

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Moray Council to introduce a revised admissions policy and procedures to schools in Moray from 4 January 2017.

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 introduce a revised admissions policy and procedures to schools in Moray from 4 January 2017. 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 in The Moray Council and any other stakeholders 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 public meetings held on 16 February 2016 in Milne's High School and on 22 February 2016 in Lossiemouth High School 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 Milne’s High School, Fochabers and Bishopmill Primary School in Elgin to meet with focus groups of headteachers. HM Inspectors also met a focus group of parent council representatives in Elgin Academy and a representative of The Moray Council in Elgin.

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 Moray Council carried out an extensive consultation process which ran from 9 February to 24 March 2016. As part of its consultation arrangements, the council consulted with school staff and parent and pupils councils of all schools. Letters were sent to parents and carers at all Moray schools and also to parents and carers of children expected to enrol in schools within two years of the publication of this proposal. During the consultation period, the council held four public meetings on 16, 22 and 24 February. Attendance at these meetings was very low. There was a total of 18 people attending these. The council reported that they had informed the Diocese about the proposal.

2.3 The council received 12 written responses to the proposal. One of these written responses summarised the views from 24 military families whose main concern was regarding their children being placed in the year below their academic peer group when they moved to Moray schools from other parts of the UK or from abroad. They feel that there is a lack of transparency over the early entry criteria. They also asked for the implementation date for the new policy to be brought forward to August 2016. The council’s online survey received responses from four Parent Councils who all supported the proposal. Three parents also responded, with two being in support of the proposal. Of these 12 written responses, almost all were in favour of the proposal.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Overall, the council’s proposal offers clear educational benefits. The proposal should ensure that all information which schools need to allocate places is contained in a single policy document. The proposal provides greater clarity for parents on how places will be allocated across The Moray Council area in the event of oversubscription to any school(s). It provides clear information about admission to denominational schools, admission of pupils from non-EU countries and arrangements for making placing requests for pupils with additional support needs. The council should continue to liaise with military families in taking forward the proposal. The proposal provides helpful guidance on admissions policy, including specific arrangements for early entry to school. The proposed policy provides clarity on the provision of transport to schools for entitled pupils. If implemented, the proposal will help ensure best value and children and young people will have equitable access to education in line with the council’s statutory responsibilities.

3.2 Overall, staff and parent council representatives who spoke with HM Inspectors were positive and saw the benefits of the proposal. Stakeholders

were pleased that all admission information was to be located in one document. They felt that the consultation had been well publicised, helpful and provided much needed clarity on the policy and procedures. A few felt that it might be helpful to have some information in the policy on cross-boundary arrangements. Headteachers welcomed the advice and guidance on transport and also on placing requests for pupils with additional support needs. They were pleased that there was now clarity on where children should be placed and at what stage when they moved to the area from other parts of the UK and abroad. They felt strongly that the education authority now needed to ensure that the admissions policy and procedures were consistently implemented across all schools in The Moray Council area. A few would like a link in the document to help parents find information on admissions for children's early learning and childcare settings. Those who met with HM Inspectors wanted more information on how this proposal linked to two other proposals being undertaken at the same time. Overall, stakeholders felt that the proposal should be implemented from the earlier date of August 2016.

4. Summary

This proposal offers clear educational benefits to stakeholders across Moray. If the proposal is implemented, it will enable children across the council to have fair and equitable access to education in line with the council's statutory responsibilities. It will enable the council to ensure best value in managing its school estate. In taking this forward, the council needs to continue to engage with parents and carers so that they fully understand the implications of the proposal and any others being undertaken at the same time. Officers also need to continue to engage with those families who move into The Moray Council area from other parts of the UK and beyond. The council should also consider implementing this proposal from August 2016 in response to stakeholders' wishes. The council's consultation proposal did not include the Diocese of the RC Church amongst the list of those consulted. The council will need to clarify in its final consultation report whether it has formally consulted with the Diocese of the RC Church. 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
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