

# Small Primary Schools in Wales



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales



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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 Purpose</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3 Main findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4 Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5 Definitions</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6 The performance of small primary schools</b>	<b>8</b>
Pupils' standards of achievement	8
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	8
The quality of education	8
Leadership and management	9
<b>7 The educational and organisational challenges for small primary schools</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>8 Arrangements for the organisation of small primary schools</b>	<b>12</b>
Small primary schools that operate independently	12
Small primary schools in informal clusters	12
Small primary schools in formal clusters	12
Informal federation or temporary 'shared headship'	12
Federation	13
Area schools	13
<b>9 The merits of different types of small primary school organisation</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix A: The perceived advantages and disadvantages of alternative patterns of small school organisation</b>	
<b>Appendix B: Examples of good practise</b>	
Case study 1: Formal Clustering Improving the teaching of mathematics in mixed-age classes	
Case study 2: Formal Clustering The use of ICT in small rural schools	
Case study 3: An area school	
Case study 4: Informal federation	
Case study 5: A formal federation school	

## 1 Purpose

- 1 This paper examines the organisation and quality of education provided by small primary schools. It gives examples of the most effective working arrangements in small schools in Wales. The case studies in Appendix B have been chosen to show the positive effect that different methods of organisation can have on educational provision and standards.
- 2 The recommendations are intended to inform arrangements for the organisation and management of small primary schools by headteachers, governors, local education authorities (LEAs) and the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 3 There are a variety of frequently used definitions for small schools. For the purposes of this paper, the Audit Commission definition of a small primary school having 90 pupils or less is used. For this report, in order to analyse issues more precisely, small schools were divided further into three groups of 1-30 pupils, 31-60 pupils and 61-90 pupils. However, as the main findings indicate, there were generally very few differences in performance between the three groups of schools.

## 2 Background

- 4 Estyn was asked to look at the educational viability of small primary schools and the quality of outcomes for pupils, as part of the remit from the Welsh Assembly Government. Since the issue of transition from primary school to secondary school was being addressed in other advice provided by Estyn, it was agreed that it would not be included in this paper.

### 3 Main Findings

- 5 There is no clear, nationally agreed definition of what constitutes a small primary school. A common definition would help to provide more clarity in any future consideration of small schools and provide a better basis for local authorities and schools to make comparisons, particularly in relation to resource allocation.
- 6 Using the definition of 90 pupils or less, about a third of primary schools in Wales can be classified as small schools.
- 7 Overall, there is little difference in the standards achieved by pupils or in the quality of education provided by small schools when compared with other schools. Whilst there is variation in performance between schools, there is no evidence to support the view that size is a significant factor. Schools of all sizes can provide a high quality education for pupils.
- 8 Small schools generally do not do so well as other schools in areas of leadership and management, staff development and curriculum planning. In particular, in small schools, when the headteacher has a substantial teaching commitment, there is less time for leadership and management tasks. This results in an increase in the workload for the headteacher.
- 9 There are few differences in the quality of teaching between small and other schools. However, the smaller the school, the more challenging it often is for the teacher to match work to all pupils' learning needs. This is because, in these schools, teachers have to teach pupils of widely different ages and stages of development in the same class.
- 10 Many small schools, regardless of their size, have a good or very good ethos. In most schools, staff work with a clear sense of purpose.
- 11 Partnership between parents and small schools is generally good. The quality and extent of parents' contribution to school life is best in the smallest schools. Often a special closeness develops between the smallest schools and parents, which contributes positively to school life.
- 12 Most LEAs find it difficult to introduce new ways of organising small schools. LEAs should consider the full range of organisational choices when reorganising small school provision.
- 13 Currently the most successful types of small school organisation, in terms of educational standards and quality of provision, include:
  - area schools;
  - schools in a federation (through amalgamation), organised to have pupils of the same age located together; and
  - schools in an informal federation ie with shared headship.

