

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to amend the Hillside School catchment area to remove the Leathan Fields, Portlethen, with this new housing being zoned to either Portlethen Primary School or Fishermoss School.

September 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 amend the Hillside School catchment area to remove the Leathan Fields, Portlethen, with this new housing being zoned to either Portlethen Primary School or Fishermoss 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' 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:

- 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
- virtual visits to the sites of Hillside School, Fishermoss School and Portlethen 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 was due to run from Monday 10 February 2020 until Friday 27 March 2020. Due to school closures and Covid-19 disruption, the council extended the consultation until 28 August 2020. A public meeting was held on 5 March 2020 in Hillside School. Sixty-five people attended the meeting. Most attendees expressed objections to the proposed new house building application being accepted as this would put pressure on school rolls and create the need for rezoning some children to other schools in the area. The council set up an online survey with two questions. Four hundred and sixty two people responded to question one which asked if stakeholders were in favour of rezoning the area of new housing in Leathan Fields away from Hillside School. Most, 75% said no, with 25% agreeing. Four hundred and fifty three people responded to question two which asked which option of the three, stakeholders supported. The majority (72%) agreed with option three to keep the new houses zoned with Hillside, just under

25% favoured option one to rezone to Portlethen Primary School and 3% favoured option two to rezone to Fishermoss School. In addition, the council received correspondence from 72 stakeholders with only one person in favour of rezoning the new housing area and many opposed any new house building in Leathan Fields.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council's proposal paper outlines three options for consideration: option one, rezone the Leathan Fields site to Portlethen Primary School; option two, rezone the Leathan Fields site to Fishermoss School; and option three, keep the current catchment area for Hillside School with no changes (the status quo). However, the council has failed to outline significant, detailed educational benefits for any of the three options outlined.

3.2 HM Inspectors note that under option one, children from the new housing area would be rezoned to Portlethen Primary School. The council considers that there is sufficient space in Portlethen Primary School but has underestimated in its forecast the actual school roll in September 2020. The council estimated the Portlethen roll to be 256 in 2020 and as of September 2020 this has increased to 267. The proposal paper does not provide evidence to suggest that the council has taken due account of the needs of children attending the enhanced provision within Portlethen Primary School. In option two, the council highlights the current challenges for children receiving their entitlement to two hours of Physical Education. An increased roll would put more pressure on the hall which is used to deliver Physical Education and serve lunches. In option three, the council states in the educational benefits section that "this will further restrict the delivery of the curriculum" but fails to expand on the current or future impact. Staff and parents at Hillside School feel that increased pressure may restrict outdoor learning and place further burdens on shared areas within the school.

3.3 Parents shared with HM Inspectors their concern and upset over an alternative to the proposal which had suggested children in P7 might be educated outside of their primary school. Whilst the council outlined that this had now been discounted, parents were unhappy that this could have been an outcome for them and their children. Parents are not confident in the projected rolls for the three schools and cite recent examples of where these have been wrong in the past. They also suggested that some distances and routes within the proposal paper were inaccurate.

3.4 Parents and staff from all schools expressed concern about the possibility of removing children from their local school and community. They recognise the value of local children attending local schools. They recognise the importance of making connections and building a sense of community with other children attending the same school as their close neighbours. The staff, parents and children of Hillside School felt that shared areas within the school, for example, toilets, gym and dining hall would face undue pressure should the school roll expand significantly. They also regret the loss of space which had supported local community groups and fear that this might not be easy to re-establish. Children from all the schools would readily welcome new children and see the benefits of making new friends. However, a few suggested that larger classes could result in having to share resources or get less time with the teacher. Parents from all schools expressed concern over increased road traffic, safety and safe routes to school, should any of the three options be approved. A few stakeholders also considered the negative environmental impact of increased traffic with more parents driving their children to school.

3.5 During the consultation period consultees advised the council of identified alleged inaccuracies and omissions in the proposal. These related to the school rolls and distances and routes between housing areas and schools. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate these alleged inaccuracies and omissions. In its final consultation

report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors' believe the council has failed to provide convincing arguments to overwhelmingly support any of the three options. The proposal paper lacks sufficient detail in terms of the educational benefits which might result from any of the proposed options. Most parents who expressed an opinion do not support the council's view. The potential increase in school rolls could make it challenging for children across the neighbourhood to receive their entitlement to two hours of Physical Education. HM Inspectors agree with the community in terms of their reservations for rezoning children to a school considerably further away from one which is within easy walking distance. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

**HM Inspectors
September 2020**