



Journal & News 22

Autumn 2006

News, articles and research for governors, heads, staff and those working with small schools.

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- The future of small school learning
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- Promoting high quality education in small schools -

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The **NSSF** Journal & News is published two times a year and issued to all individual and group members. Individual members receive their copies directly by post. Group members receive their copies via their group or LA representative. We are most grateful to our group and LA contacts for distributing the Journal & News on our behalf.

For information on how to join the **NSSF**, please see the details below and at the end of this Journal & News.

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The views expressed by contributors to this publication are not necessarily those of the NSSF

About the NSSF - Registered Charity Number 1096234

The **NSSF** is an independent, member organisation with charitable status, which seeks to promote the continued development of high standards of teaching and learning in small primary schools. Its 1200+ members include individual schools, heads and teachers, governors, LEAs, LEA advisers, independent consultants and groups of schools in the United Kingdom.

Our aim to promote high quality education in small schools is implemented via the termly meetings of the **FORUM**, Journals, publications and papers, a Website and an annual conference, which keep members in touch with one another, with research into the work of small schools and with developments at national and local levels. We do not, however, engage in campaigns on behalf of schools that have been identified for reorganisation by their local authorities beyond calling attention to the evidence about the high standards attained by pupils in small schools. We commend the work of the National Association for Small Schools in this area.

In alternate years, we organise with the National Association for Small Schools, **National Small Schools' Week** to celebrate and publicise the strengths and achievements of small schools in the UK. These have been held in 2002, 2004 and 2006 and the next is in June 2008. We also organise a Best Small School Website Competition, which coincides with National Small Schools' Week.

Our definition of small primary schools includes schools of up to about 100 pupils in nursery, primary, first, infant, junior, middle-deemed-primary and special settings. We have in membership a number of larger schools that welcome our emphasis on high quality teaching and learning and on slim management systems. We welcome this diversity. While the majority of members are from England, we have many friends and members in other parts of the UK and hope to extend this in the belief that the Forum will benefit from experiences gained in diverse contexts.

Membership

Membership is open to individuals (eg heads, teachers, governors, LA personnel, colleagues in HE etc), schools, higher education establishments, groups and clusters and local education authorities. Individual persons or schools join for £10 per annum; groups, clusters and local authorities may join for £4 per school plus £4 per adviser or officer who may also wish to receive our mailings, subject to a minimum of 6. Membership brings the benefits of two journals each year, attendance at meetings of the **FORUM**, access to the members' section of the **NSSF** Website and preferential rates at our annual conference.

The membership year is from 1 April. To renew membership please visit the Website. For membership details visit the **NSSF** Website at **www.nssf.co.uk** or contact the membership secretary, Mike Carter, details above.

Editorial

Dear colleagues,

Welcome to the first edition of the 06/7 NSSF membership year, which started on 1st April. A special welcome to new members, including North Yorkshire colleagues. Together with the NASS, we held National Small Schools' Week in June. Holding this every two years seems about the right frequency but was the week helpful to you? Certainly, the House of Commons meeting created good interest and raised small schools' profile. The NSSF conference was very successful, focussing on networking and federations. Included in this edition are articles about our Website competition, which was deservedly won by Haresfield School (see page 9). However, we are not clear about the extent of local activities in counties and schools. Drop me an e-mail about what happened in your area during National Small Schools' Week so we can build up a picture.

It looks as if this year will see no respite from government initiatives, many of which impact so awkwardly on small schools. While many of us are happy to see the **greater opportunities that extended services can offer rural children**, for lots of rural schools the implementation is likely to be very difficult and involve real problems financially and with time to manage them. However, small schools seem to have **good advantages for greater personalisation of learning**. NSSF contributed to "Beyond the Classroom" – a DfES seminar about what teaching and learning could look like in 2020, when these points were raised. See the article on page 10. Initiatives concerned with networking and federation are currently gaining impetus, which is why our conference told the stories of several who have some experience. However, like many other initiatives we are asked to join, it would help to have the benefit of some rigorous long-term research based in small schools. Consequently, it is good to see that CfBT is reviewing small school collaborations and we are grateful to Dr Jeff Jones for his interim report (see page 24).

Another new initiative is the **Excellent Teacher (ET)** scheme. This is similar to the **Advanced Skills Teacher (AST)** scheme and entails teachers proving exactly the same standards. However, **unlike ASTs, ETs are not expected to work outside their school**. These schemes are worthwhile and designed for the many super teachers that do not want to take the management career path. The catch is that the posts rely on either the school or the LA funding the additional costs. Small school teachers seem therefore at a disadvantage, despite their broad and effective experience. However, a networked group or federation of schools may make such an appointment with a potentially a huge impact. I have also heard of small school headteachers becoming successful ASTs supporting their LA's services. We would be pleased to know if the extent of small school ASTs and ETs.

It is good to see **the Primary Review** is to take place. This new research project **seeks to review primary education in a completely unbiased way**. This has not been attempted for the many years in which changes have overlaid changes, without clear evaluation of their impact. Led by Professor Robin Alexander, a team of some of the nation's best researchers are looking at 10 themes in primary education and inviting submissions. NSSF would like to make a submission that shows, for example, the many advantages of small schools and mixed-age teaching. Let me know if you would like to play a part in our submission, however small.

Indeed, if you, or other teachers are interested in the issues of teaching mixed-age pupils there is already a project for you. The NEMED international research programme is promoting research and networking **to provide support for mixed-age (multigrade) teaching**. Based at the London Institute of Education, the UK end of the project has already held a meeting, which was well attended, largely by teachers of multigrade classes in larger urban schools. The DfES estimates that some 25% of English classes are mixed age.

Please use NSSF as a resource. Let me know if you do not have the codes for entry to the full Website. Use my e-mail to "Ask NSSF" as many have already. We answer at no cost whenever we can. Do keep in contact. With best wishes,

Mike Carter

mike.carter3@tesco.net

Brief News

Section 5 inspections in small schools.

Currently, there is insufficient experience of Sec. 5 inspections in small primary schools to draw particular conclusions about small school outcomes. Very few small schools have told us about the impact of these inspections. Sometimes small schools do, however, sell themselves short when completing the SEF, by undervaluing their contribution to pupils' personal development. Inspectors are charged with evaluating both the school's contribution to meeting ECM outcomes and the pupils' progress towards them. Where self evaluation is weaker Ofsted says that schools are at early stages of developing indicators concerning ECM outcomes and progress in the non-core subjects. The editor is working at finding simple yet robust ways to monitor and evaluate these in school. The introduction of 'Proportionate Inspections' (even shorter) for the best English schools is unlikely for small schools but NSSF would like to hear of any experience of these. Meanwhile, NFER is independently researching the impact of Section 5 inspections and Peter Rudd (Senior Researcher) has noticed that size of school might be a variable. This is being incorporated into the on-going research.

Level 3 to Level 5?

It is surprising to learn that about a quarter of pupils in England who attain Level 3 when they are seven, do not proceed to reach Level 5 when they are eleven. Neither is this seeming loss of higher attainment made up for by the strong achievement of others. While there are issues about the relative accuracy of SATs, it must seem demoralising for pupils of early promise. This picture is for schools of all sizes but is less likely to be the case in small schools, where teachers are adept at differentiating and so keen to meet individual pupils' needs.

NSSF e-consultants

NSSF is building a list of small school headteachers, whom we can occasionally consult to gain a wider view of issues affecting small schools across the UK. We send a very few questions by e-mail and ask these consultants to respond but only if they have time then. We are very grateful to these colleagues and very conscious of the pressures on their time so we make the process as simple as possible. We have several regions without an e-consultant yet, particularly in the North-West, the South-West, Scotland and Wales. If you are interested in this, please e-mail to: mike.carter3@tesco.net when you will e-mailed further details to consider.

GTCW grants for CPD in Wales.

GTCW recognises that Continuing Professional Development for teachers in small schools can be difficult. However, it provides well funded schemes to support CPD and small schools are under-represented in the applications. The schemes include: The Group Bursary (for 3 or more teachers but it could be for two in very small schools), Professional Development Bursaries, Teacher Research Scholarships, Sabbaticals and Professional Networks. The schemes can offer from £600 to £8000, which can be spent on supply cover to release the teacher(s). Visit www.gtcw.org.uk/cpd

Small Primary Schools in Wales

Estyn has published a document of this title which makes some very interesting reading. As for England, the findings of HMI and a large number of inspections show that school size and school performance are not closely related. Indeed, similarly to England, Welsh small schools (Estyn uses a criterion of under 90 on roll) have a slight edge insofar as slightly more small schools reach the 95% target of having satisfactory standards and they have slightly higher standards in 'key skills'. The ethos is good or very good in small schools and, in Key Stages 1 and 2, the vast majority deliver the full range of subjects as effectively as other schools. Parental and community partnerships are often strong features. In leadership and management the smallest schools compare well but the document notes the workload pressures on headteachers. There some interesting differences in leadership terms in schools with over 30 pupils compared with the English situation, which could be accounted for by the differences between the Welsh and the English inspection frameworks. The document also usefully evaluates aspects of various forms of organising small schools in an area. Obtainable from: www.estyn.gov.uk

Small schools under threat?

We have heard about numerous areas where LAs are considering school re-organisation. The falling school population and the difficulty of recruiting small school headteachers are significant reasons. However, it is unnecessary when in England at least, we have a political predisposition against closure, that more communities will be without their school and more children will be bussed to larger schools missing the advantages of a small school education. The difficulty here is the lack of British research evidence about long-term savings from

amalgamations or various forms of federation. NSSF asked DfES for guidance about what a 'surplus place' is (see article on the House of Commons meeting, [page....](#)) and we were eventually told that it concerns the proportion of schools in which there is 25% or more unfilled places. *"Primary schools maintained by the LEA with at least 30 surplus places and at least 25% of surplus places. Surplus places at primary schools is the difference between the pupil number and capacity data and the total number of pupils in the LEA maintained primary schools where capacity exceeds pupils. Maximum intake can be taken rather than Annual School Census."* While some LAs predict large savings by reducing surplus places, it seems unlikely that the reduction of small schools' surplus places can make significant savings. Even when a small school is closed, the long-term savings have often been minimal.

Times Educational Supplement Article

Gerald Haigh's article of 6 October 2006 (page 22) quotes NASS in suggesting that there is a current round of re-organisation proposals throughout the UK. It also suggests that financial savings by closing small schools may be minimal if any. Although costs per pupil are often greater in small schools, our rural pupils are at a definite disadvantage and so should cost more. Consequently, long-term savings from small school closures are minimal if any and not worth the additional strain of transporting pupils for ever. Underlying such closure/amalgamation proposals is a deeply held, but disproved, view that small schools don't teach the full curriculum. This view bubbles up in all sorts of guises despite substantial evidence to the contrary. (See

Parliamentary Issues on [Page.....](#)) Federations are seen as a way to overcome this, despite the lack of evidence of any financial savings.

Teacher's TV

Programmes are now available between 11am and 1.00pm and this should make viewing more accessible but I can't see it in small schools where every minute counts even in lunch time! However, the best bet is to view on line when you can choose when to watch the 15 minute programmes. This is such a super resource, it is inevitable but a pity to see that viewing figures are not high. I would encourage some viewing by small school teachers who otherwise can be relatively isolated. There are several programmes shot in small schools (eg ones about the Scottish experience of introducing MFL.) and currently a series is being produced, so watch out for viewing times.

Children's Garden at the Malvern Show

Many congratulations to Worcestershire NSSF member school, Hanley Swan Primary whose entry for the Malvern Spring Show became a permanent working garden which will be open to visitors again during the Autumn Show. This garden is designed to attract and encourage wildlife. It is a real testament to the excellence that small schools so often achieve and to the very hard work that pupils, parents and staff have contributed to make the project such a success. They even ran a gardening club throughout the summer holidays. Such dedication! The Three Counties Agricultural Society promoted the enterprise and also awarded the school first prize for their gardening magazine which was written by pupils in Class 3. Copies of this magazine are being sold to raise funds for the work on the garden. Mike Brogden

We have received no items for the **REVIEWS SECTION** for this edition.
We would welcome some reviews of materials, books or websites by February.

