Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

Education & Children's Services

Closure of Tullynessle School Statutory Consultation
Online Survey Results

The statutory consultation period regarding the closure of Tullynessle School ran between 1 September 2025 and 31 October 2025. During the consultation period all Tullynessle residents, parents/carers, community members, parents of children who were enrolled at Tullynessle School at the time of mothballing and other identified stakeholders were invited to participate in an online survey to express their opinions on the proposal.

The survey provided a summary of the proposal with accompanying maps. The proposal is to discontinue education at Tullynessle School, which is currently mothballed, and to re-assign its catchment area to Alford Primary School or Keig School.

Alternative methods of contact were also suggested for consultees wishing to comment but were uncomfortable with completing a survey.

A total of 75 people took part in the survey with 111 comments left regarding the proposal. It is recognised that stakeholders may have more than one child; more than one answer has been provided for some of the questions. Some respondents left multiple comments covering more than one topic and some chose not to leave any comments.

Although the proposal clearly stated that the consultation pertained only to the Tullynessle Primary provision, many respondents provided comments on the Tullynessle Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) provision and their votes were based on a wish to reinstate it. One respondent resides in Aberdeen, and another one provided a contradictory response, indicating that their primary child was affected by the proposal while also stating that the child attends a secondary school. Additionally, it is recognised that multiple responses from the same households were submitted by different family members.

Despite those factors, all responses were included for the purposes of this survey report and counted within the overall results. However, it should be noted that those responses have had a significant influence on the final outcomes.

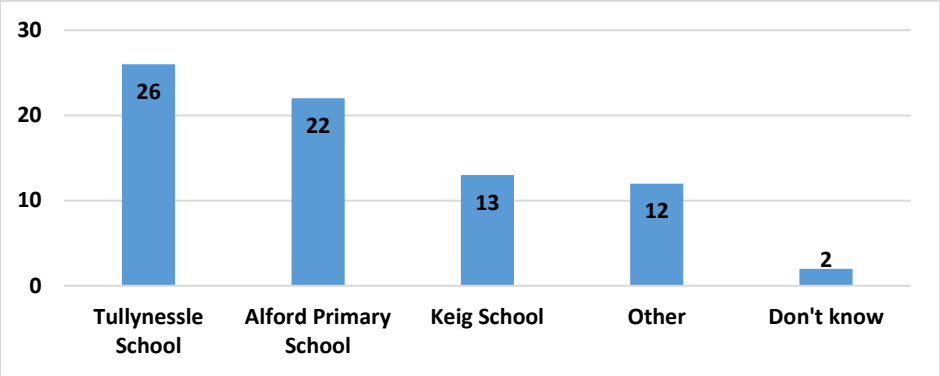
All responses received during the consultation period will be considered as part of the final report. This document focuses solely on the survey element of the consultation, and all completed surveys have been analysed and summarised below.

Q. In which primary school catchment do you reside?

The majority of the respondents to the survey, 61 (81%), reside in the catchment areas directly impacted by the proposal. 26 (35%) respondents live in the Tullynessle School

catchment, 22 (29%) in the Alford Primary School catchment and 13 (17%) in the Keig School area. 12 (16%) participants reside in the surrounding areas not directly impacted by the proposal and two respondents did not know what their school catchment area is. Participants who selected 'Other' for their residency location live in the Huntly, Stonehaven, Westhill, Towie, Tough, Inverurie and Aberdeen areas, amongst others. Chart 1 below shows the results from the question.

