

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Moray Council to vary the catchment areas of Alves, Anderson's, Applegrove, Kinloss and Pilmuir 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 vary the catchment areas of Alves, Anderson's, Applegrove, Kinloss and Pilmuir Primary Schools. 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 meeting held on 23 August 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; and

- visits to the site of Alves, Anderson's, Applegrove, Kinloss and Pilmuir Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

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

2.2 The consultation period ran from 22 August to 30 September 2016. A public meeting was held on 23 August 2016 and was attended by six members of the public. No particular issues arose nor was there opposition to the proposal at this meeting. The consultation paper was widely publicised on the council's website and within the individual schools. Headteachers from each of the five schools discussed the proposal with their Parent Councils, children and staff as appropriate. A council survey resulted in 14 responses from members of the public. A few of those who opposed the proposal gave reasons which related to their own particular situation including travelling distances. A few also gave reasons not directly linked with this proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Should the proposal go ahead, HM Inspectors agree that families who live in the affected areas will be provided with clear information on their zoned primary school. The individual school roll forecasts outlined within the proposal paper indicate clearly that revised catchment areas should lead to a better balance of school rolls across the primary schools in the Forres Associated School Group. This has the potential to ensure a sufficiency of school places within the individual communities. For some schools, the proposal has the potential to create a more sustainable school roll for the future. In other schools, it will help to avoid potential overcrowding. The proposal also aims to retain and enhance flexible learning spaces such as libraries, art and music rooms within the schools.

3.2 Overall, the council received a small number of responses to the proposal. The majority of families who responded to the survey were in favour of the proposal and almost all who spoke with HM Inspectors are in favour. They agree with rationale behind the proposal and feel that it will give them clear information about the zoning for primary schools in the Forres Associated School Group. All families agree with The Moray Council regarding the need to ensure a sufficiency of school places and that these are balanced more effectively across the schools within the functional capacity of each school. Families also felt the proposal would not impact on parental choice across the five schools where places were available. Staff from the five schools who spoke with HM Inspectors are in favour of the proposal and agree with the educational benefits that would arise.

3.3 Children who spoke with HM Inspectors agree with the proposal. They feel the council's aim of ensuring a sufficiency of school places at their local school is fair. They agree that there is the potential to create a more sustainable school roll in the smaller schools. Children benefit from flexible learning spaces in each of their schools and they are pleased the proposal sets out to retain or enhance these areas.

4. Summary

The Moray Council has set out a clear rationale for the proposal and has consulted stakeholders well. They rightly make clear the need to ensure a sufficiency of school places across the five communities. The council is taking positive steps to create a more sustainable school roll within the smaller school communities. The proposal sets out to retain and enhance flexible learning spaces in each of the schools. Proportionally, the council received few responses to the survey. It has, however, listened to the views of families regarding the proposal and given reassurance where required.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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