(Eg. If you have experience of "BBC Jam" and can write a few words about it we would be very grateful for them.)

An important document was published recently. **Rural Disadvantage – Reviewing the Evidence** (2006) was written by members of the Commission for Rural Communities, which is part of the Countryside Agency. It is a wide-ranging and lengthy document and downloadable from:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/CRC31-RuralDisadvantage-reviewingtheevidence.pdf>

The document investigates a wide variety of ways in which rural dwellers are at a disadvantage in education and in life generally. It is thorough in that it investigates the situation for a range of currently typical rural groups coming to some pertinent conclusions that dig beneath the headlines. It is therefore doubly unfortunate that the comments made about primary education (p.50) suggest that rural schools' smallness limits the curriculum they provide. The evidence about small primary schools does not support this. They also, perhaps correctly, cite evidence of greater

extended school opportunities provided in urban than rural areas. They conclude that already fewer out-of-school opportunities are provided in rural areas. They found the.....**"lack of transport, poor road infra-structure, large distances and the cost of tackling these issues, are all additional challenges faced by rural schools developing extended services.....Rural schools cited financial support, staff issues and transport as the top barriers to developing extended services."** (p.56) Despite its lack of attention to the effectiveness, the community value yet the vulnerability of the "village primary school", this document adds much support to the argument made elsewhere in this edition that rural dwellers constitute a slowly growing disadvantaged group. See article about 2020 Learning in this issue page 10. Mike Carter

NSSF is also grateful for the help it receives from friends and partners.

We are sent a copy of a few related journals including the always interesting Human Scale Education NEWS, the well-written NASS newsletter and East Sussex's even bigger and better Small Schools' Forum Newsletter. Indeed the writers of a few articles in the latter gave their kind permission for reproduction in this NSSF edition.

Ask the NSSF

We are often asked for information or advice and try to give it when we can. For example:

So where are the hard Federations?

"I'm trying to find some regional examples of successful federations of small schools – hard as opposed to soft federations – one headteacher responsible for two or more schools with a joint governing body. I have the names of some schools but really want to gather a good regional spread if possible. I don't need a great deal of detail – just the name of the federation / schools and where they are would do really."

Gillian Ireson

Research and Development Programme Co-ordinator, National College For School Leadership

email: gillian.ireson@ncsl.org.uk

www.ncsl.org.uk

Please let either me or Gillian know of these. mike.carter3@tesco.net or 01743 233893.

Threats of small school amalgamations.

The Chair of Governors of a small school in Kent phoned urgently. The school had unexpectedly come under threat despite healthy provision and numbers on roll. Knowing that NSSF does not fight closure threats, the chair wanted to know where generic information could be found about the state of small school effectiveness. *We certainly could provide this but also recommended the school to contact NASS.*

Such requests are not uncommon currently.

Ideas in Rural Education – Friendly Schools and Kindergartens in Poland

Martin Fitton has told us about an exciting European (Da Vinci funded) bid that should link some rural schools in a Polish Federation with some in the UK. It should allow for some visits by colleagues in Poland, networking and possible links for researchers in ITT. The bid is being developed with some Welsh schools through CPRW.

NSSF Papers Requests.

We get requests from schools for hard copies of a number of NSSF Papers. These are mostly available to download from the Website (www.nssf.co.uk) but sometimes its easier to have a hard copy sent. We were pleased to receive and meet our most recent request from Orkney.

This is but a selection of the enquiries received recently. NSSF is pleased to help and often is able to put folk in touch with those having a similar problem/solution. Contact: mike.carter3@tesco.net

The NSSF Website: www.nssf.co.uk

- Get the best of advice on small school curriculum and management issues from NSSF Papers
- Read or download NSSF Reports (research, studies, conferences etc)
- Browse and download authoritative *summaries of documents from the DfES, OfSTED, the QCA and some Parliamentary reports (*You need a password for the Summaries; see below)
- Visit back copies of the NSSF Journal & News
- Get details about the next meetings of the Forum
- Find links to other useful organisations and ideas
- Site visited nearly 3000 times a month

*To protect the copyright of some of these documents, members need to use a password to gain access to these marked pages. Members should email Diane Fisher (diane@sdfonline.co.uk) with name, school, cluster name (if applicable) and LEA and a password will be sent to you.

Individual members receive this Journal & News by post. Group members receive it via their cluster / group / education authority contact. See the list of member education authorities and groups towards the back of the journal if in doubt, email Diane.

Also visit the Website for joining details.

National Small Schools' Week 2006 (Organised jointly by NASS and NSSF)

Notes from the Seminar at the House of Commons

2.00 pm on 21 June 2006 at The Wilson Room, Portcullis House, Westminster.

1. Mike Carter (NSSF) welcomed those present and thanked Matthew Taylor MP and his team for facilitating the event.
2. Matthew Taylor (MP for Truro and St Austell) introduced the session. He is well aware of the high quality of the work of small schools as he has many small schools in his constituency. The pressures of funding continue and lead to concerns about the viability of the smallest schools, especially as primary pupil numbers are in decline. Of the several strengths demonstrated by small schools, their flexibility is notable. The notion that 'small equals weak' is wrong.
3. Professor Maurice Galton (University of Cambridge and NSSF Honorary Member) referred to the small school attended by his own children. The generally accepted definition of small is up to about 100 pupils; below 50 is usually termed very small. About 10% of primary schools in the UK are therefore small or very small and most of these are of church foundation. Federation procedures are disguising some closures or amalgamations. Several myths seem to perpetuate: that the teachers in small schools are less well qualified; that there is underachievement; that they are isolated; that they are too expensive. The realities are that the teachers match the national profile except that they engage in more INSET and seem to be more confident; that they have coped well with the National curriculum; that their teaching practices are similar to those in larger schools except that they have led the way on many innovations, including mixed age teaching and clustering with other schools; that the pupils achieve at least as well and often better; that small schools often team with large inner city schools to broaden their pupils' outlook. Claims that small schools are more expensive seem to ignore both a number of urban costs and the human costs of bussing young children. Small schools should be judged on their merits, not generalisations. Few of their initiatives have been followed up in a systematic way; there is a dearth of research on the small school.
4. HMI Deana Holdaway (OfSTED) had made a random selection of reports on small school inspections since the latest version began in September 2005 so had no systematic conclusions to announce, merely some personal observations. There is much to celebrate. There are many misconceptions. There are weaknesses in all sizes of school, small or large: subject leadership; assessment; evaluation; action on improvements; underachievement, especially in the Foundation stage. Strengths noted in small schools include: some inspirational leadership; strong team work; partnership with parents and community; good teaching; imaginative lessons; curriculum provision beyond the statutory requirements. But a weak teacher in a small school can be very disadvantageous.
5. Fred Corbett, (Deputy Director, Children's Services, Norfolk County Council) described the recent history of the County in which the schools were viewed as often problematic, with a higher proportion of schools, especially small schools, found to be weak by OfSTED. It was thought that federating small schools might be an answer, both to the questions of standards and the shortage of headship applicants. Public consultations revealed strong local passions

and the wish to retain the local school and led to a rethink. The issue is not size but effectiveness so Norfolk has a rural schools policy, not a small schools policy, although about one-eighth of the County's schools are small and these are particularly susceptible to problems caused by staff turnover or illness and the shortage of headship applicants. The LEA finds that small schools are just as good as larger ones, except there is some evidence of fewer children in small schools reaching the higher levels (Levels 3 and 5). There is much to celebrate in individual schools, for example, the development of a modern foreign language, environmental education, school councils, residential visits, using museums and galleries.

A problem for heads of small schools is that promotion is usually seen to be to the headship of a bigger school. As an answer to this and to the shortage of applicants for small school headship, Norfolk has developed an informal policy of Partnership Schools in which two schools retain their separate identities and their governing bodies but share a headteacher. Twenty five schools are taking part, all volunteers, usually resulting from a headship vacancy in one of the schools. In one case, a church school is linked with a non-church school. The scheme offers heads a form of promotion and new challenges without them having to move away and the collaboration works without undermining the individuality of the schools. None of Norfolk's schools have sought to move to formal federation.

6. Discussion and questions

- *Mike Carter*: disagreed with Fred Corbett; the very size of small schools endows them with advantages.
- *Fred Corbett*: it's the quality of leadership, not size, that counts. There are good features in schools of all sizes.
- *Dan Rogerson* (MP for North Cornwall): how does Norfolk recruit new heads to existing partnerships?
- *Fred Corbett*: no vacancy has yet appeared.
- *Gwyn Prosser* (MP for Dover): Kent has a problem with surplus places which it aims to solve by closing small schools. The local people fought this but the County Council is determined.
- *Carol Tosh*, NSSF Chairman: our conference on 23 June is considering how to maintain the viability of schools.
- *Matthew Taylor*: it is too simplistic to seek to close small school to reduce overall surplus places.
- *Maurice Galton*: no studies have been done since the mid-1980s on the hidden costs of school closures.
- *Mike Carter*: the long-term costs have not been reduced by closures in two LEAs that he knows of.
- *Fred Corbett*: the Audit Commission hits councils hard. What do they mean by surplus? School buildings could be used more creatively but financial support has to come from the different agencies involved and there is a lack of joined-up thinking.
- *Anita Pincas* (IoE, London University): interested in mixed age teaching, along with colleagues in several European countries. The project aims to maximise the use of IT, eg the Internet, virtual classrooms, texting. Is this happening in the UK?
- *Mervyn Benford* (National Association for Small Schools, NASS): in Flintshire, three schools link lessons via web-cams. Oxfordshire has Internet links with Sweden.
- *Bill Goodhand* (NASS Chairman): in Lincolnshire, partnerships are beginning, including one with a secondary school. Is there a cost to the schools in Norfolk?
- *Fred Corbett*: it is seen as resource neutral as the separate schools are still funded as if each had a headteacher.
- *Mervyn Benford*: the problem in Kent is that the LEA views small schools as being unable to meet the standards. The Countryside Commission has just issued figures that show that rural primary and secondary schools generally achieve better SAT results than urban schools.
- *Matthew Taylor*: the fall in school roles is prompting a new debate about surplus places and "thresholds" for closures. These need greater clarification.
- *Andrew George* (MP for W Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly): because of a small population and no option of bussing pupils, small schools are a necessity on the islands. They might offer an interesting study. Here the head of the secondary school is also head of the primary schools.
- *Mike Carter*: hopes that OfSTED will update its 2004 data (presented at the 2004 House of Commons Seminar) resulting from the inspections of small schools.
- *Janice Lawson*, DFES (Federations Unit): increasing numbers of schools are seeking advice on federating and it is seen as a step towards amalgamation. There is a targeted capital fund for federations. As a governor of a partnership school, she is concerned that the head has to report to two governing bodies. Probably the greatest shortage of headship applicants is for RC schools.
- *Chris Foster*, (Association of Teachers and Lecturers): 2008 is likely to be a problematic year when headteacher retirements will lead to many vacancies, especially in the counties.

Matthew Taylor thanked everyone for his or her contributions and closed the seminar.

Notes by Mike Brogden (NSSF)

Some examples of local events during National Small Schools' Week 2006

- Caton St Paul's Primary School in Lancashire held a day of art with a local artist on Wednesday 21st June. Headteacher: Carole O'Hare, head@st-pauls-ce34.lancsngfl.ac.uk
 - Wilmcote CE Primary School near Stratford held a Shakespeare workshop for Year 5 on Mon 19th June and Year 6 visited Stratford High School for a session using ICT for music making. Both these years also visited a workshop called "Shakespeare the Storyteller" and a performance of FRAMED. Other years visited "The Dell" for a performance of "Summer Dreams". Headteacher: Jacqueline Forsyth, admin@3313.wgfl.net
 - Kent LA is staged a day conference on 15th June,
 - Morville CE School in Shropshire is held a recall evening to celebrate its 150th anniversary.
-

National Small Schools' Forum Website Competition 2006

There were 15 entries for this competition. The winners were announced at the annual conference on June 23rd.