- 14 In particular, small schools in a formal or informal federation, help to maintain the social and cultural base of the community.
- 15 The Education Act 2002 provisions for federated governing bodies are likely to be more acceptable to many stakeholders, than other forms of reorganisation which require statutory processes.
- 16 LEA school funding formulae usually include factors recognising the additional needs of small schools, but these do not always fully reflect the organisational and management challenges of managing federated provision on two or more sites. Factors for small schools and the funding attached to them vary from LEA to LEA.
- 17 The success of clustering small schools depends substantially upon the relationships established between the collaborating schools. Collaborative arrangements are generally more effective when staff willingly enter into these agreements as equals. When fewer schools are involved in a cluster arrangement, it is more likely that the level of collaboration will remain at an informal level.

## 4 Recommendations

- 18 The Welsh Assembly Government should:
- R1 consider undertaking a consultation on the notion of 'shared headship' which would be the managerial equivalent of the governing body of a group of federated schools;
  - R2 allocate a small schools grant to LEAs, through a targeted distribution methodology, specifically to support strategic change in the way small schools operate and are supported;
  - R3 further promote the use of video links between small school sites through the use of information technology;
  - R4 clarify the identification of small schools by agreeing a national definition; and
  - R5 bring together the conclusions of existing work and commission further work on the viability and value for money of small schools.
- 19 LEAs should:
- R6 develop strategies to promote and support innovative and flexible ways of working in small schools;
  - R7 regularly review whether small schools are providing value for money;
  - R8 ensure their other School Organisation Plan and other strategic plans, where appropriate, address the issue of small schools and articulates local policy and related criteria;
  - R9 examine the full range of organisational choices when reorganising educational provision;
  - R10 develop further the potential of having video conferencing or webcam links between small school sites;
  - R11 make sure that headteachers in small schools have enough non-teaching time for their leadership and management responsibilities; and
  - R12 when an area school is created, make certain that the school is large enough to support a headship post with enough non-teaching time for the headteacher's leadership and management responsibilities.

20 Small schools should:

R13 work collaboratively with other schools; and

R14 develop further the potential of using information technology as a means of communicating with other schools.

## 5 Definitions

21 Currently, there are many definitions of a small school but no consensus of opinion. In relation to primary schools, the Audit Commission has used 90 pupils as the threshold on the basis that it is at this point that costs per pupil rise significantly. Small schools that have a religious affiliation are usually defined by diocesan authorities as those where a majority of the headteacher's time is spent on teaching. There are also a variety of definitions used by LEAs depending on the size and nature of the authority. Definitions adopted by LEAs are usually for the purpose of allocating resources within the local funding formula for schools or setting a benchmark for the purpose of considering whether and how small schools should continue in existence. However, the lack of a common definition does sometimes make it difficult for LEAs and schools to make comparisons between their circumstances and those elsewhere.

22 In 2002-2003, the number of maintained primary schools<sup>1</sup> by size was:

<b>Pupils on register</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>	<b>Percentage of all primary schools</b>
Up to 25 pupils	54	3%
26-50 pupils	165	10%
51-100 pupils	265	17%
101-200 pupils	514	32%
201-300 pupils	403	25%
301-400 pupils	133	8%
401-500 pupils	64	4%
501-600 pupils	4	Less than 1%
Total	1602	100%

23 In the same year, the number of maintained primary schools by number of full time equivalent teaching staff was:

<b>Number of full time equivalent teaching staff</b>	<b>Number of schools</b>	<b>Percentage of all primary schools</b>
1	7	Less than 1%
2	143	9%
3	143	9%
4-6	366	23%
7-9	413	26%
10-12	272	17%
13-14	102	6%
15 and over	156	10%
Total	1602	100%

<sup>1</sup> The National Assembly for Wales 'Schools in Wales: General Statistics 2003'.

