

Small Schools Working Group

Briefing Paper

Part 1: Introduction

Background

Norfolk is a large rural local authority with significant areas of relatively sparse population. It currently has 133 primary schools of under 100 pupils (36%), of which 65 (49%) are church schools, and 38 under 50 (10%) of which 21 (55%) are church schools. In the secondary phase, there are 5 schools under 600 (4 FE) and 12 under 750 (5 FE).

Over the past decade or more, we have pursued a policy of supporting small and rural schools both financially and through a range of organisational and collaborative strategies. (This was set out in the Education Review Panel report on small schools in 2002).

School Organisation Strategy

The most recent time we formally considered Norfolk's policy in respect of its small schools was in 2002, when the Review Panel reaffirmed the existing policy of securing and strengthening small schools in rural communities. This has been principally achieved by supporting formal and informal school collaborations and partnerships. We currently have 60 schools operating in "management partnerships" in which two or more schools are managed by one headteacher. Most of these, although not all, are small primary schools. Some of these arrangements have been further strengthened by the governors federating into a single governing body. We believe this is more than in any other Local Authority. Evaluations of this strategy which have been undertaken show that they have been successful in securing strong leadership for these schools, and Ofsted inspection reports have almost always been positive about the impact of these arrangements. However, partnerships and federations do not necessarily address all the challenges currently facing small schools such as budgetary pressures and providing a rich curricular and social experience.

We have supported the government's policy of "presumption against closure", although we have assisted the governing body of one small school (East Winch) in its closure when it reached the view that the school was no longer viable. The currently pending reorganisation of the Grimston cluster involves the closure of two very small first schools and their amalgamation into a new Grimston primary school which will eventually have about 120 pupils on roll. On 12 May the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel will discuss a report on the implications of all-age schooling as a potential model of organisation for some, mainly rural, Norfolk schools and recommend that the small schools working group explore further its advantages and disadvantages.

One of the issues that the Group will need to consider is the scope of the project. In Norfolk we have in the past taken small primary schools to be those with 100 pupils or fewer on roll. For instance, the 2002 Standards Fund initiative focused on this group of schools and the small schools package of services was available for this group. In the secondary sector small schools have been supported in their budgets if they have had fewer than 504 pupils.

Part 2: Definitions of School Categories and Governance Models

Maintained School Categories

Under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 there are three categories of school:

- Community
- Foundation
- Voluntary (divided into Controlled and Aided)

Schools in all three categories have a lot in common. They work in partnership with other schools and the LAs, and they receive funding from LAs and they have to deliver the National Curriculum. However, each category has its own characteristics.

Community Schools

In Community Schools (formerly county schools), the LA employs the school's staff, own the school's land and buildings and have primary responsibility for deciding the arrangements for admitting pupils. The LA is the freehold owner of the property.

Foundation Schools

At Foundation Schools, the Governing Body employ the school's staff and have primary responsibility for admission arrangements. The school's land and buildings are owned by the Governing Body or by a charitable foundation. Many of these schools were formerly grant maintained schools. Foundation Schools can be split into three categories:

- Those without a foundation
- Those with a foundation but which are not qualifying foundation schools (this means that 45% or less of Governors can be Foundation Governors)
- Those with a foundation and which are qualifying foundation schools (the majority of Governors appointed by the foundation).

Voluntary Aided

In Voluntary Aided schools (many of which are church schools) the Governing Body employs the staff, and decides admission arrangements. The school's land and buildings are normally owned by a charitable foundation. The Governing Body contributes towards the capital costs of running the school.

Most aided schools are linked to either the Church of England or the Catholic

Church, but there are schools linked to other faith groups and a few non-denominational schools.

Voluntary Controlled

Voluntary Controlled schools are almost always church schools, and the land and buildings are often owned by a charitable foundation. However, the LA employ the schools' staff and has primary responsibility for admission arrangements.

Other Types of School

Trust Schools

A Trust school is a state funded foundation school supported by a charitable trust. It is made up of the school and partners working together for the benefit of the school. The Trust enables Trust Schools to:

- manage their own assets (including land which is transferred to them on becoming trust bodies)
- employ their own staff
- set their own admissions arrangements.