Inevitably, the three independent judges had a very difficult task in finding a winner out of 15 different sites. The seven criteria used were: Ease of use; Addressing likely audiences' needs; "Human Scale"; Reflecting school values; Use by and/or for children; Breadth of functions; and Kept up-dated. Although judges found the criteria hard to use they did provide clear outcomes. Overall, the sites were easy and clear to use and some had very exciting pages being kept up to date reasonably well. (Let's hope it's not the headteacher doing this. – It is time consuming!) However, many sites were not realizing the potential for use by and for the pupils. (The use by and for Governors is also an area needing further development.)

The criteria for judging small school websites will be re-considered before the next Website competition is launched. The three winners from this competition and the two previous ones will not be allowed to enter. Neither will committee members' websites.

Congratulations to the winner:

www.haresfieldschool.co.uk



The school was delighted and received the £100 prize.

Runners up were:

www.scapegoat-hill.kirklees.sch.uk : www.coaley.gloucs.sch.uk : www.northcrawley.milton-keynes.sch.uk

Congratulations to these and many thanks to all who entered the competition. We have seen small school websites grow in number, size and quality as people become more aware of their possibilities. Webmasters, both private and professional, are learning the purposes and need for various pages and thereby increasing their site's value. NSSF does not think that a Website is the school's most important priority, but if you are setting yours up, do think through the purpose of pages and make sure that the school has the ultimate control of the site. See page 19.

Small schools and learning in 2020.

Reflections from the DfES “Beyond the classroom” seminar held on 21st September 2006.

This article considers the situation for small schools in moving towards the ways of learning that may be possible in 2020. It takes account of the responses of a small group of headteachers of rural primary schools, when they were asked about extended services and personalised learning. It considers the rural situation rather than that for the small proportion of small schools that are urban. (The NSSF considers a small school generally to have under about 100 pupils. There are some 2600 such schools in England, mostly rural.)

Demographics. While the seminar’s paper about social, economic and demographic trends is very helpful, it does not consider changes in the population of rural (or out-of-town) areas. However, there appear to be some conflicting factors about the future rural population. It seems likely that there will be a continued if slow drift of the middle classes to live in the country. “Tele-cottage” working is likely to increase considerably. Largely speaking the 20th century’s trend, the large reduction in agriculture-based employment, has ended as new ways are being found to make land-ownership economic. However, transport and rural facilities are likely to present more difficulties, both for rural commuters and others living in the countryside. Overall, it seems most possible that the rural population will rise at a steady if ‘slowish’ rate. This has implications for the provision of facilities and services if rural dwellers are not to become a new disadvantaged minority.

Small Rural Schools are:

- much in agreement with the moral imperative to improve peoples lives. Indeed many heads of rural schools consider the children and young people of the area to be at a considerable disadvantage from the scarcity of services and transport provided locally.
- most small schools are likely to be extremely positive about notions of **personalised learning** because:
 - they know their pupils and their backgrounds very well
 - this knowledge is built up over several years
 - there are close and often regular relationships with parents
 - they usually have a close knowledge of the community and any available facilities
 - they are used to visiting helpers (parents/ community)
 - most heads have long experience of collaboration with other schools in clusters and then in networks/federations etc., and the concomitant leadership and management issues.
 - many parents (and communities) feel a strong commitment and even ownership of their local school.
 - with relatively small classes of mixed ages, teachers are used to high levels of differentiation and supporting and challenging pupils individually
 - many small schools are very keen to investigate the growing advantages of ICT
 - small schools could provide very conducive seedbeds for extensions of ideas of personalised learning – eg home working, parental involvement, learning platforms, network solutions, etc., etc.
- likely to display large variation in their ability to adapt and to extend provision. This is mainly because of local circumstances, eg the distance between the school and pupils’ homes or the next network school, or etc. (It would be quite wrong to characterise those small schools that are slow to develop as having reluctant staff - as was done for workforce remodelling. A small school’s particular circumstances hugely affect its ability to take up particular initiatives.)
- likely to show some anxiety about fully extending their services because ways to solve implementation difficulties are not yet sufficiently researched, especially the longevity of funding.

Many rural small school heads and governors are likely to have high levels of anxiety about a **requirement** for the 5 core **extended services** to be delivered in each locality.

This is because:

- the people involved (heads, staff and governors) have no remaining capacity for more organisation/management time without abandoning previous reforms,
- they will not be able to see ways to fund activities enough because in rural areas they will cost considerably more due to additional transport, small numbers, service providers additional costs, etc.,
- the small budgets of small schools and even of federated schools are unlikely to be able to subsidise extended activities in the long run,
- the often limited size of a rural community may restrict the availability of expertise to share and become involved.

Nevertheless, a good number of rural schools already provide a rich range of well attended extended services, where their particular circumstances allow. But for many, provision of the full five core extended services will be impossible and the schools will feel as if they have been asked to win the Battle of Britain with no aeroplanes. Currently, this aspect of the change agenda (the 5 core extended services by 2010) is headed for real difficulties in a large number of rural locations. The irony is that these are some of the headteachers with the most holistic and effective individual care approaches to education. They want to see the children and communities benefit but only some have got the means for this provision.

How might this crisis be avoided?

1.) We should consider promoting diversity of services. For example, while a particular school may not be able to provide daily after-school clubs it may be able to promote on-line activity and learning for pupils at home. If there are not enough children to make a nursery class viable, there might be a possibility of providing a weekly visit from a playbus. It is the stipulation of the detail of core services which will be problematic.

2.) We already accept the notion that rural education costs more, (although many would argue that SSAs do not reflect the extra costs). It is therefore reasonable to suppose that any further services are likely to cost more as well. (Many would argue that this may help to redress the dearth of services provided in the countryside.) Rural LAs will need additional funding.

3.) The nation needs to consider that the additional extended services provided for pupils in urban areas is unlikely to be matched in quantity by rural areas, without sustained additional funding. Rural children and their families are likely to have an unequal access to a full range of services. They would thus form a disadvantaged group with a legitimate call upon additional funding.

While suggesting a wonderful future for our children's development, the "Beyond the Classroom" seminar indicated that more thinking is needed now, if severe concerns by small schools are to be allayed.

Mike Carter (Editor: National Small Schools' Forum News and Journal.)

Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by straightforward stupidity. J.C. Collins

Collaboration: Federation: Partnership

Ronald Arnold (no stranger to small school) has written a report for EMIE/NFER entitled: *Schools in Collaboration: federations, collegiates and partnerships.* (March 2006) EMIE report No 86. The report is very helpful in pointing out some principles and drawing on case studies for various LAs. It provides a good background for any considering greater collaboration.

This is one of its concluding paragraphs.

"The future development of federations and partnerships is by no means a straightforward matter and its success will depend on the right answers to certain questions. Some ...will turn on the issue of freedom of choice, an enthusiasm for shared progress, and a willing acceptance of some dilution of autonomy. No school should be forced into partnership, and no partnership is subject to the dictate in its membership. All the successful examples described in

this report began and have been sustained in a spirit of common resolve and sensitivity to the needs of others. As we have seen, some partnerships have gone beyond the notion of common curricula and shared resources, and have argued for common accountability, in terms of inspection and performance data, and a common admissions policy. Anything that dampens down such aspirations, or makes it more difficult to fulfil them, will be a backward step.” [Para 7.4, p.38]

The following articles are notes taken at the last NSSF conference: They share what heads said about their experiences of federation.

- KATE NASH -

An International Perspective

Notes from Workshop:

Kate Nash introduced herself and explained that she was a Headteacher of a small school but was now a Headteacher in a larger school.

She had been fortunate enough to travel to Holland and also New Zealand to see how they operate their schools and how different they were to the systems in place in UK schools.

Schools in Holland operate without each school having a Headteacher. Kate saw this and was convinced it worked!

In Holland they have “More Schools Heads” which lead more than one school. All schools have a board and each school has a “Location Leader”. Dutch federations are defined as “two or more schools which share one board”. Federations have been established to address Headteacher recruitment and retention, demographic changes and falling rolls, to establish networks and provide economics of scale.

Kate quickly ascertained that federation in Holland was very normal and was working very well for them because of the power it provides. She explained that in order for the schools to federate, there was a need to agree on all areas, have the same vision and a shared ethos. It was also apparent that all federations were different and individual to meet each schools needs. Heads had a non-teaching commitment which meant they were more organised, less pressured and stressed, more time to reflect and could assist with teaching issues and problems.

Heads were provided with a personal coach, from the business world, as and when required to assist and train in leadership styles. **Heads were therefore more dynamic and less tired.** They also had more administration assistance which freed up more time for hands on tasks.

Another relief for Heads were Superintendents whose role is similar to that of our LEA reps. They are able to deal with problems far quicker to relieve the heads.

Kate explained that **schools are closed Wednesday afternoons (this is PPA time)** and ALL children go home for lunch each day. Travel to school is by walking or cycling. Kate noted that the vast majority of Heads were male as women were working part-time to make them available for children at lunch times and Wednesday afternoons!

Kate reported the benefits to the schools:

- Dynamic and energetic leadership
- Greater number of staff
- Distributed leadership
- Support and collaboration
- Working on joint initiatives

In New Zealand, Kate experienced a slightly different approach. She explained that they used personalised learning with personal targets. Because the culture in New Zealand is so different to the UK, Kate felt the schools were very chilled.

She explained there are no league tables(!), **pupils are very much involved in determining their learning**, schools are closely involved with the university and headteachers are very informed about current educational thinking. There is a focus on team teaching, thereby having larger classrooms but with two teachers. Kate added that practices in New Zealand are some 6/7 years behind the UK. Pupils are at the heart of the school – if they are happy, they will learn. They intend to continue their focus on sharing experiences with the pupils that are rich and challenging and encourage deep and profound learning. They “take up challenges and set sail into the open seas!”

- ESTELLE SMITH -

West Lulworth & Winfrith First Schools - Dorset

Notes from Workshop:

Estelle Smith introduced herself and explained that she had been Headteacher of West Lulworth since 2000. She explained that the two schools in question, West Lulworth and Winfrith First Schools served an area which was populated mainly by the elderly and army families – this meaning that army children moved around a lot. The schools are 5 miles apart.

The schools relied on outside catchment children but even with this, numbers were dwindling each year dramatically and both schools were under constant threat of closure.

Ofsted put the schools into special measurements and there were public meetings about putting the schools together.

Estelle explained that the schools, staff, governors, parents and the children were put under immense pressure to try and resolve the continuing difficulties and felt constant pressure from the LEA to close the schools. Federating the two schools was considered very favourably but there were two headteachers and the obvious staffing and distance problems to consider when dealing with federation. Problems with the two schools continued over a very long 4/5 year period.

The schools had no school field so sports day, etc. was held on the playground which presented obvious problems for the children. Due to headteacher problems at Winfrith, Estelle explained that she was required to work closely with that school as well as West Lulworth and it was noted how this period of federated headship was working well.

After a consultation period, it was decided that both schools would be federated and this happened on 1st September 2005. Estelle reported that everybody involved were very nervous about this huge step because it meant there would be one governing body, one school office, one headteacher, etc. but they soon began to realise the benefits, ie: savings in the budget, shared resources, joint activities, etc.

etc. Estelle was pleased to state that the schools have gone from strength to strength. The staff is happier and more relaxed and the children are reaping the benefits of shared resources with fellow pupils and mixing with more children in the same year group.