## **6 The performance of small primary schools**

### **Pupils' standards of achievement**

- 24 Inspection evidence indicates that, overall, pupils in small schools achieve similar standards to pupils in other schools. The percentage of good or very good standards of achievement in classes is very similar across all sizes of schools. However, slightly more small schools reach the Welsh Assembly Government's target that 95% or more of classes should have at least satisfactory standards.
- 25 Overall, pupils in small schools achieve similar although slightly higher standards in key skills<sup>2</sup> than pupils in other schools. They generally do better in speaking and listening, reading and using information and communications technology. Standards in physical education and physical development, especially outdoor play for children under five, are lower in small schools because often there is not enough space to develop the pupils' skills.
- 26 In small schools, there are usually only a small number of pupils taking national curriculum tasks and tests. Also, the number of pupils in a cohort for any one year may vary significantly. In addition, lower test results for pupils with special educational needs can have a greater effect on the test results for a very small cohort. It is therefore not statistically reliable to analyse and compare the outcomes of national curriculum results of small schools individually.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- 27 All small schools reviewed for the purposes of this report, regardless of their size, have a good or very good ethos and a clear sense of purpose. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is developed effectively. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work are good.

### **The quality of education**

- 28 There are few distinct differences in the quality of teaching across schools of different sizes. The most striking issue is that, in small schools, it can be more difficult for teachers to match work to pupils' needs because pupils in each class may be of widely different ages and stages of development. This is particularly the case in the smallest schools (with up to 30 pupils), where there is 28% of unsatisfactory work compared with 8% of unsatisfactory work in schools with over 210 pupils.
- 29 Many small schools provide a good quality curriculum in most areas of learning for pupils under five years of age. However, around one in ten small schools lack appropriate provision for physical development for children under five years of age. In these schools, cramped classrooms, lack of access to a larger space, such as a school hall, and the absence of a secure, outside play area, limit opportunities for

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<sup>2</sup> Key skills include speaking and listening, reading, writing, numeracy and using information and communications technology

children to use large toys and apparatus on a regular basis in order to develop their gross motor skills.

- 30 In key stages 1 and 2, the vast majority of small schools are able to deliver the full range of subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education, as effectively as other schools.
- 31 Most small primary schools meet the special educational needs of pupils well. Often, pupils remain within the same class with the teacher for several years. This can give the teacher an opportunity to build up a detailed knowledge of each pupil's individual needs. In addition, the small number of pupils in each class can mean that teachers have more time to give individual attention to pupils.
- 32 Partnership between parents and all types of small schools is generally good. The quality and extent of parents' contribution to school life is consistently good in the very small schools of less than 30 pupils. Often, a special closeness and working relationship develops between the smallest schools, parents and the community, which contributes positively to school life.

### **Leadership and Management**

- 33 Generally, the very smallest schools compare well with schools of all sizes in areas of leadership and management. These schools perform particularly well in:
- routine administration and organisation;
  - the extent to which leadership ensures clear direction; and
  - the extent to which the school has explicit aims and values.
- 34 There are greater differences, however, between the small schools with 31-60 pupils and 61-90 pupils and other schools. These small schools have the lowest proportion of good and very good quality of leadership and management and the highest proportion of unsatisfactory and poor leadership and management than all other size schools. Schools that are not small generally do better in the processes of induction, appraisal and professional development.
- 35 Common weaknesses in schools with between 31 and 90 pupils are:
- the effectiveness of subject leadership;
  - routine administration and organisation;
  - the evaluation of major spending decisions; and
  - the extent to which leadership ensures a clear direction.
- 36 In all small schools, there is often a greater workload pressure on a headteacher than in other schools since their teaching commitment generally takes up a large proportion of the week. In these schools, the headteacher may have significantly

less time to undertake leadership and management tasks than a non-teaching headteacher.

- 37 Overall, the quality of staffing, accommodation and learning resources, and the effect these have on standards and quality, are not significantly affected by school size. This may be because LEA budget formulae give protection to small schools. However, this makes it more difficult to judge value for money. There have been some studies, for example, by the Audit Commission and individual local authorities which have looked at the issue of financial liability and value for money. However, the outcomes of this work have not been brought together or considered widely.

