



# ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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## **CONSULTATION REPORT Proposed Closure of Cordyce School**

This Consultation Report has been compiled in response to the recent public consultation on the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School in Aberdeen. The document summarises the responses received on the proposal set out below and Aberdeen City Council's response to the verbal and written comments submitted by interested parties, in compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

### **Proposal:**

**To permanently close Cordyce School in Aberdeen, with effect from 1 April 2018**

## **1. METHODOLOGY**

This consultation was conducted in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. All requirements of the legislation have been met.

## **2. CORRECTION**

Following publication of the Council's proposal document on 30 August 2017, a minor error in the reported previous staff numbers at Cordyce School, as detailed in the table at Paragraph 4.2 of the document, was discovered. The original document stated that there were two depute head teachers, 14.42 full time equivalent class teachers, and 17 social workers, based at the school. In fact there was one depute head teacher, 10.42 full time equivalent class teachers, and 10.5 full time equivalent social workers at the school.

Upon discovery of this error, an updated version of the proposal document providing the correct staff numbers, was published on the Council's consultation website and distributed to stakeholders on 18 September 2017. As the error was not considered by officers to be significant, it was not considered necessary to review the merits of the proposal or to revise the timescales for consultation.

## **3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS**

### **2.1 Public Event**

A public consultation event was held on 20 September 2017 to discuss the proposals. The event took place at Bucksburn Academy commencing at 7.00pm. The event was attended by five individual stakeholders, as follows:

- 2 teachers formerly based at Cordyce School
- 1 teacher from another Aberdeen City school
- 1 social worker formerly based at Cordyce School
- 1 community member

### **2.2 Comments Received**

Twenty-four online submissions were made in response to the consultation, via the Council's consultation portal. In addition the EIS teaching union submitted a response by email, and one further email response was received from an individual stakeholder.

### **2.3 Issues Raised**

The main issues raised at the public meeting and in the written responses to the consultation, are summarised below.

- Some respondents to the consultation welcomed the proposal, in that it would ensure that children could be accommodated within mainstream settings along with their peers, rather than being labelled and segregated. Others noted positively that schools are managing to meet the needs of pupils who require extra support.

- Other respondents welcomed the fact that the proposal would help the Council to reduce its costs.
- Concerns were raised by some stakeholders regarding the extent to which children with additional support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties can receive appropriate levels of support, following the closure of Cordyce School.
- It was suggested that within a mainstream setting, it would be difficult for teachers to provide the right level of support, and that this could have a detrimental impact on other children within the same class, whose education could be disrupted. One respondent suggested that children's needs for medical assessments are ignored by schools and that children are not taken care of in schools.
- In their responses some stakeholders highlighted the need for additional support and resources within mainstream settings, including specialist staffing, to help support pupils with additional support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Others suggested that additional resources could be made available for Cordyce School in order to improve the support it can provide to pupils, and that the school could therefore remain open.
- It was also suggested that children who are struggling to cope in a mainstream setting may be tempted to avoid attending school, or that they would be moved to part-time timetables, and that this would result in them being left behind. Similarly, another respondent felt that children could feel frustrated that they do not match up to their peers within a mainstream setting. One respondent suggested the proposal would result in children being forced into mainstream, and as a result may choose not to attend school, when they may have been happy to attend at Cordyce.
- Stakeholders also highlighted that within Cordyce School, the specific needs of pupils could be catered for by trained staff within a controlled environment, and that moving pupils to mainstream classes would impact on the learning and teaching in those classes. This, it was felt, would result in support staff needing to spend more time with individual pupils, leaving them with less time to support others. It was also suggested that mainstream staff do not have the appropriate level of training to support children with specific needs.
- Some respondents questioned the benefits of the bespoke pathways for individual pupils, suggesting that pathway planning is limited and non-transparent, with limited resources available for supporting the pathways.
- Another respondent was critical of the way in which the Council's report on its review of inclusion was disseminated in 2014, suggesting that the detail of this report was not shared due to fears over what it contained. The same respondent suggested that the bespoke pathways on offer do not offer the breadth of curriculum to replace what was available at Cordyce School.
- One stakeholder questioned why the consultation was being carried out now, given that the school had not been in operation for some months, suggesting that this was a retrospective consultation. Another response criticised the Council for cutting funding to a school which had played a valuable role in the community, suggesting that the education and wellbeing of young people should not be about saving money. A further respondent questioned why staff were still working at the school.

### Comments received from the EIS teaching union

The comments received from the EIS are summarised below:

- The EIS suggested that the reduction in pupil roll at Cordyce was due to schools no longer being able to refer pupils to Cordyce, and it questioned whether out of authority placements would now be the only route for high tariff young people. It suggested that closing Cordyce School would reduce the continuum of provision, as some young people would still require to access provision which is not part of a mainstream setting.
- The EIS response suggested that the hub provision in mainstream schools has changed considerably and schools are unclear about the support that is available. It also questioned how the likely impact of the proposal on schools was measured.
- The response highlighted that staff do not feel adequately trained to deal with the social and emotional difficulties presented by young people, and that recruitment difficulties mean that staff find it more difficult to access high quality training. It was also suggested that the recruitment difficulties are impacting on schools' ability to offer personalisation and choice to young people.
- Finally the EIS concluded that it wholeheartedly supports the inclusion agenda, but that it recognises the significant limitations placed on schools as a result of staffing shortages and budget constraints. It suggested that it is vital for the type of support which was provided at Cordyce School to remain an option for some pupils, to avoid out of city placements.

### **2.4 Education Scotland Report**

An essential element of the statutory consultation process is the involvement of Education Scotland, whose report is provided as Annex A of this Consultation Report.

In its report, Education Scotland agreed that the proposal has educational benefit, that the continuum of provision which has been designed by the Council has merit and will provide appropriate alternatives for young people who may have attended Cordyce School. HM Inspectors were assured that the Council is working toward a range of inclusion strategies, and that the education benefits statement within the proposal document provides clear evidence of this.

The report also noted that the development of satellite hubs around the city is in an early stage of development. It recommended that the Council reassures stakeholders that the alternatives to full-time mainstream provision will be designed in consultation with them, and that the continuum of provision can effectively meet the needs of the most vulnerable young people.

### **3. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PERIOD AND CONTAINED WITHIN THE EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT**

#### **3.1 Suggested lack of support available in mainstream settings**

Recent research has provided a growing body of evidence in relation to ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences). As a result colleagues have access to more information to enable them to understand and support children and young people who have experienced trauma. Historically, these children and young people have been amongst the vulnerable learners who have accessed off-site provision. There is now a far greater understanding that to address the damage done in early childhood these children and young people need to develop a sense of belonging within their local community in a learning environment where positive relationships are prioritised.

The proposed closure of the building would enable a reduction in ancillary costs, allowing continued investment in staff resource to provide timeous and proportionate interventions for children and young people. The staffing resource (teachers, pupil support assistants and educational social workers) will be deployed across the city to work directly with children, young people and their families.

#### **3.2 Concerns about attendance at school**

In order to raise attainment attendance at school is crucial. Head Teachers are responsible for reviewing and monitoring data on attendance and for putting in place school procedures which allow for early discussion with Home School Liaison Officers and Educational Social Workers to address cases of poor attendance.

#### **3.3 The need for staff training within mainstream settings**

It is acknowledged that there is an ongoing need for high quality staff training. The number of children across the city with social, emotional and mental health needs, including in our primary schools, exceeds the number which could be accommodated at Cordyce School. It is vital that the capacity to meet these needs is developed across Aberdeen City. It should be acknowledged that there are significant numbers of highly qualified and skilled staff who have created environments in which vulnerable children and young people have been able to flourish. This expertise will be used to help build capacity.

#### **3.4 The benefits of bespoke pathways**

By working in conjunction with partners in social work, NHS and the third sector the Council has extended the range of professionals engaged in planning with children and young people, their families and schools. This has led to the development of Child's Plans which focus on the individual needs of children and young people. More appropriate pathways, building on learners' strengths and the factors which motivate them, have resulted. It is recognised that this provision needs to continue to grow.

It is also acknowledged that for some young people schools alone cannot provide the level of personalisation and choice that allows them to be successful learners. In these situations learners will continue to have access to alternative learning environments and to have opportunities for personal development, always with the ultimate aim of returning to their mainstream provision.

It is recognised that an appropriate curriculum is of critical importance and that planning for children and young people needs to take them from where they are in their learning. All classroom teachers plan to meet the needs of all learners and are encouraged to use a variety of strategies to meet need and reduce stigma.

Aberdeen City's continuum of provision highlights the range of interventions from universal through targeted and specialist. The establishment of Local Partnerships and the deployment of staff for primary and early intervention will enable the needs of the majority of learners to be met within their locality. The partnerships which have been built with third sector partners provide specialist interventions, which will continue to ensure the focus on skills for learning, life and work.

### **3.5 Dissemination of the report on the Review of Inclusion**

The recommendations from the Inclusion Review provided clarity in terms of the actions for Aberdeen City to take to fulfil its statutory duties. The full report contained sensitive information regarding individual colleagues and it was stated at the outset that in order to protect them the full report would not be published.

### **3.6 The decision to stop enrolling children at Cordyce**

A variety of factors led to the decision not to enrol additional pupils at Cordyce; these included the staffing position and concerns over health and safety within the building. In light of the planned transformation it was felt that it would be inappropriate to enrol a new cohort of pupils when the future of the provision was uncertain.

### **3.7 Response to comments from the EIS teaching union**

The Inclusion Review recommended that Aberdeen City Council take account of the legislation in respect of the Presumption of Mainstreaming. The staffing difficulties at Cordyce School meant that young people could not have their entitlements delivered at Cordyce.

It is recognised that for some children and young people accessing learning within a school environment can be difficult. Throughout this process the message has been confirmed and colleagues have continued to be advised that off-site provision would remain an option for children and young people. However, it has also been made clear that it is not appropriate for children and young people to be referred to an alternative provision with no ongoing contact with their mainstream school.

Alternative locations have been identified and Head Teachers and Pupil Support staff have received information about these and the processes to be followed if they are considered to be possible options for children and young people. This confirms that out of authority placements are not the only route for our vulnerable children and young people.

Bespoke pathways will now be developed jointly with schools and partners. The roles of the central team have been reviewed to enable a greater focus on supporting children and young people in need of specialist interventions. This is as a result of the experience of colleagues engaged in the development of bespoke pathways and feedback from stakeholders.

The original recommendation of the Inclusion Review was to replace Cordyce school with a provision which would cater for children from P4 – S2 and a Life Skills

Academy. It was also recommended that the temporary primary provision at Airyhall School be replaced with an alternative provision. The proposal for a number of hubs across the city was shared later. The following permanent 'hubs' have been identified: St Nicholas Centre; The Foyer Classroom; The House at Queen's Road.

The Mental Health agenda is being taken forward in line with the National Mental Health Strategy. Mental Health First Aid training has been offered but it is recognised that it will take time for all staff to access this. The initial aspiration is to have a Mental Health champion within each Local Partnership.

A mapping activity, designed to identify resources and supports which staff can access, is under production. The provision within individual schools is being examined. Given the national increase in the number of children and young people presenting with social, emotional and mental health issues, the transformation of our service is critical. With a maximum pupil roll of 49, Cordyce School is not in a position to meet the needs of children and young people across the city.

The staffing resource remains and is being used to ensure we have the right professional roles to address this agenda. Account has also been taken of the changes to the role of school nurses and the fact that adjustments will be made to their remits to enable them to spend more time supporting children and young people with social and emotional health needs.

It is appreciated that staffing difficulties have impacted on many schools, however, the absence of secondary qualified staff delivering a secondary curriculum at Cordyce School exacerbated the challenge and impacted on the staff members themselves.

#### **4. COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSALS**

Following the conclusion of the consultation period, Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, requires the Council to review the relevant proposal, having had regard to any written representations that have been received by it during the consultation period, any oral representations made to it at the public meeting held on 20 September, and Education Scotland's report.

