

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to relocate Anna Ritchie School to within Peterhead Community Campus.

March 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to relocate Anna Ritchie School to Peterhead Community Campus. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the virtual public meeting held on 20 January 2021 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- attendance at virtual meetings with Anna Ritchie School and Peterhead Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 The proposal for relocation of Anna Ritchie School emerged from a wider engagement process regarding the proposal to relocate Peterhead Academy to the new community campus at Kinmundy.

2.3 The statutory consultation period ran from 7 December 2020 to 26 February 2021. Copies of the consultation proposal were made available to statutory consultees. Copies were also available at local public buildings and on the council website. Due to the current COVID 19 restrictions that were in place, a virtual public meeting, advertised in the local press and on social media, was held on the 20 January 2021.

2.4 The virtual public meeting was attended by around 16 members of the public and 10 elected members. In addition, 47 responses were received through an online survey and another one written comment was received by the council. Of the responses to the online survey, 18 were in favour and 24 against the proposal. The main areas of concern raised through the comments and from stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors were related to the proposed location. Stakeholders are concerned about the proximity of the new building to the secondary school and the potential for bullying by Academy pupils. They are also concerned that Anna Ritchie might lose its identity in the campus setting. A minority of stakeholders are concerned about lack of outdoor space for children and young people, and whether these spaces would be overlooked by Academy pupils. The Parent Council have concerns about the design of the actual building based on the visits they made to another recently built special school in the local authority.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Aberdeenshire Council's proposal to relocate Anna Ritchie School has the potential to bring considerable educational benefits for all children and young people across the new campus. HM Inspectors agree it could provide opportunities to develop inclusive practices and partnership working between establishments on the Kinmundy site. Senior leaders and partners talk enthusiastically about the opportunity to develop a comprehensive plan for inclusion across the campus. This includes aligning services and supporting collegiate working and professional learning between specialist provisions and mainstream staff. It could also support the campus and wider community to learn about equality and diversity in 21st century Scotland.

3.2 A few stakeholders have concerns about Anna Ritchie School losing its unique identity and place within the local community. However, senior staff are committed to fostering, and building on, their well-established links within the local community. Stakeholders recognise the need for significant planning to support the transition to a new, larger and busier campus for children and young people with complex additional support needs. Should the proposal go ahead, there is a long lead in time to prepare for such a move. This will help to alleviate any stakeholder concerns and ensure all young people feel safe, listened to and at the centre of decision making.

3.3 HM Inspectors believe that the proposed purpose-built building has considerable potential to enhance the learning environment for learners at Anna Ritchie School. Families of children and young people with additional support needs in the wider community will also have access to improved specialist, community and leisure facilities. This includes wireless enabled facilities, hoists, medical facilities, sensory rooms and outdoor learning spaces. Stakeholders welcome the council's commitment to designing a purpose-built learning environment which will allow spaces to be used flexibly and creatively. All young people from Anna Ritchie who met with HM Inspectors welcome the improved facilities and resources the new school could offer. They look forward to accessing the enhanced leisure and sports facilities within the campus. Representatives of the Parent Council valued tours of another school to see what could be offered. Parents are eager to continue to offer their knowledge of their children's additional support needs to help inform the facilities they require to support future planning.

3.4 There is potential to enhance the curriculum and enrich children's and young people's learning experiences in a new school on the community campus. This includes Community Learning and Development staff based at the campus supporting the development of community learning programmes for groups and individuals. Young people welcome the increased opportunities to access more learning experiences, including a range of curricular subjects at Peterhead Academy. This will offer further personalisation and choice, and enhance flexible senior phase learner pathways and opportunities to raise attainment. Across the campus, there could also be increased opportunities for achievement and developing skills for learning, life and work.

3.5 During the consultation period the council was notified by the Parent Council of alleged omissions in the proposal. The council has taken steps to investigate these alleged omissions and has responded to the Parent Council in writing. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

4. Summary

Overall, HM Inspectors believe there are considerable educational benefits of the proposal to relocate Anna Ritchie School to within the community campus. The purpose-built building could provide an improved learning environment for learners with complex additional support needs. This includes wireless-enabled facilities, and access to sensory suites and community sports facilities. There are opportunities to enhance learning pathways and raise attainment and achievement through access to specialist staff and community partners. Across the wider campus, there are increased opportunities to develop inclusive practices and integrated services for the benefit of all children, young people and staff.

Well-considered transition planning, involving all stakeholders, will be an important consideration in taking the proposal forward. This should help to alleviate the concerns raised about the dignity and safety of learners from Anna Ritchie and relationships across the campus. Senior leaders should also consider carefully how access to shared facilities will be managed to ensure equity for Anna Ritchie learners. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged omissions notified to it.

HM Inspectors
March 2021