Aberdeenshire COUNCIL Education & Children's Services

Proposed Merger of Fintry School & King Edward School
Public Meeting held at Turriff Primary School
4 March 2026, 6.30pm

Attendees
Laurence Findlay, Director of Education & Children's Services
Maxine Booth, Quality Improvement Manager
Rachael Goldring, Learning Estates Team Manager
Audrey Clark, King Edward School Head Teacher
Amanda Roe, Area Manager
Gail Dick, Project Officer, Learning Estates Team

Elected Members
Cllr David Keating, Education & Children's Services Committee Chair
Cllr Anne Stirling
Cllr Iain Taylor
Cllr Alastair Forsyth
Cllr Mark Findlater

HMI Inspector
Alona Murray

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair of the meeting, Councillor Keating introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He also introduced the Aberdeenshire Council Officers; the Elected Members present and laid out the format of the meeting.

Consultation Overview

The Director of Education & Children's Services informed the meeting that the evening forms part of the formal consultation process for the proposal of the merger of Fintry School and King Edward School.

The Council proposes that Fintry School and King Edward School should merge resulting in the closure of one of the schools. The current catchment areas of the school will merge to become one catchment area zoned to the school which is retained. A merger of the two schools will retain a small rural school within the area.

Both schools had declining rolls and since March 2025, officers have been in discussions with staff and parents at both schools regarding the proposed merger.

Whichever option is chosen the current staff at King Edward School will remain either at the school or move to Fintry School.

MB explained that changes to the learning estate including mergers or closures require the Council to carry out a statutory consultation in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

MB also informed the meeting that at the public meeting held in December, it was agreed that this meeting would be held at a neutral location, either Turriff Academy or Turriff Primary.

As part of UNCRC it is important to gain pupil views, therefore we asked the Head Teacher at King Edward School to undertake this with the pupils as they are going to be directly affected by this decision.

Since August, there have been an additional 11 pupils enrolling at the school. Giving an overall roll of 33 pupils.

We have been notified about the defibrillator, and this has been resolved by our property colleagues who identified that the issue was because of a power cut in the bad weather.

Questions from the Floor

The Chair then opened the floor to questions; he requested that members introduce themselves for minute purposes before asking their questions.

Community Member: The Council doesn't have any money and needs to use its resources to the best they can. Fintry School is in one building and can only be a school. King Edward School is situated within three separate buildings. Best value for the Council is to sell King Edward School and use the site for housing.

Parent: We all want what is best for the children, and there is a strong movement for Fintry School to remain. Why was the roll allowed to deteriorate? It must have been noted that that the roll was falling.

LF: Parents have the choice to submit a placing request for any school that they wish. The Learning Estates Team process placing requests both for primary and secondary schools.

Parent: You must have noticed that the roll was falling at Fintry School.

MB: We continually monitor all school rolls throughout Aberdeenshire, tracking patterns and trends. Historically we have always seen a movement of pupils when a school moves to one class of 25 pupils.

Chair: We can only act if parents provide a reason to why they wish to move schools, many placing requests are submitted with no reason being given.

Parent: I feel we are losing sight of what is important for the pupils. King Edward is a great school the option appraisal scores were similar. What would be the benefit of moving pupils to another schools. I cannot see the education or social benefit of moving the children. I feel that the merger has already happened due to Fintry School being mothballed. It would be a huge upheaval and disruptive for pupils and staff, not to mention the financial aspect of the move.

Community Member: I feel Fintry School being mothballed is a great opportunity to upgrade the building which will be fit for purpose for the next 20 years. Not moving children into a temporary building at King Edward School.

Community Member: King Edward School costs more for heating and lighting, Fintry School is under one roof, and has one door providing safety and security for the pupils. It also has fantastic playground facilities. King Edward School has an extra classroom but requires an additional toilet for the capacity to expand.

AC: Space could be reconfigured within King Edward School to provide space for an additional toilet.

Chair: I would encourage members of the meeting to think of each building as it is now, possibly with some slight amendment.

Community Member: The portacabin provides additional space, which is a bonus.

Community Member: What about a visit to Fintry School.

MB: A visit to the school was offered in the launch letter, to date we have not received requests to visit Fintry School.

Parent: I agree with the comments, the children's education is important, at least half of the children on the roll at King Edward School will be at the Academy by the time the consultation is concluded. Future children will benefit from a more sustainable building and is a more sensible approach. What is more beneficial to you the views of children aged between 5-10 or the views of your officers that create reports? King Edward School is an aging building.

LF: We gather all data, including condition reports, suitability reports, survey results, comments from parents and the community as well as HMIE Inspectors before a recommendation is made to Councillors. We want long term sustainability in our schools, especially within rural areas.

Parent: What is the cost of moving children to Fintry School?

Max: We don't have a cost of moving the children, or the transition visit costs. It shouldn't be a barrier. It is important to invest time for children to move and ensure all the equipment in the school is in working order. Equipment would also need to be moved with the pupils.

Parent: Staff at King Edward School have lots of experience, there are more children with additional support needs, and I feel there is a lack of these spaces at Fintry School.

Parent: What is the opinion of the staff at King Edward School?

AC: Staff have had the opportunity to take part in the survey to share their views.

Parent: I have children who were previously at Fintry School, one misses walking to school and is sometimes overwhelmed with the noise on the bus.

Community Member: I agree it is an upheaval to move children to another school, however, children are resilient, we should not be using the move as a reason to retain King Edward. Do you think pupil numbers will grow in the future?

LF: The number of primary school pupils are set to decline, there will potentially be up to a 16% decrease by 2046. The birth rate is also declining within Aberdeenshire. There is currently a peak in secondary schools, then pupil numbers are set to decline. We do value rural education but have to work to make rural schools more viable.

