



APPENDIX A

CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING THE MERGER OF DALES PARK AND MEETHILL SCHOOLS

2021

**This Consultation Report has been issued by Education and
Children's Services of Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with
the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

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1. The Proposal

- 1.1 At its meeting on 3 December 2020 Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the Merger of Dales Park and Meethill Schools.
- 1.2 The Proposal Document included as Appendix 1 to this report, was issued to those individuals and bodies listed under Distribution within the proposal document. The Proposal Document was also published on the Council website: <http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/education-consultations/>
- 1.3 The proposal on which the consultation took place was that:

Education provision at the existing Dales Park and Meethill Schools should be discontinued with effect from July 2025.

Existing and future pupils of Dales Park and Meethill Schools should continue their education within the new Peterhead Community Campus located at Kinmundy Road, Peterhead from August 2025.
- 1.4 This would mean that both Dales Park and Meethill Schools would close and merge into one new school with a new identify at the new Community Campus at Kinmundy.
- 1.5 The Proposal Document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 7 December 2020 until 26 February 2021. This adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation.
- 1.6 On 31 October 2013 Education, Learning and Leisure Committee approved the adoption of a set of principles in relation to the Learning Estate. It was agreed that a workshop should be held with elected members and stakeholders to apply strategic principles to the Peterhead network.
- 1.7 On 26 March 2015 the Learning Estates Strategy was presented at Education, Learning and Leisure Committee which stated the approach in Peterhead, following extensive local engagement, provides education and other benefits for pupils, parents and the wider community in a way which is sustainable in the longer term.
- 1.8 Peterhead Community Campus project has been a Council priority since 2016 and has been a project within the Education and Children's Services Service Plan 2016-2019.
- 1.9 Extensive engagement of stakeholder events have taken place since 2016 as part of the development process for the campus. In February 2017 Aberdeenshire Council agreed to bring the Peterhead Community Campus Project forward through the Asset Management Development Group and thereafter to Committee.

- 1.10 At Education and Children Committee and at Communities Committee in March 2017 it was agreed that two options would be further explored.
- 1.11 At the full meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on 8 February 2018, the new community campus at Peterhead was agreed for the Aberdeenshire Council's Capital Plan, and at its meeting on 27 June 2019 the site at Kinmundy was approved.

2. Public Engagement

Public Meeting

- 2.1 All parents/carers and stakeholders were invited to a public meeting which was scheduled to be held during the consultation period to discuss the proposal. The meeting was scheduled to be held on 3 February 2021 at 6.30pm within the Theatre, Peterhead Leisure and Community Centre, Balmoor Terrace, Peterhead.
- 2.2 Attendees were going to be given the option to attend the meeting in person booking a place through Eventbrite or to attend the online meeting. Details on how to book a place or access the online meeting was to be published on the Aberdeenshire Council school consultation web page one week prior to the meeting.
- 2.3 However, due to the change in COVID-19 restrictions officers were unable to hold the face to face public meeting. Communication was sent to all parent/carers and stakeholders informing them that the face to face public meeting could no longer take place and the meeting would be held online. A link to the meeting along with guidance on accessing the meeting was also provided.
- 2.4 The meeting was chaired by Councillor Owen and was attended by parents, staff, elected members and members of the community. A total of 41 people attended the meeting. The minutes of the meeting are attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.5 During the meeting there were questions and comments that covered the following topics;
- Other schools considered for the proposal
 - Safety of pupils crossing Meethill Road
 - Class structure and sizes
 - Upgrade of current school
 - Capacity of proposal new primary
 - Proposal on schedule
 - Distance from Meethill catchment to Kinmundy
- 2.6 Meethill Parent Council had previously provided the Learning Estates Team with a set of questions, these were addressed at the meeting, and are detailed within the minutes.

- 2.7 The Parent Council Chairs at both Dales Park and Meethill Schools were offered meetings to discuss the proposal in an informal setting. Meethill Parent Council representatives met with officers on 23 February 2021. This gave officers invaluable insight into the concerns of the Meethill School parents.

