

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Moray Council to vary the catchment areas of Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Linkwood, Seafield and West End Primary Schools and Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Moray Council's proposal to vary the catchment areas of Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Linkwood, Seafield and West End Primary Schools and Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School. 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' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of 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 final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Linkwood, Seafield and West End Primary Schools and Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School; 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 30 November 2016 in connection with the council's proposal;

- 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 site of Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Seafield and West End Primary Schools and Elgin Academy and Milne's High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The Moray Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 21 November 2016 until 20 January 2017. The proposal paper was made available in paper format at all affected schools and in local libraries. It was also posted on the council's website. Letters were issued to parents at all affected schools. Community councils in the affected areas were consulted. A public meeting was held on 30 November 2016 with a total of nine members of the public in attendance. The council received 24 responses to an online survey and one written response. Of these submissions, between 14-17 were supportive of all four aspects of the proposal. Between 1-6 respondents were not in favour of the proposal. The main concerns raised were the use of the River Lossie to determine catchment area boundaries, older siblings being zoned to different schools and eligibility for free transport.

2.3 A written response was received from the City and Royal Burgh of Elgin Community Council. This was supportive of the council's proposal. The council took appropriate steps to consult with children and young people. Children and young people were overall supportive of the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has set out a reasonable case for the proposed changes to the catchment areas of Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Linkwood, Seafield and West End Primary Schools and of Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School. In arriving at its proposal it gave good consideration to pupil safety, in particular, by identifying shorter and safer routes to a number of schools. The proposal to rezone part of West End Primary School catchment to Bishopmill Primary School removes the need for children to cross the busy A96. Children resident in the areas currently zoned to Lhanbryde Primary School and Elgin Academy will benefit from the ending of the split zoning for their area. This will improve transition arrangements and ensure continuity and progression for learners. There is no detriment for families who currently attend Bishopmill, Lhanbryde, Linkwood, Seafield and West End Primary Schools or Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School. The proposal assists the council to meet its agreed principle that the whole of the zone of a primary school should form part of the zone of one secondary school only.

3.2 All parents, staff and children from Bishopmill, Lhanbryde and Seafield Primary Schools who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. Parents and children from all schools saw clear benefits in all children at a given primary school moving to the same secondary school. Parents and children also welcomed the introduction of safer routes to school taking out the need for children to cross busy roads. Parents from West End Primary School who met with HM Inspectors had no particular views on the proposal.

3.3 All parents and staff from Elgin Academy, Elgin High School and Milne's High School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. Whilst the impact would be minimal they welcomed the introduction of safer routes and the potential to improve transitions for young people through the removal of split zoning.

4. Summary

The council's proposal is of clear educational benefit. Pupil safety has been a key consideration, in particular the proposed introduction of shorter and safer routes to a number of schools. The proposal assists the council to meet its agreed principle that the whole of the zone of a primary school should form part of the zone of one secondary school only. Transitions will be improved as will continuity and progression for learners. In taking forward the proposal it would be helpful for the council to publicly restate the position of younger siblings zoned to Elgin High School where older siblings attend Elgin Academy, should the catchment areas change.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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