



**EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**FEBRUARY 2024**

**PROPOSAL DOCUMENT**

**CLOSURE OF FISHERFORD SCHOOL**

**Consultation open between  
5 February and 29 March 2024**

**If you have difficulty reading this document please contact  
the Learning Estates Team on 01771 676600 or  
[LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)**

**ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL IS PROPOSING, SUBJECT TO THE OUTCOME OF THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION PROCESS:**

- **To discontinue education at Fisherford School, which is currently mothballed and re-assigning its catchment to either Auchterless School or Rayne North School or split the catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School.**
- **The proposal would apply to the primary school stages (P1-P7) of education in Fisherford School catchment area.**
- **The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.**

This document has been issued by Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. The Act requires that changes to the school estate, including the proposed closure of a school, are subject to rigorous statutory consultation.

The schools affected by this proposal are:

Fisherford School  
Auchterless School  
Rayne North School

## DISTRIBUTION

A copy of this document is available on the Aberdeenshire Council website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/> or by emailing [learningstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:learningstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

This document will be provided to:

- Parent Council of Auchterless School and Rayne North School
- Parents of pupils at Auchterless School and Rayne North School
- Pupils at Auchterless School and Rayne North School
- Parents of pre-school age children living within the Fisherford School catchment area
- Staff at Auchterless School and Rayne North School
- Trade union representatives of staff at Auchterless School and Rayne North School
- Auchterless, Inverkeithny and Fisherford Community Council
- Local Early Years Partner Providers
- Fisherford School catchment residents
- Education Scotland

A copy of this document is also available from:

- Auchterless Primary School, Auchterless, Turriff AB53 8BA

- Rayne North School, Meikle Wartle, Inverurie AB51 5BY
- Formartine Area Office, 45 Bridge Street, Ellon AB41 9AA
- Learning Estates Team (call 01771 676600 or email [LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) to arrange for a paper copy to be posted)

## **1. Legislative Background**

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (Section 1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (Section 3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Under the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification Fisherford School is an 'accessible rural school' (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more). The Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the heightened consideration to be given to rural school closures.

## **2. Introduction**

- 2.1 Aberdeenshire Council strives to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all its services. It attaches particular importance to providing the best possible educational experience for all pupils within its schools.
- 2.2 This proposal document is focussed upon Fisherford School, located within the Formartine area of Aberdeenshire.
- 2.3 This proposal document contains several maps. Pdf copies of all maps will be available on the Aberdeenshire Council website at the address given on page 2 of this document. Printed copies of the maps will also be available on request at Auchterless School and Rayne North School.
- 2.4 The consultation will run from Monday 5 February until Friday 29 March 2024. A public meeting will be held to discuss the proposal on 6 March 2024 at 6.00 pm at Turriff Primary School, Meadowbank Road, Turriff AB53 4WB.
- 2.5 The consultation process for this proposal is set out in detail in Section 17.

## **3. Reason for Proposal**

- 3.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
- No children have attended Fisherford School since August 2021 when the school was officially mothballed;
  - In April 2022, only one family expressed an interest in their child enrolling at the schools for the 2022/23 session and no parents have chosen to enrol their children for the 2023/2024 session;
  - Six children living in the Fisherford catchment area could potentially start Primary 1 at the beginning of the 2024/25 session and another six between

- August 2025/26 and August 2027/28, once they reach school age;
- The survey issued to Fisherford residents in the middle of 2023 revealed that only one parent would potentially be interested in enrolling their child(ren) at the school, once they reach school age;
  - The school roll could become greater than eight with just three year groups P1-P3 at the start of the 2026/27 session;
  - It is unlikely that all in-zone families would wish to enrol their children at the school due to The Parents' Charter of 1981 which gives parents the right to make a placing request for the school of their choice;
  - The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below;
  - All alternative uses of the school building require the official closure of the school in the first instance.
- 3.2 The current proposal follows informal engagement between Aberdeenshire Council officers, local elected members, the community council and community members.
- 3.3 Letters were sent to every property within the catchment area and an email to Auchterless, Inverkeithny and Fisherford Community Council to inform residents and Community Council members of the online survey available between 19 June to 14 July 2023, the engagement session on 3 October 2023 and alternative contact details for the Learning Estates Team.
- 3.4 The online survey was completed by 19 respondents and eight Fisherford community members attended the engagement session.
- 3.5 A number of suggestions were made for uses of the school building if Fisherford School was not in a position to reopen. These are detailed in the Options Appraisal document in Appendix B.

#### **4. Examination of Alternatives**

- 4.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:
- to re-open Fisherford School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or
  - to continue with the current mothballing arrangement.
- 4.2 Through the survey and during the community engagement session, officers sought suggestions for alternatives to closure. Only one involved the building operating as a mainstream primary school for local pupils, a few suggested other uses if the school was never to be reopened for education and other suggestions would not be a viable alternative to closure. All suggestions were assessed during the options appraisal process and are included in Appendix B.
- 4.3 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required as to the most appropriate way to re-zone the school catchment area. Further discussion of this is included within the options in Section 7 of this report.

4.4 The detail of the Council's consideration of the alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and the Options Appraisal document.

## **5. Fisherford School**

5.1 In May 2021, due to decreasing the Fisherford School's roll, the Director of Education and Children's Services made the decision to mothball the school from August 2021. As of August 2021, there would have been only three pupils on the school roll.

5.2 Officers supported the families and staff. Pupils were successfully accommodated at other schools of their choice and staff were appropriately relocated.

### **5.3 Current Details**

5.3.1 Turriff Cluster consists of nine Primary Schools, Auchterless, Crudie, Easterfield, Fintry, Fisherford, Fyvie, King Edward, Monquitter and Turriff Schools. Each of these schools is in the catchment area for Turriff Academy.