## **7 The educational and organisational challenges for small primary schools**

- 38 Small schools can face challenges in delivering high quality education, because of:
- the effects caused by staff changes or weak teaching. In these cases, the maintenance of high standards or continuous improvement may be more difficult;
  - mixed age classes, often covering three or more year groups and sometimes more than one key stage. In these schools, teachers need to match work to a very wide range of pupils' learning needs;
  - very small age cohorts, leading to reduced opportunities for activities such as team sports and for pupils' social interaction with their peers;
  - limited or lack of positive, peer group interaction and motivation to achieve high standards;
  - low numbers of teaching staff. As a result, subject responsibility for national curriculum subjects cannot be widely shared which places a heavy workload on a few teachers;
  - a very small number of teachers to provide supervision and cover in instances of emergencies as well as other health and safety considerations;
  - heavy workload demands on headteachers who have a dual role, combining significant classroom teaching commitment with management responsibilities;
  - few opportunities to provide non-contact time for subject leaders;
  - difficulties in attracting staff, especially headteachers, to schools where they may feel professionally isolated; and
  - a lack of modern facilities, equipment or even a school hall.

## **8 Arrangements for the organisation of small primary schools**

- 39 The ways that small schools are currently organised can be grouped into six broad categories. However, the language that is sometimes used to describe these groups is open to a variety of interpretations and, hence, may not be commonly understood.

### **Small primary schools that operate independently**

- 40 Schools which organise themselves in this way work independently and usually have little contact with other schools.

### **Small primary schools in informal clusters**

- 41 In these schools, working together consists of exchanges between headteachers and teachers of neighbouring schools to discuss current issues. These meetings can be a source of sharing good practice as well as helping to resolve local difficulties, such as finding supply teachers or sharing peripatetic staff.

### **Small primary schools in formal clusters**

- 42 This type of organisation involves more formal collaboration and co-operation, between small schools. For example, staff from schools in the cluster meet regularly to discuss issues, share INSET days, as well as draw up school policy documents and schemes of work. Individual teachers may take responsibility for leading a subject in a cluster of schools. There may also be sharing and exchanging of:
- teachers in specialist areas;
  - administrative support; and
  - resources.
- 43 Such clustering can also result in shared planning of school visits and out of hour's activities.

### **Informal federation or temporary 'shared headship'**

- 44 In this type of organisation, which can probably only be temporary under current legislation, a headteacher of another, usually larger school, takes responsibility for the leadership and management in the small school. This arrangement usually occurs following the vacancy of the headship of the small school.
- 45 The benefits of this situation include that the wider range of staff expertise within the larger school may be used to support the smaller school's curricular planning, teaching and learning, as well as assist in aspects of monitoring and evaluation process.

- 46 At present, it is not clear whether this arrangement fully meets the statutory legislation that applies to schools since, legally, a school has to have a governing body and a headteacher. In addition, there are issues that relate to equal opportunities in the way that 'shared headships' come about. The arrangement is also problematic in that it involves a headteacher working for two or more different governing bodies. In these circumstances, there is a lack of clarity about accountability and ultimate decision-making in key areas such as personnel management and budget setting.

### **Federation**

- 47 Federation occurs when two or more schools are closed to create a single 'split - site' school with one headteacher and governing body. The headteacher and governing body can still choose to operate each site as a relatively independent unit covering the whole age range and this is a common arrangement.
- 48 However, it is also possible to organise schools by Key Stage, for example having infants' and junior sites. Organising such schools so that pupils are grouped by age can provide planning and curriculum gains but these may partly be offset by increased travel times and costs. Care is also needed to maximise continuity of experience at the point of transition from one site to another.
- 49 Although the provisions are not yet in force, section 24 of the Education Act 2002 does allow for a further form of organisation, also described as federation. In this case, a federation consists of a group of schools with a shared governing body constituted under a single instrument of government. However, the schools remain separate legal entities and have their own headteacher. It would be helpful for the Assembly to explore whether 'shared headship' could also be accommodated through this route and whether schools, LEAs and governing bodies would favour such a development. The federation of governing bodies will not require the statutory school reorganisation process to be followed. Therefore, it is likely to be easier for LEAs to achieve change through this route.