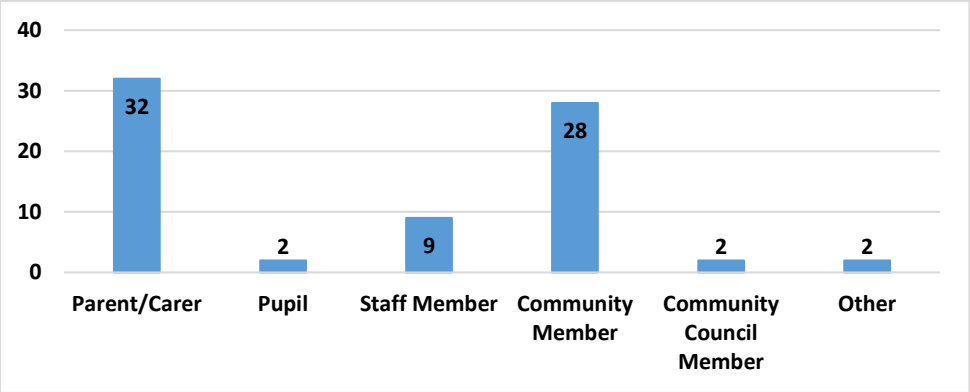
Chart 1



Q. Are you a?

As shown in Chart 2 below, the majority of respondents to the survey were parents/carers. The survey was completed by 32 (43%) parents/carers, two (3%) pupils, nine (12%) members of staff, 28 (37%) community members, two (3%) Community Council Members and two 'Others', who described themselves as 'Aberdeenshire Council worker' and 'Someone who cares about communities'.

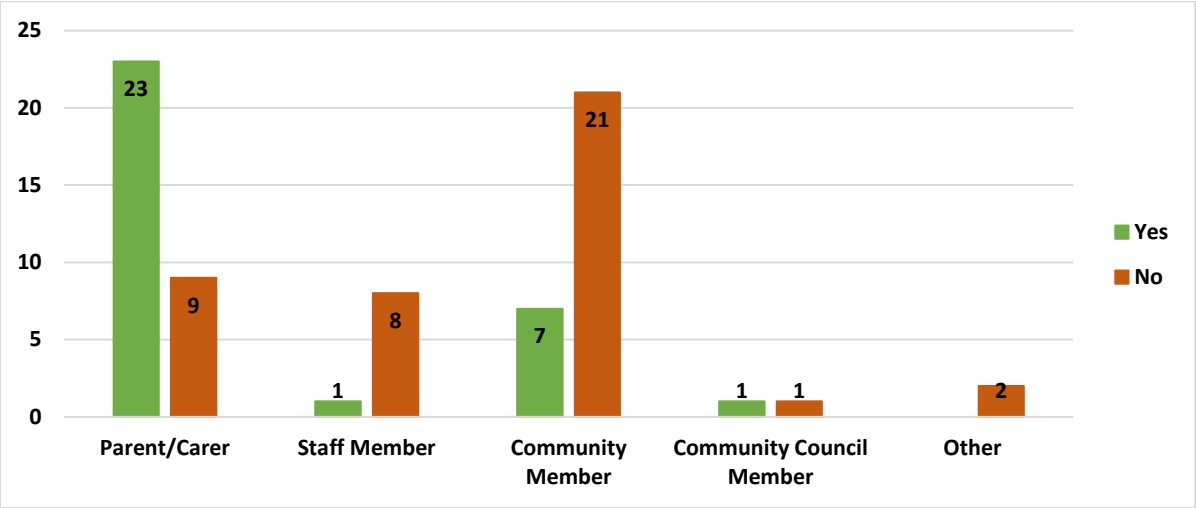
Chart 2



Q. Do you have a primary aged pupil or younger child in your family affected by the changes to Tullynessle School?

In total, 23 parents/carers, one staff member, seven community members and one community council member have children affected by the changes to Tullynessle School. Chart 3 below shows the results from the question.

Chart 3



Of the 23 parents/carers who completed the survey, only 20 have primary school age children or those under school age, who are residing in the areas directly affected by the changes to Tullynessle School. The vast majority attend Keig School, 12; four attend Alford Primary School and seven are under school age.

