Appendix A

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

EDUCATION & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

SEPTEMBER 2025

PROPOSAL DOCUMENT

CLOSURE OF TULLYNESSLE SCHOOL

Consultation open between

1 September 2025 and 31 October 2025

If you have difficulty reading this document, please contact the Learning Estates Team on 01771 676600 or LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL IS PROPOSING, SUBJECT TO THE OUTCOME OF THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION PROCESS:

- **To discontinue education at Tullynessle School, which is currently mothballed and reassign its catchment to either Alford Primary School or Keig School.**
- **The proposal would apply to the primary school stages (P1-P7) of education in the Tullynessle School catchment area.**
- **The defined catchment area of Alford Primary School or Keig School be permanently extended to subsume the defined catchment area of Tullynessle School.**
- **The proposed change, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.**

This document has been issued by Aberdeenshire Council in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. The Act requires that changes to the school estate, including the proposed closure of a school, are subject to rigorous statutory consultation.

The schools affected by this proposal are:

Tullynessle School
Alford Primary School
Keig School

DISTRIBUTION

A copy of this document is available on the Aberdeenshire Council website: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/ or by emailing learningestates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

This document will be provided to:

- Parent Councils of Alford Primary School and Keig School
- Parents of pupils at Alford Primary School and Keig School
- Pupils at Alford Primary School and Keig School
- Parents of pre-school age children living within the Tullynessle School catchment area
- Staff at Alford Primary School and Keig School
- Trade Union representatives of staff at Alford Primary School and Keig School
- Donside Community Council
- Local Early Years Partner Providers
- Tullynessle School catchment residents
- Education Scotland

A copy of this document is also available from:

- Alford Community Campus, Greystone Road, Alford AB33 8TY (Main Reception and Library)
- Keig School, Keig, Alford AB33 8BH
- Learning Estates Team (call 01771 676600 or email LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk to arrange for a paper copy to be posted)

1. Legislative Background

1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (Section 1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (Section 3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).

1.2 Under the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification, Tullynessle School is a 'remote rural school' (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more). The Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the heightened consideration to be given to rural school closures.

2. Introduction

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council strives to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all its services. It attaches particular importance to providing the best possible educational experience for all pupils within its schools.

2.2 This proposal document is focused solely upon primary education at Tullynessle School (P1-P7), located within the Marr area of Aberdeenshire.

2.3 Tullynessle School Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting is not part of this consultation. Any proposal in relation to the ELC setting will be the subject of a separate consultation.

2.4 This proposal document contains several maps. PDF copies of all the maps will be available on the Aberdeenshire Council website at the address given on page 2 of this document. Printed copies of the maps will also be available on request at Alford Primary School and Keig School.

2.5 The consultation will run from Monday 1 September 2025 until Friday 31 October 2025. A public meeting will be held to discuss the proposal on Monday 29 September 2025 at 6.00 pm at Tullynessle and Forbes Hall, Suie Road, Tullynessle, Alford, AB33 8QN.

2.6 The consultation process for this proposal is set out in detail in Section 17.

3. Reason for Proposal

3.1 In April 2024, it became clear that Tullynessle School roll would drop to just eight pupils at the start of the 2024/25 academic year due to some parents submitting placing requests for other schools.

3.2 As a result, in May 2024, the Director of Education & Children's Services decided to temporarily mothball Tullynessle School beginning in August 2024. This means that the provision of a school is suspended with pupils temporarily zoned to another catchment area. No children have attended Tullynessle School since August 2024.

3.3 On 7 May 2024, Tullynessle Parent Action Group T-PAC submitted a letter in which they opposed mothballing and raised concerns about the lack of a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 before the Council's decision to mothball the school and ELC setting. They requested that a statutory consultation should be conducted, particularly because the school is classified as a "remote rural," and there is a statutory presumption against the closure of rural schools.

3.4 The Primary 1 admission period for all Aberdeenshire Schools takes place in January each year. Press releases were issued to inform families that applications could be made for pupils to enrol at school. The deadline for submitting out of zone placing requests is 15 March annually. Communication about admissions was shared with the Tullynessle, Keig and Alford Primary schools' communities, on the Tullynessle School website, Facebook and Engage Aberdeenshire portal. Applications and placing requests would be accepted if sufficient numbers were received to ensure the continued viability of the school allowing it to reopen. No applications or out of zone requests to Tullynessle School have been received since the school was mothballed.

3.5 On 3 March 2025, officers wrote to all residents of the Tullynessle School catchment area and parents/carers whose children were enrolled at Tullynessle School at the time of mothballing, giving them the opportunity to express their interest in their children enrolling at the school. No family has shown an interest in enrolling their children in P1 to P7 at the school.

3.6 Due to there being no pupils wishing to return to Tullynessle School to make the educational experience viable, the school will remain mothballed for the 2025/26 session.

3.7 According to NHS data, there are 10 children living in the Tullynessle School catchment area who may be eligible to start Primary 1 between the school sessions 2026/27 and 2028/29 across three year groups P1-P3 . This assumes that all Tullynessle children will enrol at their zoned school once they reach school age.

3.8 The Parents' Charter of 1981 gives parents the right to make a placing request for a school of their choice. Historically, Tullynessle families have actively exercised their right to submit placing requests, with 19 Tullynessle children successfully enrolled in alternative schools between 2020 and 2024. Therefore, it is unlikely that all in-zone families would choose to enrol their children at the school.

3.9 Between 2020 and 2024, in total there were 21 placing requests received for pupils to attend schools outwith the Tullynessle catchment area, compared to 11 placing requests to attend the school. During the 2023/24 academic year, of the seven pupils who were expected to continue their education at Tullynessle School in the following school year, only two resided in the Tullynessle catchment area. The viability of the school was therefore dependent on the enrolment of pupils from outwith the catchment area.

3.10 During the 2023/24 session, at its peak, there were 14 pupils on the school roll. With the capacity of 25, the occupancy level was 56%. From August 2024, with

a roll of only eight pupils, the utilisation of the school would have reduced to 32% had the school remained operational. Such a low roll does not support the wellbeing of all learners and does not meet their varying needs. Moreover, the low occupancy is unsustainable, financially inefficient and does not offer the best value.

3.11 There is no reasonable prospect of a sufficient increase in the local pupil population to support the reopening of the school in the future.

3.12 The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below. Some of these alternatives to closure were suggested during the options appraisal process. All alternative uses of the school building require the official closure of the school in the first instance.

3.13 The current proposal follows informal engagement between Aberdeenshire Council officers, local elected members and community members. The Community Council have been invited to attend all engagement sessions and have been provided with relevant information.

3.14 Two suggestions were made for uses of the school building if Tullynessle School was not in a position to reopen. These are detailed in the Options Appraisal document attached to this report as Appendix A.

4. Examination of Alternatives

4.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:

- to reopen Tullynessle School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or
- to continue with the current mothballing arrangement.

4.2 The Tullynessle community have been given the opportunity to present alternatives to closure and to present their views for the authority to consider. A few comments were received during the meeting held in December 2024 and one submission was received following the meeting. The majority of observations were educational and community based, whilst others would involve commitment from the community, other agencies or private companies.

4.3 The option of reopening of the school is not viable at this time. This requires a number of families to enrol their children at the school.

4.4 Other suggested alternatives for the use of the building cannot be implemented or trialled without the formal closure of the school. All written suggestions as well as those mentioned during engagement sessions have been considered and are detailed in the Options Appraisal document.

4.5 There are only two viable options for Tullynessle School identified as part of the options appraisal. One is a continuation of the mothballing, and the other is to progress with the closure consultation.

4.6 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required as to the most appropriate way to rezone the school catchment area. Further discussion of this is included within the options in Section 7 of this report.

4.7 The detail of the Council's consideration of the alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and the Options Appraisal document.

5 Tullynessle School

5.1 Officers from the Learning Estates Team have closely monitored the roll at Tullynessle School for several years. In 2018, the school had 21 pupils, but this number declined to 13 by 2023. By April 2024, it became clear that the roll would drop further to just eight pupils at the start of the academic year, including one potential out of zone request. This is due to parents submitting placing requests to other schools. The Live School Roll Forecast showed no anticipated increase in enrolment at Tullynessle School over the next five years.

5.2 On 1 May 2024, due to the declining roll at Tullynessle School and a forecast showing no expected increase in pupil numbers for at least five years, the decision was made to mothball the school from August 2024.