Online Survey

- 2.8 During the consultation period parent/carers, stakeholders and community members were invited to take part in an online survey to express their opinion on the proposal.
- 2.9 The survey provided a summary of the proposal to the merger of Dales Park and Meethill Schools. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.
- 2.10 A total of 554 people took part in the survey. A full summary of the online survey is attached as Appendix 3.

Discussion with Pupils

- 2.11 As part of the consultation process, Head Teachers at Dales Park and Meethill Schools discussed the proposal regarding the Merger of Dales Park and Meethill Schools. Some of the comments that were made are listed below and the full comments are attached as Appendices 4 and 5.

Dales Park School

Positive Aspects

- More people to play football with, help mend/improve relationships between Meethill and Dales Park Schools, get to make new friends
- More room, more fun, more people, bigger games hall, more opportunity for sports
- Make new friends, more teachers

Negative Aspects

- Relationships might be difficult to start with, travelling to the school, might be too far
- Scared, unknown, might be harder to learn in a big school
- Difficult for the older Dales children that have already settled into their environment, re zoning might be an issue, it might not be built in time

Meethill School

Positive Aspects

- More space, more friends more people to go up to the academy with
- More money because of selling land
- Meeting old friends
- Not be lonely and have more friends

- Bigger things and new playground
- New teachers
- New electronics and science stuff
- Looking out for younger siblings
- Get better at socialising

Negative Aspects

- More fights, bullying
- Too much people, too big
- Knocking into people in the playground
- Really busy and don't know if it would be scary
- Might get lost
- Crossing a road
- Teacher might not come
- Might not fit in

2.12 Pupils from Meethill School also made comment on what the new school name might be and the new uniform.

Staff Engagement

2.13 Staff provided their feedback through the online survey, there were nine responses received. The majority supported the move for Dales Park School and did not support Meethill School moving to the campus. None of the staff that responded were in favour of the schools merging together.

2.14 They felt that Meethill School will lose its sense of community, it would be too far for some pupils to walk, they also felt that the capacity of the new primary school was too large.

2.15 Staff also indicated that the current staff at the schools had applied to work in smaller schools and not a school of possibly 20 classes or more. They also expressed concern regarding redundancies.

2.16 They also felt that Meethill Road is an extremely busy road and expressed concern at pupils having to cross the road.

3. Written Responses

3.1 On 28 January 2021 correspondence was received from Meethill Parent Council regarding the proposal. It contained questions from the Parent Council, a map of the green space around Meethill School and results of a survey that has been conducted by Meethill Parent Council.

3.2 The survey was dated 22 May 2020, which is out with the official consultation period for the consultation, therefore has not been considered as part of the final analysis.

3.3 The main concerns that were raised are listed below, these concerns were also addressed at the public meeting on 3 February 2021

- School Transport
- Road Infrastructure
- Safe routes to school
- Timescale of project
- Upgrade of existing schools
- Primary School size
- Class sizes
- Staffing

4. Education Scotland Report

4.1 The Education Scotland report is produced in full, attached as Appendix 6.

4.2 Education Scotland recognises that proposal will assist the Council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. They also agree that the proposal to provide 600 places in the primary school in the new community campus is sufficient to meet the projected combined rolls of both schools should they merge.

4.3 Education Scotland agrees the council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. There will be a number of potential educational benefits for children and staff should the proposal go ahead. These include the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging, engagement and ownership for all pupils and staff across an inclusive campus. The provision of a modern, purpose built campus offers an improved learning environment designed to suit the demands of a 21st century curriculum. Flexible learning spaces will encourage staff to work collaboratively, provide more opportunities for children to work cooperatively and allow a range of teaching and learning approaches including, active, interdisciplinary and outdoor learning. The inclusion of new community sports facilities on the campus will significantly enhance opportunities for physical education and related activities. The new campus will offer greater flexibility for a range of school activities, including before and after school.

4.4 Education Scotland reports that pupils from Meethill School will benefit from a range of resources not currently available to them, including a sensory room and life-skills area as well as easier access to specialist classrooms within the wider campus. Both schools will benefit from dedicated nurture spaces which support individual and small group work. Dales Park pupils will benefit from increased circulation space and additional space to support collaborative activities. Dining facilities for both schools will be improved.