### **Area Schools**

- 50 In this type of organisation, two or more schools may be closed and replaced by a single larger school. This may be located on a new site, or on one of the old sites with refurbished buildings. Such developments require statutory reorganisation proposals .

## **9 The merits of different types of small primary school organisation**

- 51 Clearly, the isolated school, working autonomously, faces the greatest number of challenges. Schools such as these are very vulnerable, and can be disproportionately affected by change. Because of their size and number of staff, they are often placed under considerable pressure by the need to implement additional local and national strategies. Small schools, LEAs and the Welsh Assembly Government have recognised the need to move away from too much isolation since this does not benefit the children, staff, governors or the community. The provisions in the 2002 Education Act have expanded the range of options available to include federation of governing bodies.
- 52 The arrangements described for clustering and informal federation all have some merit but their success depends primarily upon the relationships established between the collaborating schools, and, crucially, the relationships between the headteachers. The strength of the collaborative arrangements will be greatest where they are entered into willingly between equal partners, most often as a result of the wish of two or more headteachers to work together.
- 53 Not all collaborating schools progress to the formal clustering stage. It is only after schools have worked at an informal level for some time, and the culture of collaboration and mutual confidence has grown, that schools are able to progress to the 'formal clustering' stage.
- 54 All collaborative arrangements can lead to improvements in working conditions by providing:
- access to wider professional development opportunities;
  - networks of support;
  - an enhanced curriculum for pupils with a wider range of activities and specific support;
  - the sharing of teacher expertise in curriculum delivery, writing policies and planning schemes of work;
  - mutual support to reduce workload; and
  - opportunities for sharing resources.
- 55 The weaknesses of the current collaborative arrangements are that:
- only a minority of schools achieve sufficiently close relationships to enable them to consistently disseminate good practice in school organisation, teaching and learning;

- they are liable to be disrupted as headteachers and their relationships change over time;
  - they are time consuming to organise and support; and
  - because more than one governing body is involved, there may be additional challenges of conflict and accountability that may be difficult to resolve.
- 56 The various types of federated school and the area school are likely to be the most successful options. However, significant changes to statutory legislation might be required to make informal federation of schools with shared headship an accepted legal category. This depends on whether shared headship can be accommodated within the interpretation of the current statutory requirement for each school to have a headteacher. In relation to shared headship, it would be necessary to address the issues of:
- accountability, and respective responsibilities where one headteacher works with more than one governing body; and
  - equal opportunities, particularly in relation to headteacher appointment.
- 57 In addition, these models need to be funded appropriately to reflect the organisational challenges of schools being on two or more sites, and to allow for a largely non-teaching headteacher. It would be useful to investigate the impact of the initiatives, which have a direct link between sites through information technology as a method of sharing good practice and promoting cross-site team teaching.
- 58 Clearly, what formal federation does offer is a way of preserving the strengths of small schools while protecting them from their isolation. Federation can reflect local needs and gain the commitment of the local community. The federation model is likely to receive support among schools and their communities because the changes involved are perceived to be less threatening. Most communities are proud of and value their independence but recognise the need to be inter-dependent.
- 59 Federation should not be seen as a cheaper option to individual school provision and, in those areas that have federated schools, there has been little or no cost saving. Federated schools may be less vulnerable to fluctuations in pupil numbers since cohorts are likely to be larger. In its Green Paper on the teaching profession (1998), the government advocated that small schools should consider federation in order to:
- provide a better career structure for staff;
  - attract a better-qualified non-teaching headteacher; and
  - help recruit governors.
- 60 When LEAs have decided that maintaining small schools, in whatever format, is not the preferred option they have often closed small rural schools and built area schools. In terms of facilities, organisation and the quality of educational provision,

these schools have been generally successful. The area school is often based in new purpose-built accommodation. This gives pupils and staff similar facilities to those that large schools have, while still partly preserving the local rural community identity. However, some individual communities lose an often much valued facility in the process. When deciding on building area schools, LEAs should ensure that they are large enough to provide a headship post with little or no teaching responsibility. Failure to do this puts additional pressure on the headteacher and can lead to the problems described earlier in the report.