Estelle's teaching colleague explained the changes since federating:

- Ofsted still conduct 2 separate inspections and there are 2 SEFs;
- Teachers have less subjects to teach as jobs are shared out;
- More money in the pot to afford things like school trips; bought in items for topics, etc;
- More opportunities for the children;
- Staff cover each other whilst on courses, etc;
- Linked sports activities – netball, football, athletics;
- Linked festivities – Christmas plays, end of term services, etc;
- The schools use a taxi minibus service to transport children from one school to the other when necessary;
- No additional funding for transport issues;
- Transport time added into timetable;
- Funding at present is as two separate schools – ie: still funding for two separate headteachers;
- Amalgamation is a current consideration but the funding will be compromised;
- At present, Estelle confirmed she operates two separate budgets.

Estelle and her colleague confirmed that the changes have been massive and everyone is happier and more content with the federated situation. The next step would be to look at amalgamation. All governors are extremely positive about this and are 100% committed to the union and foresee that there will be little problem apart from choosing a name!!

- QUESTIONS & ANSWERS -
“Collaborate , Federate , Network or . . . ?”

1. Do we need Headteachers and do non-teaching Headteachers become de-skilled? *Headteachers are able to choose whether to lead and teach. It was generally felt that Headteachers would not become de-skilled. If Headteachers are sharing schools, often their attendance in school, or lack of it, is questioned!*
2. Should we look to federate if we are happy with our Cluster? *Vera Ballinger explained that she was involved in a very effective cluster which had been in existence for 20 years. Schools low on numbers, ie: under 50, might wisely look at federation to save their school.*
3. How easy is it to group children together, ie: mixed age groups, gifted & talented and what appropriate opportunities would be available if they do collaborate? *Detailed planning necessary to accommodate every group, right down to coat pegs, lunch boxes, etc. Children allowed to choose activities suitable to their ability in mixed age groups.*
4. If not collaborating with any other school, will school suffer? *Working in isolation not beneficial to children, share resources, experiences, age groups. Not an unpleasant experience to change and federate/collaborate.*
5. How do you maintain advantages of smallness if you federate? *Carol Tosh explained she put two small schools together but they still remain a small school. Need to be careful what you decide to merge together and creative about what you separate. Best of both worlds to have small groups coming together.*
6. Does the Headteacher post need to be advertised when federating? *Carol Tosh explained that this does vary but a strong leader is best with great expertise in the school.*
7. Is there training for middle or location leaders? *Nothing specific to small schools. Dorset – all small schools part of a cluster. National College have DVD available.*
8. Is funding for federation hard – do schools lose out? *Carol Tosh reported that schools should not lose out, based on individual circumstances. The Five Island Schools have come out better off but don't expect to make savings – it is more about preserving.*

23.06.2006 NSSF Conference: Uplands, High Wycombe

A committee is cul-de-sac into which ideas are lured and then quietly strangled.

J.A. Lincoln

Date for your diaries - National Small Schools Week
18 June – 22 June 2007

A celebration of the work of small schools

The NSSF are pleased to confirm that National Small Schools Week will be held
during the third week of June 2007.

For more information including full details, school packs, ideas and resources please
visit our website in early 2007... **www.nssf.org.uk**

Language at Ninfield CE Primary School

As a result of feedback and requests from parents, we introduced the learning of a Modern Foreign Language (MFL) into Key Stage 2 from September 2005.

First we had to decide which language to adopt and after in-depth research amongst our staff – well a discussion during a staff meeting at least- we quickly realised that the only common language we had all had, was French. A MFL Co-ordinator was appointed to start the process.

The next step was to find out what support there was for the introduction of a MFL. The QCA scheme of work provided the framework and resources are beginning to come onto the market. We have yet to make use of these. We have purchased resources to support the QCA scheme, including French vocabulary books and dictionaries. The new KS2 Framework for languages will also be of help. A visit to the East Sussex trade Fair put us in touch with Linguathorn, who were able to provide ICT support and the benefits of access to native speakers. It helped that our Secretary/Bursar had recently purchased a house in France and was having lessons herself and one of our Governors was a fluent speaker. It's amazing what help is out there if you ask! We also identified support from our local secondary school and from native speakers in the community.

Instead we set out to challenge the statement in the QCA scheme that any teacher can deliver the units. We divided up the units over our classes and year groups and planned a phased introduction, starting with the KS2 classes working on Units 1 – 4 this year. Armed with our resources we began.

Of course it's not just the deliver of the units, it's the inclusion of languages in other aspects of the curriculum, hence some of our children are writing playscripts in English and in French and a French carol is included in our church service. Then there is the incidental usage of French throughout the day, eg when calling the register.

So far, so good. The nouns are no problem, even the verbs are not too bad. Those years of learning by rote that we endured seem to have worked! It's the grammar that gets us from time to time, and sends us in search of support. Our secretary gets a visit, or we log onto the internet. One word of caution, like all internet searches, there can be some interesting outcomes. One day I did a search for everyday French phrases. The site that came up included useful phrases such as 'your face looks like it's been hit by a manhole cover!' It brought a little light relief to a wet playtime if nothing else.

It's early days, but yes, it does seem that the QCA units can provide the support for teachers with limited language knowledge to deliver the MFL curriculum. We are aware that we will need further support for the future when units 5 – 12 are introduced, but we may be able to obtain additional training for our teachers and possibly engage the help of a native speaker.

The children? Well, they are enjoying their French lessons and hopefully by the end of the year they will have sufficient knowledge to participate fully in a French week, which we are planning. We are aiming to make our next PGL adventure holiday a French one and there should be plenty of adult volunteers to make the trip to check out the site (and the hypermarkets nearby). We are also trying to make links with a French school, through contacts in France.

It is an exciting development, which we hope will make an impact on children's learning in other areas. If you do decide to introduce a Modern Foreign Language – Bon Chance!

Karen Bye, Ninfield, East Sussex.

NB See Teachers' TV for a programme based partly on the experiences of a small school introducing MFL in Scotland. Ed.

<i>I can speak Esperanto like a native.</i>

Spike Milligan

We are very grateful for the following article - specially written for this edition by staff at DfES Federations Unit.

Small Schools, Partnerships and Federations – a DfES Perspective

We recognise that small schools are at the heart of many local communities and support them where they are providing a good standard of education, where parents want them and where they have the support of the local education community.

Partnerships of different sorts, from loose collaborations to more formal 'governance' federations, can be a way to help small schools to deliver an effective and popular service.

The principle of collaboration will be nothing new to most schools, but it may nonetheless be helpful for us to set out here some of the forms of partnership that small schools might wish to consider.

Why establish partnerships or federations?

Working together, schools can share best practice, facilities and expertise. Avoiding duplication of effort or resources gives teaching heads and other staff more time to devote to the core business of teaching and learning, rather than administration. The same principle applies to other common policies, such as behaviour or admissions, and joint working can also facilitate inclusion and diversity.

Quick benefits from a federated approach come from taking advantages of economies of scale, for example, having single, shared maintenance contracts for buildings and grounds, ICT equipment and support, school catering and caretaking.

Cross-phase federations can also improve transition between phases, and give staff the chance to learn from the strengths of excellent teaching in different phases.

Types of partnership

The chart [underneath this article] summarises the characteristics of a range of partnerships. We know that different schools and local authorities call their partnerships and federations by different names, so we have tried in this 'Partnerships Continuum' to establish a shared language.

The loosest form of partnership is non-formal collaboration: typically, head teachers may exchange ideas and good practice, bring staff together for joint training, or pool funds to obtain economies of scale on purchases.

A 'soft' federation can bring such collaborative working onto a more formal basis, without either school's governing body relinquishing or delegating any of its powers. Characteristics of such federations are joint committees and service level agreements.

'Governance' federations are those that are subject to statutory regulation under the provisions of the 2002 Education Act. 'Soft governance' federations maintain separate governing bodies for each school, as in a 'soft' federation, but the difference is that the governing bodies formally delegate some or all of their statutory functions to a joint committee or committees. This can lead to more effective committee working, as committees have the power to make decisions on behalf of the schools.

'Hard governance' federations represent the most complete form of partnership short of amalgamation. Two or more schools agree to form a single shared governing body. The schools each retain their own identity, but the same governing body manages them all.

Schools can be in more than one form of partnership at the same time. For example, two small primary schools may establish a hard governance federation, and the governing body of that federation may then establish a softer federation with a local secondary school.

Partnerships can be single phase or cross phase, and non-governance federations can also include FE colleges and independent schools. Provisions in the current Education Bill would also permit FE colleges to join soft governance federations.

Which form of partnership is best for our school?

There is no 'one size fits all' answer. As governors or head teachers, you should consider what you want to achieve through partnership: higher standards, joint staff development, shared resources, economies of scale, and/or other benefits.

You will want to take account of whether your aims are short-term – to deliver a specific objective or address a temporary problem – or longer-term. If longer-term, a governance federation will probably provide greater stability.

You will also know your local communities better than anyone else, and will have an idea how parents and other community members may react to different approaches. It may suit you to begin with a soft federation to establish joint processes and build up trust, and then review at a later date whether you want to move towards a governance federation.

Leadership

One issue that often arises is whether schools in a federation should share a head teacher or retain a separate head in each school. Both options are possible in all sorts of federation: two schools in a soft federation can share a head teacher, and hard governance federations can operate with different heads in each school.

Current trends among smaller schools

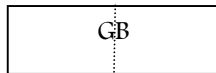
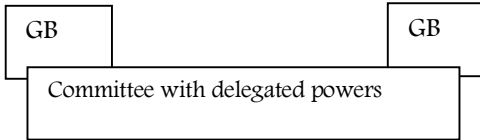
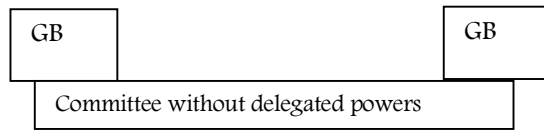
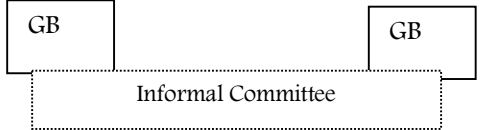
We do not keep in DfES any records of the number of different types of federation, and there is no duty on schools to notify us when they establish or join a federation. (Hence the request on page 6. Ed.) However enquiries coming in to us are a good barometer of change.

From those conversations with schools and local authorities, we can identify two trends:

- Collaborative working has become the norm; almost every school is in one or more partnerships;
- Albeit from a very low base, the number of hard governance federations seems set to grow rapidly, particularly among smaller primary schools.

The reasons for the growing interest in hard governance federation among small schools are varied, but the main issues we have identified are:

- Economic reasons – to ensure that small schools remain viable;
- Leadership – either difficulties in head-teacher recruitment or wishing to allow more non-classroom time for a head to take a more strategic leadership role over 2 or 3 schools;
- Providing a broad curriculum, by making it easier to bring in specialist support when the same year group or key stage group from 2 schools is brought together.

	Hard Governance Federation	Soft Governance Federation	Soft Federation	Informal, Loose Collaboration
	EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP			
	STATUTORY		NON-STATUTORY	
Diagram				
Governing Body?	Single governing body shared by all schools.	Each school has its own governing body, but the federation has joint governance / strategic committee with delegated power	Each school has its own governing body; the federation, however, has joint governance / strategic committee without delegated powers	Each school has its own governing body and the group of schools meet informally on ad-hoc basis
Statutory?	Yes. Hard governance federations are established using Federations Regulations made under Section 24 Education Act 2002	Yes. Soft governance federations established using Collaboration Regulations , made under Section 26 Education Act 2002	No. Schools can set up soft federations without having to follow regulations.	No. Schools can form informal collaborations without having to follow regulations.
Common goals?	All schools share common goals through SLA and protocol ; having single governing body allows for efficient, streamlined decision making in all areas.	All schools share common goals through SLA and protocol ; joint committee can make joint decisions in some areas, but not all.	All schools share common goals through protocol ; joint committee can make joint recommendations , but it is up to individual governing body to authorise plans.	All schools share common goals and can work together on ad-hoc issues and informal agreements.
Common Budget?	No, but having a single governing body allows for prompt budgetary decisions on behalf of the group of schools.	No, but if JSC has budgetary powers delegated to it, they can make prompt budgetary decisions for the group of schools.	No, but it could make budgetary recommendations for the group, which in turn would have to be approved by individual governing body.	No. However, if group of schools wish to commit budget, they would need to go back to their individual governing bodies to approve.
Shared staff?	Common management and appointments are agreed in a simple, effective manner. Sometimes choose to have single headteacher across group of schools.	Common management positions and appointments, but need to have protocol / contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Common management positions and appointments, but need to have protocol / contract to underpin commitment to shared posts.	Unlikely to have common management positions, but if they exist, they have to be agreed in a protocol / contract.
Targeted Capital Fund (TCF) ?	Eligible for TCF	Eligible for TCF	Only eligible if schools are supported by the same Trust nominating Governors	
Trust?	The Trust nominates Governors to the single governing body providing stability across the partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Trust nominates Governors to the Governing Body of all schools• A Trust nominates Governors to the Governing Body of one school but not others• Could have more than one Trust each nominating Governors to the Governing Body of a different school		

For some, hard governance federation is seen as an alternative to amalgamation. The selling points for hard governance federation in that context are that it maintains the identity of the different schools and that each school continues to receive its own budget.