4.5 Education Scotland further reports that the proposal identifies potential benefits for staff, including an improved working environment and access to modern resources and facilities. Being part of a larger professional community, including primary, secondary, special school and enhanced provision will promote opportunities for joint professional learning and increased opportunities for leadership development. There will be a broader range of staff

expertise and allow for better sharing of good practice, materials and resources. Staff will be able to work more collaboratively and effectively on improving professional reflective practice and self-evaluation.

- 4.6 Education Scotland indicated that the children, staff and parents from Dales Park School who met with HM Inspectors recognise the potential benefits of the proposal. They like the idea of working in a modern building that is designed to promote accessible and inclusive learning. Staff and parents felt this will be particularly beneficial to children with additional support needs, including those who attend the Enhanced Provision currently based in Dales Park School. They recognise the proposed flexibility of learning spaces and identified the potential to work more collaboratively with colleagues. Staff recognise the potential benefit for children transitioning to Peterhead Academy if the primary was on the same campus. Children saw the proposed merger as an opportunity to make new friendships, meet new teachers and have more space in which to learn. Access to improved physical education accommodation and facilities were seen as attractive.
- 4.7 Education Scotland also indicated that the staff and parents from Meethill School who met with HM Inspectors feel that Meethill School is still fit for purpose and see limited benefits to the proposal. They are not supportive of the inclusion of Meethill School in the proposal. They do, however, recognise the benefits of the new campus for the other schools involved. Staff and parents acknowledge that Meethill School would require some upgrading should it remain open. Key areas of concern are the proposed campus being too large and impersonal, children of different ages being on the same campus, increased travelling distance and road safety concerns. Parents and staff feel that Meethill School is the heart of the local community and that this would be lost should the school close. They also have concerns about what will happen to the Meethill School site should it be vacated. Children from Meethill School were more positive about the proposal. They were excited about the prospect of improved facilities, such as a bigger library and sports facilities.
- 4.8 Finally Education Scotland reported that representatives of the Anna Ritchie and Peterhead Academy schools including staff, young people and parents were in favour of the proposal. They believe the shared campus will encourage greater collaboration between children and young people across the campus. They think transitions for children will be enriched and that a better understanding of diversity and attitudes to inclusion will be improved.

5. Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations

Merging of Dales Park and Meethill School

- 5.1 Aberdeenshire Council looks to the maximum capacity of a primary school to be no more than 600 pupils. According to government guidelines within the Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy "Connecting People, Places and Learning" Guiding Principle - The Learning Estate should be well managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value. Education and Children's Services want

to deliver improvements for the estate that will impact the greatest number of buildings, and the council aims to reduce the overall number of buildings which will result in a reduction of carbon footprint and energy consumption. Burnhaven School was not included after the options appraisal stage.

Distance

- 5.2 Dales Park Nursery will also be included within the Kinmundy site for the proposed new Community Campus. The nursery will be a separate building located on south eastern part of the site. Dales View Drive will provide vehicular access to the nursery. The existing Dales Park School is located to the south east of the proposed site on Dales View Road. This presents an opportunity to have various access points to the proposed Peterhead Community Campus which will be located at the north part of the Kinmundy site.
- 5.3 The distance from Meethill Road to the Kinmundy site access on Kinmundy Road is approximately one mile. The distance from Meethill School to the access point via Dales View Drive is approximately half a mile. If there are various access points to the Kinmundy site, this will help shorten travel time to and from school from the current Meethill School area.

Safe Walking Routes to School

- 5.4 Planners and design teams in collaboration with the Roads Department will ensure that safe walking routes to schools are an integral part of the process. This will look at the town as a whole due to the catchment of the primary and the secondary. Currently there are crossing islands within Meethill Road further calming measures within Meethill Road would need to be addressed. However, there are already a substantial number of children crossing Meethill Road due to having placing requests at either Dales Park or Meethill School and living in the catchment area of the other school.