- 61 School reorganisations, particularly closures, pose many challenges for LEAs. Some of these challenges may come from parents and the local communities, particularly where their own local school is affected. There may also be problems relating to staff redundancies, including headteachers and other staff who were unsuccessful in being appointed to the new area school.
- 62 LEAs should ensure that their School Organisation Plan thoroughly explores the issues related to school size and clearly articulates their local policy and related criteria. This could include, for example, the automatic review of schools whose pupil numbers fall below a certain threshold.

**Appendix A**

**The perceived advantages and disadvantages of alternative patterns of small school organisation**

<b>Small schools that operate independently</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important aspect of the local community, especially in encouraging rural regeneration and sustaining communities, particularly Welsh language communities.</li> <li>• Pupils are educated close to home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of collaboration at any level, due to a variety of reasons such as distance from other small schools, lack of commitment or poor relationships with neighbouring small schools.</li> <li>• Onerous demands on the headteacher.</li> <li>• Difficulty in recruiting headteachers in some LEAs.</li> <li>• Small number of staff have to co-ordinate work in all areas.</li> <li>• Greater difficulty in providing pupils with an appropriate curriculum and a wide programme of extra-curricular activities.</li> <li>• Staff have limited development opportunities and may feel isolated.</li> <li>• Few opportunities to share good practice.</li> <li>• Wide age and ability range in classes.</li> <li>• Support for small schools may be financial and administrative burden to LEA.</li> <li>• A small school budget with little room for flexibility and which may result in insufficient administrative support.</li> <li>• High per pupil cost within a finite LEA budget for schools</li> </ul>

<b>Informal clustering</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exchanges between staff in neighbouring schools to discuss current issues.</li> <li>• Useful for sharing good practice and solving local difficulties such as finding supply teachers or sharing peripatetic staff.</li> <li>• Advantages of the 'independent' small school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the disadvantages of the 'independent' small school, apart from the first, may remain to a greater or lesser degree.</li> </ul>

<b>Formal clustering</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff meet to discuss management issues.</li> <li>• Sharing INSET days.</li> <li>• Drawing up policy documents and schemes of work.</li> <li>• Individual teachers taking co-ordinating responsibility for an area across a cluster of schools.</li> <li>• Sharing and exchanging teachers in particular specialist areas.</li> <li>• Sharing administration staff and resources.</li> <li>• Planning school visits and out of hours activities jointly.</li> <li>• All the advantages of the 'independent' small school and informal clustering.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the disadvantages of the 'independent' school, apart from the first, may remain to a greater or lesser degree.</li> <li>• Limited opportunities for staff to develop middle management skills and share best practice.</li> <li>• A lack of shared criteria and consensus about what is 'best practice' and a lack of clear strategy on how to address this. This can lead to schools only co-operating at a superficial level and produces some unnecessary duplication of activities.</li> </ul>

<b>Informal federation ie shared headship</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing the number of headteachers needed thus overcoming recruitment problems.</li> <li>• Reduced management costs provide greater budget flexibility and may provide more learning support assistants for the wide-age groups within classrooms.</li> <li>• The greater range of staff expertise may help smaller schools improve: curricular planning; teaching and learning; monitoring and self-evaluation.</li> <li>• Less duplication in management and administration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The schools may not share a common mission statement.</li> <li>• A head of an infant or junior school may find it difficult to lead and manage a through primary school.</li> <li>• The headteacher's time has to be shared between the schools and s/he may not be involved in all aspects of the life and work of each of the smaller schools.</li> <li>• Possible lack of clarity about the roles &amp; responsibilities of headteacher and governing bodies, eg disciplinary issues, performance management.</li> <li>• Currently, such headships are not usually advertised in normal way.</li> </ul>