5.3 Pupils from Tullynessle School were offered a place at either Alford Primary School or Keig School, with transport provided. Individual meetings were held with each parent/carer to discuss their circumstances and provide support. All pupils were enrolled at Keig School, based on families' choices. Transition visits were arranged for all pupils from Tullynessle School. If mothballing continues, younger siblings who have not yet started school will also be guaranteed a place at the chosen school, with transport provided.

5.4 Meetings were held with the staff of Tullynessle School. All school staff were offered alternative positions in accordance with their existing contracts and HR & OD policies and procedures.

5.5 <u>Current Details</u>

5.5.1 Alford Cluster consists of 13 primary schools: Alford Primary, Cluny, Craigievar, Dunecht, Echt, Keig, Lumsden, Midmar, Monymusk, Strathdon, Tough, Towie and Tullynessle Schools. All these schools are in the catchment area for Alford Academy.

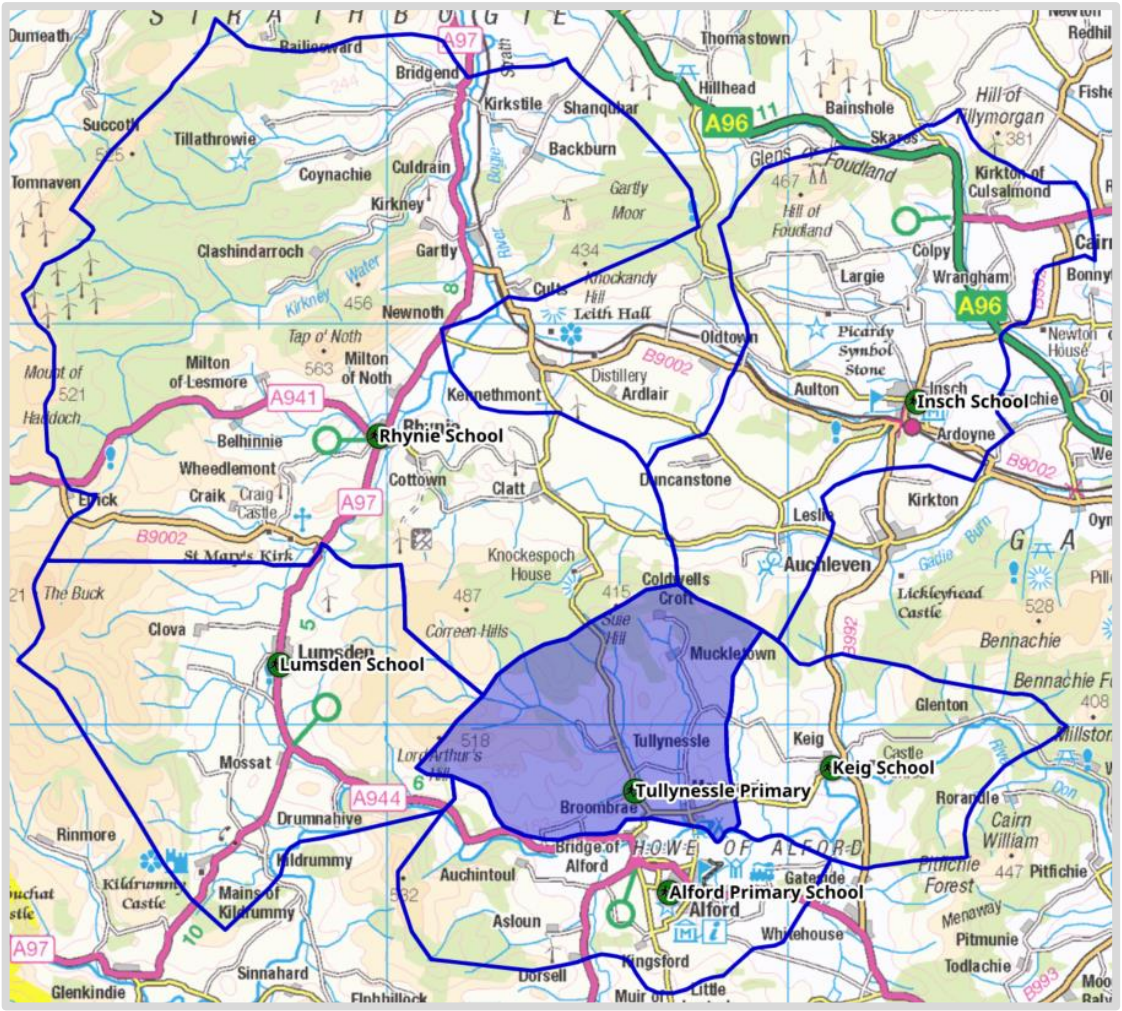
5.5.2 Tullynessle School's main building was built in 1922. The school is non-denominational and serves the hamlet of Tullynessle and the surrounding rural area. It is located three miles north-west of the town of Alford.

5.5.3 The catchment area for the school stretches from Den of Drumgowan on the north to Hole of Haughton on the south and from Satter Hill on the east to Lord Arthur's Hill on the west.

5.5.4 The Scottish Government guidelines classify Tullynessle School as a 'remote rural school'.

5.5.5 The school borders with Alford Primary, Keig and Lumsden Schools, which sit within the Alford Cluster, and Insch and Rhynie Schools within the Huntly Cluster. Map 1 below shows the catchment area and neighbouring schools.

Map 1 – Catchment area for Tullynessle School and surrounding schools



5.5.6 Distances between Tullynessle School and surrounding schools sourced from Google Maps are listed below:

- Alford Primary School – 2.3 miles
- Keig School – 3.6 miles
- Lumsden School – 8.2 miles
- Insch School – 10.4 miles
- Rhynie School – 9.2 miles

5.5.7 The school offers primary education from P1-P7, with Early Years education having been deactivated in August 2024.

5.5.8 Tullynessle School is a single-storey building with two classrooms, one for school age children and one for the ELC setting. In 2020, a decision was made to relocate the ELC setting from a temporary unit into the main building. This was a result of the poor condition of the temporary unit and the feasibility of the continued repairs. The low occupancy of the school and the School Roll

Forecast supported this decision, which reduced the capacity to 25 pupils. This change did not prevent alternative arrangements being implemented in future if the roll of the school had risen beyond 25 pupils.

5.5.9 In addition to the main teaching areas, the school provides a dining/general purpose room, ancillary spaces such as an office, staff room and toilet facilities. A servery serves meals prepared at Alford Community Campus and delivered to Tullynessle School on a daily basis. The outside area consists of a concrete playground surrounding the school with a grass playing field beside with some play equipment.

5.5.10 Tullynessle School delivered primary education from P1-P7 and pupils were taught in a multi-composite single class.

5.5.11 When the school was last in operation, the primary staffing complement with Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was as follows:

- Head Teacher – 1.00
- Teacher – Flexible Days – 0.42
- Teacher – 0.11
- Pupil Support Assistant – 0.37
- Administrator – 0.36
- Admin Support Assistant – 0.33
- Senior Catering Assistant – 0.69
- Janitor – 0.22
- Cleaner – 0.45

5.5.12 The school did not operate a breakfast club or after school club outwith school hours. Some parents attempted to establish one, as well as arrange transport to Alford, but it was unsuccessful. The lack of after-school care was one of the reasons some parents gave on placing requests to other schools.

5.5.13 If the school was to reopen with one class, the staffing entitlements (FTE) would be comparable. This would be dependent upon the actual school roll and in line with the Aberdeenshire Teacher Staffing Standard.

5.5.14 In addition, ASN teaching and pupil support staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need across the Alford Cluster.

5.5.15 Every local authority in Scotland is required to grade their schools for condition and suitability. The gradings range from A to D for each category with the following values:

A: Good – Performing well and operating efficiently (85-100%)
B: Satisfactory – Performing adequately but with minor problems (60-85%)
C: Poor – Showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (40- 60%)
D: Bad – Does not support the delivery of services to children and communities (0-40%)

Tullynessle School is rated as ‘A’ (89.71%) for suitability and ‘B’ (75.60%) for

building condition.

5.5.16 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Tullynessle School.

6. Details of Proposal

6.1 The Council proposes that Tullynessle School should be closed on a permanent basis. This would be with immediate effect from the completion of the consultation process. The Council also proposes that all existing primary age pupils living within the Tullynessle School catchment should continue their education at the schools they are currently attending. If the proposals are implemented, any siblings of these current pupils would be able to join their brother/sister(s) at the same school. This proposal to close the school does not impact upon future decisions around the ELC setting.

6.2 The school catchment area would be reassigned to one of the neighbouring primary schools. Discussion of these options is set out in Section 7.