Trust schools

Trust schools do not represent a different form of partnership as such, but Trusts can underpin any form of partnership. A Trust can support one, some or all of the schools in a partnership. The advantages of a Trust would be to bring in external expertise and strengthen governance across the partnership.

Funding

Some capital funding for federations is available through the Targeted Capital Fund. You can find details at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=9784> or by calling Denise Barker on 020 7925 5358. There is however no additional recurrent funding available specifically for federations.

Legislation

If you are thinking about governance (hard) federation, you may wish to consult the relevant regulations made under the 2002 Education Act. These can be found on the website of the Office of Public Sector Information, at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm>

For soft governance federations, the relevant regulations are the Collaboration Regulations, Statutory Instrument 2003/1962. For hard governance federations, they are the Federation Regulations, Statutory Instrument 2004/2042.

Where can we find out more?

Information about federation, together with links to other sources of information, can be found on the DfES website at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/> and information about other forms of partnership at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/eips/> Alternatively, call the Partnerships and Federations Unit of DfES on 020 7925 5358 or 020 7925 6666.

What makes a good small school Website?

By Mike Brogden

One of the reasons for setting up the NSSF Website competition was to enable us to learn about the range of ideas in operation. We have now held the competition three times over four years and during that time, more and more schools have set up their own sites, often via the several firms that offer their design services and sometimes through their LEA IT support. According to schoolswebdirectory.co.uk the range is from 100% of primaries in some LEAs having a Website, to none in a few. How many of these are small schools, I can't tell and as some of the sites are no more than a page giving the school's address and phone number, (or the DfES page showing a range of inapplicable information including the number of schoolgirl mothers in one LEA's case), the actual extent of primary school websites is a matter of guesswork. I conclude that school websites are a rapidly growing phenomenon and that it is time to take stock and consider some principles.

1. Who will set up and run the site, keeping it up to date?

A Website is very time consuming, requiring frequent attention. Out of date pages give a poor impression, irritate and reduce visit frequency, so the job needs very reliable volunteers/personnel. This is not a job for the teaching head of a small school. Ideally, it's a job shared between several and if you are really lucky, there may be an IT-competent governor or parent who can take the lead, if buying expertise is too expensive.

2. What is it for?

Is it to:

- provide essential information for current and prospective parents?
- inform parents and the community about the school's work?
- enthuse and engage the pupils?
- ease school admin?
- provide information for staff and/or governors?

The best sites are working towards achieving all five aims so (1) above becomes even more crucial. With controlled access, different people can run particular sections. The muddled sites appear not to have thought through their aims and thus reflect the sometimes unsuitable formats provided by commercial designers.

3. Implications

i. Providing essential information for current and prospective parents:

A lot of this information already exists in the school prospectus. The full prospectus should be on the site as a downloadable document but some of its contents could be repeated for easy access. This will be largely overtaken by the coming "school profile" although schools may wish to keep many aspects provided in the prospectus that are not in the school profile. One such aspect could be those sections that convey the school's ethos and pedagogic principles.

- school name, address, contact details; a map; school plan
- type of school and what this means (eg if Aided, state the school's affiliation)
- the LEA and contact details
- number of pupils, age range, number of classes
- the strengths of the school's size
- school hours and terms (as far ahead as possible)
- admission and induction procedures
- PTA information
- staff list (both teachers and support staff)
- list of governors, their roles, duties and routines; how to contact the chairman (not via the school)
- the latest SAT and "added value" data (Very few sites make these easily understood by parents)
- downloadable documents: prospectus, governors' reports and minutes, admission form, holiday form, clubs and visits permission forms, school and PTA newsletters, school policies, OFSTED report, home-school contract etc
- facility for sending emails to the school office
- storage of index of local services as required for Every Child Matters Outcomes

ii. Informing parents and the community about the school's work:

This is the aspect that is particularly well done in many websites but the items must be kept up to date.

- photos and descriptions of classroom work, school events, visits and visitors (endless possibilities)
- calendar of events open to parents and events that are open to the community
- PTA activities
- homework (but difficult to keep sufficiently up to date)

- extra curricular activities
- out of school hours provision
- links to other useful sites (including the NSSF)

iii. Enthusing the pupils:

- (ii) above contributes to this, of course
- class pages, developed by the pupils, perhaps as part of ICT work (ie each class has access to their pages so they may add to or update them).
- activities for pupils – details of homework set – holiday challenges - ‘weblinks’ to safe and stimulating sites for further challenge/learning.
- a host for individual pupil or group Learning Platforms (Restricted access areas whereby individual pupils or groups can be set learning tasks and linked to portals providing on-line learning)

iv. Easing school administration:

This aim for school websites was much under-developed in our competition entries.

- downloadable items as in (i) above
- facility for the on-line completion and return of forms
- secure part of the site for governors to access policies, agendas, reports, draft minutes; contact details for all governors and the clerk
- details and application forms for school staff vacancies
- secure part of the site for staff to access documents such as School Profile, last OfSTED report, SEF, last SIP report, development plan, curriculum planning, pupil reports
- ditto for any cluster arrangements; joint reports; collaboration agreement; activities; coordination, etc, etc
- questionnaire for parents (for on-line completion)

4. General points:

- children must not be identified and it would be wise to seek parents’ permission before including their photos
- many school websites currently give little regard to the work and duties of the governing body or mention links and networks with other schools.
- avoid seeming to be patronising, both of the adults and of the children. Little green men conducting a tour of the school, cartoon characters and ‘infant’ language are examples of this pitfall. Many of the commercially designed sites get this wrong. Perhaps they think primary means unsophisticated.
- do take great care over spelling and grammar. It does not quite meet the school’s statement about high standards if “role” is confused with “roll” and apostrophe’s are in the wrong places. Get someone to check everything.
- avoid acronyms, even PE, RE and ICT
- avoid gimmicks such as moving banners and cartoon characters that jump round the screen; restrict the number of colours. Beware the Walt Disney approach of some designers. (See “avoid being patronising” above.)
- very selective quotes from OfSTED may give the impression that there’s something to hide. Have the whole report available to download.
- secure areas for the governing body, staff, PTA and pupils can be set up to be opened by each group for updating without giving access to the rest of the site
- “guestbooks” offer the opportunity for browsers to record their comments for all to see. The terrible spelling and grammar used by some pupil visitors may not be good for the school’s image.
- use the website to ease school admin (as well as easing things for parents who have the technology): downloadable forms (even better is they can be completed and returned on-line) could save office time.
- ensure that the headteacher has complete authority over the site.
- include links where you feel they might help eg cluster schools, NSSF, OfSTED.

5. Further guidance:

- try Googling “primary school” + websites (include the double inverted commas to refine the search) to find several firms offering website design services at prices said to start at about £200 and LEA lists of websites. Many of the firms don’t seem to offer what I’m advocating but it is presumably possible to negotiate for less flashiness and more substance.
- if your LEA offers a website service, this may be preferable to the commercial deals.
- for those webmasters who are sufficiently keen, investing in software such as Dreamweaver or other less complex programs such as Netscape Composer offers most flexibility.

Pupils and Teachers Learning Together

Last year with the launch of our school website, I wanted to develop my ICT skills further. I often watched in wonder as our ICT coordinator created further elements to our website and wanted to be able to contribute. I decided the best way to develop my skills was with my class of Year 6. I had often felt the QCA units had limitations in providing enough challenge for the gifted and talented in my class.

In September I set up an after school club centred on digital photography and webpage design. Alexander McMillan, our ICT Coordinator, agreed to help to get us started and we haven't looked back since. Together we have created a variety of multimedia web pages. The children clearly enjoy their work and have helped each other to expand their ICT skills. They always get excited when they discover new wizardry.

Recently, during "Science Week", I wanted to develop the whole class use of multimedia. I decided the best way to achieve this was to give each child the role as a multimedia reporter. They were given a "Press" badge which allowed them access to report on any science activity happening in the rest of the school. They were allowed to use a variety of multimedia. The children quickly set about filming, tape-recording, interviewing and photographing events. We decided the best work was to be displayed through web pages. With the use of hyperlinks they connected photographs and video clips. The more able children clearly enjoyed sharing their skills and the whole class quickly developed a good understanding of webpage design. The only problem now is that I and continually nagged for ICT time in order for them to create even further web pages! The experience this year has been highly enjoyable. Web pages are a fantastic and very enjoyable medium for children and a great addition to any topic.

Sally Cleaves, Netherfield CE Primary School East
Sussex.

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Positive Discrimination – A rethink prompted in Iceland

In the UK we have got used to the idea of positive discrimination. We use it to help groups of pupils to access the full curriculum. For example, pupils from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds are often supported by learning mentors. Pupils with statements of special educational needs are often supported substantially. Talented pupils are often offered subsidised help to extend their expertise, for example, in music or through schemes such as children's university.

Decisions about which pupils the nation should help with additional resources are made based on cultural and topical factors according to the current 'political correctness'. They are identified by what is viewed to be a disadvantage at the time. Consequently, there are interesting differences over time, between nations and even between areas (eg Local Authorities). Sometimes a priority is made where a group has been found to have poorer academic performance although poorer performance has not always led to positive action. For example, boys' performance has increasingly been weaker than girls', and while there is much advice, boys have little direct financial support.

In Iceland, I visited a kindergarten which, for much of each day, taught boys and girls separately. It was based on the idea that, when mixed, the sexes tend to behave in gender stereotypical ways. Grouping boys together provides more neutral behaviour choices and likewise for the girls. These kindergarten experiments have not yet had the benefit of research into the eventual academic outcomes. However, receiving schools have noted considerable cooperation and less gender behavioural differences amongst the pupils passing on.

It's doubtful that this system would suit the UK but it does seem that we need to do more to raise boys' performance.

We need to re-consider priorities for positive discrimination on a national basis. Our growing awareness of the implications of Personalised Learning and the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda, point to an extension of notions of inclusion and to the need to ameliorate the many less obvious but powerful factors that militate against a child's learning. Indeed such factors could eclipse current notions of pupil-led funding. Gender may well be one such important factor.

Another may be the child's home location. Pupils in rural areas need positive discrimination. It could be said that this already happens through advantageous LA formulae. The truth is that county decisions render village schooling a bit of a post code lottery (see notes for Parliament in this edition) due to such varying acceptance of the rural need and the Government's insufficient sparsity factor included in SSAs. Consequently, there is a reluctant financial advantage for rural pupils and small schools often feel under threat. Yet their pupils (and families) have real disadvantages in their need for transport to access services provided in towns and cities. This disadvantage is likely to increase as extended schooling transforms the lives of many urban children and their families. While some small schools offer many out-of-school activities and family services (often informally) many find difficulty in staffing and finance, but the greatest problem is transport. While rural schools offer more in partnerships with other schools, the difficulty of transport still undermines the sustainability of activities. The next village school is no longer "just down the road". Many children attending village schools are already bussed to their own school, let alone another half hour ride for wrap-around services at another.

