

15 June 2015

Agenda Item: 09

**REPORT OF THE 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 the Committee of the focus and progress of the small primary schools working group currently being developed across the County. The Committee is also asked to note the achievements of small schools and the report highlights some of the particular challenges faced by small schools at this time.

**Information and Advice**

2. 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 the Nottinghamshire County Council meets its statutory duty to provide a school place for every primary aged child
3. As of October 2014, there are currently 283 primary schools in Nottinghamshire of which 69 have cohorts of less than 150. 40 schools have fewer than 105 pupils and 20 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 5 schools with a net capacity of 150 or less, or, schools with a total number on roll of 150 or less in Ashfield, 28 in Bassetlaw, 5 in Broxtowe, 8 in Gedling, 4 in Mansfield, 18 in Newark and 9 in Rushcliffe (**Appendix 1**)
4. Small schools are an integral part of Nottinghamshire's provision of primary school places. Approximately 25% of primary schools are small (under 150 pupils). Small schools have the total capacity to provide approximately 9,000 school places. As of October 2014, 7,363 pupils attend small schools. Whilst some small schools are full and oversubscribed, taking the small schools as a whole, there is capacity in many. Many families select out of catchment small schools because they are seeking a nurturing environment for their child. Most small schools are Faith schools; there are currently 29 Church of England Voluntary Aided or Voluntary Controlled schools and 1 Roman Catholic small school across the County.
5. 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 head teachers 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
  - 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.
6. Following this meeting with the Director of Children's Services, 15 small school head teachers volunteered to join a working party to explore with officers their concerns. As a result, a series of small group interviews were undertaken by these head teachers with relevant lead officers in the relevant services. Following this series of meetings a report was taken to the February 2015 meeting of the Schools Forum.
  7. Whilst the paper to the Schools Forum presented a summary of suggested actions, 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. The formula for all schools has been adjusted locally, following the direction from the Department for Education (DfE) that a greater proportion of the overall quantum available should 'follow the child'. This greater emphasis on the 'per capita' funding element has disadvantaged small schools. In order to compensate for this reduction impacting disproportionately on small schools, the Schools Forum agreed to raise the 'lump sum' paid to all primary schools to £100,000, an increase of £11,000 above the figure initially proposed by officers. As this sum is the same for all schools, irrespective of their size, the effect is to compensate small schools for some of the impact of the government required move to greater 'per capita' funding.
  8. In March 2015 and May 2015, two twilight workshops were arranged in partnership with the Southwell Diocese 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 teachers either retires or moves to another school. Case studies of successful school to school partnerships, collaborations and federations were presented by head teachers and chairs of governors.
  9. As we look to the future where demand for school places will increase, the vital role played by small schools in providing essential, high quality school places is acknowledged. However, at times of such financial constraint within the public sector, it is also recognised that small schools face particular financial challenges. Therefore, supporting chairs of governors and small school head teachers to actively explore alternative models of leadership and governance, such as partnerships, collaborations and federations, has the potential to create more sustainable and cost effective leadership arrangements.

### **Other Options Considered**

10. This report seeks to update the Committee 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**

11. 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 needs of individual pupils.
12. 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.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

13. 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.

### **Crime and Disorder Implications**

14. Pupils who become disenfranchised from education as a result of poor attainment and progress are at risk of involvement in criminal activity. Therefore ensuring that every child accesses high quality education, particularly in rural settings, and is able to succeed, plays a significant role in reducing their likelihood to engage in crime and disorder.

### **Financial Implications**

15. No additional funding is requested in this report.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That the Committee:

- 1) notes the focus and progress of the small primary schools working group currently being developed across the County
- 2) notes the achievements of small schools and the particular challenges faced by small schools at this time.

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**Constitutional Comments**

16. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

**Financial Comments (SS 02/06/15)**

17. There no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

None.

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

All.

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