Option 1 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Alford Primary School

Option 2 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Keig School

Discounted options and alternatives to closure

Option 3 - Close Tullynessle School and split the catchment between Alford Primary School and Keig School

Option 4 - Reinstate the ELC setting at Tullynessle School, merge Tullynessle School and Keig School and deliver primary education at both buildings

Option 5 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Lumsden School

Option 6 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Rhynie School

Option 7 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Insch School

Option 8 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Towie School

Alternative 1 – Reopen Tullynessle School with the current catchment area

Alternative 2 – Reopen Tullynessle School with an expanded catchment area

Alternative 3 - Continuation of mothballing Tullynessle School

Details of the Council's consideration of the discounted options is set out in Section 8 and the alternatives in Section 9.

6.3 Alternative uses for the building will be further explored with the community during the consultation period and beyond. Two potential uses have been suggested by the community and officers will support individuals or groups who wish to take them forward.

6.4 It is important that this proposal does not have a negative impact on any children currently attending schools affected by this proposal and that they have continuity in their education.

6.5 Table 1 below details the suitability and condition ratings, current roll and capacity of schools affected by this proposal and Aberdeenshire Council 2024-based School Roll Forecasts over the next four years. The published forecasts can be viewed at the below link:

https://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/admissions/school-roll-forecasts/

However, for Keig School the figures presented are live data based on the 2024 forecasts. They include Tullynessle pupils who joined Keig as a result of mothballing, the new P1 intake, and reflect the impact of both on future projections.

Table 1 – 2024 School Roll Forecasts

School	Suitability Rating	Condition Rating	Capacity	Current Roll (June 2025)	SRF 2025/ 2026	SRF 2026/ 2027	SRF 2027/ 2028	SRF 2028/ 2029	SRF 2029/ 2030
Tullynessle School	A	B	25	0	< 5 *	< 5 *	< 5 *	< 5 *	< 5 *
Alford Primary School	A	A	372	354	328	319	286	251	228
Keig School	A	B	50	39	45	44	45	38	37

* Due to GDPR this data has been suppressed to prevent possible identification of an individual

6.6 The options identified above would have minimal impact on the school roll of Alford Primary School and a slightly larger impact on Keig School, due to the smaller size of rural schools in general.

7. Options Assessment

7.1 Officers have applied an approved methodology to assess the identified options. The process included a detailed analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). The SWOT analysis used is attached as Appendix B.

7.2 Together with each school's baseline score and outcome of the options appraisal matrix, other aspects taken into consideration for the overall recommendations are:

- Transport
- Outcome of engagement carried out with the wider Tullynessle School community and Keig School parents/carers, staff and pupils
- Learning Estate sustainability
- Environmental impact

7.3 Table 2 below shows the highest top two ranking options.

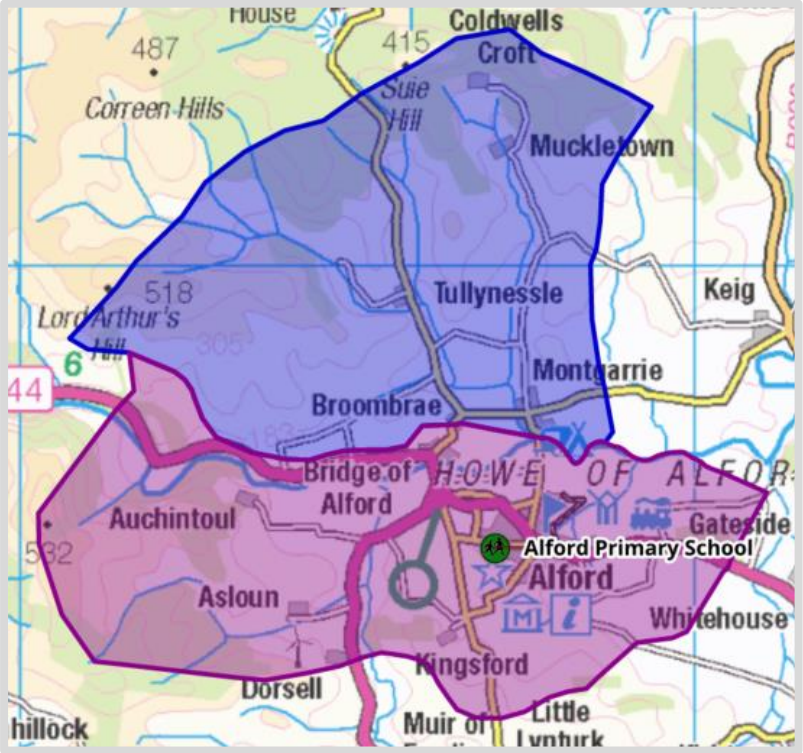
Table 2 – Outcome of Options Appraisal

Options
Option 1 – Close Tullynessle School and merge with Alford Primary School
Option 2 – Close Tullynessle School and merge with Keig School

7.4 **Option 1 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Alford Primary School**

7.4.1 The proposed catchment area for this option is shown below in Map 2.

Map 2 – Tullynessle School merged with Alford Primary School



7.4.2 Alford Primary School is located within the Alford Community Campus which opened in 2015. The school is located in the town of Alford at Greystone Road. The school is non-denominational and under the Scottish Government guidelines classed as a “remote rural school”, meaning that it is located in a settlement with a population of less than 3,000 people and over a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 people or more. During the period of mothballing, the school has been nominated as one of the designated schools for pupils moving into the Tullynessle catchment area.

7.4.3 The school is part of a broader campus that integrates an ELC setting, primary school, and academy under one roof. The primary school consists of 13 classrooms. Beyond the learning spaces, the campus includes a dining hall, outdoor courtyard, sports hall, and both all-weather and grass playing fields. Additional facilities include a theatre, swimming pool, climbing wall and

community library, offering resources for both students and the wider community.

7.4.4 Alford Primary School is a mainstream school with designated Enhanced and Complex Needs Provisions serving the Alford Cluster. It is equipped with facilities to support pupils with a wide range of additional needs.

7.4.5 Alford Primary School does not offer morning or after school clubs.

7.4.6 The school has a capacity of 372 pupils and a roll of 354 P1-P7 pupils in June 2025 (SEEMIS extract). These were distributed across 13 classes. The 2024 School Roll Forecast suggests a substantial fall in pupil numbers from 328 in 2025 to 228 in 2029. This currently represents a 95% use of capacity, decreasing to 61% in 2029.

7.4.7 The class structure for the 2024/25 session is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Alford Primary School Class Structure

Stage	Class structure
P1/2L	25
P1H	25
P2F	30
P3EG	25
P3SW	25
P4Ba	27
P4Br	27
P5B	30
P5L	30
P6E	27
P6S	28
P7GY	29
P7M	26

7.4.8 Alford Primary School ELC setting has a capacity of 40 and offers three delivery models. In June 2025 (SEEMIS extract) there were 71 children attending the setting, attending various sessions, a very small number of whom were zoned for Tullynessle School. Children are entitled to 1140 hours across the year. The setting is open all year round from 8am to 6pm daily.

7.4.9 In recent years, on average, there were 11 placing requests for pupils wishing to attend Alford Primary School and four placing requests from pupils residing within the Alford Primary School catchment area to attend an out of zone school.

7.4.10 Alford Primary School is currently assessed as A (98.99%) for Suitability (good - performing well and operating efficiently; school buildings and grounds support the delivery of services) and A for Condition (good - performing well and operating efficiently; school buildings and grounds support the delivery of services).

7.4.11 During the session 2024/25, there were 10 pupils from the Tullynessle catchment area attending Alford Primary School and all were transported by their parents/carers. Meanwhile, there were three transport contracts in place for 31 in zone pupils attending Alford Primary School, at a daily cost of £542.20.

7.4.12 Between 2020 and 2024, 21 placing requests were received for pupils to attend schools outwith the Alford Primary catchment area, compared to 56 placing requests to attend the school.

7.4.13 With the permanent closure of Tullynessle School, this number could increase in the future, although with a very small number of children living in the area, the number of transport contracts is unlikely to rise significantly.

7.4.14 As there are pupils from the Tullynessle School catchment area that currently attend either Alford Primary or Keig Schools, no adverse effects for Alford Primary School are expected to arise with the permanent closure of Tullynessle School.

