

25th April 2022**Agenda Item: 11****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION, LEARNING AND
SKILLS****SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SMALL SCHOOLS****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members on how small schools are supported across the County. In addition, the report seeks the approval of Members to further disseminate the revised 'Small Schools Toolkit' to support governing bodies explore leadership models which can support the sustainability of small schools into the future.

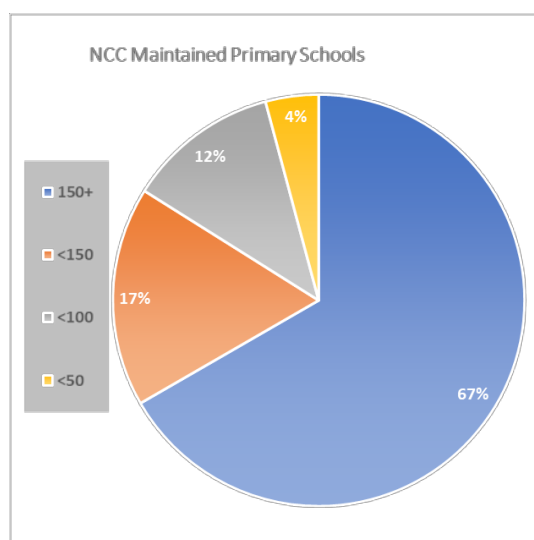
Information

2. This report has been finalised in the context of the Government's White Paper, 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child' published on 28th March and updated on 29th March 2022. The Government's ambitions for schools and families are already captured in Nottinghamshire County Council's ambition as outlined in The Nottinghamshire Plan 2021-2031, Ambition 4, which is committed to ensuring children and young people are provided with sufficient high quality early years provision and school places in their local communities.
3. In addition, this report is written in the context of the report to this Committee on 13th September 2021 'Outcome of the Consultation Options for the future of North Clifton Primary School and Response to Petition to Keep the School Open'. A recommendation was made in that report regarding a review of Nottinghamshire's small schools in partnership with the dioceses to ensure that rural schools can be sustainable into the medium and longer terms. Whilst this review is ongoing, surveys have been undertaken with school leaders and governors to inform the initial stages of this work. This report provides Members with an update regarding the progress which has been made to date and includes feedback from the surveys where relevant.

Small Schools – contextual information

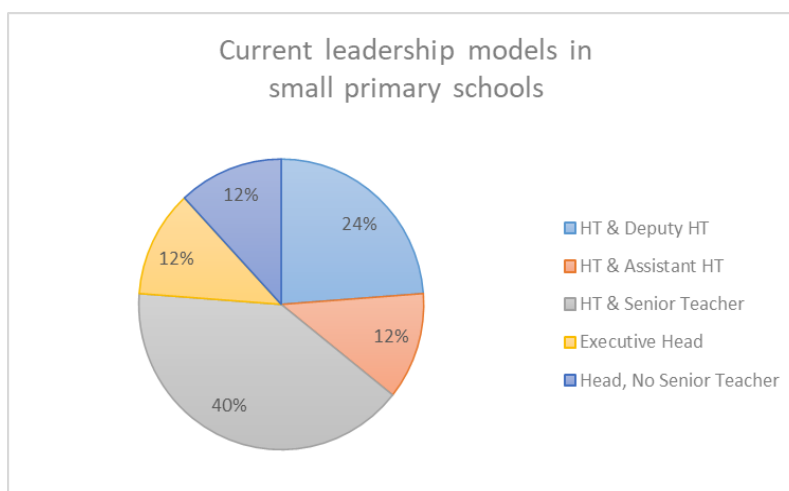
4. There is no legal definition of a small school. For the purposes of this report a definition has been applied based on that typically used by the Department for Education which suggests that a small primary school has less than 150 pupils.

5. On 14th March 2019, the Department for Education published its research into 'Running small rural primary schools efficiently'. This found that the three main challenges faced nationally by small rural schools with regard to funding to be:
 - volatility in pupil numbers. A decline in pupil numbers causes a significant percentage drop in the school's budget
 - typically staff are more experienced (therefore more expensive) and less likely to leave than in larger and non-rural schools
 - the cost of providing cover for teachers who need training can be high in small schools due to the lack of available cover within the school.
6. There are 284 primary schools in Nottinghamshire.
 - 116 primary schools are academies: 25 of these academy schools are Church Schools (12 Voluntary Aided (VA) and 13 Voluntary Controlled (VC)
 - 168 primary schools LA maintained: 56 (1/3) LA maintained schools have cohorts of less than 150 pupils, 27 of these with less than 100 pupils There are 7 schools that currently have fewer than 50 pupils (1 infant and 6 primary)
 - of the 56 LA maintained small schools, 14 are infant schools, 1 is a junior school and 41 are primary schools. 1 school formerly an infant school has now been designated as primary (Christ Church CofE Primary).

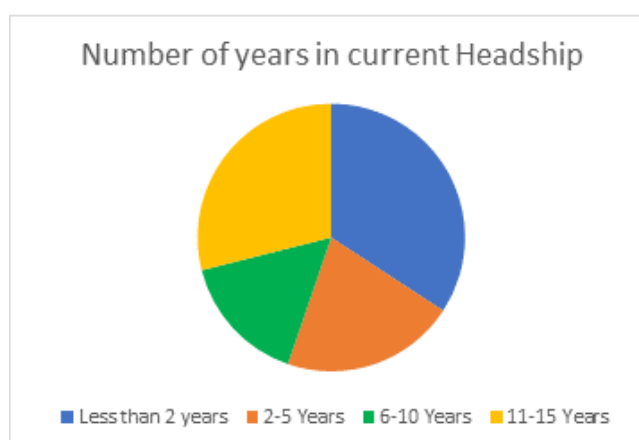


7. From the October census of pupil numbers, considering all small primary schools, the small school pupil population was 6,797 pupils while for all Nottinghamshire primary schools was 66,728 pupils. Therefore, 10.2% of the primary school population access their education in a small school.
8. The rural schools tend to be primary schools serving small rural communities. However, the majority of small infant 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 many cases. In Ashfield there are 4 small schools (all are infants), in Bassetlaw 21 (1 is an infant), in Broxtowe 3 (2 are infant), in Gedling 5 (3 are infants), in Mansfield 4 (2 are infants, 1 is a junior), in Newark 11 (1 is an infant), and in Rushcliffe 8, (1 is an infant). Maps are attached at **Appendix 1**.

9. Leadership models in small schools are varied. A quarter of our small schools have both a headteacher and deputy headteacher and approximately half have a headteacher and no other staff on the leadership pay spine.



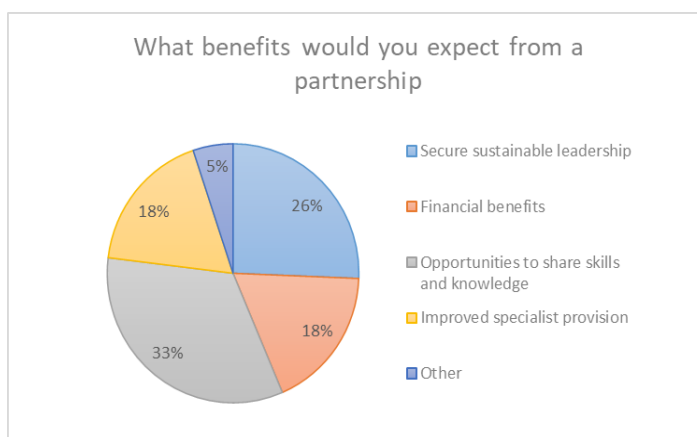
10. The Department for Education, in its research brief, found that recruiting to remote rural locations (sometimes with limited and expensive housing) was considered harder than recruiting to urban schools. Most small schools identified headteachers and senior teaching staff as particularly difficult to recruit, while many also highlighted issues finding administrative and supervisory staff.
11. In Nottinghamshire, the recently revised package on offer to schools for headteacher recruitment has been developed to ensure that small schools can access this within their budgets. Data from the Council's Governing Body Services shows that 82% of headteacher appointments are completed at the end of the first round of the process. The stability of small school headteachers in Nottinghamshire is high, with only 11% of small schools recruiting 2 or more headteachers since 2008. Almost half of headteachers have been in post in Nottinghamshire County Council schools for over 6 years and 28% of small school headteachers have been in post over 11 years and therefore succession planning/leadership options should be key considerations for governing bodies.



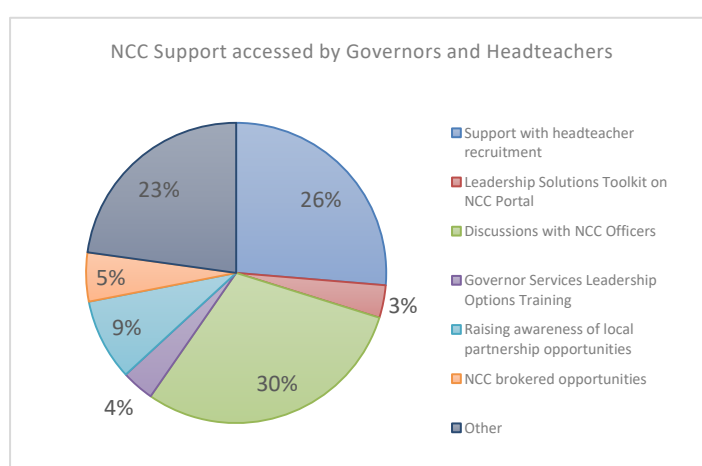
12. It has been Nottinghamshire's long-standing policy to support small schools working in partnership. In the survey to headteachers, 88% stated their school is currently working in

partnership either formally or informally with other schools or groups of schools. All stakeholders are clear about the benefits they receive from partnership working.

Many schools are proud of the impact their partnership is having on ensuring high quality provision for their children.



13. Governors and headteachers have accessed a range of support from the Council to help and advise with leadership solutions and develop partnership working.



14. Current/planned support for small schools provided by the Council include:

a. Services to schools

- HR: provide a buyback service to all schools based on staff headcount to reduce the cost to small schools.
- Governor Services provide a buyback service to all schools. As part of Governor Services work on the small schools project, this service and others have reviewed the 'Leadership and Governance Toolkit for Small Schools'. The Toolkit is an online support tool which allows it to be updated in line with any new national or local legislation, advice and guidance, such as the recently published education White Paper. The Toolkit has been developed collaboratively in consultation with HR Services, Finance, Education Improvement Services and Legal Services and in

response to the needs of small schools. The online document is accessed by governors on Governor Hub. The toolkit comprises:

- A Collaboration Guide: including a Template Collaboration Agreement and Terms of Reference
 - A Secondment Agreement: for when schools share staffing/leadership arrangements. The Education Improvement Service is formulating a process for undertaking these arrangements
 - A Federation Guide: including a suggested Timeline for a Federation
 - An Academy Guide: to be reviewed in the context of the Government's White Paper
 - A Leadership and Governance Solutions PowerPoint. The intention is to record a webinar based on the PowerPoint and link it to the Governor Hub ready for governors to access when it is convenient to them.
- Small schools are also able to buyback services including:
 - Finance
 - Maintenance
 - Place planning
 - Transport.
- b. Quality of Education
- A bespoke Small School Network providing funded training sessions tailored to meet the needs of small schools (for example, all these sessions are 'twilights' meaning the schools do not need to fund supply teacher cover)
 - Regular headteacher briefings
 - A Universal Offer for Continuing Professional Development and training from the Education Improvement Service, East Midland Education Support Service
 - A funded annual leadership conference (maintained schools)
 - Special Educational Need & Disability (SEND) area/family SEND Co-ordinator meetings/SEND small schools network
 - Funded support for vulnerable pupils
 - Bespoke funded strategic support
 - Advisers to support governors undertaking headteacher appraisal.
- c. Developing effective partnerships is a key element of Education Improvement Service work. Promoting, developing and brokering partnerships both formal and informal have been a key support strategy over the last decade, including supporting academy conversion where applicable.

Resource implications

15. No immediate additional resource is required to disseminate the revised small school toolkit although capacity may be required to develop Nottinghamshire's education 'Local Strategic Plan' as outlined in the Government's White Paper.

Other Options Considered

16. No other options were considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

17. Small schools are valued by this Council as they provide statutory school places, mainly but not exclusively, in rural communities. The work of the Council to support small schools continues to be a priority. The revision of the Governance Toolkit for Small Schools will support governing bodies and headteachers to explore alternative leadership and governance models to support the sustainability of small schools for the benefit of their communities.

Statutory and Policy Implications

18. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

19. There are no immediate financial implications. With the ending of the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokerage grant in October 2022, Members will need to consider models to finance and deliver school improvement for maintained schools which are not yet good or better or at risk of requiring improvement.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That Committee:

- 1) approves the relaunching of Nottinghamshire's revised small school toolkit during the summer term 2022 to support small school governing bodies and school leaders to explore leadership options which strengthen the sustainability of their schools.
- 2) approves the further dialogue and partnership with school leaders, including CEOs of Multi-Academy Trusts as well as the relevant Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses operating in Nottinghamshire to explore potential ways forward to support the leadership and sustainability of small schools in the context of the Government's White Paper, 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child'.

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Constitutional Comments (ELP 08/04/22)

20. The recommendations fall within the remit of Children and Young People's Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (MDN 12/04/22)

21. There are no direct financial implications from this report. With the 50% funding reduction of the Local Authority Monitoring and Brokerage Grant in 2022/23, and its complete cessation for 2023/24 (£642,941 was received in 2021/22), Members will need to consider models to finance and deliver school improvement for maintained schools which are not yet good or better or at risk of requiring improvement.

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.

[Running rural primary schools efficiently - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/running-rural-primary-schools-efficiently)

[Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child)

[Outcome of the Consultation Options for the future of North Clifton Primary School and Response to Petition to Keep the School Open – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 13th September 2021](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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GLOSSARY

Maintained School:	A community school that received funding via Nottinghamshire County Council
VC (Voluntary Controlled):	A school funded solely by the Local Authority which is the admission authority but a foundation or trust (usually a Christian denomination) has some formal influence in the running of the school
VA (Voluntary Aided):	A schools state-funded via NCC in which a foundation or trust (usually a religious organisation), contributes to building costs and has a substantial influence in the running of the school. In most cases the foundation or trust owns the buildings.
Partnership:	Where two or more schools work together informally to support shared development
Collaboration:	Where two of more schools agree to establish a formal partnership overseen by a Joint Committee. Each school retains its own governing body
Federation:	Where two or more schools agree to establish a formal partnership under a single governing body