In terms of Section 10(2) (e) of the said Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the Consultation Report is required to contain a statement explaining how the Council complied with its duty under the above Section 9(1) of the Act.

With relation to Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act and having considered all of the information received during the consultation process, officers are satisfied that no comments have been received which would have caused them to review the merits of the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School in Aberdeen.

#### **5. FIRE AT CORDYCE SCHOOL**

On 13 November 2017, Cordyce School suffered a major fire, which largely destroyed the main school building. Whilst officers are working with the Council's insurers to determine the best course of action for the future of the building and the site as a whole, the proposal to permanently close the school as an institution remains in place, and the Council is required to continue with the statutory consultation process.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

It is therefore recommended that the Education and Children's Services Committee agrees to implement the proposal to permanently close Cordyce School in Aberdeen, with effect from 1 April 2018.

**Helen Shanks**  
**Acting Director of Education and Children's Services**  
**December 2017**

## REPORT FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND

### Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to close Cordyce School permanently.

#### 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 (as amended) (the 2010 Act)*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeen City Council's proposal to close Cordyce School permanently. 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 a copy of 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

#### 1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

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

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 20 September 2017 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the site of The Foyer, St Machar Academy, St Nicholas Pupil Support Centre and Aberdeen City Council Headquarters, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Act 2010*.

2.2 The consultation ran from 30 August until 13 October 2017. The council announced the consultation in local press and information, including the proposal paper, was placed on the council website and in council buildings. Copies of the proposal were made available in all Aberdeen City Council secondary schools. Stakeholders were invited to respond to the proposal through a comment form. A public meeting was held on 20 September 2017. Fewer than ten stakeholders attended. The council made appropriate arrangements to consult with stakeholders. During the consultation period the council received 25 responses from stakeholders including parents. Three were in favour of the permanent closure of the school and 21 opposed the proposal.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 Cordyce School provides secondary education for pupils with additional support needs arising from social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Young people have previously attended the school from all areas of Aberdeen City. Over time, there has been a gradual reduction in the number of young people attending the school. Fewer than ten young people were on the school roll for session 2016/17. Since August 2017 there have been no young people enrolled at the school. The Cordyce building is rated C (poor) for both its condition and its suitability for use as a school. It also has an energy performance rating of G (very poor).

3.2 HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has educational benefit. The council outlines clearly the educational benefits which it believes will be brought about by the permanent closure of Cordyce School. The Continuum of Provision, designed by the council, has merit and will provide appropriate alternatives for young people who may have attended Cordyce School. HM Inspectors noted that work on the satellite hubs around the city, as an element of bespoke pathways for young people, are at an early stage of development. In its final paper, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the alternatives to full-time mainstream provision will be designed in consultation with them and with the aim of ensuring successful outcomes for young people. The council has established a number of successful partnerships with other organisations which offer young people valuable support and alternative placements, including work experience.

3.3 Most stakeholders who responded to the consultation directly are opposed to the proposal. They feel that the council has not yet delivered suitable, robust alternatives for the most vulnerable young people. They would welcome greater clarity about the viability of the range of alternatives proposed by the council. Stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors are in favour of the proposal. They feel young people will be better served by a range of alternative, bespoke pathways which have the potential to meet their needs more effectively. They would also welcome greater clarity about aspects of the proposal. In particular, arrangements for young people who have the greatest needs. In its final report, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the needs of the most vulnerable young

people can be met effectively through a well-coordinated continuum of provision across the city.

#### **4. Summary**

HM Inspectors believe the proposal has educational benefit. We are assured that the council is working toward a range of inclusion strategies as alternatives to Cordyce School. The educational benefits statement provides clear evidence of this. For young people who may have become pupils of Cordyce School, the council has set out a range of appropriate alternatives. However, in its final paper, the council will need to reassure stakeholders that the alternatives which the council asserts will bring about successful outcomes for the most vulnerable young people will do so.

The council notified HM Inspectors on 14 November 2017 that the school building had been destroyed by fire. This was prior to the publication of both Education Scotland's report and the council's final consultation report.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
November 2017**