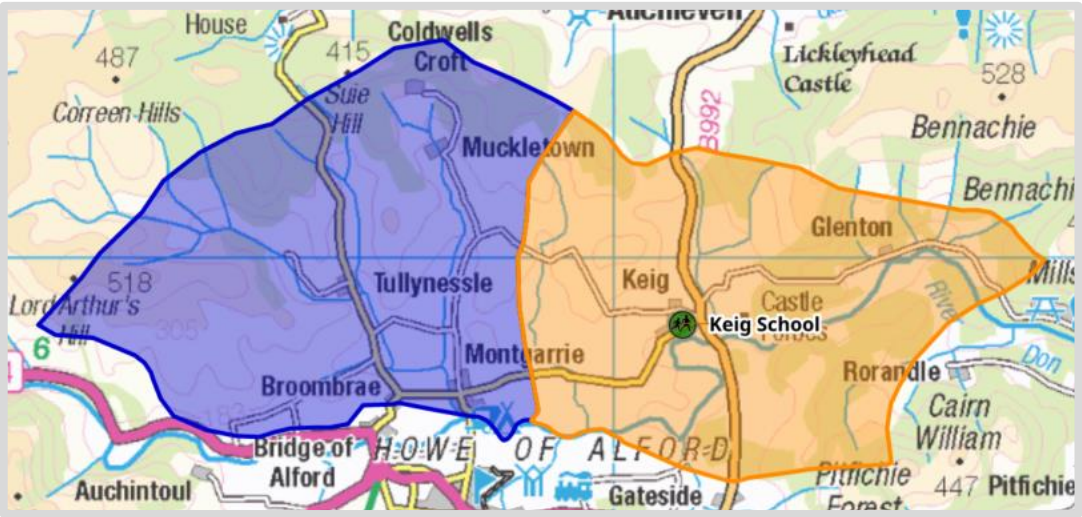
7.4.15 This option would have a positive impact on the sustainability of Alford Primary School, as it is forecasted to have a large decline in the school roll in a few years. However, if Tullynessle School was to close and merge with Alford Primary School, it would be a significant change in the school profile from a small rural school to a large school, which is considered to be against parental expectations.

7.4.16 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Alford Primary School.

7.5 Option 2 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Keig School

7.5.1 The proposed catchment area for this option is shown in Map 3 below.

Map 3 – Tullynessle School merged with Keig School



7.5.2 The original building was built in 1930, with extensions added in 1963 and 2011. The school is situated in the village of Keig, 5 miles south-east of Alford and 3.7 miles east of Tullynessle School. The school is non-denominational and under

the Scottish Government guidelines classed as an “remote rural school”, meaning that it is located in a settlement with a population of less than 3,000 people and over a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 people or more. During the period of mothballing, the school has been nominated as one of the designated schools for pupils moving into the Tullynessle catchment area.

7.5.3 The school offers primary education from P1 to P7. The building is a single-storey accommodation and consists of two classrooms, general purpose hall with stage, Head Teacher office, admin office and staff room. The school has a servery which is designed to provide meals prepared at the Alford Community Campus kitchen and delivered to the school on a daily basis. The outdoor areas consist of a spacious concrete playground at the front of the school and grass playing fields at the rear.

7.5.4 Keig School does not offer morning or after school clubs.

7.5.5 The school has a capacity of 50 pupils and a roll of 39 P1-P7 pupils in June 2025 (SEEMIS extract). These were distributed across two classes. The Live 2024 School Roll Forecast, which reflects current and potential Tullynessle pupils, indicates fluctuations in pupil numbers ranging from 41 to 48 between the 2026 and 2029 academic years. This represents 82% to 96% of the school capacity.

7.5.6 The class structure for the 2024/25 session is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4 – Keig School Class Structure

Class structure	Class size
P1-3	19
P4-7	20

7.5.7 Early Years education is not provided at the school and local children attend ELC setting at other nearby schools or private settings.

7.5.8 In recent years, on average there were four placing requests for pupils wishing to attend Keig School and two placing requests from pupils residing within the Keig School catchment area to attend an out of zone school.

7.5.9 Keig School is currently assessed as A (92.89%) for Suitability (good - performing well and operating efficiently; school buildings and grounds support the delivery of services) and B (86.82%) for Condition (satisfactory - performing adequately but showing minor deterioration).

7.5.10 During the session 2024/25, there were 11 pupils from the Tullynessle catchment area attending Keig School. Of those, seven who were directly affected by mothballing were transported to the school via one school transport route. Additionally, there was one more transport contract in place for eight in zone pupils attending Keig School. The daily cost of both contracts was £121.97.

7.5.11 With the permanent closure of Tullynessle School, this number could increase in the future, although with a very small number of children living in the area, the impact on school transport contracts is likely to be minimal.

7.5.12 As there are pupils from the Tullynessle School catchment area that currently attend either Keig or Alford Primary Schools, no adverse effects for Keig School are expected to arise with the permanent closure of Tullynessle School.

7.5.13 Some of the Keig School community members have expressed concerns about a significant increase in the school roll during the 2024/25 school session, perceived to be due to the enrolment of pupils from Tullynessle. However, this increase was attributed to a substantial in zone Primary 1 intake for the academic year. Seven children joined Keig School as a result of the Tullynessle School mothballing and the Live School Roll Forecasts do not predict that pupil numbers will exceed the school's capacity.

7.5.14 Between 2020 and 2024, nine placing requests were received for pupils to attend schools outwith the Keig catchment area, compared to 21 placing requests to attend the school. In the 2024/25 academic year, of all the pupils attending Keig School, only 12 resided in the Keig catchment area. As with Tullynessle School, the viability of Keig School depends on the enrolment of pupils from outwith the catchment area.

7.5.15 This option would strengthen the long-term sustainability of Keig School, a small rural school that is projected to experience a decline in roll in the coming years. The enrolment of Tullynessle pupils would help stabilise the roll and support the continued operation of the school, particularly in the context of wider population decline in rural areas across Aberdeenshire.

7.5.16 There is no current Education Scotland Inspection report available for Keig School.

8. Discounted Options

8.1 The detail of the Council's consideration of the discounted options is set out below:

Option 3 - Close Tullynessle School and split the catchment between Alford Primary School and Keig School

Despite achieving a high score in the SWOT analysis, this option has been discounted. Due to the topography of the Tullynessle catchment, there is no practical way to split the catchment between Alford Primary School and Keig School. All solutions considered, with the boundary line drawn along Suie Road or in the middle of fields, would have properties and families scattered on different sides and being zoned to different schools. This option would require more transport contracts to transport families residing close to each other to two different schools, rather than just one, increasing transport costs and vehicle CO^2 emissions. This would also have a negative impact on the local community by weakening the strong bonds that hold its members together.

Option 4 - Reinstate the ELC setting at Tullynessle School, merge Tullynessle School and Keig School and deliver primary education at both buildings

This option involves reinstating the ELC provision at Tullynessle School, reopening the school building with early stages of primary education delivered at Tullynessle and upper stages at Keig. After careful consideration, this option was discounted for several reasons.

As outlined in Section 2 of this report, the ELC setting at Tullynessle School is subject to separate regulatory procedures related to the deactivation of an ELC. Reopening the school itself would not lead to the reinstatement of the ELC provision at Tullynessle.

This option scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology for several reasons. It would result in continuous under-utilisation of the existing school estate. It neither addresses current capacity issues nor contributes to long-term estate efficiency. The option is also inconsistent with the Council's Learning Estates strategy and does not support the long-term viability of either site when operating at reduced capacity. Moreover, splitting the primary provision across two sites would unnecessarily increase travel time, distance and transport costs and it would be contrary to the expectations of some parents/carers and community members.

This approach will only be considered when one of the two schools is over capacity.

Option 5 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Lumsden School

The Lumsden School catchment contains a historic dual zone where the pupils living in the northern part of the primary school catchment are entitled to attend either The Gordon Schools or Alford Academy, whilst pupils living in the southern part of the catchment attend Alford Academy.

Merging Tullynessle with Lumsden School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology due to the increase in travel time, distance and transport cost, it would not help to address capacity issues, therefore, would not contribute to improving the utilisation of the existing school estate, it would be against parental expectations and would require a further statutory consultation regarding the secondary school catchment areas.

Option 6 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Rhynie School

Rhynie School has been part of statutory consultations and as an outcome, the school catchment was permanently extended to subsume the defined catchment area of Clatt School and provides a dual zone for the previous zone of Gartly School.

If Tullynessle pupils were zoned for Rhynie School for their primary education, but remained zoned to Alford Academy for secondary education, they would attend a different secondary school than their peers at Rhynie School, who are zoned to The Gordon Schools. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.

Merging Tullynessle with Rhynie School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology due to the increase in travel time, distance and transport cost, would be against parental expectations and would require a change of the secondary school catchment areas.

Option 7 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Insch School

If Tullynessle School was to close and merge with Insch School, it would be a significant change in the school profile from a small rural school to a large school, which would go against parental expectations.

