Aberdeenshire COUNCIL Education & Children's Services

Options Appraisal

Banchory-Devenick School

Background

During December 2025, a routine inspection of the boiler system at Banchory Devenick School identified significant deterioration in two of the flues, which are now beyond permanent repair. A temporary repair was undertaken to allow the school to remain operational in the short term.

Whilst a temporary repair was undertaken, a full replacement of the flues is required to ensure the boilers can continue operating. Failure to replace the flues will result in the boilers being condemned and shut down.

Officers within Property & Facilities Management have been progressing a programme of works to address high-risk oil pipes, following two oil pipe leaks in schools in recent years. Banchory Devenick School currently has an underground oil supply pipe, categorising it as high risk. The existing oil tank is also non-compliant due to its current location and therefore should be relocated as part of the remedial works. The estimated cost for this element is approximately £55,000.

The boilers were installed in 1990 and are now 36 years old, despite the recommended operational lifespan for such boilers being approximately 15 years. Replacement parts are no longer available, meaning any future failures would necessitate a complete boiler replacement. In the event of boiler failure, a transition to LPG would be recommended if site space allowed to eliminate risks associated with oil storage and to adopt a more environmentally sustainable solution. The estimated cost for a full boiler replacement is £180,000.

The flat roof has reached or is close to reaching the end of its expected lifecycle and replacement is recommended at an estimated cost of £65,000 with a further £150,000 required for the electrical installation. The water tank will also require replacement which is estimated at £10,000. Table 1 includes high level costs for all required works.

Table 1 Summary of works and costs at January 2026

Works Required	**Budget Cost**
Heating Upgrade	£180,000
Water Tank Replacement	£10,000
Flat Roof Upgrade	£65,000
Electrical Upgrade	£150,000
Toilet Upgrade	£75,000
Playground Resurface	£50,000
Total	**£530,000**

Officers in Education & Children's Services (ECS) and Property & Facilities Management conducted a high level interim assessment regarding the next steps and presented a report to ECS Leadership Team on 16 January 2026, and to Senior

Leadership Team (SLT) on 28 January 2026 which outlined the indicative costs of repair, capacity and utilisation across the Portlethen Cluster and suggested next steps.

On consideration of the report, SLT agreed a relocation of Banchory Devenick School to Fishermoss School from April 2026 as a School within a School. This timescale was intended to support a smooth transition, enabling pupils and staff to remain together and continue operating as Banchory-Devenick School from an alternative location, while maintaining continuity of education in the medium term.

A further report was presented to Education and Children's Services Committee on 26 March 2026. The report updated the committee on the situation at Banchory-Devenick School and outlined the strategic and operational viability of the school and sought permission to commence a statutory consultation on the permanent closure of the school. This report considers the options for the future of Banchory-Devenick School.

Pupils were supported to transition to nearby schools, and Banchory-Devenick School has remained non-operational since April 2026.

Banchory-Devenick School Current Roll and Future Roll Implications

In March 2026, there were 25 pupils enrolled at Banchory-Devenick School. 9 pupils resided within the catchment area, 4 were zoned to other schools within Aberdeenshire and the remaining 12 reside within Aberdeen City. The number of pupils per cohort is detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – Banchory-Devenick Pupil Cohort March 2026

Cohort	No of Pupils
P1-3	11
P4-5	9
P6-7	5

The roll was 25 pupils, which is a one class entitlement, however the school was operating with two classes, a P1 - 3 class of 11 pupils and a P4 - 7 class of 14 pupils. According to NHS data there are 8 pupils due to start at the school between 2026 and 2028. Data shows that annually several in-zone children choose schools out of catchment and there are out of authority applications from Aberdeen City families.

The primary enrolment period was between 12 and 16 January 2026, there was one in zone enrolment and three placing requests from Aberdeen City residents. There are no planned housing developments within the catchment area.

According to SEEMiS (19 January 2026) there were 13 primary aged pupils residing within the Banchory Devenick School catchment area, of which 9 attended the school. The remaining pupils either attended Fishermoss, Hillside or Portlethen Primary Schools.

If the school only had in zone pupils attending, the expected roll would be between 9 and 11 pupils for the next four sessions, which is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – SRF – Banchory Devenick School Expected In Zone Pupils

Year	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
In Zone Pupils	9	9	9	11	11

Operational and Strategic Requirements – Portlethen Cluster

There are five primary schools in the Portlethen Cluster which are Banchory-Devenick, Fishermoss, Hillside, Portlethen Primary and Newtonhill Schools. For the purposes of reviewing all options, Lairhillock School as one of the neighbouring schools has been considered as part of the review and is included in the information below. Lairhillock School is however part of the Stonehaven Cluster and the designated secondary school is Mackie Academy therefore the totals are not included in the table for the Portlethen Cluster below.