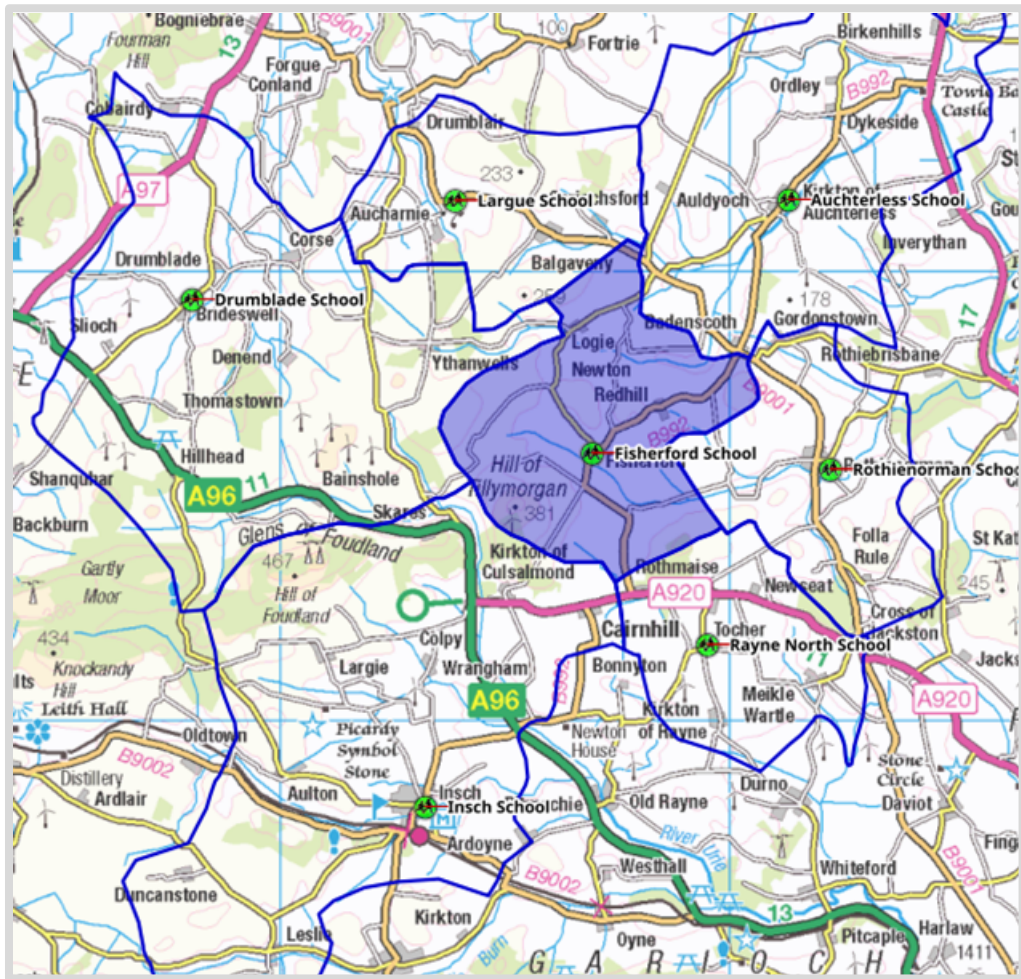
5.3.2 Fisherford School's main building was built in 1932. The school is non-denominational and serves the hamlet of Fisherford and the surrounding rural area. It is located in Fisherford, 11 miles south-west of the town of Turriff.

5.3.3 The catchment area for the school stretches from Drumsinnie on the east to Hillhead of Bogfouton on the west and from south of Newton Torneybank to north of Mains of Rothmaise.

5.3.4 The Scottish Government guidelines classify Fisherford School as an "accessible rural school".

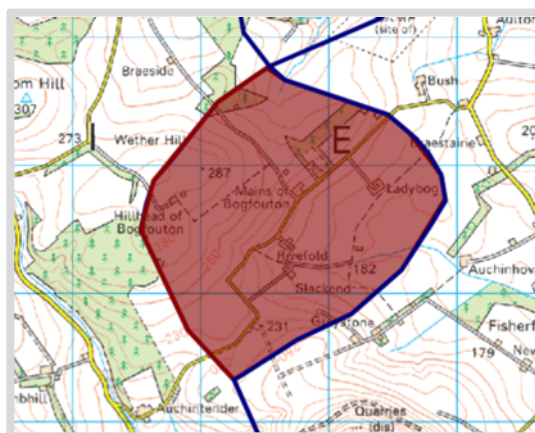
5.3.5 The school borders with Auchterless, Rothienorman, Rayne North, Insch, Drumblade and Largue Schools. Rothienorman and Rayne North Schools sit within the Meldrum Cluster and Insch, Drumblade and Largue Schools within the Huntly Cluster. Auchterless School is located within the Turriff Cluster. Map 1 below shows the catchment area and neighbouring schools.

Map 1 – Catchment area for Fisherford School and surrounding schools



5.3.6 The majority of the Fisherford School catchment area is zoned to Turriff Academy. A small part of the catchment around Mains of Bogfouton is zoned to The Gordon Schools as shown in Map 2 below. This consultation does not propose any changes to secondary school catchment at this time. Any references to secondary school catchment in this document are on the basis of the majority being zoned to Turriff Academy.

Map 2 – Fisherford School catchment area zoned to The Gordon Schools



5.3.7 The school has a capacity of 30 pupils and it comprises of two buildings, the main school and the dining facility. The main school comprises of two

classrooms and general purpose hall, office, staff room and other ancillary spaces such as storage and toilet facilities. The dining facility comprises of a dining room, staff toilet and store. The school has a servery which served meals prepared at Rothienorman School and delivered to Fisherford School on a daily basis. The outdoor areas are a concrete playground at the school front with some play equipment and a garden to the rear of the building. Pupils have access to a grass playground adjacent to the school for sports and break times. The ground belongs to Fisherford Community Association.

5.3.8 Fisherford School delivered primary education from P1-P7 and pupils were taught in a multi-composite single class. There is no nursery on site and local children attended nursery at other nearby schools. The school did not operate a breakfast club or after school club outwith school hours.

5.3.9 When the school was last in operation, the staffing complement with Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was as follows:

- Head Teacher – 0.50
- Teacher – 1.00
- Non-class Contact Time – 0.11
- Administrator – 0.33
- Admin Support Assistant – 0.23
- Pupil Support Assistant – 0.75
- Senior Catering Assistant – 0.34
- Janitor – 0.11
- Cleaner – 0.34

5.3.10 If the school was to re-open with one class, the staffing entitlements (FTE) would be comparable. This would be dependent upon actual school roll and in line with the Aberdeenshire Teacher Staffing Standard.

5.3.11 In addition, ASN teaching and pupil support staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need across the Turriff Cluster.

5.3.12 Every local authority in Scotland is required to grade their schools for condition and suitability. The gradings range from A to D for each category with the following values:

A: Good – Performing well and operating efficiently (85-100%)

B: Satisfactory – Performing adequately but with minor problems (60-85%)

C: Poor – Showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (40- 60%)

D: Bad – Does not support the delivery of services to children and communities (0-40%)

Fisherford School is rated as 'B' (80.93%) for suitability and 'B' (70.6%) for building condition.

5.3.13 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Fisherford School.

## **6. Details of Proposal**

6.1 The Council proposes that Fisherford School should be closed on a permanent basis. This would be with immediate effect from the completion of the consultation process. The Council also proposes that all existing primary aged pupils living within the Fisherford School catchment should continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. If the proposals are implemented any siblings of these current pupils would be able to join their brother/sister(s) at the same school.

6.2 The school catchment area would be reassigned to one of the neighbouring primary schools. Discussion of these options is set out in Section 7.

**Option 1** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Auchterless School

**Option 2** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Rayne North School

**Option 3** - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School

### **Discounted options and alternatives to closure**

**Option 4** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Rothienorman School

**Option 5** - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Rothienorman school and Auchterless School or Rayne North School

**Option 6** - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Auchterless School, Rayne North School and Rothienorman School

**Option 7** - Close Fisherford School and create a dual zone between Auchterless School and Rayne North School

**Option 8** - Close Fisherford School and create a dual zone between Rothienorman School and Auchterless School or Rayne North School

**Option 9** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Insch School

**Option 10** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Drumblade School

**Option 11** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Largue School

**Alternative 1** – Re-open Fisherford School

**Alternative 2** - Continuation of mothballing Fisherford School

Details of the Council's consideration of the discounted options is set out in Section 8 and the alternatives in Section 9.