Road Infrastructure

- 5.5 New roads and parking infrastructure, off-road walking and cycling routes to the campus will be designed and built, following best practice guidelines and Aberdeenshire Council standards. All new infrastructure will be determined through the planning process including consultation with the Roads Department team to ensure the provision is appropriate. Involvement from the Transport Strategy Team and Public Transport Unit will also take place to ensure safe routes to school and the wider community campus are planned and identified.

Class Sizes

- 5.6 Should the proposal go ahead class sizes will continue to follow national class size maximas, however, the number of classes per cohort will increase.
- P1 – 25 pupils
 - P2 - P3 – 30 pupils
 - P4 - P7 – 33 pupils
 - Composite classes – 25 pupils

Staffing

- 5.7 All existing staff at both Dales Park and Meethill Schools will have the opportunity to transfer to the new school at the Community Campus. Additional staff may be required because of the extra housing and children. However, if the merger does go ahead there will be one Head Teacher.

Upgrade Existing Schools

- 5.8 The Conditions of this funding is predicated on achieving outcomes. The benefits of this integrated approach also include the reduction of carbon footprint, reduction of number of buildings, and to become fully digitally enabled throughout all learning spaces.
- 5.9 If all elements of the campus are not delivered including the merger of the primary schools then there is likely to be a significant impact on the availability of government funding. In this scenario there would need to be further dialogue with Scottish Futures Trust and the Scottish Government.
- 5.10 All schools in the learning estate are subject to condition and suitability assessments, these together with school roll forecasts form the basis of the Council's own investment programme. The Council must prioritise this budget across its entire estate and given other priorities in Aberdeenshire it would be unlikely there would be opportunity to invest in these two existing primary schools.
- 5.11 The ongoing repair and maintenance programme of the school estate will continue, however, other investment is not available or prioritised at this time at Dales Park or Meethill Schools.

Size of Kinmundy Site

- 5.12 The Kinmundy site is 30 acres. It is large enough to accommodate the Academy, a large Primary School, a Special School, a Nursery and pitches. Community facilities can also be fully accommodated if this is the agreed site for them.

Vacant Buildings

- 5.13 Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal Policy which must be followed when assets become surplus to requirements. If Dales Park and Meethill School were to join the Community Campus then there would be no requirement for either of the current school buildings to continue as a school. It would be the intention of Education and Children's Services to declare the building surplus to requirement, other council services will be approached to express an interest in the site. There will be opportunities for the site to be developed as green space and/or playing space. 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.

School Transport

- 5.14 In Aberdeenshire and across Scotland transport is available to pupils who live two miles or more from a primary school and three miles or more from a secondary school. Looking at the geographic spread of the catchment for Meethill and distance to the new Kinmundy site, all pupils currently zoned to Meethill School would be living within two miles of the new campus.
- 5.15 There will be increased car parking compared to what is currently at Dales Park and Meethill Schools. There will also be designed pick up and drop off points.

Transition for Pupils

- 5.16 Careful transition planning will ensure a positive transition for pupils to the community campus. Individual plans will allow for enhanced transitions.

School Day

- 5.17 Start and end times of the school day will be considered by the Campus Management Team as part of the Access Strategy for the building. Lunch and break times can also be at different times, detailed engagement will take place with pupils, parents and staff as the project develops.

6. Errors, Omissions and Additional Information

- 6.1 During the consultation period no errors or admissions were brought to the attention of officers. The only change in the consultation was the delivery of a meeting with the Meethill Parent Council.
- 6.2 The online public meeting held during the consultation is compliant with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, which states the Council must hold and be present at a public meeting and give advance notice of the date, time and venue of the meeting to relevant consultees and Education Scotland.

Out of Zone Pupils

- 6.3 Currently there are 257 pupils at Dales Park School (seemis extract 23 April 2021). Of this total there are 80 (31%) out of zone pupils attending the school.
- 6.4 Currently there are 201 pupils at Meethill School (seemis extract 23 April 2021). Of this total there are 76 (38%) out of zone pupils attending the school.
- 6.5 A number of pupils at both Dales Park and Meethill School live out with the school catchment area. Pupils who do not attend their zoned school are not entitled to school transport, parents/carers are fully responsible for transporting their child(ren) to and from school. Some of these pupils would be required to cross Meethill Road to attend their chosen school.