Q. Do you support the closure of Tullynessle School?

The primary focus of the survey was whether the respondents support the closure of Tullynessle School. A total of 21 (28%) respondents support the Tullynessle School closure, 48 (64%) are in opposition and six (8%) have no preference. This is presented in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4

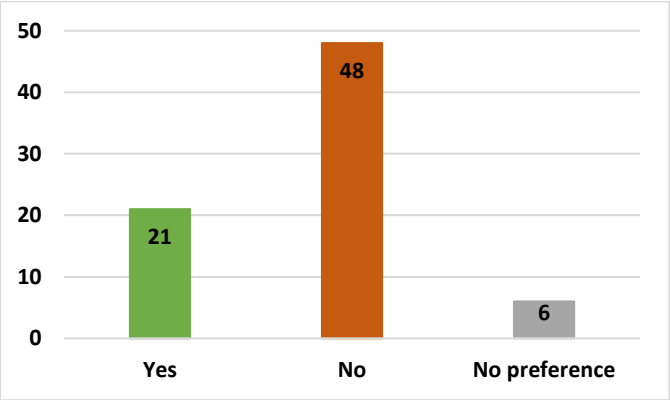
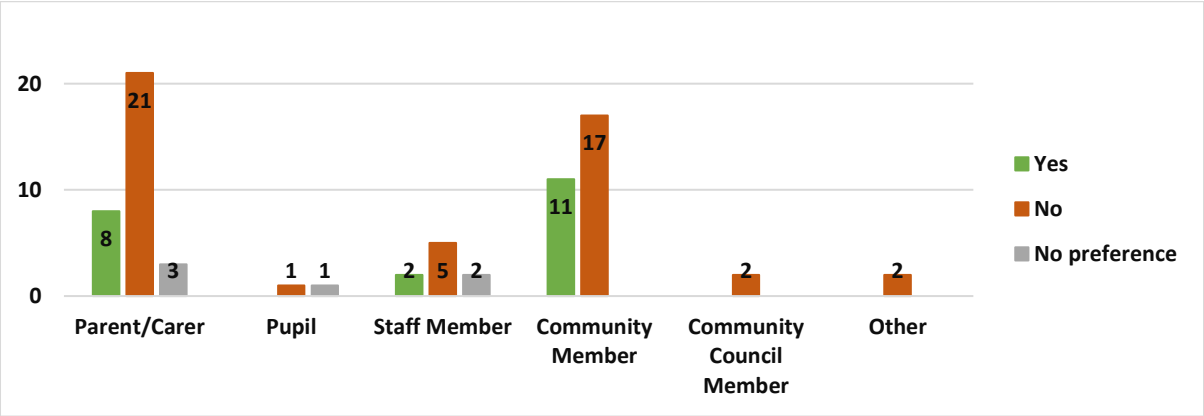


Chart 5 illustrates the voting patterns of individual interest groups on the Tullynessle School closure proposal.