Parent: Has it been considered if Fintry School is retained, will all the pupils want to move? If they don't and pupil numbers decline will both schools end up closed in future years.

Parent: Will parents of upcoming children be asked I am not sure if I received the information?

MB: All households within both the Fintry and King Edward School catchments were sent details of the proposal. We also included early years providers, community councils, as well as staff and parents of children enrolled at Fintry School before the mothballing. The information regarding the proposal has also been shared widely on social media.

Parent: There are children enrolled at King Edward School that reside within the Banff and Macduff areas, they might not want to move to Fintry, moving location could prevent the roll from growing. King Edward School is a feeder for both Banff Academy and Turriff Academy which is attractive to parents.

Parent: I have only visited King Edward School, it is a beautiful school, with wall displays of the children's work. The school was welcoming with a warm and nurturing environment.

Parent: The pupils from Fintry have settled in well at King Edward School it could be unsettling for children to move again. Why was Fintry School mothballed?

LF: The school roll had dropped to eight pupils, and for the children's educational benefit and social wellbeing, the decision was made to temporarily close Fintry School. However, it is not considered best practice to keep a school mothballed for more than two years.

RG: We have been in discussion with parents for some time regarding the proposed merger of the schools, our intention was to keep both schools operational until a final decision was made. However, due to the declining roll at Fintry School, the decision was taken to mothball the school."

Parent: I want to open this question to the floor – What is the benefit for our children to now move to Fintry School.

Community Member: I no longer have primary aged children, however, I asked them their best experiences at Fintry School, they intimated; families attending Christmas concerts; monthly community café's for a range of children up from pre-school age.

Parent: I want the King Edward Team in Fintry School, is that the right reason to move back. Will all the staff want to move?

Parent: My children said they would move back to Fintry School if it reopened.

Parent: Everyone has a different opinion of which building should be kept.

Parent: The Council's policy is that children should not travel for more than 45 minutes on school transport, the current transport contract is 40 minutes to King Edward. It would exceed 45 minutes if Fintry School was to reopen. Would an additional contract be required. King Edward School is central to the combined catchment whereas Fintry School is on the periphery.

Community Member: Fintry School was closed by default, an issue was not addressed which led to the mothballing.

Parent: How will the survey be analysed, individuals out with our community can participate and individuals can make multiple submissions, we are relying on people being honest.

MB: As the survey is publicly accessible, it is possible for individuals outside the immediate community to participate, and multiple submissions from the same person. We will report the number of households within each catchment alongside the number of survey responses received. While we rely on participants to engage honestly and in good faith, the analysis will clearly acknowledge these limitations to ensure transparency and accuracy in reporting.

Parent: Fintry School is the only community asset in Fintry, King Edward has the hall which is well used, the Fintry community could lose the school.

Parent: Prior to COVID the hall at Fintry was used regularly, 5-6 nights per week, it is not now being used due to the increased prices and the procedure for hiring the hall. The larger hall and facilities at Fintry School would benefit the children.

Parent: Both schools carried out fundraising activities in Turriff, the prospect of raising more money is greater due to the increased footfall.

Parent: What can be done to address LETS to give the public access to facilities.

LF: We cannot give the public access to all schools in the evenings, we focus on having hubs within each cluster. Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal procedure which must be followed when buildings become surplus to requirements. If a decision is made to permanently close either school, there would be no requirement for the building to continue as a school. The Service would intend to declare the building surplus to requirement and other council services will be approached to express an interest in the site. This would be assessed through the Asset Disposal procedure. Thereafter any surplus council sites can be subject to an Asset Transfer Application.

Community Member: Would it be possible to arrange site visits to both schools on the same day.

MB: Yes, this will be arranged for Wednesday 11 March 2026, the times and information will be circulated to parents.

Chair King Edward Community Hall: We have a good rapport with King Edward School, with the hall regularly used for events and for storing school equipment. The school and the hall operate very much as a shared community space. I have attended

many events in the school hall, and it has always been sufficient in size for the activities taking place.

Community Member: Fintry School is under one roof and the children get to practice on the stage. Pupil numbers were high in previous years.

Community Members: As a Councillor you receive reports in which you make your decisions, could they attend a site visit to the schools?

Cllr Stirling suggested that a drone film could be presented at the relevant Committee meetings.

Parent: Can we hear the opinions of staff working in the building, their opinions are valid.

Parent: Fintry School has no staff is that fair.

Next Steps

The Chair then informed the meeting that the proposal regarding the merger of Fintry School and King Edward School is subject to consultation between 16 February 2026 and 27 March 2026. This covers the required period of 30 days of term time consultation.

Any comments on the proposal must be submitted by 4pm on Friday 27 March 2026. Comments can be submitted by email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or in writing to Learning Estates, Education & Children's Services, Aberdeenshire Council, Unit 15, Harlaw Way, Inverurie AB51 4SG.

He encouraged participation in the online survey. The link and QR code to the questionnaire is displayed on the table at the back of the room and on the Education Consultation page on the Aberdeenshire Council website.

Once the consultation period is over, all written submissions, minutes of this meeting and pupil discussions will be provided to HMIE for their consideration. They will produce a report on the consultation. A final report on the consultation will be presented for comment at Banff and Buchan and Formartine Area Committees in June 2026. Education & Children's Services in August 2026 for a recommendation.

Finally, the report will be presented to Full Council in September for a decision. Following the meeting the Council will enter an eight-week call-in period when members of the public can ask Scottish Ministers to call in the decision. If the decision is not called in the Council will be able to proceed with the project. If the proposal is called in the School Closure Review Panel will consider the proposal. This may take up to 16 weeks. If the panel grants consent to the proposal, the Council will then commence the implementation process.

Closure of Meeting

Cllr Keating thanked all present for attending and closed the meeting.