Social Media

- 6.6 On 16 February 2021, a “Save Meethill School” page was created on social media, receiving in excess of 400 followers. The page gave a link to the online survey, requesting supporters to help save Meethill School.
- 6.7 The social media page was supported by some members of the community who reside out with the Peterhead area, they will not be affected by the result of the proposal. An additional 479 responses were received after the launch of social media campaign.
- 6.8 Prior to the survey being shared on social media, 75 people had taken part in the survey, these participants have children at either Dales Park or Meethill School or have children that attended nursery.
- 6.9 Of these 75 participants, 47 intimated that they support Dales Park School moving to the new community campus, 16 do not support the move, and 12 have no preference.
- 6.10 25 participants intimated that they support Meethill School moving to the new community campus, 38 do not support the move, and 12 have no preference.
- 6.11 32 participants intimated that they support the merging of both Dales Park and Meethill Schools at the new community campus, 37 do not support the move and 6 have no preference.

7. Compliance with Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 7.1 Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 states that:

After the Education Authority has received HMIE’s report, the Authority is to review the relevant proposal having regard (in particular) to

- (i) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,*
- (ii) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,*
- (iii) HMIE’s report.*

- 7.2 Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally carefully the written representations. The Education Authority’s position is set out in this document.
- 7.3 Section (10) (3) of the 2010 Act also places a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracy or omission within the Proposal Paper which has either been identified by the Council or raised by consultees.

- 7.4 This section of the 2010 Act also requires the Council to provide a statement on the action taken in respect of the inaccuracy or omission, or, if no action was taken, to state that fact and why.
- 7.5 Officers are required to publish its response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report. The Council's detailed responses to the alleged inaccuracies is set out within this Consultation Report in Section 6.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The Council now has the following options:
- Continue to progress the proposal to merge Dales Park and Meethill Schools at the Community Campus; or
 - Relocate one school to the Community Campus at Kinmundy Road.
- 8.2 Officers have outlined a number of educational benefits within the proposal document for current and future pupils at both Dales Park and Meethill Schools. They believe that that balance of educational benefits outweighs the number of concerns raised in opposition to the proposal.
- 8.3 There is likely to be significant impact on the availability of government funding if the proposal to merge Dales Park and Meethill Schools at the Community Campus does not proceed.
- 8.4 Education Scotland agree that discontinuing education provision at the existing Dales Park and Meethill Schools has potential educational benefits. Pupils would benefit from a new building that supports learning and teaching styles of the 21st Century. The larger professional community created will promote opportunities for joint professional learning and increased collaboration.
- 8.5 Education Scotland also agree that the proposal will assist to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources.
- 8.6 Officers recognise that the communities of Dales Park and Meethill hold significantly different views regarding the proposal and have legitimate concerns regarding road safety and safe walking routes to the proposed new school.
- 8.7 Officers recognise the need to continue to engage with all stakeholders to address concerns regarding road safety and safe walking routes to the proposed new school.
- 8.8 Should the proposal go ahead, officers recognise the need to continue to consult and communicate effectively with staff, children, parents and the wider community in engaging with them fully in the future planning and design stages of this proposal.

8.9 Should the Council agree to the proposal, as this would involve the permanent closure of two primary schools, the decision will be subject to Call-In by Scottish Ministers. Members of the public will have the opportunity to request that ministers review the decision. Details of the timescales for this process will be published on the Aberdeenshire Council website once the decision has been made by Full Council.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 The recommendation of Officers is to continue to engage with stakeholders of Dales Park and Meethill Schools to address their concerns regarding road safety and safe walking routes to school.

9.2 The recommendation of Officers is that Aberdeenshire Council should continue with the proposal to permanently close both Dales Park and Meethill Schools and merge into one primary school at the new Community Campus at Kinmundy Road, Peterhead.