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Learning Estate Strategy Consultation Outcomes – December 2020

Summary of Consultation Outcomes

Consultation and engagement on the 'Approach to Developing a Long-term Strategy for the Learning Estate' has included an online questionnaire on the guiding principles contained within the strategy document (issued to Head Teachers, school staff, parents, union and community representatives); engagement meetings with Head Teachers, Parent Council and Community Council representatives; and a follow up questionnaire asking attendees at the engagement meetings to highlight the principles that are most important to them.

The consultation has indicated broad support for the approach amongst all stakeholders.

All stakeholders are keen to see Moray progress with improving our learning estate, with a particular focus on:

- Ensuring our learning environments support the wellbeing of all learners (and staff and community) and meet all needs to support inclusion/accessibility
- Ensuring our learning estate is well managed and maintained in a good condition
- Ensuring all our schools are equipped with the best digital technology.

All stakeholders were appreciative of the opportunity to comment on the strategic approach, but were keen to move forward with more detailed discussions regarding option appraisals for each Associated Schools Group. Local engagement will commence in the new year.

The comments received during this initial consultation will be used to inform the development of options for ongoing discussion with stakeholders.

Note: the detailed consultation responses are available as a background paper

1. Stakeholder Questionnaire – March 2020

A. Summary of responses received

- 300 responses received.
- Respondents were primarily school staff and parents/carers.
- The greatest number of responses were from the Buckie and Forres ASGs.
- The majority of respondents (80.7%) were supportive of the principles as set out within the strategy.
- Amongst staff there was a high level of support (>90%) for most principles, with the exception of:
 - The development of schools as community/public service hubs (14% against)
 - Maintaining schools that are below capacity by increasing the school roll through rezoning (12.5% against)
 - Maintaining schools that are below capacity by utilizing the space for other services or community facilities (13.2% against)
- Amongst members of the community there was broad support for most principles, with the most support for digital enablement and ensuring our schools are designed to meet the needs of all learners. There was a mixed view on whether we should maintain schools that are below capacity by increasing the school roll through rezoning (48.3% for and 41.7% against).
- Amongst parents/carers there was greatest support for the following principles:
 - All learners in Moray should have the opportunity to learn in high quality school buildings (78.7% for)
 - School buildings should be designed to meet the needs of all learners (87.2% for)
 - Staff and communities should be fully involved in decision making for their local schools (87.2% for)

There was less support for the principle that schools should be developed as community/public sector hubs (23.4% against) and that the programme should be prioritized based on population growth and current maintenance issues (18.1% against).

- The comments received reflect differing views, priorities and concerns including:
 - The difficulties of working within buildings that are below standard;
 - The importance of appropriate facilities that can enhance the quality of education and enable schools to respond effectively to the challenges they are facing;
 - The importance of digital;
 - The challenge of rezoning in a rural context, but recognition that this can support the sustainability of small rural schools;
 - The desire to retain schools within our communities;
 - An understanding of the need to prioritise areas of population growth, but we should also be mindful of the needs of other areas in Moray;
 - A desire to invest in quality community assets;
 - Some support for the closure of small schools where there is an educational benefit in doing so.
 - The solution may be different in each community/ASG

2. Engagement Meetings – November 2020

A. Summary of Head Teacher Feedback

- A priority should be supporting the wellbeing of all learners (and the staff that work in our schools) and ensuring our buildings meet all needs to support inclusion/accessibility.
- Flexible learning spaces are key, but they need to be designed with school-based staff and be as flexible as possible.
- Agree that our learning environments need to be greener and more sustainable but the solution may be different in different contexts.
- Outdoor learning and making the best use of our outdoor spaces is important, but we need to ensure our outdoor spaces are secure and safe. Our buildings also need to be designed to support regular movement between indoor and outdoor spaces (taking account of the need to change shoes, put on coats etc).
- Digital learning is important but we need reliable broadband/Wifi access and sufficient ICT support from our central ICT teams.
- Community integration is welcomed but there should be a strategy for community use at the outset, prior to any agreement on building design.
- Equity in terms of access to resources and facilities across Moray needs to be considered.
- School building design/planning needs to take account of safer routes to school, drop-off points for cars and buses etc.

B. Summary of Feedback from Parent and Community Council Chairs

23 Parent and Community Council representatives attended across three engagement sessions

There was broad support for the aspirations, principles and aims of the learning estate strategy with comments received on each of the principles discussed as follows:

The learning estate should be well managed and maintained in a good condition

- Important to have a shared standard that would include upgraded buildings and new builds
- Would like more information on criteria for A-C ratings in terms of condition and suitability

Learning Environments should facilitate excellent learning and teaching – flexible learning spaces rather than traditional classrooms

- Need to cater for children who prefer traditional learning spaces too
- Concern about noise levels in open plan spaces
- Staff need to be consulted on design – should be considered alongside teaching methods
- We need a better understanding of what is meant by a flexible learning space
- Space for parent interaction is important too

Learning Environments should support the wellbeing of all learners and meet all needs to support inclusion/accessibility

- Inclusion and accessibility is important for staff and community users as well as learners
- Inclusion and accessibility shouldn't just be for physical needs but also pupils with communication needs

Learning Environments should be greener and more sustainable

- How does sustainability and greener ambitions fit with older buildings that may not be suitable for refurbishing?

Outdoor learning and the use of outdoor learning spaces should be maximised

- Lockdown and COVID teaching highlights the benefits of access to outdoor learning
- Parents have seen the benefits of more outdoor learning since it has become more common due to COVID.

Learning environments should have the best digital technology

- Technology is fast evolving – a balance is required to avoid overuse and different levels are “best” for Primary and Secondary
- Training for teaching staff and the provision of ICT kit should be linked to this core principle
- This would enable improved links between schools and further and higher education – blended learning for better access to courses

The learning estate needs to be managed in line with changing demographics – so that any capacity issues can be dealt with in timely way

- Would like to see “managed and maintained in line with...”

Schools should serve the wider community and be integrated with other services (sport & leisure, libraries, health, others?)

- Community integration – particularly small, rural schools – is important. Integrating age groups from nursery to elderly can be beneficial (might not suit all communities)
- Sharing services shouldn't be at the detriment to other facilities in the community – i.e. creating a community space shouldn't take over from a community run hall
- Does shared facilities mean shared costs? i.e. integrated staffing models
- More integration of leisure facilities i.e. all weather pitches for community use as well as school

Target occupancy of our schools should be between 75% and 90%

- Target occupancy should be over a longer period of time and not just the numbers in any given year– could be a lot going up to secondary one year with less starting school but capacity is needed the following year

Where there are falling school rolls we should explore options for use of the spare capacity to benefit the community.

- Define what “spare capacity” means – space might be used for art/drama/music etc so isn’t underutilised but might not have children in it

3. Follow on Questionnaire

The follow on questionnaire asked respondents to rank the strategy principles in priority order. The principles ranked as highest priority were:

- Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners and meet all needs to support inclusion/accessibility.
- The learning estate should be well managed and maintained in good condition.

The principles ranked as lowest priority were:

- Target occupancy for our schools should be between 75% and 90%.
- Where there are falling school rolls we should explore options for use of the spare capacity to benefit the community

Appendix 2

Please rank the following principles from highest priority to lowest for your community... (one being highest)