Tullynessle pupils zoned for Insch School for their primary education, but remained zoned to Alford Academy for secondary education, would attend a different secondary school than their peers at Insch School, who are dual zoned to The Gordon Schools and Inverurie Academy. A further statutory consultation would be required to change the secondary school catchment areas.

Merging Tullynessle with Insch School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology for several reasons, including the increase in travel time, distance and transport cost, the change of school profile, it would be against parental expectations and would require a further statutory consultation regarding the secondary school catchment areas.

Option 8 - Close Tullynessle School and merge with Towie School

Merging Tullynessle School with Towie School option was considered, because some Tullynessle parents/carers chose Towie School ELC setting for their early years education. However, it was noted that these children do not remain at Towie School for their primary education.

Merging Tullynessle with Towie School scored poorly in the options appraisal assessment using the SWOT methodology due to increased travel time, distance and transport cost, accessibility and the need for a further statutory consultation to realign the secondary school catchment zones.

9. Alternatives to the Proposal

9.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure.

9.2 The Tullynessle community have been given the opportunity to present alternatives to closure and to present their views for the authority to consider. The deadline to submit suggestions and alternatives was 31 December 2024.

9.3 The detail of the Council's consideration of the alternatives is set out below.

9.4 **Reopening of Tullynessle School with current catchment area**

9.4.1 Between 2017 to 2023, the school roll was fluctuating between eight to 25 pupils. During that period out of 33 of the possible P1 intake, only 15 children enrolled at Tullynessle School for P1, and this number includes also out of zone

placements.

9.4.2 In April 2024, it became evident that at the start of the academic year, the Tullynessle School roll would decrease to eight pupils (including one potential out of zone request), due to parents submitting placing requests out of the school.

9.4.3 There are no Masterplans agreed for Tullynessle and no large planning housing developments located within the Tullynessle School catchment area. However, a further review of local planning data identified 13 planning applications approved between 2017 and 2024, proposing a total of 21 new housing units. The current status of these units is as follows:

- 5 units were completed between 2017 and 2018,
- 2 units are under construction (commenced in 2019 and 2021),
- 14 units have not yet started.

This breakdown indicates that although planning permissions have been granted, the majority of developments are either still in progress or yet to commence.

Using the approved School Roll Forecasts model, which estimates an average of 0.3 child per completed household, the current impact on the school roll is minimal. It is estimated that the five completed units have generated approximately two children of school age since 2017.

If all remaining 16 units are eventually built and occupied, the potential school age population may possibly increase by five children. However, this growth would likely be spread over an extended period; therefore, there is no strong prospect of generating enough new pupils from new housing to reinstate the school.

9.4.4 As of 10 May 2024 (SEEMIS extract) there were 32 pupils of primary school age (P1-P7) residing within the school catchment area. Of these, six attended Tullynessle School, while the remaining children attended other schools in the Alford Cluster, as a result of placing requests. The majority attend Alford Primary and Keig Schools.

9.4.5 As already stated in Section 3, the school has not been operational since August 2024. Aberdeenshire Council sought enrolments for the school from both in zone and out of zone pupils for the 2025/2026 session. No applications were received. Only one family queried the enrolment of their preschool age child at the Tullynessle ELC setting, but without the intention to reenrol the older sibling at Tullynessle School.

9.4.6 There were fewer than five children under school age who could have started for the session 2025/26, and another 10 could start between the 2026/27 and 2028/29 sessions. However, the registration period for school places for the term 2024/25 was open between 15 and 19 January 2024 and no applications were received. This results in a potential seven pupils on the school roll by 2028.

9.4.7 The data in Table 5 below accounts for all former pupils reenrolling at the school

and new P1s joining the school. It therefore appears unlikely at present that the school would reach a roll that would support learning, teaching and wellbeing.

Table 5 – Live 2024 School Roll Forecasts

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Possible P1 Pupils	< 5 *	< 5 *	< 5 *
Live SRF	8	6	7
Total Capacity	25	25	25

* Due to GDPR this data has been suppressed to prevent possible identification of an individual

9.4.8 Aberdeenshire Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching and make the reopening of Tullynessle School unviable.

9.5 **Reopening of Tullynessle School with expanded catchment area**

9.5.1 There is a documented trend in Aberdeenshire of declining primary school rolls, especially in rural areas, which is having a significant impact on school utilisation and long-term viability.

9.5.2 A catchment review to increase the potential roll and sustainability of a school can be a sensible option in some cases. However, this would have to be achieved with no detrimental impact on affected schools as a result.

9.5.3 Consideration has been given to extending the Tullynessle catchment area. As shown above in Map 1 within Section 5, the school borders with Alford Primary, Keig and Lumsden Schools, which sit within the Alford Cluster and Insch and Rhynie Schools, which are part of the Huntly Cluster.

9.5.4 Extending the Tullynessle catchment to incorporate part of the Alford Primary catchment would negatively impact the sustainability of this school. Alford primary currently operates at a stable occupancy level, but the School Roll Forecasts indicate a significant decline, reaching 61% use of capacity by 2029. In addition, the suggested rezoning of Bridge of Alford and northern Don area back to the Tullynessle catchment would not generate any new pupils in the short or medium term, as there are not many properties and no large housing developments in these areas.

9.5.5 Extending the Tullynessle catchment to incorporate part of the Keig catchment would also negatively impact the sustainability of this school. Keig currently operates at a sustained occupancy level of 78%, mainly due to an increase in roll from Tullynessle pupils joining last year. The School Roll Forecasts however, indicate a decline in the school roll reducing capacity usage to 67% by 2029.

9.5.6 Extending the Tullynessle catchment area to incorporate part of the Lumsden catchment would likely result in the mothballing of Lumsden School, which currently operates at 38% occupancy and the roll is forecasted to drop significantly in the coming years.

9.5.7 Extending the Tullynessle catchment area to incorporate part of the Insch or Rhynie catchments would also require a change in secondary school boundaries. Rhynie already operates well below a sustained occupancy threshold of 75%, and the School Roll Forecasts indicate that the occupancy of Insch will fall to 69% by 2029. Rezoning a part of Inch School to the Tullynessle catchment would be a significant change in the school profile from a large school to a small rural school, which would be contrary to parental expectations.

9.5.8 Extending the Tullynessle catchment in multiple directions to incorporate parts of all neighbouring schools' catchments would undermine the sustainability of these schools. This option would require changes to the existing cluster boundaries and would have a negative impact on pupils in some affected areas by increasing travel distances. Moreover, none of the areas being considered for rezoning contain a large number of properties or housing developments that might generate additional pupils in the near future.

9.5.9 When rezoning existing catchment areas, Aberdeenshire Council does not require pupils or younger siblings to move schools. Therefore, the impact of any change in the boundary line can take up to seven years to be seen and is therefore unlikely to have a substantial impact on the number of pupils available to attend Tullynessle School.

9.5.10 Any of the above rezoning options would deliver negative financial and environmental impacts, as more pupils would have to be transported to the school.

9.6 **Continuation of mothballing**

9.6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current mothballing arrangement, Aberdeenshire Council does not consider that this would be the best option for the community. Mothballing would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.

9.6.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.

9.6.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing. New pupils either reaching school age or moving into the catchment, who attend the designated school, would be entitled to school transport.

9.6.4 Those pupils who chose out of zone placements to other schools whilst Tullynessle School was still operational are not entitled to school transport.

9.6.5 As the Tullynessle school building is not currently in use, a continuation of mothballing would have no further impact on the community.

9.6.6 The Council is responsible for the costs of maintaining a mothballed building and its grounds.

9.6.7 As discussed in Sections 3 and 9, the data does not suggest that reopening the school would be a viable option and therefore continuing of mothballing has been discounted.

10. Educational Benefit Statement

10.1 Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy 'Connecting People, Places and Learning', which was developed by Scottish Government and COSLA, contains ten guiding principles. Local Authorities are required to take account of these principles in planning changes to their school estate, namely:

- Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners;
- Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners;
- The learning estate should be well-managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value;
- The condition and suitability of learning environments should support and enhance their function;
- Learning environments should serve the wider community and where appropriate be integrated with the delivery of other public services in line with the place principle;
- Learning environments should be greener, more sustainable, allow safe and accessible routes for walking, cycling and wheeling and be digitally enabled;
- Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning environments should be maximised;
- Good consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and an involvement in decision making processes should lead to better outcomes for all;
- Collaboration across the learning estate, and collaboration with partners in localities, should support maximising its full potential;
- Investment in Scotland's learning estate should contribute towards improving learning outcomes and support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

10.2 An update to the Aberdeenshire Learning Estate Strategy was approved by Education and Children's Services Committee on 1 February 2024. The Council's strategy sets the minimum standards for the various elements of educational buildings to achieve optimal educational benefit. The amended strategy for Aberdeenshire Council's Learning Estate sets out four values, Excellence, Inclusion, Sustainable Estate and Equity, which are core to all decision making.

