HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HMIE addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to merge Fintry and King Edward Schools and permanently discontinue education at the school site not retained.

April 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from HMIE has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of a proposal by Aberdeenshire Council to merge Fintry and King Edward Schools and permanently discontinue education at the school site not retained. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

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

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 4 March 2026 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the sites of Fintry School, King Edward School, Banff Academy and Turriff Academy, meetings with community representatives, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of either Fintry or King Edward School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

© Crown Copyright

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeenshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 The public consultation ran from 16 February to 27 March 2026. Copies of the proposal were made available to stakeholders and on the council website. A public meeting was held on 4 March 2026 in Turriff Primary School. Thirty-eight stakeholders attended the public meeting. The council received eight written responses and 225 survey returns. The majority of responses were in support of the proposal to merge the two schools. In regard to which site would be better following any merger, stakeholders are divided. From the survey returns, 103 would choose Fintry School site, 115 King Edward School site, one suggesting both sites and six not answering. However, stakeholders are respectful of each others' views. They are clear that if the proposal to merge is agreed, both communities will come together to support the merged school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree there are potential educational benefits to the proposal to merge Fintry and King Edward Schools. Fintry School was temporarily closed from August 2025 following the school roll reducing. Almost all stakeholders, who met HM Inspectors, agree with the proposal to merge the two schools. They are realistic about the need for the council to use education resources efficiently and consider a merger to provide the best likelihood of preserving a rural school option within the area in the longer term. Many stakeholders, including children, who spoke to HM Inspectors are positive about the opportunity for children to work alongside peers that the current situation provides. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal to merge two schools would likely enable the resulting school to sustain a roll that allows for at least two classes split between year groups.

3.2 Children and parents at King Edward School, who met HM Inspectors, welcome that the council has committed to keeping the current staff team at whichever site is chosen following any merger. They value highly existing relationships and spoke about how well staff support children to progress. The staff have a positive relationship with children. HM Inspectors observed that children, including those who moved from Fintry School, are settled and enjoying learning and playing alongside their peers.

3.3 Stakeholders who spoke to HM Inspectors are split in regard to which site should be chosen for the remaining school, should the proposed merger go ahead. Fintry School has a capacity for 50 children. In September 2025, there were 20 children of primary age living in the Fintry catchment area, the majority (14) were attending Turriff Primary School. King Edward School has a capacity for 47 children. In September 2025, there were 28 children of primary age living in the King Edward catchment, with a minority (12) attending the King Edward School. In April 2026, during the HM Inspectors visit, the King Edward School roll had risen to 35 children. School roll projections for the combined school roll is 28 by 2029. HM Inspectors agree that either site has the capacity to meet the future likely roll should the two schools be merged.

3.4 Council assessments of both sites determined that both are in a condition to continue to operate as a school. Fintry School is graded as A (good) and King Edward as B (satisfactory). King Edward School is in three buildings, which are close together. The site includes temporary

© Crown Copyright

accommodation, which is currently used as a dining hall. Children and young people commented on the temperature fluctuations and high noise levels within this portacabin. The toilets are in need of upgrading. Fintry School is one building. However, one classroom is accessed via steps and would require improvements to improve accessibility. Both sites have large outdoor spaces which work well for outdoor learning and play. Part of the outdoor areas at King Edward School are not council owned. HM Inspectors consider that both sites have the capacity to enable staff to deliver all aspects of the curriculum. Whilst Fintry School site is in slightly better condition, both school sites would benefit from upgrades to the accommodation.

3.5 Fintry School catchment is within Turriff Academy catchment. King Edward School catchment is divided between Banff Academy and Turriff Academy. In its proposal, the council states that these catchment boundaries will remain. A few stakeholders, that met HM Inspectors, who live towards the Banff area have indicated that should the Fintry site be chosen, they may move their children to a school in Banff or MacDuff. Should the Fintry site be chosen, a few families within the catchment may choose to have their children attend the school rather than opting for placing requests at Turriff Primary School. HM Inspectors recommend that the council considers further the likely long-term impact on the school roll of each site.

3.6 Stakeholders, who met HM Inspectors, have mixed views about which site should be chosen. Children at King Edward School, who live in the catchment area of both schools, prefer the school site nearest to where they live. A few, who have only ever attended King Edward School, are not clear if they will like the Fintry site. Those who used to go to Fintry School commented on how they preferred that the school has one building, so they could go to lunch and toilets without going outside. Senior leaders and most young people at both Turriff and Banff Academies consider that either site could be suitable. Staff at King Edward School, who spoke to HM Inspectors, expressed a clear preference for the King Edward site to be the one retained. Their reasons include the flexibility of accommodation, the location and that children are already settled at the school. A majority of stakeholders from King Edward School expressed the view that moving the children could be an unnecessary disruption to their learning. They are concerned that positive work, linked to the specific school site, such as eco groups, would have to restart. HM Inspectors recommend if the merger is agreed and the Fintry School site is chosen that the council works closely with staff to develop plans for the relocation. Transition plans should be communicated clearly to children and their families to reduce any concerns and minimise any disruption to learning.

3.7 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The council undertook pre-consultation engagement with staff, parents and both communities. A clear preference for a merger emerged, with parents largely agreeing that this would provide children with more opportunities to learn alongside peers in the same age group.

3.8 As Fintry School was temporarily closed there will be no impact on travel arrangements for children now attending King Edward School if this is chosen as the preferred site. However, as the two school sites are only 3.4 miles apart, should the Fintry site be chosen, this will not result in significantly longer journeys for most children. King Edward School is near the main road between Banff and Turriff which does present the potential for stakeholders to use public transport on occasion. Children travel regularly to both Banff and Turriff to attend activities such as sports groups. Fintry School site has the better car park facility. However, HM Inspectors do not consider that these factors should be the significant reason for choosing which site to use.

© Crown Copyright

3.9 Stakeholders, who met HM Inspectors, recognise that permanent closure of either school may impact negatively on the village affected. However, they consider that a merger is the best way forward in order to protect rural school education in the area. In regard to community facilities, King Edward has a well used community hall. For that reason, should the King Edward site become available, most stakeholders do not yet have a clear view of what the site should be used for. Fintry does not currently have a community facility. However, due to the cost of hiring the school, very limited use was made of the site by the community over recent years. Should the site become available, community members, including children, would like to see it made available for community use. In both cases, stakeholders consider sites should be used for community benefit, for example proceeds from any sale of the site being invested into the area.
HM Inspectors recommend that if the proposal is agreed, the council works with community members to consider the future use of the site that becomes vacant.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree there are potential educational benefits to the proposal to merge Fintry and King Edward Schools. Stakeholders, who met with HM Inspectors, agree with the proposal to merge the two schools. They consider this will create one rural school that is more likely to be viable, given that school rolls are projected to fall in the longer term. Regarding which site should be chosen if the proposal is agreed, HM Inspectors consider neither site has a clear advantage. Fintry School site has the benefit of being one building and having fully council owned outdoor space. However, King Edward School has better transport links, being near the main Turriff and Banff Road. The analysis of the likely impact of school rolls based on each site may be important in determining which site would be the better option. If the proposal is agreed and the Fintry School site chosen, HM Inspectors recommend that the council works with staff and families to develop an effective plan for the relocation of the school that minimises any disruption to learning.

HM Inspectors
April 2026

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland

© Crown Copyright