The Portlethen Cluster has capacity for 1,738 pupils and is currently operating at 73% capacity as demonstrated in Table 4 below. It is forecast that by 2029 there will be 475 spare primary places which is the equivalent of a two stream school.

Table 4 – Portlethen Cluster School Roll Forecast – Published 2025 Based

School	Capacity	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Banchory Devenick	70	25	27	27	28	30
Fishermoss	358	256	261	251	235	221
Hillside	509	444	405	377	360	364
Newtonhill	459	338	353	365	399	422
Portlethen	342	212	206	205	210	227
Total	**1738**	**1275**	**1251**	**1227**	**1232**	**1263**
Lairhillock (Stonehaven Cluster)	217	123	126	132	133	239

Table 5 below is based on an interim 2026 forecast and contains live data, updated rolls following the movement of pupils from Banchory-Devenick School, any planned housing developments in the catchment area and NHS data.

Table 5 – 2026 Interim School Roll Forecasts

School	Capacity	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Fishermoss	358	252	234	212	193	193
Hillside	509	410	384	365	341	316

Portlethen	342	197	183	173	168	157
Newtonhill	459	360	379	410	418	417
Portlethen Academy	1010	964	1023	1075	1108	1105
Lairhillock (Stonehaven Cluster)	217	135	141	139	137	135
Mackie Academy	1435	1155	1192	1254	1264	1228

The Portlethen Cluster has capacity for 1,738 pupils primary age pupils and is currently operating at 70% capacity. It is forecast that, by 2030, there will be 653 spare primary places across the cluster, which is equivalent to a two-stream school. Given the available capacity within the cluster together with the proximity of neighbouring schools, there is no identified operational or strategic requirement to return Banchory-Devenick School to operational status.

The table below shows the approximate distances from Banchory-Devenick School

Table 6 – Distance from Banchory-Devenick School

School	**Distance**
Fishermoss School	5.5 miles
Hillside School	3.5 miles
Portlethen Primary School	4 miles
Lairhillock School	9 miles

The table below shows condition and suitability grades for each of the schools assessed in this appraisal.

Table 7 – Condition and Suitability

School	**Condition**	**Suitability**
Banchory-Devenick	B	A
Fishermoss	B	B
Hillside	A	A
Portlethen Primary	A	A
Lairhillock	A	A

Consideration of Options

As part of this process, officers conducted an Options Appraisal regarding the future of Banchory-Devenick School. There were six broad options to consider:

- Operate as a school-within-a-school at Fishermoss School
- Undertake the building works required

- Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Hillside School
- Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Fishermoss School
- Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Portlethen Primary School
- Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Lairhillock School

The options were considered and scored against the SWOT mechanism in the table below.

Table 7 - SWOT Scoring and Ranking of Options

Options	Option Detail	Score
Option 1	Undertake works at Banchory-Devenick School	5th
Option 2	School within a school at Fishermoss School	6th
Option 3	Permanently close Banchory-Devenick and rezone to Hillside School	1st
Option 4	Permanently close Banchory-Devenick and rezone to Fishermoss School	3rd
Option 5	Permanently close Banchory-Devenick and rezone to Portlethen Primary School	4th
Option 6	Permanently close Banchory-Devenick and rezone to Lairhillock School	2nd

Option 1 - Undertake works at Banchory-Devenick School

This option would allow education provision to continue within the existing Banchory-Devenick catchment area and would improve the condition of the school building following completion of the required works. However, this would require significant capital investment in a school with a low roll, limited future growth and a high level of surplus capacity within the wider Portlethen Cluster.

From a strategic perspective, investment in the existing building would not address the long-term utilisation of the school estate or the wider capacity position across the cluster. The Portlethen Cluster is forecast to retain significant spare capacity, and continued operation of Banchory-Devenick School would maintain an underutilised asset rather than support a more sustainable estate model.

This option therefore does not align with the objectives of Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estate Strategy, which seeks to ensure that the school estate is sustainable, affordable and makes best use of available capacity. In addition, there is currently no identified capital funding available to undertake the required works. Given the scale of investment required, the low number of in-zone pupils and the competing demands across the wider school estate, this option was not considered to represent the best strategic use of public resources and was therefore discounted from further consideration.

Option 2 - Operate a school within a school

This option was offered to all parents and carers; however, families chose to enrol their children in other schools. As a result, the option of operating Banchory-Devenick School as a school within a school at Fishermoss School was not progressed. This option scored low and was deemed a temporary one whilst a decision was made regarding the decant of Banchory-Devenick School. Whilst it would have allowed the pupils and staff to remain together, they are now enrolled in other schools through parental choice. This is not considered a viable long term solution and it would not align with council policy or the Learning Estate Strategy as it does not address capacity issues across the cluster and would continue an underutilisation of the existing school estate.

Option 3 - Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Hillside School

Option 3 scored highest in the options appraisal matrix. It is recognised that this option would involve a change of setting for pupils, including a move from a small rural school to a larger school environment. This may differ from some parental expectations and could require careful transition planning to support pupils' emotional wellbeing. However, the option also presents a number of strengths. Hillside School shares a boundary with the Banchory-Devenick catchment area and is the closest school by distance. It is a modern, carbon-efficient building with enhanced learning spaces, access to before and after school care, and a larger peer group for pupils. Permanent closure of Banchory-Devenick School and rezoning of the catchment area to Hillside School would align with Council policy and the Learning Estate Strategy, and no capital expenditure would be required. Some pupils may experience increased travel distances and associated transport costs would increase; however, pupils living within the current Banchory-Devenick catchment area would be entitled to school transport if closure and rezoning were approved.

Option 4 - Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Fishermoss School

This option scored third highest in the options appraisal matrix and presents similar strengths and weaknesses to those identified for Hillside School. Fishermoss School was identified as the temporary host location for pupils and staff from Banchory-Devenick School while options for the future of the school were being appraised, as it had suitable accommodation immediately available for this interim arrangement. Fishermoss School is the furthest of the Portlethen Cluster schools from Banchory-Devenick School.

Option 5 - Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Portlethen Primary School

This option ranked fourth highest in the options appraisal and shared many of the strengths and weaknesses identified for both Hillside School and Fishermoss School. Portlethen Primary School would provide access to a larger peer group, modern learning facilities and established transition arrangements to Portlethen Academy. However, it did not score as highly as either Hillside School or Lairhillock School. As

a result, while Portlethen Primary School represents a viable option, it was not considered to offer the same overall strategic, educational and community benefits as the higher-ranked options.

Option 6 - Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Lairhillock School

This option shares many of the same strengths and weaknesses as the Portlethen Cluster school options and was ranked second highest in the options appraisal. A key strength is that Lairhillock School offers a rural education setting which is more comparable to Banchory-Devenick School. This was identified as a positive factor by many parents and carers during the informal engagement process and is reflected in the choices made by a number of families while Banchory-Devenick School has been non-operational.

However, Lairhillock School is within the Stonehaven Cluster and its associated secondary school is Mackie Academy, whereas the Banchory-Devenick School catchment area currently feeds to Portlethen Academy. Under this option, the primary catchment would be rezoned to Lairhillock School, while Portlethen Academy would remain the designated secondary school for pupils living within the existing Banchory-Devenick catchment area.

Alternative Option 6 - Permanently close Banchory-Devenick School and rezone the catchment area to Lairhillock School progressing to Mackie Academy for secondary provision

This option would support a more coherent P7 to S1 transition for pupils living within the current Banchory-Devenick catchment area, as they would transfer to Mackie Academy alongside the majority of their Lairhillock peers. The available school roll forecast indicates that Mackie Academy has sufficient capacity to accommodate the projected small increase in pupils each year.

Discounted Suggestion - Extending the catchment area

Extending the Banchory-Devenick School catchment area in order to increase the school roll would not align with the principles of the Learning Estate Strategy or the Council's approach to managing the school estate.

The Portlethen Cluster has significant spare capacity, with forecast pupil numbers indicating that existing schools within the cluster can accommodate pupils from the Banchory-Devenick catchment area. Extending the catchment area would therefore create additional school estate capacity rather than making best use of the capacity already available. This would be contrary to the wider objective of ensuring that the school estate is sustainable, efficient and affordable.

In addition, extending the catchment area could affect neighbouring school communities and require further consideration of transport, transition arrangements and secondary school pathways. Given the available capacity within the Portlethen Cluster, this option is not considered to provide a strong operational or strategic justification and has therefore not been taken forward as a preferred option.

Pre Engagement

Pre engagement activity took place during Term 4 of the 2025/26 session, which included a face to face drop in session for the community, and a survey. As one of the options being considered as part of the options appraisal is the permanent closure of Banchory Devenick School; under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternative to closure. The 2010 Act makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against the closure of rural schools. The authority must ensure that any alternatives to closure have been identified and give stakeholders an opportunity to present them for consideration.

28 people (23 of whom indicated they live in the Banchory-Devenick catchment area) completed the online survey and one person attended the drop in session summary.

Participants were asked for their suggestions for any alternatives to the closure of Banchory-Devenick School. They are summarised below.