10.3 If Tullynessle School was to reopen, with a reduced number of pupils over a greater age range, there would be increased challenges in ensuring that all children develop the four capacities of Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Responsible Citizens and Effective Contributors.

10.4 A small school roll made up of one or a few year groups significantly diminishes the sustainability and viability of a school, offers less opportunities to learners which results in a negative impact on their educational and social development.

10.5 There are concerns that pupils' educational development may not be as successful as it could be, if opportunities to work closely, regularly and frequently with peers of the same age are limited.

10.6 Isolation for some pupils, due to no connection with peers of the same age or sex in a school with an extremely small roll may have a negative impact on their social development.

10.7 The proposal would provide improved opportunities for children to develop skills for learning, life and work e.g., increasing opportunities for working with others of a similar age and stage which are very limited in schools of less than eight children in a multi-composite setting.

10.8 While it may seem that having fewer pupils in a class would allow a teacher to provide more one-on-one attention, in this case fewer means limited pupils' learning experiences. Classes low in pupil numbers have disadvantages, which are further compounded when a school has a single class, potentially with only one or two children at each year stage.

10.9 While one or two pupils absent from a large class isn't a major issue, a small number of absent pupils can make a significant difference in a small class. If there are only eight pupils in a class, two missing pupils represent a much larger percentage of the class population, making it more difficult for the teacher to continue with planned lessons.

10.10 This will significantly impact on the class dynamics and learning experiences of children in the single class setting, with the likely consequence that a child may be the only pupil at a particular stage. Thereby having no other pupil to share their learning experience with and benefit from those interactions.

10.11 A smaller class is less likely to represent a diverse cross section of society. Pupils benefit from being members of diverse classes because they have the opportunity to hear viewpoints that differ greatly from their own. While some small classes do have a diverse array of members, many are relatively homogeneous in nature and, as such, do not offer pupils the opportunity to learn in a diverse setting.

10.12 Some academic activities require a minimum number of participants. Activities such as small group projects, group discussions or peer to peer learning activities are much harder to implement in a small class because there are fewer pupils to divide into groups, limiting pupils' options. Other options, such as large-scale games, may be impossible in single small settings because there are not enough pupils to allow for game play, or due to the wide variation in the age and physical development of the pupils, potentially making an activity unsafe.

10.13 Some pupils enjoy the anonymity associated with being a member of a larger class and school. These pupils are uncomfortable in the spotlight and prefer to blend in with the crowd as they move through the process of learning. For pupils

of this nature, small classes are far from desirable because in educational settings with reduced pupil numbers, they do not have the same opportunity to mix with their peer group.

10.14 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form.

10.15 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the modern school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Alford Primary and Keig Schools have sufficient pupils to allow the children to work collaboratively on various topics and activities. The class teachers will work with both individuals and groups at each stage of the curriculum, and group working allows pupils to develop different skills from those that are developed during individual work.

10.16 Within larger schools, pupils will have the opportunity to develop wider relationships and friendships which will see them better prepared to meet the social and learning opportunities and challenges ahead in the context of a secondary school with a roll of around 600 pupils. This is important in terms of developing their education through their school journey.

10.17 Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.

10.18 Educational benefits are considered below for pupils if either of the options mentioned in Section 7 are adopted.

10.19 Pupils at Alford Primary and Keig Schools regularly work in cooperative learning groups. A cooperative learning strategy normally involves four pupils of similar age group working together collaboratively. If Tullynessle School reopened with a low roll that would mean that the groups would be limited in size and there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. The pupils may not be of a similar age and could be spread across P1-P7. A low roll would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.

10.20 A larger school roll offers children from the Tullynessle School catchment area an increased possibility of participating in teams in a range of games. These educational, cultural and sporting activities provide a number of benefits for children in terms of both academic and social development and support the process of transition towards the larger and more varied educational setting of a secondary school.

10.21 Pupils at Alford Primary and Keig Schools can participate in various activities and events across the year. Alford Primary School hosts Christmas sing-a-longs, a school show, P7 residential trips, charity and fundraising events, book swaps, sports days, potted sports, and additional outings for certain year

groups. Keig School offers a similarly engaging experiences, such as Christmas and school shows, day trips, P6/7 residentials, charity events, book fairs, community cafes, and spring and winter fairs.

10.22 An increased roll gives pupils the opportunity to participate in a range of groups, such as Pupil Council, House Captains, Rights Respecting Schools, Eco-Committee, a buddy system and playground leaders. Alford Primary offers these roles through its Metaskills mixed-stage group model. Keig similarly provides access to Pupil Council, Rights Respecting School group, House Captains, Eco-Committee, Young Leaders, buddy system and playground leadership.

10.23 Both schools engage with their local communities and older residents through intergenerational activities. Alford Primary's upcoming plans include collaborations with a local care home, a heritage museum, and the local Men's Shed. Keig contributes through events such as its community café, spring and winter fairs, village-based potato drops and Christmas show. These events provide valuable learning experiences and enhance community bonds.

10.24 Both schools offer a wide range of extracurricular opportunities that support physical development and personal interests. Alford Primary School benefit from Active Schools initiatives and staff or pupil led clubs, including Touch Rugby, Junior Joggers, Show Group, Chess Club, Art Club, Digital Leaders, and Coding Club. It also participates in the Hamewith Concert, which involves poetry, singing, dancing and musical performances. Keig School offers clubs and sports such as football, netball, swimming and Lego Club, ensuring pupils have regular opportunities to engage in different activities.

10.25 Some of the educational benefits arise not from larger pupil numbers (e.g., to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities. Alford Primary benefits from being part of a Community Campus where Active Schools activities are offered to the cluster schools. Keig provides experiences such as residential trips and P7 transition activities, helping pupils prepare for their next educational stage.

10.26 Alford Primary and Keig Schools have Parent Councils that support learning, teaching, school improvement, and parental and community engagement. If Tullynessle School were to reopen there would be an opportunity for a Parent Council to operate; however, with a small pupil cohort, there would be a smaller number of families to participate, resulting in a greater reliance on individuals to support the school.

10.27 Both schools offer diverse outdoor environments that support outdoor learning experiences. Alford Primary School use a polytunnel, planters, a quiet outdoor learning space, mud kitchens, local woodlands such as Murray Woods, climbing frame and astro pitches. Keig School's outdoor areas include a play area known as "up the back," greenhouse, trim trail, willow tunnel, swings, football pitch, wildlife areas with bird feeders, outdoor classroom, mud kitchen, sand and water patio area and Forbes Estate woodland.

10.28 Alford Primary offers Enhanced and Complex Needs Provisions with facilities

such as a life skills room, sensory room, nurture zone, chill out zone, focus room, and a general-purpose wellbeing room. The Nature Nurture Practitioner also delivers outdoor sessions in the polytunnel and quiet garden.

10.29 Although Keig is not a designated Enhanced Provision school, it has made considerable enhancements to support ASN learners as well as a larger roll. Over the past year, ASN spaces have been improved, including a relaunched breakout space, a quiet space in the office area for self-regulation, 'relaxation stations' based in classrooms and new outdoor trim trail equipment funded by the Parent Council.

10.30 The results of the survey conducted with Keig School pupils, asking how they feel about their school, what they like and dislike, and how having more children has affected them, revealed that the integration of Tullynessle pupils with Keig School has brought a range of social and educational benefits for the pupils, staff and the wider school community.

Pupils have increased opportunities to make new friends and build wider social networks, supporting their social and emotional development. Many children, across all stages, have stated positively about having more children to play and learn with. This larger roll has created a more vibrant learning environment and helped make new friendships, which has been especially valuable for pupils who might otherwise have had very small peer groups.

Learning experiences have been enriched through a wider variety of activities, events and trips, such as music week, health & wellbeing week, football festivals, teddy bear picnics and whole school trips, which have all been made possible and more enjoyable with a larger group of pupils. Some pupils also commented on the inclusiveness and the individual support that they receive from caring and dedicated staff, highlighting that teachers are kind, helpful and supportive.

In addition, the increased roll has strengthened the sustainability of the school. Some pupils recognised that having more children helps to keep the school open, ensuring continued access to local primary education in their rural community.

10.31 It is Aberdeenshire Council's view that the pupils from the Tullynessle School catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide several such benefits, judged against both the Aberdeenshire and National criteria set out above.