6.3 Alternative uses for the building will be further explored with the community during the consultation period and beyond. Several potential uses have been



suggested by the community and officers will support individuals or groups who wish to take them forward.

6.4 It is important that this proposal does not have a negative impact on any children currently attending schools affected by this proposal and that they have continuity in their education.

6.5 The options identified above would have minimal impact on the school rolls of Auchterless and/or Rayne North Schools. Table 1 below details the current roll and capacity of schools affected by this proposal and Aberdeenshire Council 2022-based School Roll Forecasts over the next 4 years. The published forecasts can be viewed at the below link:

<https://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/admissions/school-roll-forecasts/>

**Table 1 – School Roll Forecasts**

School	Suitability Rating	Condition Rating	Capacity	Current Roll (Sept 23)	2022 SRF 2024/2025	2022 SRF 2025/2026	2022 SRF 2026/2027	2022 SRF 2027/2028
Fisherford School	B	B	30	0	0	0	0	0
Auchterless School	A	B	75	59	54	48	35	35
Rayne North School	A	B	74	53	50	52	48	49

## 7. Options Assessment

7.1 Officers have applied an approved methodology to assess the identified options. The SWOT analysis used is attached as Appendix A1.

7.2 Together with each school’s baseline score and outcome of the options appraisal matrix, other aspects taken into consideration for the overall recommendations are:

- Early Years
- Transport
- Outcome of a survey representing the views of the Fisherford School parents and the Fisherford catchment residents
- Learning Estate sustainability
- Environmental impact

7.3 Table 2 below shows the highest top three ranking options.

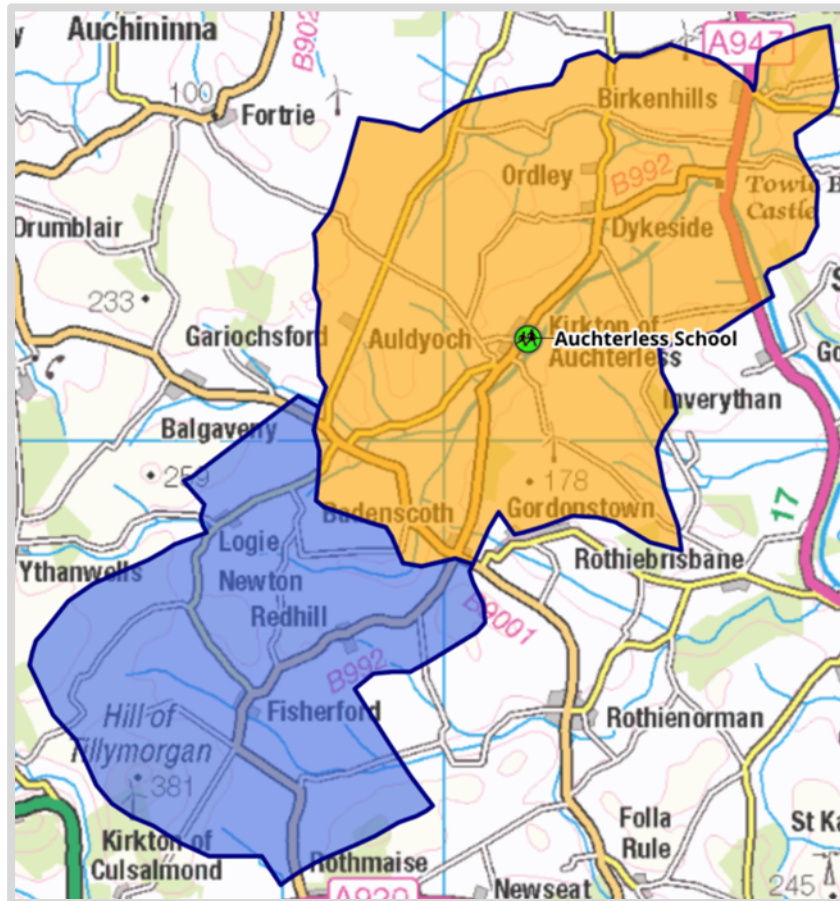
**Table 2 – Outcome of Options Appraisal**

Options
<b>Option 1</b> - Close Fisherford School and merge with Auchterless School
<b>Option 2</b> - Close Fisherford School and merge with Rayne North
<b>Option 3</b> - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School

#### 7.4 Option 1 – Close Fisherford School and merge with Auchterless School

7.4.1 The proposed catchment area for this option is shown below in Map 3.

Map 3 – Fisherford School merged with Auchterless School



7.4.2 Auchterless School was built in 1930 with subsequent extensions constructed in 1955 and 2001. The school is located in the village of Auchterless and is situated 7.2 miles south of Turriff and 4.8 miles south-east of Fisherford School. The school is non-denominational and under the Scottish Government guidelines classed as an “accessible rural school”, meaning that it is located in a settlement with a population of less than 3,000 people and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 people or more. During the period of mothballing the school has been nominated as one of the designated schools for pupils moving into the Fisherford catchment area.

7.4.3 The school offers primary education from P1 to P7. The building is a single-storey accommodation and consists of four classrooms, PE hall, dining hall, library, Head Teacher office, reception and staff room. The school has a servery which is designed to provide meals prepared at nearby Fyvie School and delivered to the school on a daily basis. The spacious outside play areas are distributed over two levels. There is a concrete area with a bad weather shelter and benches on the first level, a playing field with football goals and a forest

garden on level two. There is some play equipment across the areas and access to both levels is via steps.

7.4.4 Auchterless School host a breakfast club run by staff and parent volunteers once a week.

7.4.5 The school has a capacity of 75 pupils and a current roll of 59 P1-P7 pupils (Census Week September 2023). These are distributed across three classes. The 2022 School Roll Forecast suggests a substantial fall in pupil numbers from 54 in 2024 to 35 in 2027. This currently represents a 79% use of capacity, decreasing to 47% in 2027.

7.4.6 The class structure for the 2023/24 session is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Auchterless School Class Structure

Stage	Class structure
P1-3	17
P4-5	19
P5-7	23

7.4.7 Early Years education is not provided at the school and local children attend nursery at other nearby schools or private settings.

7.4.8 In recent years, on average, there was one placing request for a pupil wishing to attend Auchterless School and two placing requests from pupils residing within the Auchterless School catchment area to attend an out of zone school.

7.4.9 Auchterless School is currently assessed as A (86.00%) for Suitability (good - performing well and operating efficiently; school buildings and grounds support the delivery of services) and B (75.01%) for Condition (satisfactory - performing adequately but showing minor deterioration).

7.4.10 There are seven pupils from the Fisherford catchment area attending Auchterless School and they are transported to the school via one school transport route. With the permanent closure of Fisherford School this number could increase in the future, although with a very small number of children living in the area, the number of transport contracts is unlikely to rise significantly.

7.4.11 As there are pupils from the Fisherford School catchment area that currently attend either Auchterless, Rayne North or Rothienorman Schools, no adverse effects for Auchterless School are expected to arise with the permanent closure of Fisherford School.

7.4.12 This option seems to be favoured by the Fisherford community members, nine out of 19 survey respondents suggested that the Fisherford School catchment should be zoned to Auchterless School.