Change to paragraphs suggestion/response

Alternative to Closure Suggestion	Aberdeenshire Council Response
Assess sustainable energy replacements/Alternative heating option such as electric heaters	The existing electrical infrastructure does not have sufficient capacity to support electric heating or other significant additional electrical demand. Increasing the electrical supply would require works by SSE, and the school's internal electrical system is also at the end of its operational life. As such, an alternative electric heating solution would require substantial enabling works and would not avoid the need for wider investment in the building.
Support local oversubscribed Aberdeen schools such as Kaimhill pupils to move to Banchory-Devenick in order to increase pupil numbers to make the boiler repair a sustainable investment in the school. Funding agreement with ACC for those children to be educated at Banchory Devenick.	Both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council have been reviewing catchment areas to seek to ensure that pupils who live in Aberdeen City are zoned for Aberdeen City schools and Aberdeenshire pupils are zoned for Aberdeenshire schools. Aberdeenshire would not be looking to extend the zoning of Banchory Devenick into the Kaimhill catchment area and it is unlikely that Aberdeen City will pay for pupils they have a responsibility to provide education for to be educated at a school outwith their authority area.

	There have been fewer than 5 placing requests for pupils zoned for Kaimhill to attend Banchory Devenick in the last 5 years. This would not support the proposition put forward.
Fix the boiler problems first and not upgrade everything at first. Review the additional costs and assess if actually necessary.	The condition of the boiler, flue system and underground oil pipework has been assessed collectively, as these components operate as part of a single heating system. Replacing only selected elements would not remove the risk of further significant failures and could result in additional expenditure being incurred at a later date. The recommended approach therefore reflects the most sustainable and cost-effective long-term solution
Invest in the repairs	The Council has undertaken condition surveys across the school estate to identify and prioritise maintenance and improvement requirements. Available budgets do not allow all upgrades to be delivered simultaneously, and investment must therefore be prioritised according to need, risk, and long-term sustainability considerations. Each school is assessed individually to ensure best value from limited resources.
Rezone Banchory-Devenick back to Cults or Mackie to increase the roll. Banchory-Devenick was always Cults the same as Maryculter	Both Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council have been reviewing catchment areas to seek to ensure that pupils who live in Aberdeen City are zoned for Aberdeen City schools and Aberdeenshire pupils are zoned for Aberdeenshire schools. The option to rezone the catchment to Mackie Academy will be explored further.
Keep school open and add a nursery as limited preschool child care in this area.	There is no requirement for additional nursery places in the Portlethen area.
Could change the Blairs development to become Banchory-Devenick catchment.	The Blairs community have already undergone a statutory consultation to rezone the secondary boundary in recent years. There is no evidence through placing requests that Blairs residents wish to attend Banchory-Devenick School.

Participants were also asked for any other suggestions including alternative uses for the building. A summary is provided below:

- A smaller privately funded nature school. Or anything that can be done for the benefit of the community
- If the building can't be a school, suggest it is turned into an outdoor learning centre/community hub
- Community centre with a café. A supervised youth club and classes for adult learning. Place to meet up for the community but would require the same repairs as the school would need.
- Without major maintenance or sustainable green energy solution to make the building useable, there is no alternative but to market it for sale.
- Sell the building/land and reinvest the money in local schools
- Reinstate the school
- Several comments suggesting the building and playing field is used as a community centre for locals.
- Do not allow unnecessary house building. Property is not shifting due to a number of issues already.
- Transform to a business hub
- Use as a nursery-two's group setting

Summary & Conclusion

The low roll at Banchory-Devenick School, particularly the number of pupils residing within its catchment area, is relevant to the objectives of the Learning Estate Strategy – *Movement Towards a Sustainable Estate*, approved by the Education and Children's Services Committee on 1 February 2024. The strategy considers school capacity, pupil numbers and projected demand in supporting a sustainable, efficient and affordable school estate.

The appraisal considered undertaking the required works at Banchory-Devenick School; operating as a school within a school at Fishermoss School; permanent closure and rezoning to a neighbouring primary school; rezoning to Lairhillock School, with or without corresponding secondary rezoning to Mackie Academy; and extending the existing catchment area. Extending the catchment area was not taken forward because it would not make best use of the available capacity within the Portlethen Cluster. Rezoning to Lairhillock School with secondary progression to Mackie Academy could support transition alongside Lairhillock peers but would require further consideration of the implications for secondary catchment arrangements.

The level of investment required at Banchory-Devenick School has been considered alongside the number of in-zone pupils, forecast demand, available capacity within neighbouring schools and competing requirements across the wider school estate. On balance, officers recommend progressing statutory consultation on the permanent closure of Banchory-Devenick School and the rezoning of its catchment area to either Hillside School or Lairhillock School. These were the two highest-ranked options in the appraisal. They were also the two options most frequently preferred by respondents when asked about a future school zone.

As Banchory-Devenick School is a rural school, the statutory consultation process must comply with the requirements applying to rural school closure proposals, including the presumption against closure and the requirement to identify and give due consideration to reasonable alternatives to closure.

It is also recommended that the Kincardine and Mearns Area Community Planning Team be informed of the suggestions received through pre-engagement regarding potential community uses of the building, should the school permanently close.

Learning Estates Team

May – September 2026