**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Moray Council to vary the catchment areas of Bishopmill, East End, Greenwards, New Elgin, Seafield and West End Primary Schools in Elgin, including establishing zones for two new primary schools.**

## 1. Introduction

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 make the following changes to primary school catchment areas (zones) in Elgin:

- to vary the catchment areas of Bishopmill, East End, Greenwards, New Elgin, Seafield and West End Primary Schools in Elgin based on geographical areas which are delineated on plans contained within the proposal document;

- to establish a catchment area for a new primary school, including nursery, to serve a delineated geographical area in south east Elgin; and

- to establish a catchment area for a new primary school, including nursery, to serve a delineated geographical area in north Elgin.

It is proposed that the implementation dates for these proposals will be:

- January 2016 for the revised catchment areas;

- no earlier than August 2018 for the new school to serve south east Elgin; and

- no earlier than August 2020 for the new school to serve north Elgin.

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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people 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.

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

- attendance at the public meetings held on 16 April 2015 and 27 April 2015 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 site of Bishopmill, East End, Greenwards, New Elgin, Seafield and West End Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

## 2. Consultation Process

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

2.2 The statutory consultation period ran from 13 April to 29 May 2015. The council held four public meetings on 13 April 2015 at Bishopmill Primary School, 16 April 2015 at New Elgin and Ashgrove Hall, along with afternoon and evening meetings on 27 April 2015 at Elgin Town Hall.

2.3 As part of the consultation the council held meetings with parent councils, staff and pupil councils of all affected Elgin primary schools, consultation with Community Councils, discussion with the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers. It also offered the opportunity for consultation with representatives of support staff trade unions, although this offer was not taken up.

2.4 The council received 59 responses to their online survey to the proposal and six written responses were received. Most of the responses supported the proposal. Parents and staff responses indicated that they were keen to know more about some particular catchment areas and also precise locations of the proposed new schools.

## 3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The proposal has a number of educational benefits for current and future learners at the schools. Overall, the proposal will lead to important improvements in the quality of learning environments for children. The proposal should support improved transitions for children from early learning and childcare settings to primary schools. Revised school rolls will alleviate current pressures in particular schools in terms of practical teaching spaces, dining spaces and social areas. This is particularly important for New Elgin Primary School which is currently operating at capacity. The proposal will also assist the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources by addressing capacity issues across its school estate in the Elgin area.

3.2 The aspect of the proposal related to varying the catchment areas of six primary schools should support children to attend the school for which they are zoned. The council has given reasonable consideration to the proposed new catchment areas. Stakeholders in several schools would like the council to consider alternative approaches to the delineation of school catchment areas. For example, they would like to see particular roads, landmarks and natural neighbourhoods being used rather than the council's proposed use of postcodes. The council should respond to suggestions by individual local school communities in taking forward the proposal.

3.3 The council has acknowledged that it will need to review individual school travel plans. In doing so, it should ensure that safe routes to school are identified and communicated to stakeholders.

3.4 Almost all school staff, representative groups of pupils and parents from all establishments affected by the proposal who met with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal. The community of New Elgin Primary School expressed a number of reasonable concerns about overcrowded dining facilities, lack of flexible learning and social spaces and the challenges of traffic management. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work closely with stakeholders, particularly those from New Elgin Primary School to clarify how it will address their concerns.

3.5 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors had a number of reasonable concerns related to the potential for siblings to be separated due to capacity at individual schools. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to provide families and stakeholders with clear guidance on how it will approach the placement of siblings, particularly where families may be split as a result of the proposed rezoning.

3.6 The aspect of the proposal related to the building of two new schools has potential educational benefits. These relate to the easing of overcapacity issues at current Elgin schools and the creation of more flexible learning and social environments, which will support active learning and collaboration between groups of children. The proposed new establishments will include up to date information and communications technologies which will enhance learners' experiences. However, there are currently no plans or details of exact locations for proposed new schools.

The council acknowledges that, once plans are available, it will need to carry out further consultation. Stakeholders have indicated that they would like the council to clarify its long term plans and timescales for improving the school estate and how it calculates roll projections. These are reasonable requests which the council will need to address in taking forward its proposal.

## 4. Summary

Overall, the proposal has a number of educational benefits. It should lead to important improvements in the quality of learning environments for children, along with improved transitions for children from early learning and childcare settings to P1 at school. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to work with individual school communities to clarify its reasons for believing the current proposal is the most reasonable and viable option open to it. It will need to review each school's travel plan, to ensure safe routes to school are identified. There are reasonable concerns regarding New Elgin Primary School which is currently facing challenges in terms of overcrowded dining facilities, lack of flexible and social learning spaces and traffic management. In preparing and publishing its final report, the council should address concerns of stakeholders at New Elgin Primary School, particularly in relation to the interim period before any new school is established. The council should provide clear guidance on its approach to the placement of siblings, particularly where families may be split as a result of the proposed rezoning. The council has indicated that the aspect of the proposal relating to the building of two new schools will result in a new consultation. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to engage with stakeholders and address their reasonable concerns about roll projections and about the timescale for the building of the schools.

**HM Inspectors**
**Education Scotland**
**August 2015**