hall and extensive outdoor area. The Care Inspectorate report for St Andrew's School in 2016 indicates a quality of provision which has been consistently graded as very good. However, there are aspects of the school which require upgrading. The proposal offers an improved learning environment and the potential for increased partnership working which can enhance the curriculum and increase attainment and achievement for children and young people of St Andrew's School. Young people attending Inverurie Academy can also benefit from being part of a more inclusive and diverse learning community.

4.2 The proposal includes the building of a new St Andrew's School on the Inverurie Campus with appropriate access to campus facilities. It is this latter aspect of the proposal which is the cause of great concern for some parents and staff in both Inverurie Academy and St Andrew's School and for some members of the wider community. Whilst agreeing with the proposal to build a new St Andrew's School, a significant percentage of those who have responded to the consultation have raised legitimate questions about what is considered appropriate access to campus facilities. In taking the proposal forward, there is a need for further discussions between all stakeholders to ensure arrangements for sharing campus spaces

including outdoor space are appropriate to meet the needs of all children and young people educated on the campus. The council also needs to take steps to reassure staff and parents that the high standard of provision currently enjoyed by children and young people attending St Andrew's School will be enhanced through the relocation of the school.

4.3 A significant number of consultees raised a range of concerns about the current architectural plans for the campus. In taking the proposal forward, Aberdeenshire Council should commit to reviewing these plans with all stakeholders and aim to find agreed solutions which are mutually beneficial to all campus users.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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