

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Moray Council to vary the catchment areas of Forres Academy, Lossiemouth High School, 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 Forres Academy, Lossiemouth High School, 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 the schools affected, 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 meetings held on 16 February and 22 February 2016 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the sites of Elgin Academy, Elgin High School, Lhanbryde Primary School, Milne's High School, Burghead Primary School and Lossiemouth 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 statutory consultation period ran from 9 February to 24 March 2016. The council held four public meetings at Milne's High School, Lossiemouth High School and two meetings at Elgin Library. Prior to the formal consultation, the council held informal discussions with headteachers of schools concerned. Copies of the proposal document were made available for parents and pupils of all affected schools and information made available to staff, trade union representatives and wider community councils. The council received 34 responses to an online survey about the proposal. Most responses were supportive of the proposal, although there were several comments contained notes of concern about specific aspects of the proposal. Six written responses were also received. One response was positive, one was neutral and four responses opposed individual aspects of the proposal. The pupil council and all children at P5 to P7 in Burghead Primary School undertook their own consultation. Forty-two out of the 45 children who responded agreed with the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal. Removing the dual-zoning and separate transition programmes in particular schools would enhance continuity in learning. The proposal would help staff to work together across the associated schools on shared plans for broad general education. It would support the pastoral and curricular transition arrangements between primary and secondary education. Staff, children and young people who met with HM Inspectors also commented on the adverse effects which dual zoning could have on existing friendship groups. Having one zoned secondary school to which all pupils transferred at the end of P7 would alleviate this.

3.2 Parents, children, young people and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors during their visits to Burghead Primary School, Lhanbryde Primary School, Lossiemouth High School and Milne's High School fully supported the proposal. They saw clear benefits to transition arrangements between Lhanbryde Primary School and Milne's High School and between Burghead Primary School and Lossiemouth High School. They felt that the proposal would help to strengthen the

shared sense of community within their local areas. Young people from these schools could more easily benefit from the wide range of community and youth organisations which provide after school learning opportunities in the areas.

3.3 The proposal would end dual zoning for Lhanbryde and Burghead Primary Schools and have the potential to enhance planning arrangements of both Milne's High School and Lossiemouth High School associated schools groups. The Home School link workers based in these school groups have established relationships with children and families in Lhanbryde and Burghead Primary Schools and this helps with supported school transition plans.

3.4 Parents, young people and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors during their visit to Elgin Academy were supportive of the proposal overall. However, parents expressed their concern over an aspect of the proposal where young people living in the Troves area of Elgin would be re-zoned from Elgin Academy to Milne's High School. These concerns include the additional time required for travel to and from school, the area's traditional links to Elgin and that no young people from that area currently attend Milne's High School or Lhanbryde Primary School. During the public consultation meetings, the council have acknowledged that they could review this aspect of the proposal and that this area could remain in the Elgin Academy catchment in the short term. Through correspondence in response to the proposal, a few families raised concerns relating to particular anomalies in small parts of catchment areas. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to work with stakeholders of Troves and some other specific areas to address these particular concerns.

3.5 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors raised reasonable concerns regarding younger siblings who may be re-zoned to a different secondary school to their older siblings. In taking its proposal forward, the council need to provide clarification about this, including arrangements to address this issue.

3.6 Stakeholders alerted HM Inspectors to the fact that the council had not formally consulted with representatives of the Roman Catholic Diocese. In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to demonstrate that it has engaged appropriately with all relevant consultees as determined by legislation.

3.7 Parents of children attending St Sylvester's RC Primary School who met with HM Inspectors expressed concern about the fairness of the council's proposal. In its final report, the council will need to clarify how it believes the educational benefits accruing from the proposal will apply to children attending St Sylvester's Primary School.

4. Summary

4.1 Overall, there are clear educational benefits to the proposal. Removing the dual-zoning and separate transition programmes in particular schools would enhance continuity in learning. The proposal would help staff to work together across associated school groups on shared plans for broad general education and on pastoral and curricular transition arrangements between primary and secondary education. However, important considerations have been raised on issues for

particular local areas, including Troves and other specific areas from written responses. In taking forward the proposal the council should provide assurance to the reasonable points raised, including for people living in Troves. The council should provide reassurance to parents regarding siblings who may be affected by the proposal and provide clarification in its final report.

4.2 In taking forward its proposal, the council will need to demonstrate that it has engaged appropriately with all relevant consultees as determined by legislation.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
April 2016**