Academies

Academies are publicly-funded independent schools whose capital costs and recurrent funding is paid by the Department for Education (DfE). They have additional freedoms including

- the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff
- freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum
- the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days.

There will also be further freedoms for academies in the way they engage in local partnerships and deliver 14-to-19 education, subject to successful passage of the Education Bill 2011.

Academies were initially established in disadvantaged areas, either as new schools or to replace poorly performing schools, where other intervention and improvement strategies have failed. Academies were established by sponsors from the business, faith and voluntary sectors (including schools and colleges). The land of these original academies is leased from the LA, the freeholder, to the Academy Trust for 125 years.

Since the last election, the coalition government introduced new legislation to enable schools that Ofsted judged outstanding, or good with outstanding features (now further relaxed) to apply to "convert" to academy status, with the proviso that they would partner with less successful schools. In some cases the Trust owns the land outright, as prior to conversion; in those cases where the land was previously held freehold by the LA, there is a 125 year lease to the Academy Trust.

Free Schools

Free Schools are a new category of school established by the 2010 Education Act. Free Schools are non-profit making, independent, state-funded schools. They are not defined by size, phase or location. They could be located in traditional school buildings or appropriate community spaces such as office buildings or church halls. They could be set up by a wide range of proposers – including charities, universities, businesses, educational groups, teachers or parents – in response to local demand. Free Schools are expected to be open to pupils of all abilities from the area and cannot be academically selective. Free Schools will have some additional freedoms. For example, teachers in Free Schools will not necessarily need to have Qualified Teacher Status. Like academies, Free Schools will be funded on a comparable basis to other state-funded schools. A Free School for primary children will open in central Norwich in September

University Technical Colleges

These are colleges for students aged 14 to 19 which specialise in technical studies and are sponsored by a university. These colleges are also independent state funded institutions. They offer full time courses which combine practical and academic studies. They are planned to be equipped to the highest standard, sponsored by a university and offer clear progression routes into higher education or further learning in work. Lord Baker, one of the originators of the scheme envisaged them forging a partnership between vocational education and universities, FE colleges and employers. The vision is for students to combine hand and mind to learn in a very practical way, integrating national curriculum requirements with the technical and vocational elements. The college ethos and curriculum is heavily influenced by local and national employers who also provide support and work experience for students. Plans are currently in hand for the establishment of a UTC in the Norwich area, with City College Norwich as the lead promoter.

Studio Schools

Studio Schools are a new state school model for 14 to 19 year olds of all abilities. They seek to address the “growing gap between what young people require to succeed in life and the skills and knowledge that the current education system provides”. Studio Schools will pioneer a “bold new approach to learning involving enterprise projects and real work which will root students' learning in the real world and will help them to develop the skills they need to succeed. The Hewett School in Norwich is currently preparing an application to establish a Studio School as a separate element within the main school. It will be intended for pupils

- currently disengaged by the traditional pedagogy, or
- potential high achievers, particularly those who are underachieving, who would be stretched academically through being given greater freedom to direct their own learning within a supportive framework, or
- less able students who would benefit from the additional support and guidance contained within the Studio School model.

The Hewett hopes that the practical learning element, the project-based approach and the individualised learning and support in the Studio School model will be a powerful catalyst for enabling students to achieve their full potential. The aim is that this approach, coupled with integrated meaningful enterprise activities and business links, will transform the lives of many young people in the Norwich and Norfolk area.

Collaboration and Partnership Arrangements

Federations of schools share a single governing body across two or more schools, whilst retaining separate legal status, budget allocations, individual admissions and performance tables, and Ofsted inspections for each school. This arrangement is sometimes known as a “hard” federation. There are currently 20 federated schools in Norfolk

“**Management Partnership**” is the name given in Norfolk to the arrangement by which two or more schools are under the leadership of a single headteacher. There are now over 60 Norfolk schools in such partnerships. The first of these were established ten years ago, and while they have mostly involved small rural primary schools, some larger schools have also been involved, including secondary schools in partnership with feeder primaries. For instance the Headteacher of Methwold High has been managing Hockwold Primary, and it is proposed that these two schools will formally merge to form a single legal entity in September 2011.