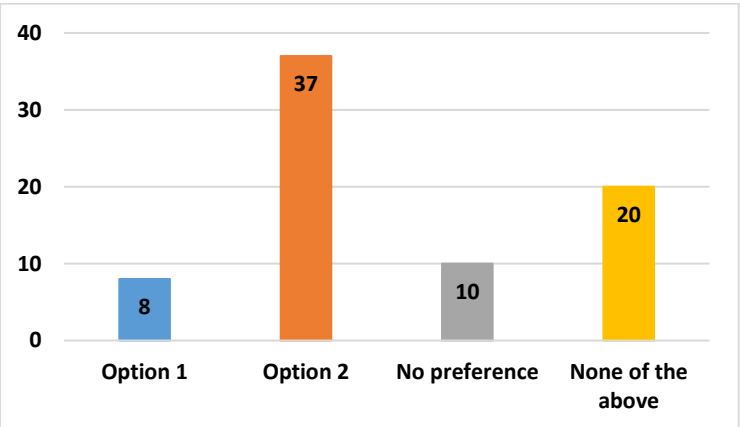
Chart 5



Q. If the closure goes ahead, which option do you prefer for the Tullynessle School catchment area?

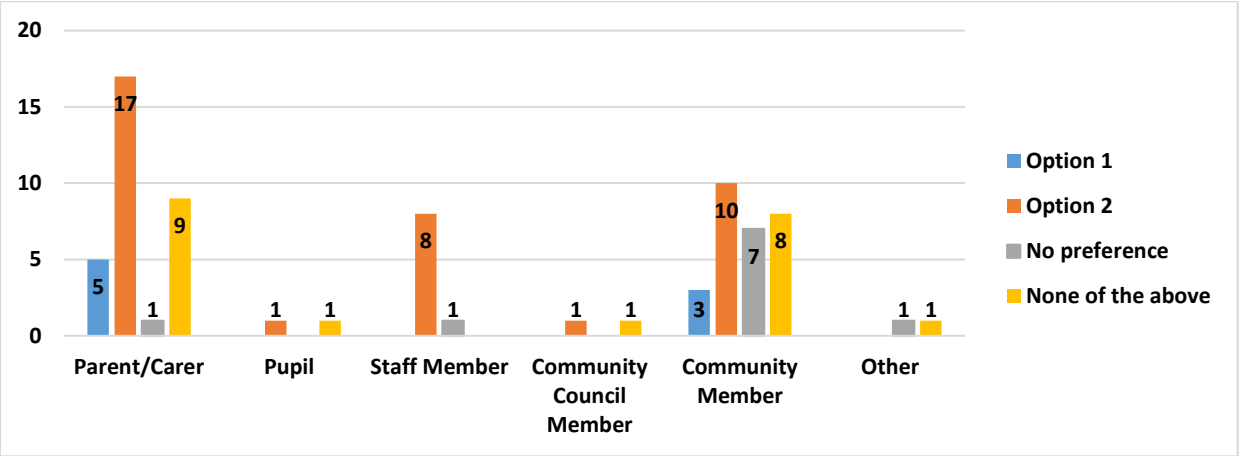
The participants were asked which option they preferred for the Tullynessle School catchment area: *Option 1* – realigning the Tullynessle School catchment with Alford Primary School or *Option 2* – realigning the Tullynessle School catchment with Keig School. The vast majority, 37 (49%) respondents are in favour of *Option 2*, eight (11%) support *Option 1*, ten (13%) indicated no preference and 20 (27%) are of the opinion that none of the proposed options should be consulted upon. Chart 6 below shows the results from the question.

Chart 6



The breakdown of preferred options by interest groups is presented in Chart 7 below.

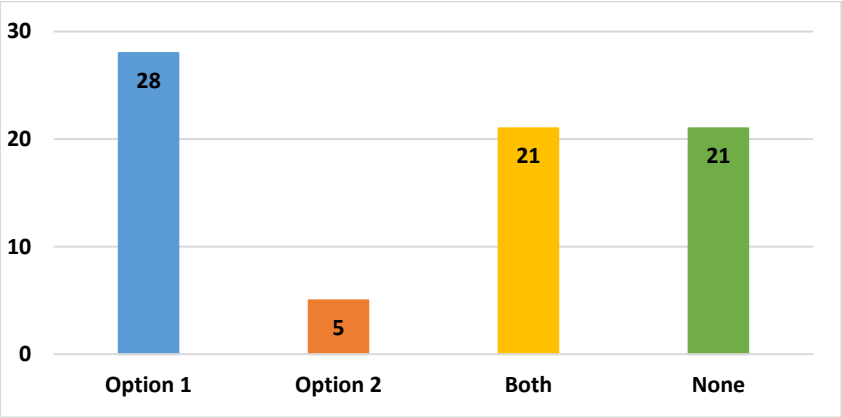
Chart 7



Q. Do you think any of these options should be discounted?

Out of all participants, 28 (37%) believe that *Option 1* should be discounted, while only five (7%) voted against *Option 2.* 21 (28%) respondents think that both options should be disregarded, while another 21 (28%) believe that both proposed options are viable and should be consulted upon. This is shown in Chart 8 below.

