

**16 January 2017****Agenda Item: 06****REPORT OF THE ACTING SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION STANDARDS  
AND INCLUSION****NOTTINGHAMSHIRE'S SMALL SCHOOLS WORKING GROUP****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the progress of the small schools working group currently being developed across the County. The report aims to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of small schools and to highlight some of the particular challenges faced by small schools at this time.
2. The report also seeks approval for a further report to be brought to the Committee when the impact of the new schools funding formula is known.

**Information and Advice**

3. Nottinghamshire's small schools are successful and popular with parents. Moreover, small schools are an integral part of Nottinghamshire's school provision and play an essential role in ensuring that Nottinghamshire County Council meets its statutory duty to provide a school place for every primary aged child.
4. As of October 2016, there are currently 281 primary schools in Nottinghamshire, of which 34 are Infant and 26 are junior schools. 62 of the 281 schools have cohorts of less than 150. 40 schools have fewer than 105 pupils and 11 schools have 60 or fewer pupils. These schools primarily serve small rural communities. However, a number of small schools are in urban areas geographically close to many other neighbouring larger schools. This contrasts to rural small schools that are quite geographically spread in some cases. There are 68 schools with a net capacity of less than 150, or, schools with a total number on roll of less than 150. There are 4 in Ashfield, 26 in Bassetlaw, 3 in Broxtowe, 5 in Gedling, 3 in Mansfield, 16 in Newark and 11 in Rushcliffe. Further information is attached as **Appendix 1**.
5. Small schools are an integral part of Nottinghamshire's provision of primary school places. Almost 25% of primary schools are small (under 150 pupils). Small schools have the total capacity to provide approximately 7,350 school places. As of October 2016, 6,813 pupils attend small schools from a primary school cohort of 69,648. Whilst some small schools are full and oversubscribed, taking the small schools as a whole, there is capacity in many. Some families select out of catchment small schools because they are seeking a nurturing environment for their child. Half of the small schools (34 out of 68) are Faith schools; there are currently 33 Church of England (C of E) Voluntary

Aided (VA) or Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools and 1 Roman Catholic (RC) small school across the County.

6. In December 2013, a delegation of small school head teachers requested a meeting with the Director of Children's Services to outline their particular concerns. These headteachers focussed on four key areas:
  - Finance – particularly the impact of the changes to the lump sum allocation to all schools
  - IT – particularly in relation to the cost of broadband to small schools
  - Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) – particularly in relation to the funding arrangements for pupils with SEND
  - Governance – particularly in relation to exploring alternative leadership models in relation to partnership working, collaborations and federations.
7. Following this meeting with the Director of Children's Services, 15 small school headteachers volunteered to join a working party to explore with officers their concerns. As a result, a series of small focus groups were chaired by these headteachers with relevant lead officers in the relevant services and a summary paper was presented to Schools Forum in February 2015, which is attached as **Appendix 2**.
8. Whilst the paper to the Schools Forum presents a summary of key issues raised by the focus groups, two particular issues were identified as key challenges: the funding formula for all schools and its impact on small schools in particular and, secondly, the pressing need for small schools to explore alternative leadership models other than the traditional, one school, one head teacher model.
9. In March 2015 and May 2015, two twilight workshops were arranged in partnership with the Southwell Diocese of the Church of England and the small schools working group, to reaffirm the commitment of the County Council to Nottinghamshire's small schools and also to invite chairs of governors in particular to engage with the pressing need to explore alternative leadership models in some small schools, particularly when a head teacher either retires or moves to another school. Case studies of successful school to school partnerships, collaborations and federations were presented by headteachers and chairs of governors.
10. Following these successful workshops, Local Authority officers from Governing Body Services (GBS), Education Improvement Service (EIS) and Human Resources (HR) have worked in partnership with governors and the Southwell Diocese to develop a Leadership and Governance toolkit, which has been widely used by headteachers and chairs of governors to develop alternative models of leadership and governance, particularly when headteachers resign or retire. As a result there are now 9 small schools working in formal collaborative partnerships, with 1 headteacher leading 2 or more schools. In addition, there are 2 small schools in a federation, 3 in a mixed collaboration (made up of 1 academy and 2 maintained schools) and 1 small school has recently joined a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).
11. The small schools working group continues to evolve with new headteacher membership. The most recent planning group meeting in spring 2016 requested further work on financial modelling to inform future direction. The high cost of headteachers' salaries is a

particular challenge. Of the 60 schools with fewer than 150 pupils, 47 headteachers are paid above the Individual School Roll. This does not include schools where executive headteachers support more than one school. Whilst many governing bodies are aware of this, the challenge has been exacerbated by the recent increases to national insurance and pension contributions. At present, the small schools working party is being supported by Finance and HR officers to understand the size of collaborations and the staffing structures which would ensure financial sustainability of small schools serving their local communities, through effective use of resources.

12. The other current challenges include effective provision for pupils with special educational needs in times of financial constraint. Local Authority officers from the Support to Schools Service are supporting headteachers and chairs of governors to understand how Families of Schools can work effectively together to address these challenges.
13. The recent commitment by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, in March 2016 confirming that no rural small school would be forced to become an academy or to join a multi-academy trust, ensures that Nottinghamshire small schools' governing bodies continue to determine their own governance arrangements in line with Nottinghamshire's Schools Policy, unless they are judged by Ofsted as requiring improvement or to require special measures. Small cohort size in small schools means that they are less likely to be judged as coasting or to be below the floor target set by the government. Nonetheless, small schools face ongoing challenges particularly around finances and recruitment of senior leaders.
14. Despite the challenges, Nottinghamshire small schools are led by committed leaders and governors, who continue to ensure that 88% of these schools were last judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted (as at 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016). Small schools fulfil a key role to ensure that the Council can fulfil its statutory duty to provide a school place for every child whose family wishes one. Having identified the particular challenges, Nottinghamshire's small schools are well placed to shape their own future through effective collaborative working, supported by Local Authority officers.
15. Headteachers and governors of small schools are anticipating that the consultation on changes to the schools funding formula will result in an increase to the per pupil funding for Nottinghamshire schools. They are hopeful that this will reduce the level of challenge in securing balanced budgets. The impact of changes is as yet unknown.

### **Other Options Considered**

16. This report seeks to update Members on the key role that small schools play in Nottinghamshire to ensure that pupils living in rural areas, in particular, can access their local, small school. In more urbanised settings, the small school provides an alternative preference to parents who wish a smaller and nurturing environment for their child. As such, no other options were considered.

### **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

17. Within Nottinghamshire, small schools are highly valued and play a fundamental role in ensuring that every child has a school place. Effective small schools provide high quality personalised education, appropriate to the need of individual pupils.
18. Ensuring every child in Nottinghamshire is able to access a preferred school, near to their home, remains a key priority for the County Council. Completing statutory primary education ensures that each child has the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to access the secondary curriculum and therefore to become a responsible citizen within society with the confidence and skills to secure economic independence.
19. The new schools funding formula may increase the amount of funding per pupil in Nottinghamshire. There is a need to determine whether this will be sufficient to alleviate the budget pressures currently faced by small schools in Nottinghamshire.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That the Committee:

- 1) notes the progress of Nottinghamshire's small schools working group.
- 2) notes the achievement of and challenges faced by small schools in Nottinghamshire.
- 3) receives a further report when the impact of the new schools funding formula is known.

**Marion Clay**

**Acting Service Director, Education Standards and Inclusion**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

Linda Foster  
Acting Group Manager, Support to Schools Service  
T: 0115 9772502  
E: linda.foster@nottscc.gov.uk

## **Constitutional Comments (LM 21/12/16)**

21. The recommendations in the report fall within the Terms of Reference of the Children and Young People's Committee.

## **Financial Comments (TMR 16/12/16)**

22. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Nottinghamshire's small schools working group – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 15 June 2015.

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

C0917