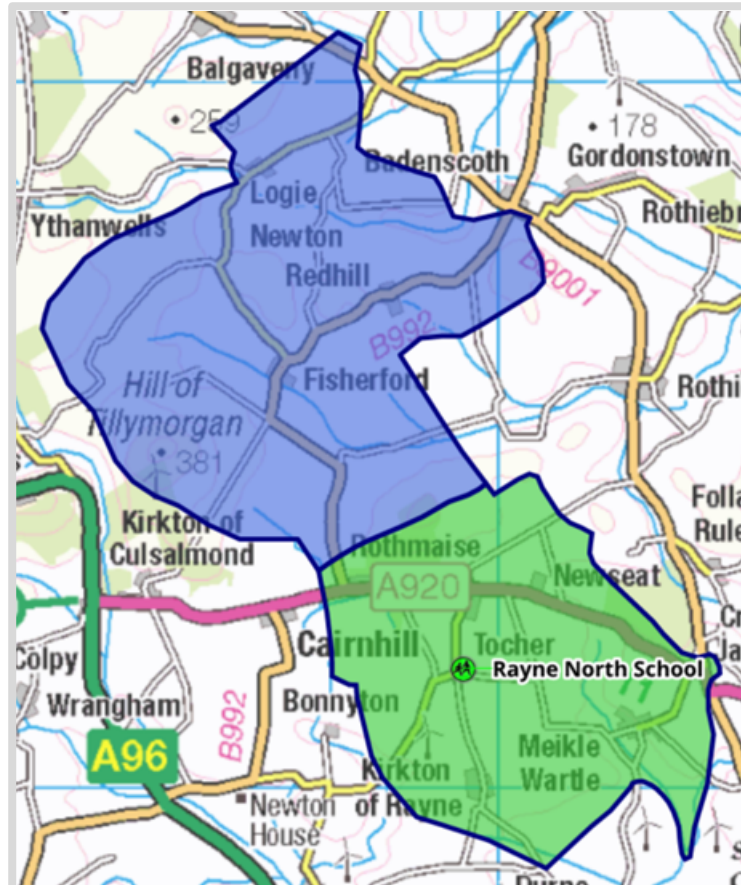
7.4.13 This option would have a positive impact on the sustainability of Auchterless School, which is a rural school and is forecasted to have a large decline in the school roll in a few years.

7.4.14 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Auchterless School.

7.5 **Option 2 – Close Fisherford School and merge with Rayne North School**

7.5.1 The proposed catchment area for this option is shown in Map 4 below.

Map 4 – Fisherford School merged with Rayne North School



7.5.2 Rayne North School was built in 1877. The school is situated in the village of Meikle Wartle, 14.3 miles south of Turriff and 3.9 miles south-east of Fisherford School. The school is non-denominational and under the Scottish Government guidelines classed as an “accessible rural school”, meaning that it is located in a settlement with a population of less than 3,000 people and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 people or more. During the period of mothballing the school has been nominated as one of the designated schools for pupils moving into the Fisherford catchment area.

7.5.3 The school offers primary education from P1 to P7. The building is a two-storey accommodation and consists of three classrooms, general purpose hall, dining hall, admin office on the ground floor, and Head Teacher office and staff room on the second floor. The school has a kitchen which also provides school lunches for Old Rayne and Oyne Schools. There is a tarred playground area, an eco-garden and a large playing field with football goals.

7.5.4 Rayne North School does not offer morning or after school clubs.

7.5.5 The school has a capacity of 74 pupils and a current roll of 53 P1-P7 pupils (Census Week September 2023). These are distributed across three classes. The 2022 School Roll Forecast suggests slight fluctuations in pupil numbers between 48 and 52, between the 2024 and 2027 academic years. This represents a 65% to 70% use of capacity.

7.5.6 The class structure for the 2023/24 session is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – Rayne North School Class Structure

Class structure	Class size
P1-2	13
P3-5	22
P5-7	18

7.5.7 Early Years education is not provided at the school and local children attend nursery at other nearby schools or private settings.

7.5.8 In recent years, on average there have been eight placing requests for pupils wishing to attend Rayne North School and seven placing requests from pupils residing within the Rayne North School catchment area to attend an out of zone school.

7.5.9 Rayne North School is currently assessed as A (86.01%) for Suitability (good - performing well and operating efficiently; school buildings and grounds support the delivery of services) and B (65.75%) for Condition (satisfactory - performing adequately but showing minor deterioration).

7.5.10 There are six pupils from the Fisherford catchment area attending Rayne North School and they are transported to the school via one school transport route. With the permanent closure of Fisherford School, this number could increase in the future, although with a very small number of children living in the area, the number of transport contracts is unlikely to rise significantly.

7.5.11 As there are pupils from the Fisherford School catchment area that currently attend either Auchterless, Rayne North or Rothienorman Schools, no adverse effects for Rayne North School are expected to arise with the permanent closure of Fisherford School.

7.5.12 If Fisherford pupils were zoned to Rayne North for their primary education, it would be on the basis that they would remain zoned to Turriff Academy for their secondary education, while their peers from Rayne North would be zoned to Meldrum Academy. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.

7.5.13 Six out of 19 survey respondents suggested that the Fisherford School catchment should be zoned to Rayne North School.

7.5.14 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Rayne North School.

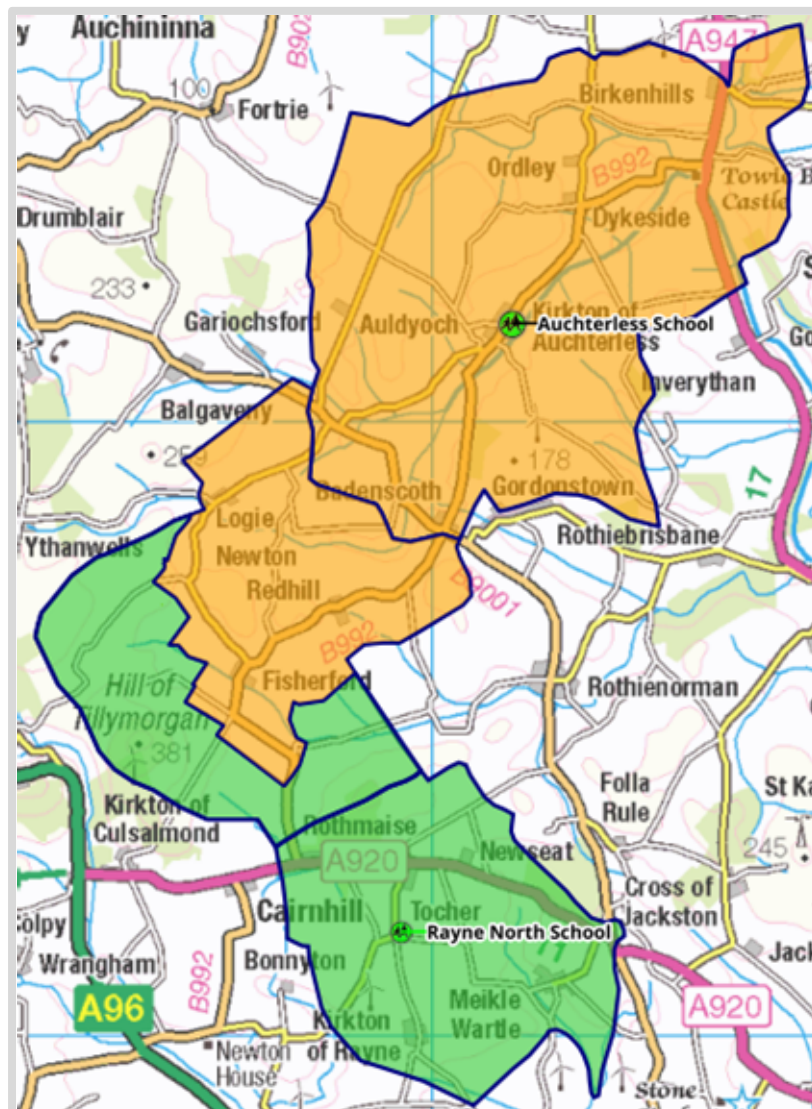


7.6 **Option 3 - Close Fisherford School and split the catchment between Auchterless School and Rayne North School**

7.6.1 Consideration should be given to dividing the catchment area between Auchterless School and Rayne North School.

7.6.2 The proposed catchment area for this option is shown in Map 5 below.

Map 5 – Fisherford School split between Auchterless School and Rayne North School



7.6.3 If this option is approved, Fisherford pupils zoned to Rayne North for their primary education would remain zoned to Turriff Academy for their secondary education, while their peers from Rayne North would be zoned to Meldrum Academy. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas. Fisherford children zoned to Auchterless would be attending Turriff Academy for their secondary education.

7.6.4 Pupils would be entitled to school transport if they attend their designated school. With the permanent closure of Fisherford School, the number of pupils requiring school transport could increase in the future, although with a very small

number of children living in the area, the number of transport contracts is unlikely to rise significantly.

- 7.6.5 This option proposes the postcodes AB51 8YQ and AB51 8YP, which would be on the boundary of the two proposed catchments areas, to be zoned to the Auchterless School catchment; however, they can be re-assigned to the Rayne North School catchment if that is what community members want.

## **8. Discounted Options**

- 8.1 The detail of the Council's consideration of the discounted options is set out below:

### **Option 4 - Close Fisherford School and merge with Rothienorman School**

Rothienorman School has a capacity of 150 and the pupil roll at Census Week September 2023 was 129, which represented an 86% use of capacity. The School Roll Forecasts indicate that the school roll at Rothienorman over the next few years will continue to be steady, with some increases. Due to the size of the community that Rothienorman School serves, this would not be a good practice to make changes to a catchment area where the number of available places may be insufficient to accommodate all pupils at that school in the future. This option would require a change in the existing clusters boundaries.

Merging Fisherford with Rothienorman School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology. This is due to the change in the secondary catchment, increased travel for pupils and creation of capacity pressures.

### **Option 5 - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Rothienorman school and Auchterless School or Rayne North School**

As discussed above under Option 4, this option has been discounted on the basis that Rothienorman School may not have a sufficient number of spaces to accommodate all pupils residing within the Rothienorman and Fisherford zones in the future.

### **Option 6 - Close Fisherford School and split catchment between Auchterless School, Rayne North School and Rothienorman School**

As set out above, splitting the Fisherford catchment between Auchterless, Rayne North and Rothienorman Schools has been discounted due to the negative impact on the current and forecasted occupancy level at Rothienorman School.

### **Option 7 – Close Fisherford School and create a dual zone between Auchterless School and Rayne North School**

Creating a dual zone between Auchterless School and Rayne North School would be against the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy, which states that no new dual catchment areas will be created due to challenges that the Council faced with the existing dual zones, including additional transport

costs and vehicles, increase in vehicle emissions as well as the planning of school places and staffing for secondary schools.

**Option 8** – Close Fisherford School and create a dual zone between Rothienorman School and Auchterless School or Rayne North School

Likewise, as with Option 6 above, creating a dual zone between Auchterless School and Rothienorman School would be against the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy.

**Option 9** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Insch School

Due to the size of the community that Insch School serves, this would not be a good practice to make changes to a catchment area where the number of available places may be insufficient to accommodate all pupils at that school in the future.

If Fisherford pupils were zoned to Insch School for their primary education but remained zoned to Turriff Academy for their secondary education, they would be in the position of attending a different secondary school to the majority of their peers at Insch School who would be zoned to The Gordon Schools. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.

Merging Fisherford with Insch School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology. This is due to the change in the secondary catchment, increased travel for pupils, challenges of the school building and being against parental/community expectations.

**Option 10** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Drumblade School

If Fisherford pupils were zoned to Drumblade School for their primary education but remained zoned to Turriff Academy for their secondary education, they would be in the position of attending a different secondary school to the majority of their peers at Drumblade School who would be zoned to The Gordon Schools. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.

Merging Fisherford with Drumblade School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology. This is due to the change in the secondary catchment, increased travel for pupils, challenges of the school building and being against parental/community expectations.

**Option 11** - Close Fisherford School and merge with Largue School

Similarly to Options 9 & 10 above, if Fisherford pupils were zoned to Largue School for their primary education but remained zoned to Turriff Academy for their secondary education, they would be attending a different secondary school to the majority of their peers at Largue School who would be zoned to The Gordon Schools. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.



This option seems not to be favoured by the Fisherford community members, only two out of 19 survey respondents suggested that the Fisherford School catchment should be zoned to Largue School.

However, it is recognised that this option could support the future sustainability of Largue School.

Merging Fisherford with Largue School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology. This is due to the change in the secondary catchment, low pupil numbers, increased travel for pupils, challenges of the school building and being against parental/community expectations.

## **9. Alternatives to the Proposal**

9.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure.

9.2 During the community engagement session, officers sought suggestions of alternatives to closure. The online survey allowed participants to present alternatives to the closure with a deadline of 14 July 2023.

9.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the alternatives is set out below.

### **9.4 Re-opening of Fisherford School with Current Catchment Area**

9.4.1 During the session 2017/18 there were 12 pupils on the school roll. Due to parents submitting placing requests out of the school and low P1 intake, the roll was fluctuating and in August 2021/22 there would have been only three pupils on the school roll.

9.4.2 There are no Masterplans agreed for Fisherford and any other housing developments located within the Fisherford School catchment area. Therefore, there is no prospect of generating new pupils from new housing to reinstate the school.

9.4.3 As of 14 September 2023 (School Census Week) there were 13 pupils of P1-P7 age living within the school catchment area. These children all attend other schools in the Turriff, Huntly and Inverurie Clusters, some through placement when Fisherford School was mothballed and others through parental choice. The majority attend Rayne North School.

9.4.4 As previously stated in Section 3, the school has not been operational since August 2021. Aberdeenshire Council sought enrolments for the school from both in zone and out of zone pupils for the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 sessions. No applications were received. Only one family expressed an interest in their child(ren) enrolling at the school.