Chart 8

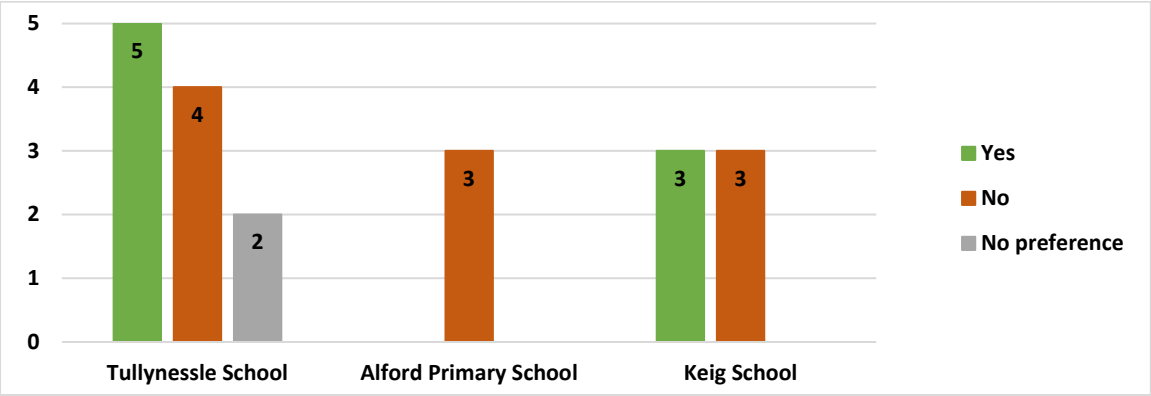


Summary

The majority of participants do not support the closure. Tullynessle School was described by some as *"a key place within the community"* and *"the heart of the community,"* providing a sense of belonging and bringing people together. There was sentiment and anger about the potential loss of this part of local life. Among community members, older residents often spoke of loss and nostalgia, remembering the role the school had played for generations. Some felt the decision was driven by financial reasons rather than the best interests of children, while for others the proposal was seen not only as an educational decision but as a social one, with potential consequences for the sustainability of the rural community. Several respondents highlighted the positive role rural schools play in children's education. Two participants referenced the Scottish Government's policy on protecting rural schools, suggesting the council was disregarding this principle.

The breakdown of parents/carers' votes on the proposed Tullynessle School closure, by catchment area, is shown in Chart 9.

Chart 9



Most of the families with primary aged children and younger children living in the Tullynessle catchment agree with the closure of Tullynessle School. Among Tullynessle parents/carers, five support the closure, four are against, and two expressed no preference. Although one respondent who selected 'No preference' noted that closure "seems sensible considering the number of pupils and cost to upkeep the school." Opponents to closure voiced their frustration about the mothballing of the nursery, disruption for children, uncertainty about transport for a younger sibling, and one suggested a split option between Tullynessle and Keig. Families supporting the closure recognised that very low pupil numbers limit social interaction and the richness of the learning experience. One parent/carer noted that the school had been struggling for years.

All Alford parents/carers who responded to the survey are against the closure. They all had different reasoning, like Alford being overcrowded, safety issues at drop-off and pick-up times. Two parents/carers voted against the closure purely because they did not agree with the deactivation of the ELC setting, and one of them was worried that closing Tullynessle School would lead to Keig school capacity pressures stopping their child attending the school in 2030.

Keig School families are evenly divided, with three Keig parents/carers supporting the closure and three opposing it. Supporters of closure feel a larger combined school would offer better social and educational opportunities and provide long-term sustainability. Opponents highlighted the loss of Tullynessle ELC and suggested a two-site solution using both buildings.

The proposal for the closure of Tullynessle School has generated a variety of opinions and suggestions from the stakeholders. While the majority wish to see the school reopen, some respondents see the merger with Keig School as a practical and sustainable solution for both Tullynessle and Keig communities.

Those opposed to the closure raised some practical concerns. Many stated that both Alford and Keig Schools were at or near capacity, raising concerns about overcrowding and the quality of education. A parent from the Alford area described school drop-off/pick-up as a *"nightmare"* and *"ridiculous"*. Some respondents were

*c*oncerned that transferring Tullynessle pupils to Alford would worsen these problems and increase safety risks.

A few respondents expressed frustration with how the council had handled the process, accusing it of acting too quickly, without listening to the local families and the community or considering the potential long-term growth in population or housing numbers.