10.32 The majority of pupils residing within the Tullynessle School catchment area currently attend a school which borders with the Tullynessle School catchment. No adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the permanent closure of Tullynessle School.

11. Effect on the Local Community

11.1 Aberdeenshire Council recognise that the uncertainty surrounding the future opening of the school has impacted the community and it is hoped that this

statutory consultation to close Tullynessle School will give clarity to the community and a sense of certainty regarding their children's education.

11.2 Tullynessle is a disparate settlement. Members of the community travel to Alford or other nearby settlements to access GP, dental surgeries, shops, post office, health centre, library and community sports facilities.

11.3 There are no Masterplans agreed for Tullynessle or large housing developments located within the Tullynessle School catchment area. Since 2017, 13 planning applications have been approved, with a total of 21 housing units; however, only five of those have been completed, with the vast majority not yet commenced construction. Therefore, there is little prospect of generating new pupils into the area to reinstate the school.

11.4 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a measure of deprivation across 6,976 data zones. SIMD ranks data zones from most deprived (ranked as 1) to least deprived (ranked as 6,976) and Tullynessle data zone is ranked at 5596. This indicates that pupils living within the Tullynessle School catchment are not considered living in socio-economical deprived households.

11.5 While in operation, the school did not operate a breakfast or after school club. Between 2020 and 2024, the building was used by the Parent Council on one occasion only during the 2023/24 session and was never utilised as a community facility during its time as a school. During the mothballing period, TPAC requested to use the school and ELC setting for a community Christmas carol event and party. However, this request was declined due to the building being maintained only on a 'wind and watertight' basis with no access to running water, making it unsuitable and unsafe for public use. TPAC was advised to contact the ECS Lets Team to explore alternative venues, but they did not follow up on this suggestion. The school building was not used as a community facility during the time it was operational as a school. This indicates that the community does not rely on the school as a public or community facility.

11.6 The Tullynessle and Forbes Public Hall facility, with its main and small halls and kitchen, is well-integrated into community life, hosting a variety of events such as birthday parties, film nights, dancing, health and fitness classes, and theatre plays.

11.7 The evidence presented suggests that closing the school would have minimal impact on the community's existing arrangements and overall sustainability. Given this active use of the Public Hall by the community, the closure of the school is unlikely to disrupt current activities or affect the community's ability to sustain its programs and events.

11.8 The option appraisal process has identified two potential future uses for the school building. The majority of feedback supported reopening of the school, although mainly to enable the ELC setting to reopen. Some older community members expressed concerns about the loss of social engagement opportunities, which had been organised by the school. However, as this has been clearly outlined throughout this document, a school cannot operate without pupils on the roll.

11.9 Aberdeenshire Council is open to work with the local community to explore whether the building could be repurposed for wider community use. This suggestion was also raised during the engagement, with some residents expressing interest in developing the site as an early learning centre or community facility.

11.10 Aberdeenshire Council has an Asset Disposal Policy which must be followed when buildings or land are no longer required for their original purpose. Should the ELC setting also be subject to a closure consultation there could be opportunities for the site to be developed as a community ELC setting or a community hub. This would have to be fully assessed through the asset disposal procedure. Thereafter, any surplus council sites can be subject to an Asset Transfer Request.

11.11 A Place and Wellbeing Assessment was carried out to consider the impacts of the mothballing and proposed closure of Tullynessle School on health and wellbeing of the local community. Through a series of meetings and collaborative workshop involving community members and key stakeholders, a range of concerns, views and suggestions were gathered.

11.12 The full Place and Wellbeing Assessment has been published on the Aberdeenshire Engage portal https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/hub-page/ecs-learning-estates and is attached as Appendix C to this report. The findings and recommendations will be shared with relevant services and teams within Aberdeenshire Council, as well as external partners and community groups who play a role in shaping the future of education provision in Tullynessle.

11.13 These recommendations should be reviewed to identify which actions can be incorporated into future plans, acknowledging that some may require further exploration and collaboration. The assessment process reflects the Council's commitment to supporting positive opportunities and addressing any unintended negative consequences for the community.

12. School Transport

12.1 As of 26 June 2025, of the 27 primary pupils currently living within the Tullynessle catchment area, school transport is provided for fewer than five of them. Other pupils are transported by their parents/carers. All pupils on the Tullynessle School roll at the time of mothballing are transported to Keig School. However, very few of them resided in the Tullynessle catchment area.

12.2 In line with the Aberdeenshire Council Learning Estates Strategy, where practicable, primary pupils are not expected to have to travel for more than 45 minutes on school transport.

12.3 The closure of Tullynessle School would not impact the journey times for pupils, as they are currently being transported to other schools. However, the additional travel time compared to travelling to/from Tullynessle School to either Alford Primary or Keig Schools for pupils attending these schools and residing in the Tullynessle School catchment area is a maximum increase of up to 7 minutes one way in normal conditions. Although for some pupils it may be significantly

less or even shorter than the distance to Tullynessle School, depending on the pupils' home address.

12.4 During the session 2024/25, there were three mainstream contracts providing transport to Alford Primary School and two to Keig School, including transport to Keig School for pupils out with the Tullynessle School catchment who had been enrolled at the school during mothballing. The total cost is £664.17 per day. These contracts provide transport for 47 pupils, of which fewer than five are pupils residing in the Tullynessle catchment area. This cost could increase in the future depending on the number of families with school age children living in the Tullynessle catchment.

12.5 If Tullynessle School was to reopen now, two of the pupils currently living in the Tullynessle School catchment would be entitled to home to school transport regardless.

12.6 In the event of closure, all pupils within the Tullynessle catchment area would be entitled to school transport should they choose to attend the designated school, there would be no cost implications to families affected by the closure. A permanent closure would continue to have little impact in this respect on costs to the Council or distance covered by vehicles.

13. Financial Implications

13.1 As mentioned in Section 12 above, the proposed changes could result in an increase in costs for school transport provision, which would need to be met by Aberdeenshire Council. However, the increase will not be significant.

13.2 Further details of the financial impact of this proposal are included in the financial template provided in Appendix D. The costs provided in the template are from the 2023/24 session, when the school was last operational for a full session.

14. Sustainability

14.1 The Carbon Dioxide (CO_2) emissions for Tullynessle and Keig Schools are detailed in Table 5 below. The permanent closure of Tullynessle School would result in a reduction of around 22 tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually and would not increase the emissions at Keig School or Alford Primary School.

Table 5 – Five-year Average CO_2 Emissions

School	Average CO_2 Emissions (tonnes)	Impacted by the permanent closure of Tullynessle School?
Tullynessle School	21	Yes
Alford Primary School	NA *	No
Keig School	30	No

*Alford Primary emissions are incorporated in the emissions of Alford Community Campus

14.2 It is inappropriate to directly compare the CO_2 emissions of Alford Primary School, located within the Community Campus, with small rural schools due to several key differences in their structure, scale and operations. The Community Campus consist of multiple wings, various facilities such as swimming pool, has a larger population and more complex infrastructure, which significantly increases energy consumption needs compared with rural schools.

14.3 There is little negative environmental impact in relation to the transport of pupils due to increased CO^2 transport emissions; however, there are relatively short distances and small numbers involved. Tullynessle School pupils will be transported to Alford Primary School or Keig School by the Council rather than travelling individually, as they did through placing requests, and transport contracts may already be in place regardless.

14.4 The negative impact on the environment, due to the transport required, will be outweighed by the closure of Tullynessle School, as the school would still require heating, electricity and maintenance to remain open for a very small roll of pupils.

14.5 The distances from Alford Primary School and Keig School to Tullynessle School are 2.3 miles and 3.6 miles, respectively. Children residing in the Tullynessle catchment area are already transported to alternative schools by the authority provided transport or their parents/carers, and this would not change with rejecting this proposal.

14.6 Teacher recruitment and retention is a challenge faced by many rural authorities in Scotland. Rural schools with small numbers of pupils on roll change the teaching dynamic, requiring teachers to be highly adept in managing the curriculum, differentiation and assessment for pupils from P1-P7 in one or just two classes to ensure an educational benefit is maintained. Due to the staffing complement within these establishments, the opportunities for collegiate and stage partner working require careful planning with local schools and increased use of digital resources to allow online communities; however, some rural settings also have connectivity difficulties.

15. Implications for Staff

15.1 As Tullynessle School is already mothballed there will be no impact on staffing arrangements at either of the affected schools from the permanent closure of Tullynessle School. All staff previously based at Tullynessle School were offered alternative positions at other establishments. A continuation of mothballing would also not have an impact upon staffing.

