

Northfield Primary Schools Feasibility Study
March to June 2023

Progress Update 1
1 May 2023

Introduction

The Council is carrying out a feasibility study between March and June 2023, to identify potential options for reducing the number of primary schools in the Northfield Associated Schools Group (ASG). To help inform the outcomes of the feasibility study, we are inviting comments and feedback from pupils, parents, staff, community groups and all other stakeholders, on the options available, and the potential impact of these options on individual schools and communities.

Stakeholders have been invited to submit their comments and feedback about the feasibility study, using our online consultation hub, which can be found here: <https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/northfield-primary-schools-feasibility-study>

This paper provides an update on progress with the feasibility study, and a summary of the feedback received so far from stakeholders.

Feasibility Study Update

Activity to Date

The team's activity to date has been focused on **gathering data** to allow for the consideration of Options 2 and 3, as outlined in the feasibility study brief (see appendix A below). This has involved the **detailed review of the existing school sites**, and undertaking site surveys where required, to gain a full understanding of each school's current circumstances, such as the building layout, condition, accessibility, and overall size of the site. This information will be used to address some of the questions listed within the feasibility study brief around the relative advantages and disadvantages of closing each site, and which sites would be most suitable to accommodate a merged school or new building.

Next Steps

The site surveys and reviews will continue over the next four weeks. During this time the team will also undertake a **detailed analysis of current and forecast pupil numbers at each school**, and look at the current school catchment areas, to consider how these could change if one of the buildings was to close. This will provide the information needed for consideration of Option 1 in the feasibility study brief (see Appendix A), and further help identify the advantages and disadvantages of closing each site.

A further progress update will be available from Monday 31st May.

Stakeholder Feedback

To date, feedback and comments have been received from over 80 contributors, and this is much appreciated. Comments received so far are focused mainly around the following points:

- Concerns that closing a school would result in larger class sizes at the remaining schools, and/or the remaining schools would become full
- The importance of making sure schools are within a reasonable walking distance of children's homes, and the need to consider road safety and traffic congestion
- Existing schools are seen as important to the local community
- Concerns about the impact that closing a school would have on the children in that school, especially those with additional support needs
- Recognition that merging schools together would help the Council to reduce costs

All of these points and any other feedback received in the coming weeks will be given careful consideration as part of the feasibility study, and when making recommendations to councillors.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

We have used this feedback to compile a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs), which is available on the consultation hub, via this link: <https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/education-and-childrens-services/northfield-primary-schools-feasibility-study>.

We will continue to update the FAQs as the feasibility study progresses and as new questions are received.

Appendix A – Feasibility Study Brief

Below is a summary of the Feasibility Study Brief. This outlines the objectives of the project, the options to be considered, and what information the final Feasibility Study Report needs to provide:

Project Objectives

To be sure that the feasibility study can meet the requirements set out in the School Estate Plan, the options identified in the study should be aimed at achieving the following:

- A reduction in the number of primary schools operating within the Northfield ASG
- An overall revenue saving in terms of building running costs
- A positive impact on reducing carbon emissions and on the Council's net-zero ambitions
- The remaining primary schools to be maintained at between 80% and 95% occupancy for at least 6 years following implementation, as determined by the most recently available school roll forecast data
- All remaining schools to be below 2 miles' safe walking distance from all homes within the catchment area

Options to be included in the Feasibility Study (not exhaustive)

To achieve the objectives outlined above, the following options will be considered in the Feasibility Study. Within each of the options below there will be several sub-options, which consider the various combinations of schools which could potentially be merged, closed or replaced:

- Option 1 – Close one school, and re-align catchment areas to provide pupils from that school with places at the remaining schools
- Option 2 - Merge two schools together, to form one new school in an existing building, and close the other building
- Option 3 - Merge two or three schools, to form one new school in a new building to be constructed, and close the existing buildings

Additional options may be identified and added to this list as the feasibility study progresses.

Questions to be considered by the Feasibility Study

The feasibility study will address the following key questions, and a final report will be provided at the end of the study which sets out the answers to these questions:

- What are the benefits / dis-benefits of potentially closing each school site?
 - Consider costs / savings, benefits / dis-benefits of closing each site
 - Consider impact on carbon emissions and contribution to the Council's net-zero ambitions
 - How could the existing catchment areas be realigned to maintain reasonable safe walking distances to school?
- Which would be the optimal site to be retained and to 'host' a merger with another school?
 - Consider running costs, carbon emissions, accessibility, sustainable travel
 - Requirements for improvement / refurbishment of buildings
 - Consider forecast pupil rolls and capacity of existing sites to accommodate future pupil numbers
 - Consider benefits / dis-benefits of merging each combination of schools
- Which would be the optimal site for a demolition and rebuild to 'host' a merger of 2 or more schools?
 - Consider size of sites and requirements for a building to accommodate 2 or 3 existing schools
 - Consider impact on carbon emissions and contribution to the Council's net-zero ambitions
 - Likelihood of planning consent
 - Costs vs savings of replacement building
 - Likely timescales for demolition and construction
 - Likely temporary arrangements for accommodating pupils during demolition and construction

Appendix B - Key Dates for Feasibility Study and Stakeholder Engagement

The intended dates for the Feasibility Study and Stakeholder Engagement are presented below.

Monday 27 th March:	Feasibility Study Launched
Monday 17 th April:	Stakeholder Engagement Launched – Information Paper added to Consultation Hub
17 th April to 16 th June:	Stakeholders invited to submit comments and feedback via Consultation Hub
Monday 1 st May:	First Progress Update for Stakeholders added to Consultation Hub
Monday 29 th May:	Second Progress Update for Stakeholders added to Consultation Hub
Friday 16 th June:	Feasibility Study Closes
Monday 3 rd July:	Feasibility Study Report shared on Consultation Hub
Tuesday 12 th September:	Outline Business Case presented to Education & Children’s Services Committee*

*The findings of the feasibility study, along with summaries of the feedback received from stakeholders, will be included within an Outline Business Case, which will be presented to the Council’s Education and Children’s Services Committee in Autumn 2023. The business case will outline each of the identified options and sub-options, and what information has been obtained through the feasibility study to support, or not support, each option being taken forwards. From this, a preferred option will be highlighted for consideration.

The Committee will then make a decision on whether to accept the preferred option, and what action, if any, should be taken next. Any proposal to close a school would require a formal public consultation, and a public meeting, before the Council could decide whether to implement such a proposal.