Small Primary Schools in Wales

<b>Federation</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All school sites can be kept open as a focus for the community.</li> <li>• Small school ethos is maintained.</li> <li>• Cross-site management and administration may be more efficient, and it may be possible to have non-teaching headteacher.</li> <li>• Expertise and resources can be shared and teachers may benefit from collaborative planning.</li> <li>• A fuller range of opportunities and extra-curricular activities can be provided, transport permitting.</li> <li>• Pupil's may benefit educationally through: being taught within a narrow age band; some specialist teaching; improved opportunities for consistency and progression.</li> <li>• Pupils from isolated rural areas benefit socially and can develop friendships before transferring to secondary school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some limitations remain eg mixed-age classes for much of the teaching week.</li> <li>• Staff meetings may begin late in the afternoon because of the additional travel to a central location.</li> <li>• Transport costs for some provision and for extra curricular activities may be high.</li> <li>• Some pupils have to travel further to school.</li> <li>• Deficiencies in the buildings remain - no additional investment is possible because there has been little saving.</li> <li>• Practical difficulties for families whose children are located at different bases.</li> <li>• Specialist staff may have to travel between sites.</li> </ul>

<b>Area schools</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the benefits of federated schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relocating or redeploying staff may be problematic.</li> <li>• An area school may not be large enough to offer the headship post without a teaching responsibility.</li> <li>• There may be opposition to the formation of the Area school from parents and the local communities.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

### Examples of good practice

#### Case Study 1: Formal Clustering

##### Improving the teaching of mathematics in mixed-age classes

This small school identified the need to improve the teaching of mathematics in its two mixed age classes. One class contained pupils from four to seven years of age (this includes reception, year 1 and year 2), whilst the other class contained pupils whose ages ranged from seven plus to 11 years of age (this includes year 3, year 4, year 5 and year 6). Teachers reviewed the planning and organisation of teaching in mixed age classes by focusing on the learning objectives for each year group based upon the same aspect of mathematics. Staff set about matching the work closely to the needs and abilities of pupils within each year group. The LEA advisor for mathematics and staff from five other small schools (three from the cluster) were invited to help with the task.

##### Good Features

- Identifying learning objectives for each year group, based upon the same aspect of mathematics, enabled all ages within the class to be taught at the same time, at a level appropriate to their age and ability.
- Sharing ideas and experiences on effective classroom management and organisation in mixed age classes, has helped to lessen the feeling of isolation that many teachers see as a consequence of working in a small school.
- The resources, including games and worksheets that teachers produced to reinforce pupils' mathematical skills, have been shared between staff in different schools.
- Working cooperatively to improve mathematics has led to the development of strong links between the schools, including sharing in-service training and joint working involving pupils.
- The development of new friendships for pupils which has allowed, in some cases, the only boy or girl in year 5 and year 6 in their own school to meet other children of their own age. This friendship has also been helpful in preparing pupils for the transfer to the secondary school.

## **Case Study 2: Formal Clustering**

### **The use of ICT in small rural schools**

Three small rural primary schools and a larger primary school located in the nearest town, have worked on improving their links with one another. The aim was to provide the best standard of education possible for pupils by sharing expertise while at the same time reduce teachers' workload. A further aim was to develop the schools as learning centres for the whole community. The schools are equipped with a good range of information technology resources, which gives these schools the opportunity to maximise their own resources.

### **Good Features**

Pupils' learning is enriched by:

- more and better opportunities to be members of sport teams and cultural activities within their own age group;
- better access to specialised teaching;
- a rota of teachers available to support pupils via email with homework queries;
- more resources to support their learning;
- teaching that more precisely meets their learning needs;
- links and friendships with a wider range of pupils; and
- an easier transition from KS2 to KS3 because pupils are already familiar with their peers.

The use of cross-school ICT has been effective for:

- improving the match of work to pupils' needs;
- supporting pupils with special needs as the peripatetic support teacher does not waste time travelling between schools; and
- the professional development of staff.

In the small primary schools have fewer subjects to coordinate and can be more specialised in one or two subjects. This allows them to provide guidance, advice and training for colleagues. This, in turn, will lead to more opportunities for teachers to develop the coordinator role and their skills as middle managers.