Mothballing of the Tullynessle ELC was criticised by 13 respondents, and only three of them have a child who is under school age. A few respondents pointed out that the nursery had recently been refurbished, and that it made no sense to invest in facilities only to shut them down, wasting public money. Others said the nursery was thriving and gave children an excellent experience. One parent wrote that it had been “head and shoulders above” other local nurseries, and another described the closure as “a disgraceful waste of resources.” Families now had to travel further for childcare, adding stress and cost to their daily routines. A few respondents also highlighted the insufficient availability of nursery places across the area.

Despite the strong opposition, there were some respondents who supported the closure. With the main concern being the very low pupil roll, some parents said they would prefer their children to be in a larger school, where there were more pupils to socialise with and broader learning opportunities. One parent/carer agreed that, although taking their child to a different ELC setting was initially inconvenient and bothersome, they eventually got used to it. Several agreed that the Council’s financial situation made the closure foreseeable - maintaining such a small rural school does not justify the operational and maintenance spending. For some, the fact that many families in the Tullynessle catchment have already chosen alternative schools is sufficient evidence that the existing model is no longer viable. Therefore, support for the merger of Tullynessle with Keig was noted as a way to retain a rural identity while achieving viability. Another respondent would welcome the possibility of implementing active travel routes.

The vast majority supported *Option 2* - merging with Keig School, if Tullynessle School did close. Participants said Keig was a smaller, rural school like Tullynessle and the transition would be less disruptive. A few respondents saw the merger as a positive opportunity to keep Keig viable in the long term. Some were of the opinion that *Option 2* should be discounted because Keig lacks capacity, cannot accommodate all pupils, and with increased pupil roll may compromise the small rural school experience. Simultaneously, *Option 1* was criticised because it was believed that Alford is already overcrowded and cannot accommodate Tullynessle pupils. Merger with Alford risks educational quality and does not bring rural school benefits. Some thought that both options are problematic without additional resources or infrastructure.

Eleven respondents suggested a split model between Tullynessle School and Keig School with reinstatement of Tullynessle ELC. This would mean using Tullynessle for early years and lower primary classes, and Keig for the upper stages. This solution however, was proposed by only three parents/carers residing in the Tullynessle, Alford and Keig catchment areas who have a primary aged pupil or younger child affected by the proposal. A few respondents suggested reopening Tullynessle as a nursery or early learning centre, saying this would fill a gap in local early years childcare provision. Some parents/carers believed that such a solution would make better use of existing facilities and also support the sustainability of both communities.

Finally, feedback from parents/carers of young and primary aged children residing in the Tullynessle, Alford and Keig catchment areas shows mixed views on the proposal to close Tullynessle School, with opinions varying strongly by catchment.

Further analysis

One of the pupils who completed the survey is already in their secondary education and the other one lives in the Tullynessle School catchment and does not attend Keig or Alford.

The staff members who completed the survey are based at Alford Primary School and Keig School.

The two respondents categorised as 'Other' indicated not having children affected by the proposal, and none of them reside in the affected catchments.

Further analysis of the survey responses show that out of all 32 parents/carers who completed the survey, eight (25%) support the school closure, 21 (66%) are in opposition and three (9%) have no preference. If the closure would go ahead, five (16%) voted for *Option 1*, 17 (53%) for *Option 2,* one has no preference and nine (28%) think that both options should be discounted.

Of 11 parents/carers living in the Tullynessle School catchment who have under school age or primary school age children, five (45%) support the school closure, four (36%) are against the closure and two (18%) have no preference. Three (27%) of those parents/carers support O*ption 1* of the proposal, five (45%) are in favour of *Option 2,* and another three (27%) is of opinion that none of these options should be considered.

Three parents/carers residing in the Alford Primary School catchment who have under school age or primary school age children, oppose the closure of Tullynessle School. Two (67%) of those parents/carers prefer O*ption 2* of the proposal and one thinks that both options should be discounted.

Of six parents/carers residing in the Keig School catchment area who have under school or primary school age children, three (50%) support the Tullynessle School closure and other three (50%) are against the closure. Of this group of parents/carers, two (33%) prefer *Option 1*, three (50%) *Option 2* and one is against either.

The remaining parents/carers who took part in the survey have either come from different areas or communities, not directly affected by these changes, or have no children affected by this proposal.

Out of nine staff members who completed the survey, two (22%) are in favour of the Tullynessle School closure, five (56%) are against and two (22%) have no preference. Eight (88%) members of staff prefer *Option 2* and one indicated no preference. The majority of the Alford Primary School staff members who completed the survey are against the Tullynessle School closure and simultaneously do not agree with the Tullynessle School catchment to be realigned to Alford Primary School.

Out of 28 community members who responded to the survey, 11 (39%) support the school closure and 17 (61%) are against. *Option 1* is favoured by three (11%) of them and *Option 2* by 10 (36%). Seven (25%) community members have no preference and eight (29%) think that both identified options should be discounted.

Further analysis of all responses broken by the participants' settlement is as follows. Of those 61 consultees living in the Tullynessle, Alford Primary and Keig catchments, 17 (28%) support the closure of Tullynessle School, 39 (64%) are in opposition to the proposal and five (8%) have no preference. *Option 2* is favoured by the majority, 31 (51%) of the respondents residing in the affected catchments, while *Option 1* is supported by seven (11%). Seven (11%) participants have no preference and 16 (26%) are against both options.

Among respondents residing in catchment areas not directly affected, four (29%) support the Tullynessle School closure, nine (64%) are against the proposal and one has no preference. Six (43%) respondents are in favour of *Option 2*, one is in favour of *Option 1*, three (21%) respondents have no preference and four (29%) believe that none of the proposed options should be consulted upon.

Participants were given an option to comment on whether any of the proposed options should be discounted. Those are summarised below:

- Option 1 (merger with Alford Primary School):
  - Capacity & overcrowding – many stated that Alford is already at or near capacity; adding Tullynessle pupils would lead to classes split unevenly; children are taught in general spaces; insufficient pick-up/drop-off facilities.
  - Loss of rural school setting – Alford is a larger, non-rural school; families from Tullynessle value small, community-based education which would be lost; large schools do not fit all children.
  - Preference for Keig School – several respondents specifically rejected Alford and supported Keig for its small and rural character; potential of having one good-sized rural school by merging Tullynessle with Keig; ensuring long-term viability of Keig.
  - Transport concerns – increased traffic on Montgarrie Road with no pedestrian provision.
  - Quality of learning experience – better education at smaller schools; merging into a large, overstretched school will have a negative impact on children.
  - Insufficient nursery provision – Alford cannot accommodate Tullynessle nursery children if merged; limited early years education provision.

- Option 2 (merger with Keig School):
  - Capacity & overcrowding – Keig is full; cannot comfortably absorb Tullynessle pupils without overcrowding; limited facilities; concern over the school handling composite classes.
  - Distance – Keig is further away than Alford; may require longer travel.
  - Loss of small school experience – adding more pupils could diminish the small, rural school environment, which is valued by some families; negative impact on neurodivergent children.

- Both:
  - Appeal for retaining local school – Tullynessle School seen as a heart of community; community spirit; Tullynessle should not close.

- Capacity issues in both schools – neither Alford nor Keig can fully accommodate all Tullynessle pupils; insufficient space and facilities at both schools; Keig bursting at the seams; Keig would have 56 pupils, if seven had not left last year.
- Loss of rural school experience – Alford is too big and with increased numbers of pupils, Keig will lose the rural feel; families should have options to choose smaller rural schools.
- Travel and road safety – concern about bad road conditions in winter and school transport cancellations due to bad weather.
- Need for alternative solutions – some parents propose splitting year groups P1-P3 and P4-P7 between Tullynessle and Keig with reopening of Tullynessle ELC setting.

Conclusion

The consultation on the proposed closure of Tullynessle School generated a variety of opinions and suggestions from local communities, including those not directly affected by the proposal. Many parents/carers, pupils, staff, and residents shared their opinions, some of them were sentimental, some practical and based on lived experience. While the majority wish to see the school reopen, some respondents see the merger with Keig School as a practical and sustainable solution for both Tullynessle and Keig communities.

Learning Estate Team
Education and Children's Services
November 2025