15.2 The staffing implications of reopening Tullynessle School are set out in Section 5 above, whilst the financial implications are set out in Appendix D.

15.3 The current staffing allocation with Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for each school is set out in Table 6 below.

Table 6 – Staffing levels for each school

Position	Tullynessle School (if reopened)	Alford Primary School	Keig School
Head Teacher	1.00	1.00	1.00
Deputy Head Teacher	-	2.00	-
Principal Teacher	-	1.00	-
Teacher	0.11	10.00	1.00
Teacher – Flexible Days	0.42	-	-
Management Time	-	2.00	0.70
Non-Class Contact Time	-	1.44	0.22
Administrator	0.36	1.00	0.36
Admin Support Assistant	0.33	0.55	0.27
Pupil Support Assistant	0.37	7.13	0.52
Children's Escort	-	0.12	-
Unit Cook / Supervisor	-	0.99 *	-
Assistant Cook	-	1.92 *	-
Senior Catering Assistant	0.69	0.40 *	0.87
Catering Assistant	-	6.33 *	-
Unit Cook / Supervisor	-	0.99 *	*
Cleaner	0.45	6.77	0.44

* Since Alford Primary School is co-located with Alford Academy within the Community Campus, both schools share support services such as catering and cleaning. The figures provided reflect Alford Academy data. Distinct data for Alford Primary School is not available.

15.4 Additional Support Needs (ASN) teaching and pupil support staff are allocated to each school in accordance with an annual assessment of needs across the cluster.

15.5 Janitorial provision is allocated to each school based on the Alford Cluster allocation.

15.6 Trade Unions are included in the consultation process. Any impacts for staff will be addressed under existing HR & OD policies and procedures.

16. Equal Opportunities

16.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) is a statutory requirement for the Council to assess the policies and practices necessary to meet the requirements of anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. It also affords an opportunity for the Council to consider the impact on the education service. An IIA has been carried out as part of the options appraisal process.

16.2 The purpose of an IIA is to examine policies and practices in a structured way to make sure that adverse effects on groups with protected characteristics are avoided. It is also a tool to enable the Council to assess what positive steps it can take to promote equality of opportunity and measure the results of the actions that have been taken.

16.3 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from Tullynessle to Alford Primary or Keig Schools. However, as the school has been mothballed since August 2024, all current Tullynessle pupils

are already making their journey to local schools. Many of Tullynessle children had been making similar journeys to other local schools many years prior to the mothballing, due to successful placing requests.

16.4 The travel distances and times for Tullynessle pupils show variability depending on their specific routes and pupils' home addresses. For those attending Alford Primary School, the maximum increase in travel distance is 2.3 miles, with a maximum increase in travel time of 7 minutes. However, some pupils will experience shorter travel distances, with reductions of up to 4.3 miles. In contrast, for pupils traveling to Keig School, the maximum increase in distance is 3.5 miles, with a maximum additional travel time of 5 minutes, while others may only need to travel 1.5 miles. Overall, changes in travel impact pupils differently, with both increases and decreases in travel times and distances.

16.5 The current travel arrangements for pupils living in the Tullynessle catchment area have been in place since August 2024. Permanent closure of Tullynessle School would not affect the travel arrangements for current pupils and future pupils are unlikely to have hugely different travel arrangements.

16.6 Funded school transport would be provided for all P1-7 pupils from the current Tullynessle catchment area attending either Alford Primary School or Keig School if one of these options is approved.

16.7 Funded transport is not provided for nursery age children; however, these children have already been attending and transported by their parents to pre-school settings across the area.

16.8 As part of the consultation process, the Council will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, parents/carers and young people, and will address comments about equality during this consultation.

16.9 Under The Equality Act 2010 education providers must not treat disabled pupils less favourably and should take reasonable steps to avoid putting disabled pupils at a substantial disadvantage. Existing arrangements in place for pupils within the schools affected with additional support needs will continue.

17. Consultation Arrangements

17.1 At its meeting on 22 May 2025, Aberdeenshire Council's Education and Children's Services Committee were asked to agree that a proposal document should be issued as a basis for consultation. No decision will be taken by the Council on the proposal contained in the paper until after the end of the consultation period. The Council will then receive a report on the consultation and will reach a view on the proposal. A copy of this document will be issued to all of the consultees listed on the first page of this document and it will also be published on the Council's website: https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/schools/school-info/education-consultations/

17.2 The period for consultation will run from 1 September 2025 until 31 October 2025, which adequately covers a period of 30 school days.

17.3 A public meeting will be held on 29 September 2025 at 6.00 pm in Tullynessle and Forbes Public Hall, Suie Road, Alford AB33 8QN. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting is welcome. The meeting will be convened by the Council and the Council will present the reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions and comments at the meeting. A minute will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered.

17.4 Opportunities will be provided for the staff working at Alford Primary School and Keig School to discuss the proposals. Opportunities will also be arranged for all primary pupils within these schools to engage in the consultation in a manner appropriate to their age.

17.5 An online survey will be available as part of the consultation. This can be completed at the following address or by scanning the QR code below:

http://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/tullynessle-statutory-consultation

17.6 The Council will also consider any written comments, which should be emailed to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. Alternatively, comments can be sent to the Learning Estates Team, Unit 15, Harlaw Way, Inverurie, AB51 4SG. Feedback should be received no later than 4 pm on 31 October 2025.

17.7 A copy of this document will also be sent to Education Scotland. They will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council during the consultation period. They will also receive a copy of any oral representations made at the public meeting and a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal. In preparing their report, they may visit the schools and make such reasonable enquiries as they consider appropriate.

18. Consideration of Consultation Responses

18.1 The Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, survey results, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a report on the consultation. This report will be published in electronic format and will be available on the Council website. Anyone making written representations during the consultation period will be informed about the report.

18.2 The report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations and a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting. The

report will also include the Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report, a response to issues raised through any written or oral representations it has received, together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information, including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled. The report will also contain a statement explaining how the Council has complied with the requirement to review the proposal in light of the Education Scotland Report and representations (both written and oral) that it received.

18.3 The last section of the report will include an officer recommendation as to whether the proposals should be adopted and implemented. The Consultation Report will be published at least three weeks prior to the Council making a decision.

18.4 A final decision is likely to be made by the Council on the proposed changes in mid-spring 2026.

19. Decision Making

19.1 The consultation report will be considered first by Marr Area Committee who will be asked to make a comment on the officer's recommendation.

19.2 Following Marr Area Committee, Education and Children's Services Committee will be asked to make a recommendation as to whether the proposed changes are implemented. This is expected to be in early spring 2026.

19.3 Following discussion and recommendation at both Marr Area Committee and Education and Children's Services Committee, Full Council will consider the report and be asked to approve the officer recommendation in the report. This is expected to be in mid-spring 2026.

19.4 At the end of the consultation process, Section 15 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 enables ministers to call-in a decision to implement the proposed closure of Tullynessle School.

19.5 Beginning on the day that the final decision is taken, the Council has a period of six working days to notify Scottish Ministers of the decision. Scottish Ministers then have a period of eight weeks from and including the date of the decision to decide if they will call in the proposal. The Council must publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified and that representations can be made to the Scottish Ministers within the first three weeks of the eight-week period. The Scottish Ministers will take into account any relevant representations that were made to them by any person within the first three weeks. The Council may not proceed with the implementation of the proposal until this eight-week period has passed.

19.6 If the Scottish Ministers decide to call in a closure proposal, it is then referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels who has a period of seven days after a call-in notice is issued to constitute a School Closure Review Panel. The Panel may decide to refuse consent to the proposal, refuse consent and remit it to the education authority for a fresh decision or grant consent to the proposal, either subject to conditions or unconditionally. The Panel must notify

the education authority of its decision within eight weeks from when the Panel was constituted or within 16 weeks if the Panel has issued a notice to the education authority that a decision has been delayed. The Council may not proceed with the implementation of the proposal until the outcome of the call-in has been notified to the Council.

20. Conclusion

20.1 Taking the above into account, Aberdeenshire Council recommends that Tullynessle School, currently mothballed, is closed and the catchment area reassigned to either Alford Primary School or Keig School, as outlined in Options 1 and 2 above.

20.2 There are strong educational, social and financial arguments in favour of this proposal.

20.3 The Council believes that the measures proposed in this document will enhance the provision of primary education within the Alford Cluster.

20.4 Whichever decision is taken with respect to the catchment area, existing pupils will not be required to change schools. This will also apply to any younger siblings of such pupils, provided they remain at the same primary school.

20.5 It should be noted that, whatever decision is made, this will not impact the ELC setting.

20.6 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements.