

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **ISSUES CONCERNED WITH SIZE AND VIABILITY**

#### **7A In Pursuit of Excellence**

##### **Wirral Headteachers and Primary Team, School Effectiveness**

**September 2004**

*The following notes are an extract from the policy document 'In Pursuit of Excellence' which was developed with all Headteachers of Infant, Junior, Primary and Primary Special schools through consultations and consideration at the termly day conferences, over the academic year 2003-4. It was presented to Select Committee on 18 October 2004. Further work is planned to ensure that the five outcomes from The Children Bill, workforce reforms and the enriched primary curriculum are all firmly embedded.*

*The extract considers the issues relating to funding, staffing and resources in developing an effective and viable primary school.*

##### **Principles of effective and viable primary schools (page 7-8)**

Schools have been given more autonomy over their budgets for some considerable time; the government now proposes to provide financial stability through agreeing three-year budgets. This will allow for more effective decisions to be made on a long-term basis around the school improvement agenda and the needs of the community, in relation to the unique context of each school.

It follows that there needs to be a range of staff employed e.g Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, teachers and support staff who may include: learning mentors, cover supervisors, Higher Teaching Level Assistants, other classroom assistants, bursars, clerical assistants, cleaners, caretakers, grounds/security staff, cooks, lunchtime supervisors, specialist coaches and instructors.

It then follows that funding should be differentially used on staffing and resources to meet the needs and aspirations of each school, thus allowing for flexibility and creativity in delivering an excellent primary curriculum.

There is broad agreement that the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 should stand-alone and that while cross-Key Stage grouping significant level of planning and intensive teaching input. There is also broad agreement that vertical grouping (mixed aged teaching) can be effectively deployed within Key Stages. The table below gives examples of how vertical grouping could be organised.

### Examples of pupil groupings within a primary school

	No mixed age teaching	Some mixed age teaching		Maximum mixed age teaching
Foundation	30	30	30	30
1	30	30	30	30
2	30	30	30	
3	30	30	30	30
4	30			
5	30	30	30	30
6	30	30		
<b>Total Size</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>120</b>

In order for a school to be viable and efficient, the number of pupils on roll will impact on the decisions made regarding staffing levels and organisation of the curriculum.

In principle, in order for a single form of entry school to be viable and efficient, the number of pupils on roll should be within the range of 180 and 210.

*However, this range of numbers is only intended as a guide and should be considered alongside the other factors.*

Other issues to be considered when establishing an effective and efficient primary school within a learning community include:

- the possibility of federation and amalgamation to ensure that community and faith needs are met;
- innovative use of staff across two sites;
- flexible delivery and use of curriculum time, with some part time staff to meet planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time;
- sufficient space within school buildings to allow for multi-agency working and for staff to undertake planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) activities;
- appropriate areas to be identified for teaching; meetings; quiet areas and deployment of space to help with behaviour strategies;
- that children should have access to a school that is no further than 2 miles from where they live;
- that schools are well placed within communities;

- that due consideration is given to parental choice.

## **7b) SMALL SCHOOLS : HOW WELL ARE THEY DOING?**

**A report by OFSTED based on the data from Inspections and national test results.**

### **OFSTED March 2000**

*There follows a series of relevant quotations:*

Following the completion of the four – year cycle of Ofsted inspections, and the National Curriculum test results in the core subjects at both key stages a comparison of achievements and the quality of education of small schools with larger schools has been completed.

We have defined a small school as one with fewer than 100 pupils on roll and have subdivided this group to create a “very small” category where the number on roll is fifty or less.

Small schools are able to cope with the demands of teaching the full National Curriculum. It is a tribute to the commitment of teachers in small schools that, by and large, they are able to teach the full range of knowledge, skills and understanding required by every subject in the National Curriculum.

Teachers in small schools work hard to make sure that their teaching is not impaired by a lack of subject knowledge; they are also extremely adept at harnessing the skills of other adults who can complement the expertise of the permanent staff.

The mixed-aged classes that larger schools prefer to avoid are, of course, unavoidable in small schools. The teaching in small schools can be just as effective as in larger schools, although it is a particular challenge to provide a high quality experience for the youngest pupils.

The teaching of under-fives is least effective where this age group is a small minority in a mixed age class of mostly older pupils. Teachers find it hard to provide work suitable for the youngest pupils, working towards the Desirable Learning Outcomes, while at the same time meeting the needs of other pupils who have progressed well into the National Curriculum Programmes of Study.

Small schools usually have smaller classes, a factor which works in the teacher’s favour to offset some of the problems of teaching a wide age range, particularly at Key Stage 1. The teachers also know their pupils very well, often teaching them for more than one year, and by working with small groups there is plenty of scope to achieve a good balance of direct teaching and independent working.

Where teaching is weak, the planning often fails to take account of the wide range of age and attainment in the class and the work is not sufficiently challenging. The potential impact of a weak teacher on the progress of the pupils in a small school can be much greater than a large school; the problem is especially acute in a very small school where a teacher will stay with the same pupils for two or more years.

A significantly greater number than might have been expected on purely statistical grounds have been in the top 100 each year, and this does not include those successful very small schools with Y6 cohorts of less than 11 and whose results were not published.

At the other end of the scale, there were more small schools than would be expected in the table of the lowest scoring schools. Again, these numbers do not include the very small schools, but the presence of some of these in the serious weakness and special measures categories would increase the number of small schools in the bottom 100. The number of very small schools in special measures was about three times as many as would be expected, and the number of very small schools with serious weaknesses was twice as many as expected.

In summary:

- The majority of small schools achieve standards which are higher than the national average at the age of 7 and 11. However, these standards are less than those achieved in larger schools when socioeconomic background is taken into account. The quality of education provided by small schools compares well with what is provided by larger schools;
- While there are also many successful very small schools, this group is less effective in its provision for under-fives and is more vulnerable to the adverse influences of weak teaching and/or leadership;
- Inspection evidence confirms that the traditional reasons for the popularity of successful small schools are well-established features of these schools today. They have a positive ethos with a family atmosphere, close links between staff and parents, an important place in the community, and good standards of behaviour;
- The inspection evidence underlines the paramount of the headteacher in a small school. The head of a small school has a more than usually direct influence on the quality of teaching and standards achieved and this provides powerful opportunities to bring about change and improvement;
- There is much from the first cycle of inspections to encourage those who work in small schools. Higher unit costs notwithstanding, a good case emerges for the place of small schools in the education system as a whole, when the quality of their educational performance is added to the broader contribution they make to their communities.

OFSTED 2000

**7c) Within the North Birkenhead area the number of pupils on roll and the projected numbers are:**

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2014</b>
Bidston Avenue Primary School	411	401
Cathcart Street Primary School	101	98
Cole Street Primary School	124	111
Holy Cross Catholic Primary School	182	183
Our Lady and St Edwards Catholic Primary School	249	290
Portland Primary School	176	186
St Laurence's Catholic Primary School	75	55
The Priory CE Primary School	208	195
Birkenhead High Academy for Girls (Junior)	270	281

Cathcart Street, Cole Street, Portland and St Laurence's Catholic Primary Schools currently fall into the category of small schools as defined by the Wirral's policy document, "In Pursuit of Excellence", within the subsection "Principles of effective and viable primary schools". Holy Cross Catholic Primary School and Portland Primary School are at the bottom of end what is considered a viable primary school according to the same policy document.

The projected number of pupils in Cathcart Street Primary School, 98 on roll in 2014, will not generate a level of funding that will give the flexibility to organise resources which will meet the needs of the school community and therefore it will be difficult to provide an excellent quality of education.

The projected number of pupils in Cole Street Primary, 111 on roll in 2014, will not generate a level of funding that will give the flexibility to organise sufficient resources to meet the needs of the school community and therefore it will be difficult to provide an excellent quality of education.

The projected number of pupils in St Laurence's Catholic Primary, 55 on roll in 2014 will not generate a level of funding that will give the flexibility to organise sufficient resources to meet the needs of the school community and therefore it will be difficult to provide an excellent quality of education.