



NORTH WALES REGIONAL CONFERENCE – 28TH APRIL 2007 MANAGING SCHOOL PLACES

Talking to governors after the conference, it became apparent that confusion occurs over the terms used for the way small schools are organised. Estyn have produced a paper called 'Small Primary Schools in Wales' that sets out the different categories very clearly. The publication is available on Estyn's website www.estyn.gov.uk

The six broad categories as described in the above publication on pages 12 –13 are as follows:

“SMALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS THAT OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY

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

SMALL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN INFORMAL CLUSTERS

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

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 schools 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.

Such clustering can also result in shared planning of school visits and out of hours' activities

INFORMAL FEDERATION OR TEMPORARY ‘SHARED HEADSHIP’

In this type of organisation, which can probably only be temporary under current legislation, a headteacher of another larger school takes responsibility for the leadership and management in the small schools. This arrangement usually occurs following the vacancy of the headship of the small school.

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 curriculum planning teaching and learning, as well as assist in aspects of monitoring and evaluation process.

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

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.

However, it is also possible to organise the 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 time and costs. Care is also needed to maximise continuity of experience at the point of transition from one site to another.

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

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.”