9.4.5 There are six children under school age who could possibly start for the session 2024/25 and another six could start by 2027. However, the registration period for school places for the term 2024/25 was open between 15 and 19 January 2024 and no applications were received. This results in a potential six pupils on the school roll by 2027. It therefore appears unlikely at present that the school

would reach a roll that would support learning and teaching.

- 9.4.6 Aberdeenshire Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching and make the re-opening of Fisherford School unviable.

## 9.5 **Re-Opening of Fisherford School with Expanded Catchment Area**

- 9.5.1 A catchment review to increase the potential roll and sustainability of a school can be a sensible option in some cases. However, this would have to be achieved with no detrimental impact on affected schools as a result.
- 9.5.2 Consideration has been given to extending the Fisherford catchment area. As shown above in Map 1 within Section 5, the school borders with Auchterless School within the Turriff Cluster, Rayne North and Rothienorman Schools within the Meldrum Cluster and Inch, Drumblade and Largue Schools within the Huntly Cluster.
- 9.5.3 Extending the Fisherford catchment area to incorporate part of the Drumblade, Inch, Rothienorman or Rayne North zones requires a change in the existing clusters boundaries. Any proposal to incorporate part of the above schools' catchments need to take account of the fact that rezoning would have a negative impact on the sustainability of these schools, which currently operate on a sustained occupancy level between 70% and 90%.
- 9.5.4 Extending the Fisherford catchment area to incorporate part of the Largue catchment also requires a change in the existing clusters boundaries. This option would lead to the closure of Largue School which already operates below 20% occupancy.
- 9.5.5 Extending the Fisherford catchment to incorporate part of the Auchterless catchment would have a negative impact on the sustainability of this school, as it operates on the lower end of the target occupancy band, 76%, and the School Roll Forecasts indicate a significant decline in the school roll in the coming years.
- 9.5.6 Extending the Fisherford catchment in a multiple number of directions to incorporate part of all neighbouring schools would weaken sustainability of these schools. This option would require a change in the existing clusters boundaries and would have a negative impact on pupils in those catchment areas in relation to increased travel distance.
- 9.5.7 When rezoning existing catchment areas, Aberdeenshire Council does not require pupils to move schools. The impact of any change in the boundary line is likely to have minimal impact on the number of pupils available to attend Fisherford School.
- 9.5.8 As pupils and their siblings from the extended zone would not be required to go to Fisherford School, there is no guarantee that a rezoning exercise to extend the Fisherford School catchment area would substantially increase the school roll in the next few years.

9.5.9 Any of the above rezoning options delivers negative financial and environmental impacts, as more pupils would have to be transported to the school.

## 9.6 **Continuation of Mothballing**

9.6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current mothballing arrangement, Aberdeenshire Council does not consider that this would be the best option for the community. Mothballing would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.

9.6.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.

9.6.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing. New pupils either reaching school age or moving into the catchment, who attend the designated school would be entitled to school transport.

9.6.4 Those pupils who chose out of zone placements to other schools whilst Fisherford School was still operational are not entitled to school transport.

9.6.5 As the Fisherford school building is not currently in use, a continuation of mothballing would have no further impact on the community.

9.6.6 The Council is responsible for the costs of maintaining a mothballed building and its grounds.

## 10. **Educational Benefit Statement**

10.1 Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy 'Connecting People, Places and Learning', which was developed by Scottish Government and COSLA, contains ten guiding principles. Local Authorities are required to take account of these principles in planning changes to their school estate, namely:

- Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners;
- Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners;
- The learning estate should be well-managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value;
- The condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function;
- Learning environments should serve the wider community and where appropriate be integrated with the delivery of other public services in line with the place principle;
- Learning environments should be greener, more sustainable, allow safe and accessible routes for walking, cycling and wheeling and be digitally enabled;
- Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised;

- Good consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and an involvement in decision making processes should lead to better outcomes for all;
  - Collaboration across the learning estate, and collaboration with partners in localities, should support maximising its full potential;
  - Investment in Scotland's learning estate should contribute towards improving learning outcomes and support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
- 10.2 An update to the Aberdeenshire Learning Estate Strategy will be considered by Education and Children's Services Committee on 1 February 2024. The Council's strategy sets the minimum standards for the various elements of educational buildings to achieve optimal educational benefit. The amended strategy for Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estate sets out four values, Excellence, Inclusion, Sustainable Estate and Equity, which are core to all decision making.
- 10.3 If Fisherford School was to re-open, with a reduced number of pupils over a greater age range, there would be increased challenges in ensuring that all children develop the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors.
- 10.4 A small school roll made up of one or a few year groups significantly diminishes sustainability and viability of a school, offers less opportunities to learners which results in a negative impact on their educational and social development.
- 10.5 There are real concerns that pupils' educational development may not be as successful as it could be, if opportunities to work closely, regularly and frequently with peers of the same age are limited.
- 10.6 Isolation for some pupils, due to no connection with peers of the same age or gender in a school with an extremely small roll may have a negative impact on their social development.
- 10.7 The proposal would provide improved opportunities for children to develop skills for learning, life and work e.g., increasing opportunities for working with others of a similar age and stage which are very limited in schools of less than eight children in a multi-composite setting.
- 10.8 While it may seem that having fewer pupils in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, in this case fewer means limited pupils' learning experiences. Classes low in pupil numbers have disadvantages, which are further compounded when a school has a single class, potentially with only one or two children at each year stage.
- 10.9 While one or two pupils absent from a large class isn't a major issue, a small number of absent pupils can make a significant difference in a small class. If there are only eight pupils in a class, two missing pupils represent a much larger percentage of the class population, making it more difficult for the teacher to continue with planned lessons.

- 10.10 This will significantly impact on the class dynamics and learning experiences of children in the single class setting, with the likely consequence that a child may be the only pupil at a particular stage. Thereby having no other pupil to share their learning experience with and benefit from those interactions.
- 10.11 A smaller class is less likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of diverse classes because they have the opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own. While some small classes do have a diverse array of members, many are relatively homogeneous in nature and, as such, do not offer pupils the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting.
- 10.12 Some academic activities require a minimum number of participants. Activities such as small group projects, group discussions or peer to peer learning activities are much harder to implement in a small class because there are fewer pupils to divide into groups, limiting pupils' options. Other options, such as large-scale games, may be impossible in single small settings because there are not enough pupils to allow for game play, or due to the wide variation in the age and physical development of the pupils, potentially making an activity unsafe.
- 10.13 Some pupils enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a larger class and school. These pupils are uncomfortable in the spotlight and prefer to blend in with the crowd as they move through the process of learning. For pupils of this nature, small classes are far from desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers, they do not have the same opportunity to mix with their peer group.
- 10.14 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form.
- 10.15 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Auchterless and Rayne North Schools have sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work.
- 10.16 Within larger schools, pupils will have the opportunity to develop wider relationships and friendships which will see them better prepared to meet the social and learning opportunities and challenges ahead in the context of a secondary school with a roll of around 650 pupils. This is important in terms of developing their education through their school journey.
- 10.17 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.

