

SCHOOL REVIEW - SMALL SCHOOLS

1. Reason for Report

- 1.1 To seek Members' approval for a wider consultation on the criteria to be employed in reviewing a school's viability when it approaches single-teacher status.

2. Background

- 2.1 A draft report was presented to Members at the June meeting of the Education Committee and the paper attached as Appendix to this paper has been drawn up in light of comments made at that meeting.
- 2.2 The rationale behind the production of the report is that the Council needs to be more "proactive" in dealing with schools which are subject to a fall in roll such as to suggest that single-teacher status is a clear possibility.
- 2.3 The Education Committee at its meeting on 25th January 2002 asked that a Working Group be established by the Education Department to lay down criteria for an automatic review of the best way to secure a school's continuing viability in such circumstances.
- 2.4 In accordance with this requirement, a Group was established which included representatives of teachers' associations, headteacher associations, a School Board and a headteacher of a single-teacher school.
- 2.5 Membership of the group was:
- Christine Dignan, Head of Education (School and Adult Services)
Keith Best, Education Service Manager (Primary)
Rob Bodell, Headteacher, Kirkbean Primary School (Association of Scottish Headteachers)
Margaret Campbell, Headteacher, Port William Primary School (EIS)
Andrea Kay, Headteacher, Glentroll Primary School (Single-teacher school)
Derek Crichton, Community Planning Manager
Tom Turner, Chairman of Mouswald Primary School Board

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 **It is recommended that Members approve the attached paper for distribution to all relevant parties for comment.**

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Director for Education
30 Edinburgh Road, Dumfries

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APPENDIX //



REVIEW OF SMALL SCHOOLS

1. Introduction

This paper has been drawn up and distributed at the request of the Education Committee in order to seek views from all interested parties on a set of guidelines which can be implemented when there are indications that a school roll is falling to a point where it may become a single-teacher school.

Figures suggest that school rolls in the primary sector could fall by 20% by 2015 and it is important that the Council has plans in place to cater for this. This was one of the driving factors behind the School Review conducted over 2001 and the Education Committee at its meeting on 25th January 2002 asked that a Working Group be established to lay down criteria for an automatic review of the best way to secure a school's continuing viability when it approached single-teacher status.

Membership of this group comprised:

Christine Dignan, Head of Education (School and Adult Services)
Keith Best, Education Service Manager (Primary)
Rob Bodell, Headteacher, Kirkbean Primary School (Association of Scottish Headteachers)
Margaret Campbell, Headteacher, Port William Primary School (EIS)
Andrea Kay, Headteacher, Glentrool Primary School (Single-teacher school)
Derek Crichton, Community Planning Manager
Tom Turner, Chairman of Mouswald Primary School Board

The group placed its recommendations before the Education Committee in June 2002 and a re-drafted paper was presented to the July meeting of Committee to take account of the views expressed at the June meeting.

It is anticipated that over the next 10 years several school rolls will fall towards a point where they would become single-teacher. The present situation is that a school becomes single-teacher when the roll falls below 20 and there are no current plans to alter this. Past practice has simply been to allow pupil numbers to drift down without intervention and the purpose of this exercise is to anticipate problems in order to see if there are steps which might be taken in order to sustain a school in this position.

2. **Single-Teacher Schools**

Concerns have often been expressed by, among others, parents and headteachers, about the difficulties there can be in providing education in a single-teacher school where there can be as many as 19 pupils covering all stages from P1-7. Small schools require policy and procedures to deal with:

- Lack of social interaction with children of the same age
- The teaching, management and administrative burden falling upon a class committed headteacher
- Isolation and lack of contact with other staff
- The need to maintain breadth of curriculum delivery
- Lack of range of skills in the school
- Involvement with the same teacher for the duration of primary schooling

At the same time, it is recognised that there is a lot of excellent work which takes place in single-teacher schools and that staffing resources are augmented by visiting specialist staff and by parents and other members of the community.

