

CUMBRIAN SCHOOLS FORUM – SCHOOL SIZE WORKING GROUP

Notes of the meeting of the School Size Working Group held on Tuesday, 5 October 2004 at Broughton Craggs Hotel, Cockermouth

Present: Mr J Douglas (VA CofE), Mrs T Eyre (Copeland Primary), Ms S Gaston-Parry (Copeland Secondary), Ms T Macur (Cumbria Governors' Council), Mr R Rogers (Eden Primary), Mr A Rutter (Teachers Associations), Mr A Hodge (LEA), and Mrs N Shiels (LEA)

Apologies:

1. Notes of the Meeting held on 5 May 2004

The notes of the meeting of the Schools Size Working Group held on 5 May 2004 were agreed as an accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

Collaborative Funding

There was some discussion regarding collaborative funding. TE reported that she was still in receipt of a specified amount of funding for collaboration. AH however reported that as far as he was aware this funding had ceased with effect from March 2004.

AH would look at this issue and report back.

Action

AH

Federation Issues

It was reported that a formal proposal would be put to the School Forum regarding the inclusion of an element in the formula for funding federation. LEAs were being urged to consider how to fund federations. Officers were working to produce a paper that would set out procedural issues associated with federations, give examples of missed opportunities and suggest possible examples where federations might be an alternative worthy of consideration. During a long discussion several important points were raised including:

- LEA officers should be advised by people 'on the ground', those with experience of running small rural schools
- Federation was not a cheap option
- Rural Academy - involved nine schools and although there was not a single governing body there was a model in place that allowed the involvement of each governing body. This could be an example of good practice and perhaps representatives of the Rural Academy should approach the LEA to highlight the work already underway
- Issues relating to 'strategic' schools combined with perceptions about the 'political' will to deal with the issues relating to falling birth rates and the effect that this would have on schools

It was evident that there were a lot of examples of good practice e.g. the joint working between Ennerdale, Eskdale and Beckermeth Schools. Federation was also an area that particularly interested RR and he had undertaken a lot of work and investigation.

The Chair suggested that this group might recommend that the LEA should be more proactive in drawing other options to the attention of Governing Bodies when a Headteacher retired. The possibility of commissioning the LEA to arrange a conference to look at these issues was considered.

3. Minimum Funding for Schools

A paper was circulated which set out a number of different models for minimum funding. The basis for the paper was that if a school was to exist then it should be properly funded. All the models were based on an assumed cost of 1.5 teachers being £46.5k. Whilst the models illustrated how large primary schools and secondary schools' budgets would be affected, none of the options included the closure of any secondary schools.

The group discussed the paper in detail and suggested that other models e.g. including the closure of some small secondary schools, based on surplus places or for every primary school receiving a minimum 0.5 headteacher funding i.e. minimum of two staff might be produced to inform discussions.

Several other points were made which included:

- Strategic Schools – how many of the schools identified could be strategic?
- Urban/Rural – these was more scope to reduce capacity in urban areas. In rural areas the units needed to be large enough to provide a suitable range of provision, however consideration should also be given to the quality of education provided to small numbers compared to that in larger schools.
- Secondary Schools – it was important to incorporate secondary schools into this exercise, however an appropriate matched formula would need to be generated.
- Consultation – there were perceptions that the LEA did not consult as fully as it should when looking at reviews and possible amalgamations.

In summing up the discussions, the Chair explained that it was important for the Schools Size Group to recommend a way forward and the LEA needed to develop a strategic overview.

It was agreed that AH, on behalf of the group, would produce a paper that would be presented to the Schools Forum. The paper would set out the work that had been undertaken by the School Size Group and would set out a base policy statement. The paper would also distinguish between primary and secondary, look at small schools – why they were open? why were they there? and a scenario of no change would also be included. The draft would be sent to all members of this group for comment by 18 October 2004. All members were asked to comment and state if changes needed to be made to the paper before it was presented to the Schools Forum on 17 November 2004.

AH/All

4. Items for Future Discussion

The group would need to meet again to discuss the response from the

School Forum. It was important that the item be properly considered by the Schools Forum so the Chair of the Forum would need to be made aware that the School Size Group would be presenting a paper for discussion. Items for possible discussion also included the production of a Schools Forum Newsletter or update but it was felt that this was an item for the full Forum.

5. Dates of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Schools Size Working Group would be held on 26 November 2004 at 9.30am. The venue would be confirmed.

NS

P&R/NJS
25 October 2004