These schools give better value for money because they:

- make better use of resources through sharing them with other schools;

- use staff time more effectively and efficiently by sharing the preparation of lessons and curriculum planning;
- overcome economies of scale by planning joint educational visits and training days; and
- improve the use they make of peripatetic teachers.

### **Case Study 3: An area school**

This case study shows the benefit of a new, purpose-built community primary school, formed in June 1998 from the closure of three primary schools. There are 225 pupils on roll, all from English speaking homes representing the full ability range. About 40% of pupils are entitled to free school meals and about 26% of pupils are identified as having some degree of special educational needs. The geographical isolation of the community with limited transport and local facilities, mean there is a need for the school to develop community activities and provision available to the public. The range of community-focussed activities is very wide ranging. Without the school, there would be little focal point within the community.

Many of the developments have been because of the personal commitment and energy of the headteacher and chair of governors. Both the success and sustainability of this initiative are vulnerable as much relies on the continued commitment of individuals.

### **Good features**

- A committed management team has raised the self-esteem of the community and offered self-improvement in an area in need of regeneration.
- The community sees the school as a 'learning community centre'.
- The school targets the needs of the community based upon national and local initiatives and in many areas leads these initiatives.
- As there are no other alternatives in the immediate environment, the school is seen as a 'one stop shop'. This has led to the natural development of the community school rather than one that has been imposed.
- Both the community and its pupils see the school as something they can identify with.
- The school is strongly led and senior managers have a clear sense of purpose.

#### **Case Study 4: Informal federation**

This small primary school has 50 pupils on roll. Prior to the school inspection in November 2001, the headteacher had been absent from school for one year. An experienced headteacher of a neighbouring school was appointed in January 2001 to take temporary care of school management. Her task was to establish systems in the school and deal with any serious matters, whilst one of the senior classrooms teachers managed the school from day to day. The initiative has worked well and this is reflected in the recent positive school inspection report. Much of the success has been due to the positive attitudes of the staff involved in the two schools.

#### **Good features**

- The headteacher has a sound understanding of the tasks to be undertaken.
- Staff, from both schools, work closely together in developing curricular areas.
- The 'teacher in charge' is mentored and trained by the experienced headteacher and as a result has a good knowledge of the management structures and expectations of the new regime.
- The good practices and successes of the supporting school are being shared and developed in the case study school.
- There are good relationships between teachers and the new headteacher with a clear, shared vision to improve the educational provision.
- Teachers in both schools have benefited from working together. In particular, the professional development of teachers in the small primary school has been greatly enhanced.

#### **Case Study 5: A formal federation school**

This school was developed from the amalgamation of three primary schools, the largest with around 50 pupils, and the smallest with eight pupils. Each of the school buildings was retained. The community also makes extensive use of one of the buildings. Initially, parents of pupils in the two smallest schools were opposed to these changes.

#### **Good Features**

- The organisation of children under five and pupils in key stage 1 on one site does much to alleviate the pressure that can arise from planning for 3-11 year olds who are grouped together in one or two classes.
- The amalgamation has enabled the school to make more viable educational visits; to stage more varied and ambitious concerts and productions; and to organise guest speakers and visits.

## Small Primary Schools in Wales

- Pupils in key stage 2 now experience games, music, physical education and swimming in their peer groups. Three pupils from the smallest school, which could not offer team games before the amalgamation, have gone on to represent the county at rugby.
- Peripatetic teachers offer music on one of the three sites. This has enhanced provision.
- KS1 pupils from all three units come together once a fortnight for a PE and Movement lesson at the local leisure centre.
- There is an exchange of teachers at key stage 2, lined to specialisms and who have co-ordinator responsibilities. This offers variety, and reduces pressures on these people.

The school has a budget that enables it to:

- have a headteacher without full-time responsibility for a class;
- provide one non-contact session per week for all curriculum co-ordinators. This is well planned and clearly focused, based on well thought out documentation and procedures;
- give most co-ordinators responsibility for just one subject, and, at most, two; and
- provide a good level of maintenance and decoration.