HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HMIE addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Moray Council to relocate Forres Academy.

November 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from HMIE has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of a proposal by Moray Council to relocate Forres Academy. 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's consultation report should include 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act.

1.2 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.

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

- attendance at the public meetings held on 29 October and 4 November 2025 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 sites of Alves, Applegrove, Kinloss, Pilmuir and Anderson's Primary Schools and Forres Academy, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Moray Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 The consultation ran from 18 September until 13 November 2025. The council made the proposal widely available including sending emails to parents and carers and having the proposal online. Moray Council held a meeting for parents in Forres Academy on 29 October 2025 and a further public meeting on 4 November 2025. An additional online meeting took place on

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6 November 2025. An online survey was available. There were 687 responses. Forty-three percent (296) of respondents supported the proposal, agreeing with the central location, the retention of current travel arrangements and the need to build the new school as quickly as possible. This includes a majority, 55% (187), of the parents and carers who responded. Fifty-seven percent (391) of respondents did not support the proposal.

2.3 Stakeholders raised a range of issues at the meetings and through the survey. These included concerns about the loss of Applegrove Primary School's playing field, anticipated issues with traffic and parking, and previous issues with flooding. A minority of stakeholders who oppose the proposal (18%) are concerned at the potential impact of the new building on local residents, this includes 76% of local residents. In particular, they raised concerns that the location of the new building could impact negatively on those living in Veteran Housing Scotland cottages nearby. The council has indicated that its project delivery team will continue to engage with veterans and support organisations to address their concerns. In preparing its final report, the council should detail how it plans to mitigate concerns about the impact on local residents and continue consultation with stakeholders as the project progresses.

2.4 The council distributed a pupil survey, involving eight local primary schools. Twenty-six classes, representing more than 600 children, completed the survey. Children identified improved transition to secondary school, the chance to see their older friends more regularly and the central location as the main advantages to the proposal. They thought that a smaller grass area, older pupils setting a bad example and noise from the new secondary would be the main disadvantages.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Moray Council carried out a consultation and options appraisal on potential sites for a new Forres Academy building in the spring of 2024. In its final report, the council should further clarify its reasons for selecting the proposed site. The proposal is for a new and improved building to be constructed on green space adjacent to Applegrove Primary School, immediately to the north of its current location. A detailed design of the new building is under development. The council shared an artist's impression of the building within its surroundings and a draft landscaping plan at the public meetings. The new build is part of the Scottish Government Learning Estate Investment Programme, which will only fund the project if agreed outcomes are demonstrated. These outcomes include zero emissions heating, energy efficiency and use of materials that reduce construction embodied carbon design.

3.2 Moray Council anticipates that the building design will provide a modern, high-quality learning environment, and that the design will promote wellbeing and inclusion. It will do this by meeting the needs of all learners and providing accessible spaces inside and outside the building. This provision will include those with more challenging additional support needs who will be accommodated in well considered accessible facilities that will support them from their arrival on site, throughout the day. The council considered outdoor learning in the draft landscaping plan, which includes an eco-garden and food technology garden. There may be other outdoor learning opportunities in the area that contains the pitch and running track. These will need to be confirmed in the final design for the new school. The council is aware that effective consultation about learning environments, direct engagement with learners and communities about their needs and experiences, and their ongoing involvement in decision making processes will be vital to its success. Where appropriate, the council should continue to consult stakeholders about internal designs and

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schemes. HM Inspectors agree there are educational benefits to this proposal. However, HMIE are clear that these educational benefits are dependent on the final build of the new school.

3.3 Collaborative working between Forres Academy and associated primary schools is already positive, and the proposed location of the new building is physically closer to them. This has the potential to make the secondary school campus more accessible to primary staff and children. They should then be able to take advantage of its specialist facilities, including those in science, home economics and physical education, such as the proposed sports pitches and running track.

3.4 All stakeholders who meet HM Inspectors, agree that a new school is required. Stakeholders who support the proposal approve of this central location and note that it will not have any negative impact on current travel arrangements for pupils. However, a significant minority of stakeholders are concerned at the use of a site within the Applegrove Primary School boundary to rebuild Forres Academy. They note that this land is currently used by the school and its pupils for recreation, sports days and fire drills. They are concerned this proposal will reduce the green space available to the school, and it will be replaced by a large secondary school which will be in very close proximity. The council agrees that the land which Applegrove occupies was originally designated as 'Common Good.' However, this land has been council-owned since the late 1950s. The adjacent Roysvale Park is 'Common Good.' A number of areas in it have been identified for long term appropriation (bus drop off) or short-term use (site management). These have been detailed within the 'Common Good' consultation and will be the subject of a future court application. The council further notes that the current Applegrove total site area is 29,410m2 which will reduce to 13,465m2 with the proposed new Forres Academy build. This is in excess of the 12,140m2 requirement set out in the 1967 legislation. In preparing its final report, the council should clarify which aspects of the proposal still require legislative agreement and detail how it is going to continue consultation with stakeholders as the project progresses.

3.5 A minority of stakeholders are concerned about the potential for increased traffic and parking in the area. They worry that secondary school parents will drop off and pick up their children in areas that are already very busy at the beginning and end of each school day. The council has undertaken a transport survey as part of the planning application. As planned, the council project team should continue consultation with stakeholders and liaise with transport colleagues about any residents' issues, including parking.

3.6 A minority of stakeholders are concerned about the potential for drainage issues in the proposed area for the new school building. They have concerns that ongoing flooding problems in the current academy building will continue. The council's Planning Application submission provides detail on site drainage improvements which includes a dedicated new rainwater sewer to reduce water entering the combined sewer in the future. In preparing its final report, the council should detail how it is going to mitigate concerns about drainage and continue consultation with stakeholders as the project progresses.

3.7 During the consultation period the council was notified of alleged inaccuracies or omissions in the proposal. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate these alleged inaccuracies or omissions. In its consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

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4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits to this proposal. That these are dependent on the final design and build of the new school. Whilst all stakeholders agree with the need for a new Forres Academy building, there is a clear division of views regarding the site for this. Moray Council should explain further the reasons for selecting this central site in its final report. It should clarify which aspects of the proposal still need legislative agreement. In preparing its final report, the council should also detail how it is going to mitigate concerns about the impact on local residents and how it will continue consultation with stakeholders as the project progresses. In its consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.

HM Inspectors
November 2025

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