Extended services should be much more expensive in rural areas and must be funded as serving a disadvantaged group of pupils and their families.

Mike Carter in Reykjavik.

The Average Child

I don't cause teachers trouble
My grades have been O.K.
I listen to my classes
And I'm in school every day
My parents think I'm average
My teachers think so too
I wish I didn't know that
'Cause there's lots I'd like to do
I'd like to build a rocket
I've a book that shows you how
Or start a stamp collection
Well, no use starting now
'Cause since I found I'm average
I'm just smart enough you see
To know there's nothing special
That I should expect of me
I'm part of that majority
That hump part of the bell
Who spends his life unnoticed
In an average kind of hell

Presented at 1979 National PTA Convention by M Buscemi, Quest International.

I doubt if there are many "average" pupils in small schools where each child is an individual! Ed.

NSSF Forum Meetings

All members are welcome

Saturday 27th January 2007 Saturday 21st April 2007

Please contact DD Office on 01296 436959 or donna@ddoffice.co.uk
for details including times, map, etc.

Organising and managing small schools when rolls fall.

Tom Canham, Education Management Consultant.

Herefordshire asked me earlier this year to look at how other Local Authorities were tackling falling school rolls, at alternative models of organisation and management of small school provision, and to offer some guidance for an authority that wanted to avoid school closure or amalgamation if at all possible.

Authorities around Herefordshire are at different stages of reviewing provision but all are experiencing falling rolls to some degree. The general approach seems to follow the DfES's recommendations in its "Toolkit", and if reduced school size or financial problems cannot be managed, then closure or amalgamation of schools are proposed, a familiar scenario.

Across England, however, there are some exciting examples of schools federating in order to overcome some problems arising from small school size such as isolation, limited resources and premises, and difficulty in recruiting headteachers. Journal 21 referred to the DfES's promotion of collaboration between schools, and the potential for solving a recruitment problem.

Federation, whether "hard" (i.e. having a shared governing body and meeting the statutory Federation regulations) or "soft" (keeping separate governing bodies but having a joint committee and meeting the Collaboration regulations), undoubtedly can provide a much broader experience for children at small schools by getting two or more school staffs to work together, to share school facilities and strengths, and to get children from the different schools to work and play together. Evidence from Norfolk, where there are successful collaborations between pairs of primary schools, and Kent, where there are large federations of schools of all phases working to the admirable principle of "No pupil and no school left to fail", confirms this. The Netherlands have had many federated schools for some years, and the NCSL study clearly attests to the benefits.

Findings from experience to date indicate that there are some essential common factors if a federation is going to work well:

- A sense of shared identity and common purpose, and equal status
- Strong and effective leadership and management
- A willingness to operate in a united way and accept some dilution of autonomy
- A commitment of both time and resources
- Trust and effective communications with all parties are vital.

The NCSL study of federated primary schools in the Netherlands noted the outstanding characteristics of the Dutch federation leaders, such as charisma, dynamism, innovativeness, passion, drive and determination to improve standards and effectiveness. Not all headteachers have all of these qualities, but it merits discussion as to whether they are all essential to the leading of a federation. The ability to bring together and lead staff from different schools clearly requires some key qualities, but they are not totally dissimilar from those needed to bring together a single school's teachers that perhaps have worked independently of each other for some time. The big difference surely is one of scale and the hurdle of physical distance between school sites.

I would suggest that, to gain the real benefits of a federation for children and staff, there is a need to work towards a "hard" federation, to gain the capacity to achieve a whole federation ethos and practice in teaching and learning. Nevertheless there are obvious and substantial benefits to enjoy in less structured versions of this, and that may be as far as some schools, and communities, want to go.

Apart from whether or not federating is appropriate in individual cases, the likelihood of additional running costs needs to be taken into account. Most authorities that have encouraged schools to federate provide some additional financial support, as the DfES did through grant until recently, in the case of its pilot federated schools. Although the schools may save the cost of one or more headteachers, typically the lead headteacher or principal will be paid more for what is a much bigger job, and may need someone to take over a part-time class teaching responsibility. A teacher on each site may be paid more to be in charge of the site, or at least to be the main contact, and there will be extra travel costs for the lead head and, more expensively, for pupils visiting other sites. And of course some setting-up costs will arise, because of the need for staff, governor and parent discussions and consultations.

Setting up is not difficult, but takes time. The DfES calculate a need for 25 to 56 weeks to get through the process, depending on the timing of school holidays and whether decisions are taken at ordinary governor meetings or special ones. The proposed change, though not irreversible, is very significant and consultation needs to be

thorough, wide and genuine, taking as much time as it takes. Of course there will be complications, but the existence of successful federations shows that none is insurmountable.

Headteachers of federated schools have spoken of a personal, professional renewal through the fresh challenges, and if you approach headship as a creative, exciting opportunity you may find setting up and leading a federation even more satisfying. But one person's challenge is another person's stress; federation is not going to be right for every headteacher, any more than it is for every school or community.

Some useful sources of information:

Department for Education and Skills (2005): *Tackling Falling School Rolls: Toolkit*. London: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills (2005): *An Introduction to School Federations*. London: DfES.

R. Arnold (2006): *Schools in Collaboration*. Slough: NFER, EMIE.

University of Warwick (2005): *Evaluation of the Federations Programme (2nd Interim Report)*. Coventry: University of Warwick.

National College for School Leadership (2006): *Federations*. www.ncsl.org.uk/publications/publications-c.cfm.

Department for Education and Skills: *Federations*. www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/.

Experience is the name that everyone gives to his mistakes.

Oscar Wilde

Psychologist Anne-Marie McBlain's tips for stressed heads: From TES 15.09.06 p 5

- Don't panic. The chances are everyone else is feeling the same.
- Acknowledge what you have already achieved. Don't let one day or a stroppy parent write off years of experience.
- Make links with other heads. Look to share ideas and strategies for everything from pupils' projects to administration tasks.
- Make time to meet colleagues and other heads to see what is going on in their world. Often you will find it is the same as your own.

But see also NSSF Paper 6, downloadable from: www.nssf.co.uk

Collaboration, leadership and small schools; - the small but beautiful research base.

This research is on-going and we are very grateful to Dr Jeff Jones and Prof. Charles Desforges for these early indications about the research.

Introduction.

Small schools have a long history of collaboration with each other. The concept of collaboration is increasingly in vogue in the educational system at large. Arnold (2006) takes the view that, 'partnership between schools runs as a current throughout all the major initiatives introduced by the government in recent years, whatever their primary aim' and Ruth Kelly when Secretary of State for Education announced that, 'In the future I think cooperation will become not only the norm, it will probably be the only way of delivering a decent all-round education for all pupils...' (2005). This, of course calls for collaboration not only between schools but also between schools and a myriad of other service providers.

The benefits of collaboration are sufficiently well known to this readership as to need no rehearsal here. Securing the benefits, however, is not without its difficulties. The task imposes severe challenges for school leaders.

Fullan (2004) has argued that given the challenges facing modern educational systems we will have to think deeper and act differently if we are to transform rather than tinker with current performance. To this end, Fullan asserts, leaders in and of schools will have, amongst other things, to develop 'lateral capacity' which is defined as the deployment of deliberate strategies where peers learn from each other across schools, across LEAs and so on. School leaders will also have to develop the skills of interacting around given problems where 'they generate better practices, shared commitment and accountability to peers and other constituencies'.

Small schools have been there for decades. What lessons have been learned from their experience?

What is the accumulated research to say to the system at large on the question of successful leadership in collaboration?

The research base

Leadership in the small schools context has generally involved various forms of collaboration including clustering, federating and, most recently, networked learning communities. Sadly there is very little research indeed on these matters in particular or on small school leadership in general. In the latest DfES survey on the state of school leadership in England (Stevens et al, 2005) the terms clustering, federating or, indeed, small schools, receive no mention. The same absence is evident in Southworth's (2004) analysis of research on primary headship. Whilst Southworth identifies context as the key mediator of a head's practice, clusters and federations receive no attention because there is little evidence to draw on. Lewis and Murphy (2005) have drawn explicit attention to **the absence of a small schools' dimension in the research literature on school leadership**. They observe that whilst, 'There is a drive to understand the function of leadership in a variety of contexts' they have been struck by, 'the possibility that some of the more visionary texts in school leadership may appear to lack relevance for primary heads working in very different contexts'.

It has already been noted that the DfES/MORI survey into the state of school leadership in England does not comment on issues specifically relevant to small schools, nor does it identify size of school as an analytical variable (Stevens et al 2005). All that being said the area is not without careful empirical study. The research base is small but telling.

Small schools collaborating.

Small schools have operated many ways of collaborating to meet the challenges confronting them. Galton and Hargreaves (1995) described how small rural schools had adapted to the challenges of the introduction of LMS and the National Curriculum. They found various forms of collaboration through clustering, an arrangement that allowed each school to keep its own head teacher but which fostered various forms of resource sharing. Galton and Hargreaves observed that clustering enhanced the confidence of teachers but that confidence was not always converted into improved classroom practices. The varying degrees of impact of clustering on teaching provision could be explained by the match or mismatch between the nature of LEA support for the clusters and the degree of development of the clusters. The researchers drew up a framework describing cluster development and its necessary support. They concluded however that the relatively informal arrangements then obtaining would need to be taken further if small rural schools were to cope with increasing pressures. It was considered that 'during the next decade, those who govern small schools will need to consider how much autonomy they will need to give up to stay in existence'.

Despite this portentous warning clustering, appropriately supported by LEAs, has proven an enduring and successful approach to collaboration (Barlow and Taylor, 2004). In this survey, clustering was perceived to be associated with the following benefits

1. Improved access to a wider range of equipment, resources and expertise. The sharing of school staff, and particularly specialist staff such as SENCOs or ICT experts, was seen to a salient benefit.
2. Recruitment and retention of staff had been enhanced through the training and nurturing of talented people in the cluster schools; through raising awareness of the benefits of clustering; and through deepening the understanding of governors and hence procuring their commitment.
3. Decreasing the perceived insularity of small schools through broadening the sense of community.
4. Recognising clustering as an alternative to closure.

Clustering was not seen to be without difficulties. In particular, there was a significant co-ordination and management task. It was felt that a co-ordinator/facilitator was essential and special training for these roles was necessary. Dedicated support from the LEA was also deemed to be crucial to the success of cluster work.

Barlow and Taylor concluded that clustering provided a workable model for reaping the benefits of small schools.

That being said the model worked best when the LEA was proactive in provision whilst supporting schools' autonomy and leaving heads in the driving seat of management. LEAs, the authors conclude, must have a 'facilitative clustering policy attending to the rationale, training and dedicated support of cluster work'.

Studies of clustering in Wales have revealed similar results. Williams and Thorpe (1998) studied LEA frameworks of support for INSET in promoting cluster work. There was found to be a clear connection between modes of leadership and levels of collaboration. Success in collaboration in terms of its impact on practice depended more on the leadership from within the group, the extent to which the teachers felt involved and represented in the decision making processes related to INSET planning and the degree of trust and confidence teachers felt in one another. These studies expose a need for high quality leadership skills in very difficult circumstances and this raises the question of how such skills are to be developed.

Collaboration through federation.

Federation usually describes the operation of two or more schools under a single head. Although different models of federation have been described (Coopers and Lybrand, 1996), few federations are actually operating and searches and enquiries have revealed only two research papers describing and evaluating this approach to collaboration (Thorpe and Williams, 2002; Arnold, 2006). Further research is in progress (G. Ireson, 2005; S. Percy, 2005; N. Donlevy, DfES, 2005) but none of this work can be drawn on here because there have, as yet, been no published research outputs.

<p>The central objective of federation is to achieve the benefits of small schools whilst avoiding the drawbacks as described earlier.</p>

Federation might be seen as the multi-site provision of one school except of course that the different sites are, at least in the short term, lodged in the culture of what was once the local school. Coopers and Lybrand (1996) considered that, 'federation refers to the specific situation where separate small schools combine to form a single school using the premises of the former schools but now with only one head and one governing body'. Davies (2001) defines federation as provision which is 'area managed but locally taught'. This latter definition fits the instances in which two or more schools operate under a single head but each retains its governing body. Federation has proven particularly attractive, it seems, where there is severe difficulty in recruiting head teachers.

As Galton and Hargreaves suggested (1995), federation might be seen as the next step in progression in collaboration between small schools. The single research publication available indicates that the circumstances of initiation and the planning for sustainability are crucial in the success or otherwise of this arrangement (Williams and Thorpe, 2002). These authors examined the operation of federated schools in rural Wales as part of a larger scale study of the 'small schools situation'. The main research questions were, 'how is federation best initiated and sustained and what factors contribute to their success?' Six instances of federation were identified. Four of these proved to be stable whilst two reverted to the separate schools. Data were collected through interviews with heads, LEA officers and school governors and, subsequently, through observation of LEA/school meetings. Interviews covered the perceived advantages and disadvantages of federation; the mechanics of the processes of initiation and sustaining federated schools; the head's role; use of resources; use of teacher expertise; curriculum provision; pupil peer grouping; factors that aided or hindered federation and the impact of the arrangements on pupils. Our main interest here is in the head's role.

Stable federations evinced significant changes in the way the head's dual role of teaching and leadership was carried out. Coopers and Lybrand (1995) calculated that federating three schools saves the equivalent of half a post in head teacher time. In the successful federations, heads had seen new possibilities in the deployment of this resource. They felt they needed to have a consistent teaching role as a means of getting to know the pupils. They also felt they needed a strong presence on each site. They met both these objectives through a distributed teaching role often in their specialist subject. At the same time the heads were committed to sustaining communications with their several communities and manage the movement of pupils and staff. In particular, these heads sustained an enduring focus on pupil experience and achievement confirming in their leadership that the chief reason for collaboration was the benefit of the pupils.

These results are confirmed in the recent survey by Arnold (2006). It should be emphasise that this survey is by no means confined to small school collaboration. Arnold concludes that, 'the most successful examples of collaboration are those which begin in a spirit of common resolve...and sustain that spirit'.

Federation clearly calls for refined leadership skills in settings which go beyond a single building and often beyond a single community. Again, this arrangement which is becoming increasingly evident raises the question of where heads are to acquire these skills.

Leadership development: lessons for and from small school collaboration.

One of the key principles of leadership development is to 'build on strengths that already exist and find ways of working with or around weaknesses' (Bolden, 2005). If the current situation of school leadership is considered in the context of transformation as defined by Fullan, it is obvious that various forms of collaborative leadership are called for. Many of the traditional anxieties about the quality of pupil experience in small schools have been well put to rest (Ofsted, 2002) but the pressure remains. To the enduring concerns about the quality of resourcing can be added new challenges including falling rolls likely to make small schools smaller; increasing difficulties in recruiting heads as management burdens increase; incessant demands for the transformation of educational standards and the extended schools agenda. At the same time I have shown that these schools have a long and distinguished track record of innovation and of certain forms of collaboration. This was recognised in 1999, with DfES grants for innovative clustering, although this initiative was not evaluated. How can leadership development in small schools be promoted? What lessons have they for the broader system?

It seems timely, if not urgent, to call for a major survey of leadership in small schools. The changing educational context as set out earlier, suggests the systems managers need to know a lot more about the challenges facing small schools in collaboration. What are the heads' major concerns and needs? How can they best be supported? How is the demand for personalisation, the full service school and other features of educational transformation impacting on these institutions? How are they contributing to meeting the twin problems of working class underachievement and pupils in the bottom 10% of the achievement range? Data seems to suggest that an issue for small schools is the progress of higher attainers, (often in higher socio-economic groupings.) A survey would provide valuable information on how to 'personalise' the support needed for these schools and at the same time reveal, we might predict, extensive good practice for others to consider.

As well as surveying the current scene it is timely to invest in programmes of research and development in small schools. Given their impressive track record of innovation small schools offer good bets as sites on which to learn lessons in transformational collaboration. Investment here would not only meet the needs of a significant percentage of the school a population it would also provide valuable lessons which, in later stages of the D and R process, be scaled up to medium and large scale settings.

Conclusion.

The research base on leadership in small schools is very small. At the same time it is consistently telling. It reveals a pattern of creativity, innovation and vision in collaboration.

<p>It shows that success depends on a persistent focus on the quality of pupil experience and on pupil achievement rather than financial opportunism.</p>
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It reveals the essential qualities of the partnerships that must obtain between LAs and schools in support of change. In this sense the research base is small but beautiful. But in the rapidly changing educational scene this is not enough. The research base needs extensive elaboration, as suggested above, for the lessons from small schools to be generalised and scaled up.

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Dr Jeff Jones (Principal Adviser, CfBT Education Trust.)

Issues of relevance to Small Schools in Parliament

The following pages report a small collection of the debates, questions and statistics raised in the parliaments of England and Scotland and the Welsh assembly. They are highly edited, with small schools in mind, from the summaries provided by "Education Parliamentary Monitor", with the kind permission of the editor, Demitri Coryton. Members wishing for more detail may join this service at epm@educationpublishing.com Relevant reviews will be posted occasionally on the NSSF website for members only. (www.nssf.co.uk)

Attitudes show in the House of Commons:

Rt. Hon. Sir John Stanley is MP for Tonbridge and Malling and asked about the number of small schools with under 100 pupils. The written answer was given on Friday 16th June as 2540 in England. (The full answer was detailed by LAs). Another question was answered on Thurs. 15th June 2006:

Sir John Stanley: *To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether it is his policy that primary schools in England with fewer than 100 pupils should be closed. [76843]*

Jim Knight (Schools Minister): *It is not the Departments policy that primary schools in England with fewer than 100 pupils should be closed. Local authorities are responsible for balancing the supply and demand of places in their areas to ensure schools serve the needs of their local communities and provide good quality education in the most cost effective way. As part of this, they need to determine the numbers and sizes of schools they need, taking into account the views and aspirations of parents and other stakeholders.*

*Many small schools are also rural schools and there is a presumption against closure of these schools. Although this does not mean that no rural school will ever close, the case for closure needs to be strong and clearly in the best interests of education provision in the area. Since the presumption was introduced in February 1998 the number of rural schools approved for closure has fallen from an average 30 a year to six a year. Statutory guidance to school organisation committees and the schools adjudicator also makes clear that **they must not assume a school must be of a certain size to be a good school.** Column 1405W Hansard: 15th June '06*

But from a debate held on 13th December 2005, about school closures in Cheshire, it was reported:

"Schools' Minister of State, Jacqui Smith (Redditch) could offer little comfort to the two Cheshire MPs because, as she reminded the House, decisions on school closures were now taken locally. Mrs Smith told the chamber that Cheshire was indeed reviewing its surplus places in Frodsham and Helsby and it was undertaking a public consultation on proposals for schools in those areas. The Minister said that it was important that such a consultation process should allow for alternative proposals to be put forward and she said that the law had been changed to require LEAs to consult their local MP

*The Minister emphasized that these were not statutory proposals for closure or merger; they would come later after the county's executive committee had decided which proposals should go forward into the statutory change process. Mrs Smith agreed with a point Mr Hall had made, that there was a presumption against the closure of rural schools but she pointed out that it was not the policy that no village school should be closed. **The Department's own guidance did suggest that schools with fewer than 150 children might have difficulty maintaining the quality of education.**"*

Education Parliamentary Monitor: Education Publishing Company 2005

(Editor's bolding.)

The final sentence is not supported by the evidence that has been available, which shows that small schools are at least as effective as schools of other sizes.

Please see NASS, NSSF for details. www.smallschools.org and www.nssf.co.uk

Primary school spending per pupil.

Sir John Stanley asked for data about pupil unit costs. Jim Knight (Schools' Minister) provided this. It shows a wide range from Lincolnshire and Shropshire both spending £2600, to Tower Hamlets at £4300 and City of London at £4990. Generally, urban primary schools spend an average of £2920 while rural primary schools spend an average of £2900. This data was for the 2004/5 financial year. July '06

Small Schools (Wales)

Nick Bourne: *Will the Minister make a statement on what support she is giving to small schools in mid and West Wales?* (WAQ47317)

Jane Davidson: *Funding for additional support for small schools in the counties of Gwynedd, Conwy, Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire amounts to £1,777,061 in total for 2006-07 financial year.*
6th July 2006

Rural Schools (Scotland)

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton (Lothians) (Con): *To ask the Scottish Executive how many (a) rural and (b) special schools have closed in each school year since 1999-2000 and how many times it has used its powers under the Education (Publication and Consultation etc.) (Scotland) Regulations 1998, or any other relevant statutory instruments, to refuse applications from local authorities to close schools.* (S2W-28604)

Holding answer issued: 6 October 2006

Peter Peacock: *I refer the member to the question S2W-18439 answered on 13 September 2005 which listed all school openings and closures, both local authority and independent, for the calendar years 1995 to 2005, albeit categorised into primary, secondary and special schools. All answers to written PQs are available on the Parliament's website, the search facility for which can be found at*
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/webapp/wa.search>.

(NB. Since 1995 the figures given show that 94 rural schools have closed. These figures include amalgamations and closures of independent schools.)

11 October 2006

House of Commons • Oral Questions, DfES • 27 April 2006

From reports of debates and answers:

Personalised learning

Jim Dobbin (Lab/Co-op, Heywood and Middleton) asked which children the Government's policy of personalised learning in schools would be targeted at. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills, Ruth Kelly (Lab, Bolton West), said that all children could benefit from increasingly personalised learning, a total of £990 million of additional funding by 2007-08 had been announced for that purpose. All schools would receive extra funding, but schools with pupils from deprived backgrounds or with low prior attainment would be targeted for extra resources.

Mr Dobbin said his LEA planned to spend money developing new technologies to help and support children at home because some children had struggled in the transition from primary to secondary school. He asked if that was the kind of project that the Secretary of State was willing to support. It was.

Barry Sheerman (Lab/Co-op, Huddersfield), the chairman of the Commons Education and Skills Select Committee, asked Mrs Kelly to take note of the research by the Institute for Public Policy Research on personalised learning and its effect on social mobility. He said that it was important to training intermediaries, and parliament should ensure that whether they were volunteers or teachers, they should be well qualified.

Mrs Kelly agreed, and said that catch-up lessons for those children who were starting to fall behind would make a significant difference not only to the number of children who obtained five good GCSEs, but also to social mobility. She thought that the research conducted on reading recovery was interesting, but that children should be taught synthetic phonics first, which would not only improve the quality of reading, but help to close the class gap.

Helen Goodman (Lab, Bishop Auckland) asked what progress the minister was making in her proposals for extended schools. The Minister for Children and Families, Beverley Hughes (Lab, Stretford & Urmston) said that more than 6,000 schools were engaged with the extended schools development programme and good progress was being made towards the target of all schools offering access to extended services by 2010. Early evaluation demonstrated that extended services could have a positive impact on the attendance and motivation of pupils, enhance children's and families' access to services and, if well managed, relieve pressure on teachers' workloads.

Miss Goodman said that children needed the opportunity to play and to relax. She asked the minister if she would support the work of the National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries which encouraged games clubs in schools. Mrs Hughes said that schools would be talking to parents and children as they planned their extended activities. Extended schools activities involved working in partnership with other organisations, and she was sure that the National Association of Toy and Leisure Libraries would have a crucial part to play in ensuring that extended activities included play.

Sarah Teather (LDP, Brent, East) said that the Headspace survey had suggested that 37 per cent of head teachers had no intention of offering the extended schools scheme. She asked the minister if she thought that was because the funding provided by the Government would only pay for one extra teacher per school.

Mrs Hughes said that the baseline survey that had been conducted at the outset showed that approximately 95 per cent of secondary schools and 87 per cent of primary schools already offered extended activities after school to some extent. The

Extended Schools

money provided—£840 million so far—was for start-up costs. Schools would need to prove that they could sustain activities and would then be supported.

Philip Hollobone (Con, Kettering) asked the Minister for assurance that the £840 million would go to schools and not be tied up in local education authorities. He asked what assessment had been made of the extra burdens on head teachers, teachers and school governors in implementing the project. The Minister replied that a significant proportion of the £840 million went directly to schools, the remainder went through local authorities. Schools would receive a substantial amount of money directly from the Department to support the development. The money was not for supporting activities in the long-term but for the development of such activities. The interim report on research commissioned from Manchester university on the impact on schools found that if properly managed, the burden on teachers would be reduced.

Classroom assistants

David Taylor (Lab/Co-op, North-West Leicestershire) asked how many classroom assistants had been recruited by primary schools in (a) England and (b) Leicestershire since 2001. The Minister for Children and Families, Beverley Hughes (Lab, Stretford & Urmston) said that in January 2001 there were 65,500 teaching assistants—including classroom assistants—employed in maintained nursery and primary schools in England. The number had increased to 97,900 as at January 2005. The equivalent figures for Leicestershire were 600 in 2001 and 1,200 in 2005. Recent figures showed a further increase in the number of teaching assistants, with numbers rising to 152,800 in 2006.

In his supplementary question, Mr Taylor asked the Minister what changes were planned to harmonise the employment conditions of those often low-paid staff, who were of course predominantly female. Mrs Hughes said that the pay and conditions of support staff were determined at local level so that they could fit local circumstances. Many local authorities were reviewing the pay of, and undertaking job evaluations for, support staff in the light of the single status agreement. said that there was evidence from schools and local authorities that the increase in the number of classroom assistants

provided a greater level of support for teachers especially at a time when education was moving towards personalised learning.

Michael Foster (Lab, Worcester) asked what evidence the Department had on the impact of having a greater numbers of classroom assistants.

National College for School Leadership

Pat McFadden (Lab, Wolverhampton, South-East) asked what assessment had been made of the contribution of the National College for School Leadership to improving professional development of head teachers. The Minister for Schools, Jacqui Smith (Lab, Redditch) said that the NCSL equipped school leaders with the skills and support that they needed to achieve a world-class education system.

Mr. McFadden asked if the minister would ensure that the structural changes implemented through the Education and Inspections Bill were equally matched by a departmental focus on the importance of school leadership. Jacqui Smith gave an assurance that the Government would continue to support school leaders, not least through the NCSL.

Classroom Discipline

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Con, Macclesfield) asked for a statement on current standards of classroom discipline. The Minister for Schools, Jacqui Smith, said that Ofsted had reported that behaviour was at least satisfactory at more than 99 per cent of primary and 93 per cent of secondary schools. But any level of misbehaviour was too high, which is why a wide-ranging programme to help schools raise standards of behaviour further was being implemented, including high-quality training materials for staff, extra resources for schools facing the greatest challenges and, in the Education and Inspections Bill, legislation to confirm the power of staff to discipline pupils.

Sir Nicholas Winterton asked the Minister to continue to emphasise the importance of discipline, which was good for education and would lead to improved qualifications which would enable people to do well in later life. Jacqui Smith agreed, and said that good teaching and learning and good discipline were fundamentally linked. HC 2006/0162

INFORMATION PAGES

About the NSSF

Registered Charity Number 1096234

Membership: The membership year is from **1 April**. Please see www.nssf.co.uk for membership information and application forms, alternatively contact the membership secretary, Mike Carter, 6, Butterwick Drive, Herongate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire. SY1 3XE. Tel: 01743 233893. E-mail: mike.carter3@tesco.net

Member Education Authorities and Groups

In addition to our individual members, the following groups and education authorities have joined their small schools. These groups and LEAs benefit from greatly reduced subscription rates, in return for one person acting as the point of contact who also distributes our Journal & News and conference information. Details of this scheme and an application form can be found on our website or by contacting Mike Carter (see Membership above). Please note; **Some LAs have infrequent mail-outs to their schools and a quicker way to obtain the latest Journal and newsletter may be to download it from www.nssf.co.uk**

Buckinghamshire, Devon, East Lothian, East Sussex, Flintshire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Isle of Wight, Kirklees, Leicestershire, Milton Keynes, Norfolk, North Ayrshire, Nottinghamshire, Renfrewshire, Shropshire, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Staffordshire, Threshfield (Group), East Riding of Yorkshire and North Yorkshire.

NSSF Papers and Reports

NSSF Papers offer guidance to small schools on matters of policy, management and curriculum. They take the realities of life in small schools into account and reflect the need for slim and effective systems. NSSF Reports are digests of research and other studies, articles that have appeared in the NSSF Journal and News, and reports of conferences. These lists are being revised and enlarged. Please see www.nssf.co.uk for the latest availability. There are three ways to obtain copies of NSSF Papers and Reports, they can be downloaded from the Website, emailed from us or sent by post.

Regional Representatives

Regional representatives provide informal links between the **NSSF** and their areas. We don't define "regions" so we're very happy to have several reps in an LEA area. Regional reps are invited to the termly meetings of the **FORUM** and to bring or send us news of small school issues in their regions. The news is added to the minutes of the meetings and summarised in this Journal & News at intervals. Contact details for the regional reps can be found on the **NSSF** website.

Vera Ballinger	Nottinghamshire	Chris Williams	S. Gloucestershire	Derek Mullen	Leicestershire
Lucy Davis	Forest of Dean	Mrs N Skinner	Kent	Mike Carter	Shropshire
Lesley Mason	East Sussex	Alison Pile	Lancashire	Janis Jenkins	Staffordshire
Geoff Lee	NCSL	Jim Cork	Lincolnshire	Carol Tosh	Buckinghamshire
David Cornwall	Cumbria	Linda Orchard	Staffordshire	John Harris	Norfolk
Anne Bark	Milton Keynes	Stephanie Fane	Surrey	Joe Caudle	Cornwall
David Powell	Dorset	Gillian Harington	Bucks	Sue McKillop	Leeds
Jenny Marriner-Kyle	Berks				

Meetings of the FORUM

The **FORUM** meets termly – please visit www.nssf.co.uk for more details. The dates for the next **FORUM** meetings are 27th January 2007 and 21st April 2007. These will be held centrally. For further information about the venues and programmes for the meetings of the **FORUM**, please visit the www.nssf.co.uk or ring DD Office 01296 436959.

Committee Members

Name	Role	From	Phone	Email
Carol Tosh	Chairperson	Bucks	01296 383333	ctosh@buckscc.gov.uk
John Harris	Vice-chairman	Norfolk	01603 433276 x123	john.s.harris@norfolk.gov.uk
Vera Ballinger	Minuting Secretary	Notts	01427 880342	veraballinger@yahoo.com
Mike Carter	M'ship Sec./Journal Ed.	Shropshire	01743 233893	mike.carter3@tesco.net
Chris Williams	Treasurer	S. Glouc.	01454 313682	cwilliams0@btinternet.com
Christine Pfaff	Committee	Dorset	01305 852977	christinepfaff@btinternet.com
Janis Jenkins	Committee	Staffordshire	01782 796214	headteacher@swynnerton.staffs.sch.uk
Chris Foster	Committee	GTC	0791 8054 813	Cfoster@atl.org.uk
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Julie Mouldsdales	Committee	Bucks	01494 783835	office@hydeheath.bucks.sch.uk
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Diane Miller	Committee	Leicestershire	0116 2478563	office@arnesby.leics.sch.uk
Diane Fisher	Committee	Website	01296 431513	diane@sdfonline.co.uk
Donna Smith	Non-Committee	DD Office		donna@ddoffice.co.uk

NSSF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

held at 9.10am on Friday 23 June 2006 at Uplands Conference Centre, High Wycombe, Bucks

This AGM took place during the NSSF Conference. The Chairman, Carol Tosh, addressed the conference explaining the Committee and Regional Representative's purpose and duties and made a request for new members and regional reps. The Chairman reminded the audience of the NSSF website and its contents. Mike Carter, made a request to the audience for E-Consultants who could provide the NSSF with feedback on topical issues and provide papers whenever possible.

1. Minutes of the AGM held in Leicestershire on 8 October 2005

The Minutes of the 2005 AGM held on 8 October 2005 in Leicestershire were agreed as a true and accurate record of events. Proposed by Mike Carter and seconded by Chris Williams.

2. Reports on previous year's work:

• Chairman – Carol Tosh:

The Chairman explained there had been two committee meetings under her Chair and the majority of her time as Chair had been spent planning and preparing for this conference. She thanked Christine Pfaff for the work she contributed to setting up the conference. The Chairman explained that she had employed the services of DD Office Support who were providing back office support for the NSSF, in particular, in connection with the conference preparations. These services were paid for from subscriptions. She confirmed that the conference would be held every two years at venues across the UK. The Chairman reported a successful day at the House of Commons during National Small Schools Week.

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
Balance from 2004/5	7,264	Newsletter	1,410
Individual Subscriptions 171 x £10	1,710	Administration	1,344
LEA subscriptions 874 x £4	3,496	Meetings	497
Total Membership (£5,206)		Miscellaneous	819
		Carried Forward	8,400
Total	12,470		12,470

(Miscellaneous items: Website costs - £525, University of Bristol; - £294)

Checked and certified as correct: Brian Watkins

The continuing healthy balance was questioned in light of the additional expenses but the Chairman explained that additional canvassing over the next year would balance the extra expenses. The accounts produced by the Treasurer were proposed by John Harris and seconded by Christine Pfaff as a true and accurate record.

- **Membership Secretary – Mike Carter:**

Mike reported that membership had dropped last year but that this year it had picked up. He confirmed that the NSSF follow the financial year, ie: April-April. Mike reported an increase in LEA subscriptions. He advised that promotion of the Website was paramount.

- **Newsletter Editor – Mike Carter:**

Mike reminded the audience that feedback was essential and any contributions were always welcome and appreciated. E-Consultants would be a useful tool in providing information, news and feedback for the Newsletter and Website.

3. **Election of Officers**

The current Chairman, Carol Tosh, took members through the election of officers, with Mike Carter nominating Carol Tosh as Chairman, as follows:

The following officer posts were then decided:

Chairman – Carol Tosh

Vice Chairman – John Harris

Minuting Secretary – Vera Ballinger

Membership Secretary – Mike Carter

Treasurer – Chris Williams

Proposed by:

Christine Pfaff

Chris Williams

John Harris

Christine Pfaff

Diane Fisher

Seconded by:

to follow

Vera Ballinger

Mike Carter

Diane Fisher

Mike Carter

It was also noted that Mike Carter would continue as Newsletter Editor for a further year only.

4. **Election of Committee**

The following new committee members were proposed by Carol Tosh and seconded by John Harris: Janis Jenkins, Christine Pfaff, Chris Foster, Diane Miller, Diane Fisher, Alex Owens (Bucks), Angela Reed (Glos), Julie Mouldsdales (Bucks), Elsa Steel (Milton Keynes)

5. **Regional Representatives**

The Chairman explained it would be beneficial to have more regional representatives and would pass a notepad around for anybody to add their name and details if they were willing to act as a regional rep.

6. **Any Other Business**

The Chairman put an open question time to the audience.

A delegate questioned whether the conference would move around the country. The Chairman confirmed that it was intended to move the venue around the country but would need to be held where the interest was highest to achieve best possible support and attendance.

The Chairman confirmed that there was an "evaluation and feedback" sheet for each delegate to complete and emphasized that the information provided would be used to improve the service provided.

The Chairman thanked all delegates for attending the conference and showing their support.

AGM closed: 9.45am

Visit the NSSF Website....

www.nssf.co.uk

.... for up to date news, events and information