School Clusters are the long-standing arrangement by which schools in Norfolk serving the same communities liaise and collaborate to increase their effectiveness and ensure that learning across the age-range from early years to sixth form is co-ordinated. There are formal arrangements by which headteachers of each high school and their feeder primary schools meet to plan liaison activities, in-service training and development and curriculum co-ordination. Small amounts of funding are made available to each cluster to support these activities, and until this year, government funding was available for joint local initiatives such as parent support advisers. Over the past year we have asked each cluster to draw up arrangements for governors to be able to come together to exercise some accountability for these activities and their effectiveness. In parallel with the consultation on schools funding arrangements, consultation will be undertaken during the autumn to review the structure, responsibilities, governance, funding and accounting arrangements.

Part 3: Issues for the Working Group to consider

It will be helpful for the Working Group to identify a number of key issues that will be the focus of its work. The following issues are suggested for discussion:

- Pupil attainment and achievement in small schools compared with other schools
- The ability of small schools to provide high quality learning and social experiences. Can they give a sufficiently rich curriculum and good interaction with their peer group?
- Internal organisation and the challenges for teachers in small schools. Is a primary school of less than four classes (i.e. at least two in each key stage) and a secondary school of less than 4/5 form entry, sustainable and viable in the long term?
- Finance: unit costs, financial viability and the costs of partnerships. Capital and transport costs of alternative provision.
- Leadership/management and governance.
- Recruitment and retention of headteachers and other staff.
- Staffing structure – sharing staff.
- The community dimension and the role of the small school in rural areas
- The role of pre-schools, Children's Centres and nurseries.

Part 4: Information and data to support the strategy

It has been agreed that the following sets of data should be made available to support the group's discussions and the identification of the key issues:

- List of primary and secondary schools ranked by number on roll (133 under 100, 38 under 50)
- Lists of schools in partnerships and federations
- Briefing paper on small schools per-pupil funding levels, and small schools protection
- Schools with acting headteachers, analysed by size of school
- Norfolk Key Stage 2 results 2008-2010 by Year 6 cohort size

School level spreadsheet data:

- School popularity taken from 2006-2010 admissions data
- Proportion of surplus places
- Key Stage 1 average points score
- Key Stage 2 %Level 4+ (Eng and maths)
- Contextual Value Added scores
- SEN levels
- Attendance levels
- Ofsted judgements
- LA advisory support levels
- Deprivation indicators

- Average costs per pupil
- Buildings suitability
- Buildings condition
- Site area: does it meet standards?
- Foundation stage results
- Denominational factors

For this initial report, high level data and commentary is presented which covers six areas:

1. School size and trends in popularity
 - Number of schools which over 6 years (2008-2014) show a 20% drop in the number on roll
2. Funding per pupil
 - Bar graph showing pupil costings in relation to size of school
3. Recruitment of headteachers
 - Schools without a substantive headteacher for a) one term b) two terms c) more than 2 terms
4. Performance data
 - % of schools performing below floor targets
 - % Ofsted overall judgement in each category
 - % quality of teaching and learning judgements from Ofsted
5. Governance
 - % governor vacancies in each category
6. Proximity of available schools
 - % of schools in each size band that has another school within a) 2 miles b) 3 miles c) 5 miles

Within each of these areas, the primary data has been sub-divided into 4 categories:

- Schools with under 50 pupils
- Schools with 51 – 100 pupils
- Schools with 101 – 210 pupils
- Schools with over 210 pupils

210 is a crucial number because we have established a principle that any newly commissioned primary school should be at least 210 pupils.

The secondary data has also been subdivided into 4 categories:

- Schools with under 500 pupils
- Schools with 501 -750 pupils
- Schools with 751 to 1000 pupils
- Schools with over 1000 pupils

1000 is a crucial number because we have established a principle that any newly commissioned secondary school should be at least 1000 pupils.

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