- 10.18 Educational benefits are considered below for pupils if either of the options mentioned in Section 7 are adopted.
- 10.19 Pupils at Auchterless and Rayne North Schools regularly work in cooperative learning groups. A cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of roughly the same age group working together collaboratively. If Fisherford School re-opened with a low roll that would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static and there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The pupils may not be of a similar age and could be spread across P1-P7. A low roll would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 10.20 A larger school roll offers children from the Fisherford School catchment area an increased possibility of participating in teams in a range of games. These educational, cultural and sporting activities provide a number of benefits for children in terms of both academic and social development and support the process of transition towards the larger and more varied educational setting of a secondary school.
- 10.21 Pupils at Auchterless and Rayne North Schools can participate in various activities and events across the year. Auchterless School holds Treasure Island, Christmas Singalong, Nativity, Auchterless Has Got Talent, Christmas Fayre; and also community cafes, sports day, theatre visits, P7 trips, class trips and whole school fun day. Rayne North School has curriculum open events, school trips, school shows, sports day, end of term services and coffee mornings.
- 10.22 An increased roll gives pupils the opportunity to participate in a range of groups, such as Pupil Council, House Captains, Rights Respecting Schools, Eco-Committee, a buddy system and playground leaders. Auchterless School offers pupils the opportunity to be on pupil voice sessions, crews and eco groups, 'Rights Respecting Schools Award' group and art club. Rayne North School has house captains and house groups who work on groups such as eco and Rights Respecting Schools; there are also talking houses to talk about school issues, Lego Club and Code Club. Rayne North School offers pupils opportunities for sporting opportunities within the cluster or authority.
- 10.23 Some of the educational benefits arise not from larger pupil numbers (e.g., to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities.
- 10.24 Auchterless School regularly cooperates on a staff level with King Edward, Crudie and Fintry Schools. Rayne North School works cooperatively on school improvement and transition activities with Logie Durno and Old Rayne.
- 10.25 Auchterless and Rayne North Schools have Parent Councils that support learning, teaching, school improvement, and parental and community engagement. If Fisherford School were to re-open there would be an opportunity for a Parent Council to operate; however, with a small pupil cohort, there would be a smaller number of families to participate resulting in a greater reliance on individuals to support the school.

- 10.26 Auchterless School has a vegetable garden, orchard and mud kitchen, organises trip trails and makes use of the community for learning opportunities, such as a church yard and walks. Rayne North School has a large playing field and an eco-garden.
- 10.27 It is Aberdeenshire Council's view that the pupils from the Fisherford School catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide several such benefits, judged against both the Aberdeenshire and National criteria set out above.
- 10.28 The majority of pupils residing within the Fisherford School catchment area currently attend a school which borders with the Fisherford School catchment. No adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the permanent closure of Fisherford School.

## **11. Effect on the Local Community**

- 11.1 Aberdeenshire Council recognise that the uncertainty surrounding the future opening of the school has impacted the community and it is hoped that this statutory consultation to close Fisherford School will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding their children's education.
- 11.2 The school building was rarely used as a community facility during the time it was operational as a school, or during the periods of mothballing.
- 11.3 The options appraisal process has identified a number of alternative uses for the school, Aberdeenshire Council would be happy to work with the local community to see whether the school building could be suitable for community use.
- 11.4 Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal Policy which must be followed when buildings or land are no longer required for their original purpose. There could be opportunities for the site to be developed as a community centre or a community hub. This would have to be fully assessed through the asset disposal procedure. Thereafter any surplus council sites can be subject to a Community Asset Transfer Application.

## **12. School Transport**

- 12.1 During the session 2023/24 of the 13 primary pupils currently living within the Fisherford catchment area, school transport is provided for 10 of them to schools within the Turriff, Huntly and Meldrum Clusters. Other pupils are transported by their parents/carers.
- 12.2 In line with the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy, where practicable, primary pupils are not expected to have to travel for more than 45 minutes on school transport.
- 12.3 The closure of Fisherford School would not impact the journey times for pupils, as they are currently being transported to other schools. However, the additional travel time compared to travelling to/from Fisherford School to either

Auchterless or Rayne North Schools for pupils currently attending these schools and pre-school pupils residing in the Fisherford School catchment area is an increase between 1 to 8 minutes one way in normal conditions. This depends on the pupils' home address.

- 12.4 There is one mainstream contract providing transport to Auchterless School, three mainstream contracts to Rayne North School, one mainstream and one in-house bus contract to Rothienorman School and one to Largue School. The total cost is £695.80 per day. These contracts provide transport for 65 pupils in total, of which 10 are Fisherford School pupils. This cost could increase in the future depending on the number of families with school age children living in the Fisherford catchment.
- 12.5 If Fisherford School was to reopen now, four of the pupils currently living in the Fisherford School catchment would be entitled to home to school transport regardless.
- 12.6 In the event of closure, all pupils within the Fisherford catchment area would be entitled to school transport should they choose to attend the designed school, there would be no cost implications to families affected by the closure. A permanent closure would continue to have little impact in this respect on costs to the Council or distance covered by vehicles.

### **13. Financial Implications**

- 13.1 As mentioned in Section 12 above the proposed changes could result in an increase in costs for school transport provision, which would need to be met by Aberdeenshire Council. However, the increase will not be significant.
- 13.2 Further details of the financial impact of this proposal are included in the financial template provided in Appendix A2. The costs provided in the template are from the 2020/21 session when the school was last operational for a full session.

### **14. Sustainability**

- 14.1 The Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions for all schools considered in this proposal document are detailed in Table 5 below. The permanent closure of Fisherford School would result in a reduction of around 12 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually and would not increase the emissions at any of the other schools.

Table 5 – Three-year Average CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions

School	Average CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions (tonnes)	Impacted by permanent closure of Fisherford School?
Fisherford School	12	Yes
Auchterless School	41	No
Rayne North School	39	No



- 14.2 There is little negative environmental impact in relation to the transport of pupils due to increased CO<sup>2</sup> transport emissions; however, there are relatively short distances and small numbers involved. Fisherford School pupils will be transported to Auchterless School and/or Rayne North School by the Council rather than travelling individually, as they did through placing requests, and transport contracts may already be in place regardless.
- 14.3 The negative impact on the environment, due to the transport required, will be outweighed by the closure of Fisherford School, as the school would still require heating, electricity and maintenance to remain open for a very small roll of pupils.
- 14.4 The distances from Auchterless and Rayne North Schools to Fisherford School are 4.9 miles and 3.9 miles, respectively. Children residing in the Fisherford catchment area are already transported to alternative schools by the authority provided transport, and this would not change with rejecting this proposal.
- 14.5 Teacher recruitment and retention is a challenge faced by many rural authorities in Scotland. Rural schools with small numbers of pupils on roll change the teaching dynamic, requiring teachers to be highly adept in managing the curriculum, differentiation and assessment for pupils from P1-P7 in one or just two classes to ensure an educational benefit is maintained. Due to the staffing complement within these establishments, the opportunities for collegiate and stage partner working require careful planning with local schools and increased use of digital resources to allow online communities; however, some rural settings also have connectivity difficulties.

