

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to permanently discontinue education at Clatt School and re-assign its catchment to Kennethmont School or Rhynie School.

November 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 Aberdeenshire Council to permanently discontinue education at Clatt School and re-assign its catchment to Kennethmont School or Rhynie 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 school; 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 October 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 Clatt, Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Clatt 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 Aberdeenshire Council took the decision to mothball Clatt School from August 2022. In February 2022, the school roll had decreased to six pupils, most of who were in the upper stages of primary school in P4 to P7. The council supported families through the mothballing process and accommodated the children at other schools of their choice. The school has remained mothballed since this time. The council completed a pre-consultation and engaged with the local community in October 2023. The statutory consultation on the proposal to discontinue education provision in Clatt School ran from 4 September until 8 November 2024. The council publicised the proposal on its website and made copies available to all key stakeholders. The proposal invites stakeholders to consider two potential options. Option 1 - Close Clatt School and re-assign its catchment area to Kennethmont School. Option 2 - Close Clatt School and re-assign its catchment area to Rhynie School. Both Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools are in the Huntly cluster of The Gordon Schools catchment area.

2.3 Aberdeenshire Council held a public meeting in Clatt Village Hall on 1 October 2024, which was attended by six members of the public. The council received 23 responses to their online consultation. Most responses were from parents and carers or community members, a few of whom had children that would be affected by the proposal. The majority of responses support the closure of Clatt School. Option 1 was preferred by 13% of respondents and option 2 was preferred by 34% of respondents. A further 39% of respondents declared no preference and 13% did not support either of the two options. The council undertook engagement with children in both Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools. Children identified a range of potential advantages, including increased friendships and the opportunity to work with more people, and disadvantages including busier playgrounds and classrooms.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council outline several educational benefits that it believes will be realised if the proposal is implemented. This includes increased opportunities for collaborative learning and working with others. HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits to this proposal. Children who were at the school when it was mothballed are settled in their new schools. Children from the Clatt catchment area have opportunities to work with and learn alongside peers that are at a similar stage of learning in the schools they now attend. This helps their team working and social skills. Demographic information for the Clatt catchment area indicates that there is unlikely to be any substantial increase of children living in the area over the next few years.

3.2 HM Inspectors visited Kennethmont and Rhynie Schools and had discussions with children, parents and staff. Children who met with HM Inspectors were able to express their views on the advantages and disadvantages of attending a small rural school setting. Those attending Clatt School enjoyed the opportunity to walk or cycle to school and felt they benefited from a higher level of personal support. All children attending Rhynie School from the Clatt catchment would prefer to see the school re-open. However, those who previously attended Clatt School recognise that since moving school they have gained more interpersonal skills and friendships. All of the children said that they are happy in their current school.

3.3 Parents and staff who met with HM Inspectors expressed their sadness of the potential loss of Clatt School. They understand the need for efficient use of education resources and want to ensure the sustainability of rural schools in the Huntly cluster for both children and communities. All parents and almost all staff agreed that option 2, to close Clatt School and rezone the

catchment area with Rhynie School, would make more sense. They agreed that as Rhynie School has a nursery, this could help with a smoother transition into Primary 1. Within its proposal, the council states that all existing primary age children, and their younger siblings, living in the Clatt area will be able to continue their education at the school they currently attend. The council will need to ensure school transport arrangements support this. HM Inspectors agree that continuity of education is important.

3.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. Before deciding that closing Clatt School represents the best value for educational purposes, the council considered three alternatives to closure: re-open Clatt School with the current catchment area; re-open Clatt School with an expanded catchment area; and continued mothballing of Clatt School. The council also considered five other options, which included the closure of Clatt School. These options were: create a dual zone between Kennethmont and Rhynie schools; merge with Premnay School; merge with Inch School; merge with Lumsden School; and merge with Tullynessle School. HM Inspectors agree that the council has given the alternative options due consideration.

3.5 The council have committed to exploring alternative uses for the building further with the community. Stakeholders, including community members who met with HM Inspectors, feel that the mothballing and potential closure of the school is a significant loss to the community. The school provided a venue for some community events and this would be lost if the building is closed permanently. If the proposal is agreed, stakeholders are concerned that the building and equipment within it may be left to deteriorate. Ideally, they would like the school to be used for educational purposes, however they recognise this may not be possible. Alternatively, they would like the building to be used to support small businesses in the area. Parents who were previously members of Clatt School Parent Council would like clarification on the use of funds remaining in their bank account.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits as outlined in the council's proposal. Children from the Clatt catchment are settled in their current school and enjoy learning alongside their peers. If the council proceeds with the proposal, it will need to consider which of the two options would be best for the Clatt catchment to be allocated. As part of this, they should consider the sustainability of the rural schools affected by this proposal. If the proposal is agreed, the council should work with stakeholders to consider the future use of the school building, site and any resources that remain in the school and playground. The council should also support previous Parent Council members to distribute any remaining funds to benefit the children from the Clatt catchment area.

**HM Inspectors
November 2024**