The Council also appreciates that some schools, by dint of their geographical position and distance from alternative schooling, should be retained regardless of other factors although there may come a time at which numbers have fallen to such a low figure that discussions on alternative options might be considered. Given the need to maintain these schools, the Council should attempt to ensure that they have staffing resources available to them beyond the formula allocation in order to combat some of the concerns outlined above. The Council also recognises the important role which a school can play in its local community and has to balance the need to maintain and support rural communities against the need to ensure that children's education is being satisfactorily and equitably provided across the region.

3. **Proposals**

- a) A School Review Group should be established when the school roll reaches 25 or when the total number of pupils in P1-4 is at 12 or less. These numbers should be the number of pupils from within the school's catchment area since, while consideration may be given to the extent to which a school is attracting pupils from outwith, the predominant factor is that of the number of pupils in a school's catchment area. It may be, however, that the review could be implemented at an earlier stage if a significant pattern of decline in school numbers is identified.
- b) This approach would allow the school community to take action in good time and before any staff reductions were due to take place.
- c) Notification of the Review should be announced in the summer term and a local Review Group formed.

- d) The work of the local Review Group should be completed by October of the following term.
- e) The Group would be required to prepare a report for the Director of Education and Community Services.
- f) The local Review Group should have within its membership:
- Parent representation (to include School Board Char; if no School Board, PTA Chair) and a pre-school parent;
 - Community Council representation/rural partnership group;
 - Headteacher;
 - Non-teaching staff representative
 - Education Department representation
 - School Education Officer
 - Community Planning representation

(The above composition of the group may well vary from school to school, depending on local circumstance, but the group should attempt to satisfy all categories).

- g) The local Review Group should be chaired by a Council officer. It will be open to the Group to call upon others to represent views and they will have the power to seek advice and request reports. While the local Elected Member will not be a member of the Review Group since he/she may be required upon to make decisions in Committee, it is important that he/she be kept informed of the Group's deliberations and be called upon for advice.
- h) **Factors to be considered by Review Group**

In considering the future viability of a school, the following factors should be considered:

- Trends in the school roll over several years; pattern over the four years of P1-4
- Pre-school figures
- Extra-territorial placement request patterns (in both directions)
- Location of school - both geographical location and location in respect of local community
- Proposed housing developments
- Alternative schooling
- Interaction of school and community
- Transport considerations
- Potential for "school of the future" specification
- Health and safety considerations
- Viability of support to achieve equality in educational standards
- Attainment and achievement levels of the pupils
- Out of school hours learning
- Condition of school building
- Other options for sustainability

- i) Among the “other options” to which reference is made above might be consideration of the appropriateness of the present catchment area. Catchment areas are lodged with the Scottish Executive Education Department and were established in 1985. It may be that some do not take account of population movement and housing developments which have taken place over this period although the implementation of the decisions taken on the region-wide review of school provision should take account of change in catchment areas. Nevertheless, this could be an important factor in considering the sustainability of a school.
- j) Another option which might be considered is the potential for “cluster management” of a group of schools. It may be that the grouping together of several schools under single management could provide:
- Opportunities for exchange of staff
 - Time release for management/administration
 - Inter-school opportunities to mix with others of the same age
 - Variety of teacher skills
- k) Another proposal put forward for consideration during the consultation exercise is that, if there are concerns about the need to address parity of provision and “equalising” of resources across schools, thought might be given to reducing the staffing levels in schools in the 20-25 band. One proposal might be that, rather than two full-time teachers and 11 hours of Classroom Assistant support, these schools could have 1.5 full-time equivalent teaching staff with 15 hours of Classroom Assistant support.

4. **Consultation**

This consultation paper is intended to be a springboard for consideration of the issues highlighted. There may well be other issues to be taken on board and alternative proposals. We would be interested in your response to the proposals and in any alternative suggestions that you might wish to make. Responses should be returned to the Director of Education and Community Services by

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