## 15. Implications for Staff

- 15.1 As Fisherford School is already mothballed there will be no impact on staffing arrangements at either of the affected schools from the permanent closure of Fisherford School. All staff previously based at Fisherford School are either employed at other establishments or have resigned from their posts within Aberdeenshire Council. A continuation of mothballing would also not have an impact upon staffing.
- 15.2 The staffing implications of re-opening Fisherford School are set out in Section 5 above, whilst the financial implications are set out in Appendix A2.
- 15.3 The current staffing allocation with Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for each school is set out in Table 6 below.

Table 6 – Staffing Levels for each school

Position	Fisherford School (if re-opened)	Auchterless School	Rayne North School
Head Teacher	0.50	1.00	1.00
Teacher	1.00	2.00	2.00
Management Time	-	0.70	0.70
Non Class Contact Time	0.11	0.33	0.33
Administrator	0.33	0.35	0.36

Admin Support Assistant	0.23	0.27	0.27
Pupil Support Assistant	0.75	1.61	0.83
Unit Cook / Supervisor	-	-	0.88
Senior Catering Assistant	0.34	0.36	-
Catering Assistant	-	-	0.91
Janitor	0.11	0.11	0.08
Cleaner	0.34	0.44	0.47

15.4 Additional Support Needs (ASN) teaching and pupil support staff are allocated to each school in accordance with an annual assessment of needs across the cluster.

15.5 Trade Unions are included in the consultation process. Any impacts for staff will be addressed under existing HR policies.

## 16. Equal Opportunities

16.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is a statutory requirement for the Council to assess the policies and practices necessary to meet the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. It also affords an opportunity for the Council to consider the impact on the education service. An IIA has been carried out as part of the options appraisal process.

16.2 The purpose of an IIA is to examine policies and practices in a structured way to make sure that adverse effects on groups with protected characteristics are avoided. It is also a tool to enable the Council to assess what positive steps it can take to promote equality of opportunity and measure the results of the actions that have been taken.

16.3 The distance which pupils currently need to travel to get to Auchterless School or Rayne North School is higher by between 0.3 and 5 miles one way, compared to the distance they would need to travel to get to Fisherford School. This translates to an increase in journey time between 1 to 8 minutes. The journey times involved are not that lengthy in comparison to those faced by many other primary and nursery age children in Aberdeenshire.

16.4 The current travel arrangements for pupils living in the Fisherford catchment area have been in place since August 2021. Permanent closure of Fisherford School would not affect the travel arrangements for current pupils and future pupils are unlikely to have hugely different travel arrangements.

16.5 Funded school transport would be provided for all P1-7 pupils from the current Fisherford catchment area attending either Auchterless School or Rayne North School if one of those options is approved.

16.6 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, these children have already been attending and travelling to pre-school settings in other nearby settlements.

16.7 As part of the consultation process, the Council will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, parents/carers and young people, and will address comments about equality during this consultation.

16.8 Under The Equality Act 2010 education providers must not treat disabled pupils less favourably and should take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage. Existing arrangements in place for pupils within the schools affected with additional support needs will continue.

## **17. Consultation Arrangements**

17.1 At its meeting on 1 February 2024, Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee were asked to agree that a proposal document should be issued as a basis for consultation. No decision will be taken by the Council on the proposal contained in the paper until after the end of the consultation period. The Council will then receive a report on the consultation and will reach a view on the proposal.

17.2 A copy of this document will be issued to all of the consultees listed on the first page of this document and it will also be published on the Council's website: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/>

17.3 The period for consultation will run from 5 February until 29 March 2024 which adequately covers a period of 30 school days.

17.4 A public meeting will be held on 6 March 2024 at 6.00 pm at Turriff Primary School, Meadowbank Road, Turriff AB53 4WB. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting is welcome. The meeting will be convened by the Council and the Council will present the reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions and comments at the meeting. A minute will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered.

17.5 Opportunities will be provided for the staff working at Auchterless and Rayne North Schools to discuss the proposals. Opportunities will also be arranged for all primary pupils within these schools to engage in the consultation in a manner appropriate to their age.

17.6 An online survey will be available as part of the consultation. This can be completed at the following address or by scanning the QR code below:

<https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/fisherford-school-statutory-consultation>



17.7 The Council will also consider any written comments which should be emailed to [LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk). Alternatively, any comments can be sent to Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie, AB51 3WA. Comments should be received no later than 4 pm on 29 March 2024.

17.8 A copy of this document will also be sent to Education Scotland. They will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council during the consultation period. They will also receive a copy of any oral representations made at the public meeting and a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal. In preparing their report, they may visit the schools and make such reasonable enquiries as they consider appropriate.

## **18. Consideration of Consultation Responses**

18.1 The Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, survey results, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a report on the consultation. This report will be published in electronic format and will be available on the Council website. Anyone making written representations during the consultation period will be informed about the report.

18.2 The report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations and a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting. The report will also include the Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report, a response to issues raised through any written or oral representations it has received, together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information, including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled. The report will also contain a statement explaining how the Council has complied with the requirement to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations (both written and oral) that it received.

18.3 The last section of the report will include an officer recommendation as to whether the proposals should be adopted and implemented. The Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Council making a decision.

18.4 A final decision is likely to be made by the Council on the proposed changes by the end of 2024.

## **19. Decision Making**

19.1 The consultation report will be considered firstly by Formartine Area Committee who will be asked to make a comment on the officer's recommendation.

19.2 Following Formartine Area Committee, Education and Children's Services Committee will be asked to make a recommendation as to whether the proposed changes are implemented. This is expected to be in Autumn 2024.

19.3 Following discussion and recommendation at both Formartine Area Committee and Education and Children's Services Committee, Full Council will consider the report and be asked to approve the officer recommendation in the report. This is expected to be in late 2024.

- 19.4 At the end of the consultation process, Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 enables ministers to call-in a decision to implement the proposed closure of Fisherford School.
- 19.5 Beginning on the day that the final decision is taken, the Council has a period of six working days to notify Scottish Ministers of the decision. Scottish Ministers then have a period of eight weeks from and including the date of decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. The Council must publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified and that representations can be made to the Scottish Ministers within the first three weeks of the eight-week period. The Scottish Ministers will take into account any relevant representations that were made to them by any person within the first three weeks. The Council may not proceed with the implementation of the proposal until this eight-week period has passed.
- 19.6 If the Scottish Ministers decide to call in a closure proposal, it is then referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels who has a period of seven days after a call-in notice is issued to constitute a School Closure Review Panel. The Panel may decide to refuse consent to the proposal, refuse consent and remit it to the education authority for a fresh decision or grant consent to the proposal, either subject to conditions or unconditionally. The Panel must notify the education authority of its decision within eight weeks from when the Panel was constituted or within 16 weeks if the Panel has issued a notice to the education authority that a decision has been delayed. The Council may not proceed with the implementation of the proposal until the outcome of the call-in has been notified to the Council.

## **20. Conclusion**

- 20.1 Taking the above into account Aberdeenshire Council recommends that Fisherford School, currently mothballed, is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to either Auchterless School or Rayne North School or split between Auchterless School and Rayne North School, as outlined in Options 1 to 3 above.
- 20.2 Whichever decision is taken with respect to catchment areas, existing pupils will not be required to change schools. This will also apply to any younger siblings of such pupils, provided they remain at the same primary school.
- 20.3 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements.