



EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**CONSULTATION REPORT REGARDING
THE CLOSURE OF KINNEFF SCHOOL**

2026

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

**If you have difficulty reading this document please contact
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been prepared following a consultation on the proposal to discontinue education at Kinneff School, which is currently mothballed (temporary closure) and re-assign its catchment area to either Bervie School or Catterline School.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 on the above proposal. The objective of this report is to:
- Provide a record of the total number and a summary of written and oral responses received during the statutory consultation period;
 - Provide a statement of the Council's response to those written and oral representations;
 - Provide the full text of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) report and a statement of the Council's response to this report;
 - Provide a statement on how the Council reviewed the above proposal following the representations received during the statutory consultation period and the report from HMIE;
 - Provide details of any omission from, or inaccuracy in, the proposal document and state how the Council acted on it;
 - State how the Council has complied with Section 9(1) and 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 when reviewing the above proposal;
 - Provide Officers' conclusions and recommendation.

2 The Consultation Process

- 2.1 The requirement for consulting on a relevant proposal relating to schools is set out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 2.2 At its meeting on [09 October 2025](#), Education and Children's Services Committee authorised the launch of a statutory consultation regarding the permanent closure of Kinneff School.
- 2.3 The proposal document made clear to consultees that the consultation period would run from 12 January 2026 until 6 March 2026 and all responses must be submitted within that time. This adequately covered the required minimum of 30 days term time consultation.
- 2.4 On 12 January copies of the proposal document were distributed to:
- Residents living within the Kinneff School catchment area
 - Parent Council of Bervie and Catterline Schools and Former Parent Council of Kinneff School
 - Parents/Carers, pupils and staff at Bervie School and Nursery and Catterline School
 - Trade Union representatives of the above staff
 - Local Early Years providers in the Stonehaven cluster
 - Local Community Council's

- Local Elected Members
 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE)
 - Regular users of Bervie and Catterline School and Kinneff Village Hall contacts
- 2.5 The proposal document and all associated appendices was published on the Council website:
<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/>.
- 2.6 All correspondence detailed the Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estates Team email address and telephone number for anyone who required a copy of the documents and survey.
- 2.7 Relevant information was published on the Engage Aberdeenshire project page: <https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/kinneff-school>. Communication regarding the consultation and public meetings was published on the Aberdeenshire Council's Social Media pages during the consultation period.
- 2.8 A cover letter with information on the consultation proposal was posted to all residents in the Kinneff School catchment area with a link to the consultation page and information on how to receive a paper copy of the proposal document. All other consultees were emailed with the information on the consultation.
- 2.9 Bervie and Catterline Schools were provided with spare copies of the proposal, along with maps and a launch poster which contained information regarding the public meeting and how to complete the online survey.
- 2.10 Inverbervie Library, Stonehaven Library and Woodhill House were provided with spare copies of the proposal and the poster to be displayed at their establishments during the consultation period for any interested members of the public.
- 2.11 Local Early Years Partner Providers were emailed a cover letter and a copy of the proposal to be distributed to their parents/carers and a poster to be displayed at their settings during the consultation period.
- 2.12 An online survey through the Engage HQ Aberdeenshire platform was available throughout the consultation period.
- 2.13 There were two public meetings made available during the consultation period. The original face to face meeting was changed to online only due to the weather warnings and road conditions on the day. The public online meeting was held on 4 February at 6.30 via Microsoft Teams and the face to face meeting was held on 3 March at 6pm at Kinneff & Catterline Village Hall.
- 2.14 All consultees were informed of the change in meeting circumstances. Two separate publications were advertised in the Mearns Leader newspaper on 30 January and 27 February with details on the consultation and each public meeting. The public meetings were also advertised on Aberdeenshire Council

social media. The Education Consultation webpage and Engage HQ was updated regularly regarding the changes to the public meeting.

- 2.15 The consultees were given the option to submit their comments on the proposal via email to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or posted to: Learning Estates Team, Unit 15, Harlaw Way, Inverurie, AB51 4SG.
- 2.16 HMIE received a copy of the proposal document and attended both public meetings. At the end of the consultation period, HM Inspectors were sent all written representations received by the Council. HM Inspectors then visited the sites of Bervie, Catterline and Kinneff Schools to discuss with relevant colleagues. An online meeting was also held with the Head Teacher of Mackie Academy. HMIE prepared a report on the educational aspects of the proposal. This aspect is covered in more detail under Section 8 of this report.
- 2.17 In line with the statutory requirement, this consultation report will be published on the Aberdeenshire Council's website on 02 June 2026 prior to the Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee and more than three weeks prior to the Council taking the decision on whether to implement the proposal. <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/>

3 The Proposal

3.1 The schools affected by this proposal are:

- Kinneff School
- Bervie School
- Catterline School

3.2 The proposal on which the consultation took place was:

To discontinue education at Kinneff School, which is currently mothballed, and re-assign its catchment area to Bervie School or Catterline School.

- 3.3 The proposal document made clear that the proposed changes, if approved, would take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.
- 3.4 All existing primary age pupils living within the Kinneff School catchment would continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. Any siblings of those current pupils would be able to join their brother/sister(s) at the same school.
- 3.5 The proposal document confirmed that all pupils within the Kinneff School catchment area would be entitled to school transport should they choose to attend the newly assigned school.
- 3.6 If Kinneff School was to be permanently closed, then there would be no

requirement for the building to continue as a school. Education and Children's Services would declare the building surplus to requirement.

- 3.7 The options appraisal process has identified a number of alternative uses for the school and Aberdeenshire Council would be happy to work with the local community to see whether the school building could be suitable for community use. This would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal Procedure and subject to an Asset Transfer Application.
- 3.8 There will not be any staffing implications relating to the proposal if implemented. The school has been mothballed since August 2024 and all staff were redeployed.

4 Educational Benefits Statement

- 4.1 The proposal document included an educational benefits statement, which is provided at Appendix 1. A summary of the educational benefits is provided below.
- 4.2 The statement highlights that pupils from the Kinneff School catchment area currently benefit from positive educational, social and developmental experiences at neighbouring schools, which contrast with those that would be available should Kinneff School reopen with a roll of fewer than eight pupils.
- 4.3 A very small and multi-composite school roll would present significant challenges in delivering high-quality learning and in supporting pupils to develop the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence. Limited peer interaction, potential isolation, reduced class dynamics, lack of diversity and constraints on group learning would be likely to have a negative impact on pupils' educational and social development.
- 4.4 Schools with larger and more sustainable rolls offer enhanced opportunities for collaborative learning, peer interaction and participation in a wide range of curricular, extracurricular and leadership activities. Pupils at Bervie and Catterline Schools benefit from group work, cooperative learning, wider friendship groups and engagement in cultural, sporting and community-based activities. These opportunities support the development of skills for learning, life and work, build confidence and leadership, and better prepare pupils for transition to a large secondary school environment.
- 4.5 Feedback gathered from pupils following the transition from Kinneff to Catterline School indicates a positive experience, with pupils highlighting increased friendship opportunities, supportive staff, enhanced social interaction and improved preparation for secondary education.

5 Public Engagement

5.1 Online Public Meeting

All parents/carers, community members and stakeholders were invited to the public meetings to discuss the proposal.

On 4 February, due to continued weather warnings and road conditions the scheduled face to face public meeting for that day was changed to online only. It was made clear that the same information would be shared at both the online meeting and the rescheduled face to face meeting.

The meeting was attended by council officers, the Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee, Elected Members and an HMIE representative. There were three members of the public who chose to attend.

The main discussion was regarding the ranking of options of Kinneff catchment area merging with Bervie and Catterline Schools and the community council's feedback of keeping Kinneff and Catterline communities together. All attendees were informed of the new face to face meeting date of 3 March. Minutes of the meeting are attached as Appendix 2.

5.2 Face to face Public Meeting

A replacement face to face public meeting was held on 3 March 2026, 6pm at Kinneff & Catterline Village Hall.

It was attended by council officers, the Chair of Education and Children's Services Committee, Elected Members and an HMIE representative. There were two members of the public who chose to attend.

Discussions included the two options, school transport implications and the timeline for outcome. Minutes of the meeting have been provided as Appendix 3.

Both the online and in-person meetings had Kinneff, Catterline and Dunnottar Community Council representatives attending and showing their views of preference of keeping Catterline and Kinneff together to align with the community council area.

5.3 Online Survey

During the consultation period all consultees were invited to take part in the online survey to express their views and opinions on the proposal.

The survey provided a summary of the proposal and the identified options. Participants were also given the opportunity to leave comments regarding the proposal.

Of the 18 participants who chose to complete the survey, the majority, 7 (39%) participants reside within the Kinneff School catchment area. There were also 6 (33%) participants who reside within the Bervie School catchment area and there were three (17%) which reside within the Catterline School catchment area. The remaining participants stated either do not know or are within another

cluster of schools. Participants identified themselves as parents/carers, community members and staff members.

The survey showed that the majority, 10 (55%) participants support the closure of Kinneff School and when asked which school catchment area they preferred, the majority, 13 (72%) participants chose to merge with Catterline School.

Comments showed a stronger preference for Catterline over Bervie, citing the close historical and current links between the two communities and the greater distance to Bervie School.

Feedback from Kinneff residents indicated that, although the closure of Kinneff School is a sad moment for the community, there is recognition of the positive benefits for pupils, sustainability and the local economy.

The full overview of online survey responses has been provided in Appendix 4. Some of which have been redacted where necessary to prevent the identification of any individuals.

5.4 Discussion with Pupils

As part of the consultation process, the Head Teacher at Bervie School and Catterline School discussed the proposal with pupils regarding the closure of Kinneff School and re-assigning its catchment to either Bervie School or Catterline School.

Pupils at Bervie School took part in the consultation in one large group answering the questionnaire. Full details of Bervie School pupils feedback have been provided at Appendix 5.

The majority of Bervie pupils, 94 (69%) feel if Kinneff School is closed, the catchment area should be rezoned to Bervie School. There were 42 (31%) Bervie pupils who felt the catchment area should be zoned to Catterline School. The pupils who preferred Bervie School was due to it being larger, offering more opportunities to make friends and eases transition to Mackie Academy. In contrast, pupils who preferred Catterline believe it is closer, provides familiarity for Kinneff children and adding pupils would enhance Catterline School's viability.

Pupils at Catterline School took part in the consultation in groups of lower stages (P1 to P4) and upper stages (P5 to P7). The lower stages answered questions in small year groups and the upper stages answered in individual questionnaires. As Catterline School pupil consultation was handwritten, a summary of the feedback is provided in Appendix 6.

The vast majority of pupils, 46 (95%) at Catterline School feel that if Kinneff School closed permanently, the catchment area should be rezoned to Catterline School. Key reasons include Catterline's proximity to Kinneff, environmental and cost benefits, opportunity to do bikeability, and existing integration of Kinneff pupils. Pupils voiced that they would miss Kinneff students, feel they

are part of the community, and can't imagine school without them.

Pupils at both schools welcomed children from Kinneff and expressed their empathy towards them. Some pupils also gave reasons why the school should stay open in regard to travel, transition to academy, cost implications and alternative uses of the building.

5.5 Staff Engagement

As Kinneff School has been mothballed since August 2024, all staff previously based at Kinneff School have been deployed. Staff within Bervie School and Catterline School have been given the opportunity to discuss the proposal and respond to the consultation.

Fewer than five staff members took part in the online survey. All participating staff members support the closure of Kinneff School and prefer the option 2 to merge with Catterline School.

6 Written Responses

6.1 During the consultation period between 12 January and 6 March 2026 representations were invited from statutory consultees and interested parties.

6.2 Responses were given through the online survey and public meetings and have been listed in Section 7 below. No additional written responses to the consultation were received.

7 Education Authority Response to Written and Oral Representations

7.1 Comments received during the consultation period have been carefully considered and the Council response is provided below. All responses to the consultation can be viewed in the online survey overview or minutes of the public meetings.

7.2 Many respondents expressed interest in future uses of the Kinneff School building. However, it was made clear in the proposal document and public meetings that alternative uses cannot be considered until the school is formally closed through the statutory process, after which the building would be declared surplus and considered in line with the Council's Asset Disposal and Asset Transfer procedures

7.3 Comments were received through the public meetings, online survey and pupil consultation regarding concerns about equity in the Kinneff community regarding school transport. This issue was raised particularly in relation to pupils who moved prior to the mothballing of Kinneff School and are not entitled to transport. Clarification on transport arrangements for each option were provided to Community Council representatives during the consultation and is repeated here for reference.

If Bervie School is selected as the designated school for the Kinneff School catchment area, all pupils residing within that catchment who choose to enrol at Bervie School will be entitled to school transport, provided they live more than two miles from the school. Pupils who were enrolled at Kinneff School at the time of its mothballing—along with their siblings—who subsequently opted to attend Catterline School will continue to receive transport to Catterline. However, pupils who left Kinneff School prior to the mothballing will remain ineligible for transport unless they attend Bervie School.

If Catterline School is selected as the designated school for the Kinneff School catchment area, all pupils residing within the catchment who enrol, or are already enrolled, at Catterline School will be entitled to school transport provided they live more than two miles from the school.

- 7.4 One respondent made comment that for the small numbers affected, families should have the opportunity to choose the best educational option for them. Creating a dual zone would be against the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy, which states that no dual catchment areas will be created due to additional transport costs and vehicles. There would also be an increase in vehicle emissions and difficulties in the planning of school places and staffing.
- 7.5 Survey comments showed mixed views, with some supporting closure on economic grounds and others expressing concerns about the impact on rural communities, young families, and the loss of small schools. Aberdeenshire Council value rural education and it is important that we retain rural education in small schools, however we cannot sustain all buildings, particularly when considering the decline in primary age pupils within Aberdeenshire. Ensuring the educational and social benefits of all children in Aberdeenshire schools are a key priority.
- 7.6 Respondents also suggested that equipment and resources could be made available for community use. If the permanent closure of Kinneff School goes ahead, as part of the decommissioning process, resources, equipment and furniture within the building will be offered for relocation and reuse. Firstly, these items will be offered to schools, but local community groups will be given the opportunity to claim any items left remaining.
- 7.7 There were a small number of comments which gave feedback on other council services and not pertinent to the Statutory Consultation to close Kinneff School therefore have not been included.
- 7.8 Some comments suggested the building could be a facility for pupils who have additional support needs. If the permanent closure of Kinneff School goes ahead, as part of the intention to declare surplus as a primary school, other uses of the building will be considered by other teams within Education & Children's Services and by other services across the council.
- 7.9 Aberdeenshire Council welcomed the comments from participants of online survey and pupil consultation which expressed the Kinneff School pupils' positive transition and contentment with enrolling in Catterline School and the

welcoming comments from both schools. There were also comments supportive of the closure which stated that though it is sad to see the closing of a school, it increases the utilisation and sustainability of other surrounding schools.

- 7.10 There was also a number of comments received through the online survey regarding the close relationship between both Catterline and Kinneff communities both historical when the school was open and the strengthening of this relationship. Aberdeenshire Council acknowledges and welcomes this feedback.

8 HMIE Report

- 8.1 In line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was produced by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) on the educational aspects of the proposal.

- 8.2 HM Inspectors attended both public meetings regarding the Council's proposal.

- 8.3 HM Inspectors undertook visits to Catterline, Bervie and Kinneff Schools and met with relevant stakeholders. An online meeting was also held with the Head Teacher of Mackie Academy.

- 8.4 The HMIE report is reproduced in full as Appendix 7.

- 8.5 The HMIE report is summarised below:

- HM Inspectors agree with aspects of the educational benefits within the proposal and that attending either Bervie or Catterline School has potential to support transition to secondary school and additional opportunities for social development. They acknowledged that it is clear that children are settled in Catterline School and enjoy working alongside peers their own age.
- HM Inspectors agree that the long-term viability of Kinneff School is unlikely to be sustainable given that no local families have indicated an interest in their children being educated in Kinneff School.
- Inspectors state the proposal to re-align the catchment to Catterline School best reflects the wishes of parents who have already chosen this option and the stakeholders who met with HMIE officials. This was due to Bervie School being a much larger school, and Catterline School being a rural school with strong community links with Kinneff. Almost all stakeholders at Bervie School support the closure of Kinneff School and recognise that parents from Kinneff may prefer a smaller school however it was noted that Bervie does provide after school care which may appeal to parents.
- HM Inspectors acknowledged the councils engagement surveys and option appraisal process when assessing the alternatives to closure of Kinneff School. Following the feedback from stakeholders, the inspectors agree that the only viable option is the permanent closure of Kinneff School and realigning it's catchment and noted the efforts made to seek views on this.
- It was advised from HM Inspectors to engage with stakeholders to seek further views and options on the future of the building following the final decision on

the statutory consultation.

- It was concluded that HMIE support the council's proposal to permanently close Kinneff School. Parents and staff are also positive about the potential educational benefits of the current and future arrangements. HM Inspectors support the proposal to re-align the catchment to Catterline School rather than Bervie School.

8.6 The Council welcomes the HMIE report and accepts its findings. In response to the findings contained within the report, Aberdeenshire Council's response is as follows:

- The Council values small rural schools which have been proposed as an option in the proposal. However, Kinneff School with eight or fewer pupils is considered to negatively affect pupils' educational and social development and wellbeing.
- The Council acknowledges the community's suggestions about the future of the school building. Should the proposal be approved, any alternative use of the building would have to be fully assessed following the Asset Disposal procedure and subject to an Asset Transfer Application. The council will work with stakeholders and groups to consider the future use of the site and re-purposing of equipment and resources within the school building.
- The Council understands the importance of continuity of education. The council will continue specific school transport arrangements for families affected by the mothballing for the duration of their primary education.

9 Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies

9.1 Section (10)(3) of The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracies or omissions within the proposal document which has either been raised by the consultees or identified by the Council itself. The Council must also 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 explain why.

9.2 On 4 February, due to continued weather warnings and road conditions the scheduled face to face public meeting for that day was changed to online only. All relevant stakeholders were informed of the decision and sent a link to the Microsoft Teams meeting at the earliest opportunity and asked to communicate this to others. It was also publicised through Aberdeenshire Council's social media, Aberdeenshire Education Consultation webpage and Engage HQ. It was made clear that the same information would be shared at both the online meeting and the rescheduled face to face meeting.

9.3 Officers are required to publish their response to representations made during the consultation period within its final Consultation Report.

9.4 There were no areas of identified inaccuracies or omitted information within the

proposal document during the consultation period.

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

- 10.1 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:
- (a) written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the consultation period,
 - (b) oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting,
 - (c) HMIE's report.
- 10.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by Officers and all the questions and comments raised were considered in detail. Data and factual information were checked where required and advice and input were sought from other Council Services where needed to consider the issues raised. This ensured that the Council met the requirements to review the proposal under Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act.
- 10.3 Officers of the Education Authority have considered equally and carefully all written representations.
- 10.4 The Education Authority's position is set out in Section 8 of this document.
- 10.5 The proposal was reviewed to consider whether any of the representations led the Council to reconsider other options as being reasonable alternatives to the proposal to close Kinneff School and rezone to Bervie School or Catterline School. None of the representations led Officers to conclude that any of these options should be reconsidered as reasonable alternatives.
- 10.6 The educational benefits were reviewed in respect of the HMIE report and representations made. There were no factors included in the report or representations made requiring any aspect of the educational benefits to be reconsidered.
- 10.7 Having reviewed the feedback from consultees, Officers conclude that the basis of the original proposal remained the best solution to provide appropriate and effective education provision for children residing in the Kinneff School catchment area.

11 Compliance with Sections 11A to 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 11.1 Kinneff School is an 'accessible rural school', and the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires the Authority to have special regard to the following factors:
- (a) the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal,

- (b) the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal.
- 11.2 As Kinneff School is a rural school, special regard was paid to the rural school factors. These were considered fully in the Options Appraisal stage and set out in the Proposal Document. Prior to launching the statutory element of the consultation, opportunities were provided to all members of the community to either suggest ways to make the school viable again or alternative uses for the building that would benefit the community.
- 11.3 The loss of the school, use of the building, impact on the community and likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements as well as its environmental impact have been set out in the Options Appraisal and proposal documents.
- 11.4 As part of the consultation, a Place and Wellbeing assessment was undertaken in December 2025 and involved discussion with stakeholders in the Kinneff community and various partners in Aberdeenshire Council. The assessment provides a structured basis for planning, partnership working and continued engagement. The report and all recommendations can be viewed in full as Appendix 1C.
- 11.5 The Place and Wellbeing assessment identified that the closure of Kinneff school represents a significant change for a small rural community where local institutions play an important role in fostering belonging. There are several recommendations within the report which are intended to support more inclusive, equitable and resilient outcomes for the Kinneff community. These apply to other services across Aberdeenshire Council, partner organisations and community groups.
- 11.6 The Council recognise that schools are more than buildings, they are part of the community identity. However, the primary purpose of a school is to educate children. Where inequalities, arise from changes in provision, these should be mitigated through other services and community-led initiatives, as recommended by the Place and Wellbeing Assessment.
- 11.7 Aberdeenshire Council's statutory duty is to ensure that education provision serves children effectively and sustainably. As defined by the Scottish Government, a school is an institution that provides structured education to enrolled pupils under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. A school cannot exist without children attending it, and pupil number are the fundamental measure of viability.
- 11.8 The Council has further reviewed the proposal and the review considered whether our assessment of the rural school factors to be appropriate considering representations received. The Council's updated assessment is detailed further below.
- 11.9 Likely effect on the local community

Kinneff School has been mothballed since August 2024 due to its low roll. There

has been no in zone families which showed interest in attending the school since the mothballing. It is recognised that the schools temporary closure has altered familiar patterns of gathering, participation and local identity within the Kinneff community however there are opportunities for the intergenerational community events and activities in both Bervie and Catterline Schools. If the proposal is approved and the catchment area is reassigned to either Bervie or Catterline School it will be important for the community of Kinneff to be included in future school events.

It was highlighted in that the school not being present within Kinneff will impact families daily experience due to limited childcare options and reliance on car travel. Kinneff School is within a rural area, half a mile from the hamlet of Roadside of Kinneff with a few houses surrounding the school. Kinneff School did not operate before and after school care. If the permanent closure of Kinneff School is approved then all pupils within the Kinneff School catchment area would be entitled to school transport, provided they attend the newly assigned school.

The hamlet of Roadside of Kinneff is on a regular bus route from Montrose and Stonehaven. Although this is a positive amenity which supports the challenge of residing within a rural area, it was noted that the bus times and reliability is a concern. However, residents travel to Inverbervie or Stonehaven for everyday local amenities and services and it appears that this is an accepted part of life within the community.

Prior to the Statutory Consultation, within the Option Appraisal process, there were many suggestions from members of the community for alternative uses of the Kinneff School building, with the majority suggesting that it is used as a replacement of the village hall. However, there were no further expressions regarding this during the consultation period. Officers within the Council will continue to engage with the local community following the Statutory Consultation process to look further into these options.

There were comments within the online survey regarding repurposing the furniture and equipment at Kinneff School. If the proposal is approved to close Kinneff School, the decommissioning process will ensure there are opportunities for the community to repurpose furniture and equipment, where possible.

11.10 Use of the building after permanent closure

The Kinneff School building was used rarely by the community with one group using the building once a week for a period of six months in the year prior to the school being mothballed. This indicated that the community does not rely on this building as a public resource and the community arrangements would remain largely unchanged if the school was to close permanently.

Kinneff have an active hall committee and the village hall which is located at the Roadside of Kinneff. This serves as a focal point for community functions and is used for booking events such as burns supper, children's parties, and is also

a polling station within the area.

During the pre-engagement and Option Appraisal process prior to the statutory consultation, community members were given the opportunity to give alternatives to closure. There were many suggestions received with a continued interest in the building being used as the village hall. All suggestions can be viewed within the Option Appraisal report at Appendix 1A.

11.11 Likely effect on travelling arrangements

Aberdeenshire Council provides home-to-school transport for around 12,000 pupils each day. Pupils from Kinneff catchment areas are already being transported to Catterline School as part of the existing arrangements.

Stakeholders have regularly queried the Council's position with school transport for pupils residing within the Kinneff School catchment area. There are many pupils within the catchment area who attend another school through a placing request prior to the mothballing and are not entitled to school transport however if there was excess availability on an entitled school transport vehicle then pupils are able to apply for a privileged pass.

Community members at the public meeting asked questions on school transport in regard to each option of the proposal. The school transport information was emailed to a community council representative and can be seen at section 7.3.

The travel distance and journey times between Kinneff and either Bervie or Catterline Schools are not considered unreasonable. Many pupils across Aberdeenshire travel similar or greater distances due to the rural geography of the area.

More information on the school transport can be found in section 12 of the proposal document.

The permanent closure of Kinneff School will give clarity for the families within the local area and certainty on school transport which has been a concerned topic from the period of mothballing of Kinneff School.

11.12 Environmental impact

During the consultation period, there were some comments made regarding environmental impact. It was recognised from a participant of the survey that as Kinneff has no enrolments, economically it should close. There were also comments suggesting the reuse of resources within the Kinneff School building to reduce waste.

Comments were received in regard to the environmental impact associated with travel arrangements. Some pupils of Catterline School preferred Catterline School over Bervie School due to its closer distance which would reduce travel and carbon emission impacting the planet. The opportunity for bikeability was also mentioned in the pupil engagement, with pupils expressing their preference

of Catterline School so they can cycle there for bikeability sessions.

The environmental impact associated with travel arrangements for Kinneff pupils are minimal. It is recognised that there will be an increase of carbon emissions with more school transport from the Kinneff School catchment area however there would be a reduction of individual journeys made by parent/carers. This is because all children within the Kinneff School catchment area would be entitled to school transport if they choose to attend the newly reassigned school. If Catterline School is chosen as the newly designated school, this would support the trends of the majority of Kinneff pupils already attending Catterline and would reduce the carbon emissions. This will result in a more efficient travel pattern for the catchment, with a reduced environmental footprint.

Any additional emissions from school transport will also be offset by the closure of an outdated and under-utilised school building which would require heating, maintenance and services for operating, despite low pupil numbers. Further information on this can be found in detail in section 14 of the proposal document.

12 Representations to Scottish Ministers in terms of Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

- 12.1 If the Authority makes a final decision to implement the proposal, it will be required to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision and provide them with a copy of the proposal document and consultation report. This must be done within six working days of that decision. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal.
- 12.2 Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal.
- 12.3 If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, they must refer the proposal to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels who may refuse to consent to the proposal or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally.
- 12.4 It should be noted that the legislation allows for any person to make representations to Scottish Ministers within three weeks of the Council taking their final decision to implement a closure proposal.
- 12.5 Aberdeenshire Council will make the decision on whether or not to implement this closure proposal at its meeting on **24 September 2026**. If the decision is taken to implement the proposal to close Kinneff School, any representations to Scottish Ministers must be submitted by **14 October 2026**.

- 12.6 Anyone wishing to make representation to Scottish Ministers during the three-week period referred to above should do so by email to schoolclosure@gov.scot or in writing to: The Scottish Government, School Infrastructure Unit, 2A (South) Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ

13 Conclusions

- 13.1 In review of the oral and written submissions to the formal consultation and survey results, it is clear that there is support for the closure of Kinneff School with preference over merging with Catterline School opposed to Bervie School.
- 13.2 Officers have carefully considered the opportunities, issues and challenges identified by stakeholders during both the informal engagement and formal consultation processes.
- 13.3 The Council now has four options, namely:
- (a) Adopt the proposal; or
 - (b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt; or
 - (c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal; or
 - (d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.
- 13.4 Each option is discussed below.
- (a) Adopt the proposal
- 13.5 If the Council chooses to adopt the proposal and close Kinneff School on a permanent basis then one of the two options for merging the Kinneff School outlined in the proposal document would also need to be chosen.
- 13.6 The majority of feedback from the consultation was through the online survey. There were 10 (55%) respondents to the survey who support the closure of Kinneff School. Almost all stakeholders who spoke with HMIE agree with the proposal to permanently close Kinneff School.
- 13.7 The most popular option amongst respondents was Option 2, to close Kinneff School and merge with Catterline School. This option is supported by 13 (72%) respondents, out of all 18 responses to the survey. The support for merging with Catterline School also came through the public meetings from the local Community Council. HMIE Inspectors also stated the realignment of Kinneff School catchment area with Catterline School best reflects the parents who have already chosen this option and the stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors.
- 13.8 Many people feel that the two communities of Kinneff and Catterline are already connected, with previous collaborations between the schools and the two rural communities currently working together in various groups. It also aligns with the Community Council area and some respondents commented on preference on rural communities choosing small rural schools. Evidence shows that the

majority (78%) of pupils residing within Kinneff School catchment area already attend Catterline School.

13.9 If the Council adopts the proposal, it would be on the basis that the educational benefits set out in the proposal document would materialise and a period of uncertainty for the community would come to an end. Children will have access to greater learning opportunities and experiences and increased socialisation through being part of a larger school roll. Opportunities to participate in peer support, classroom learning, learning groups across stages and between classes and opportunities to engage at lunchtime, after school and team events will be increased. The projected numbers of children within the Kinneff catchment area are insufficient to make the school viable. Significant factors in this are parental placing requests to other schools and the declining population in rural areas. Bervie School and Catterline School have the capacity to accommodate additional children. The proposal will assist the Council in delivering “Sustainable Learning Estate” by maximising its occupancy and ‘Best Value’ by making more efficient and effective use of its resources.

13.10 In summary, the key points that have been highlighted during the consultation period are as follows:

- The report from HMIE support the Council’s proposal to permanently close Kinneff School and agree that there are educational benefits for pupils as outlined in the proposal. It was noted children who were transferred to Catterline School have settled well and enjoy learning alongside their peers their own age.
- The Council, having had special regard to the rural school factors, does not consider that the proposal will adversely affect the sustainability of the community. It was highlighted throughout the consultation from Community members, staff members and parent carers that merging Kinneff School catchment area with Catterline will strengthen the historical and current links with both communities.
- It was recognised from the local stakeholders that merging of Kinneff with Catterline will help sustain the utilisation of Catterline School.
- All zoned Kinneff pupils at the time of mothballing chose to attend Catterline School opposed to Bervie School. If the closure goes ahead and is approved to be merged with Catterline School, Kinneff zoned pupils who are currently out of zone at Catterline School and put in placing requests prior to mothballing will be provided with free home to school transport.

(b) Amend the proposal in a minor way and adopt

13.11 There was a suggestion from a stakeholder that due to the small numbers of pupils, families should have their own choice of school. The Council’s response to this suggestion can be found at section 7.4 of this report.

13.12 There are no further minor amendments that have been proposed to the Council during the consultation.

(c) Amend the proposal significantly and undertake a further consultation exercise on a new proposal

13.13 No significant changes to the proposal have been suggested during the consultation period.

13.14 Having reviewed the HMIE report and feedback from consultees, officers concluded that the basis of the original proposal continues to be the most appropriate response to the unsustainable school roll of Kinneff School.

(d) Withdraw the proposal and maintain the status quo.

13.15 This option would be to continue to mothball Kinneff School. Maintaining the status quo would continue the uncertainty for the community. The repeated attempts to seek enrolments to school and the fact there are no effective planned housing developments suggest that it would be difficult for Kinneff School to re-open with a viable roll in the near future.

13.16 Unoccupied buildings deteriorate more quickly than operational premises and leaving the building for further time will accelerate this. The council is responsible for the costs of maintaining its buildings.

13.17 Withdrawing the proposal, the Council would be failing to recognise or respond to the educational and social benefits for the children living in Kinneff. HMIE has recognised that the proposal would lead to clear educational benefits for Kinneff pupils.

13.18 As it is unlikely that the school would re-open based upon current data, there may require to be a further full statutory consultation at a later date to close the school. Allowing for appropriate governance the process can take in the region of nine months to complete.

13.19 It is considered to be unreasonable to go through another lengthy statutory consultation process. The uncertainty surrounding the future of the school has impacted the community and it is hoped that this statutory consultation to close Kinneff School will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding their children's education.

14 Recommendations

14.1 The recommendation of the officers is that the Council should adopt the proposal to permanently close Kinneff School and re-assign its catchment to Catterline School.

14.2 On the basis of the feedback received during the consultation period and taking account of the educational and social benefits of the proposal and the HMIE report, it is concluded that the recommendation in Section 14.1 is the most reasonable, appropriate, sustainable and viable option.