

The rationale for the establishment of a minimum of one form entry primary schools

1. Small schools are an essential part of the local education provision on the Isle of Wight due to the mix of rural and urban communities. They can be highly effective and serve their local communities well. However, their size also means that they can easily become fragile in terms of sustainability.
2. Since the early 1990's the school system on the Island has experienced a significant reduction in the size of pupil population due to changing demographics which has not been matched with the appropriate rationalisation of primary school provision. Coupled with the relatively high proportion of small schools on the Island, this inevitably results in a less than optimum use of the financial resources made available to the children and young people.
3. The challenges for small primary schools are:
 - staff often have to cover several curriculum and pastoral areas at the same time;
 - there is no flexibility to cover for any weak or ill member of staff;
 - unpredictable and flexible budgets makes medium and long term planning difficult;
 - the movement of one child or family in or out of the school can have a significant impact on standards, financial resources and behaviour;
 - a large proportion of the school's budget is spent on fixed costs including management and premises costs.
 - The current national shortage of Headteachers is also a concern as small schools may not be able to recruit the right calibre of Headteacher to manage the above issues

4. National Context - Number of Primary Schools in England

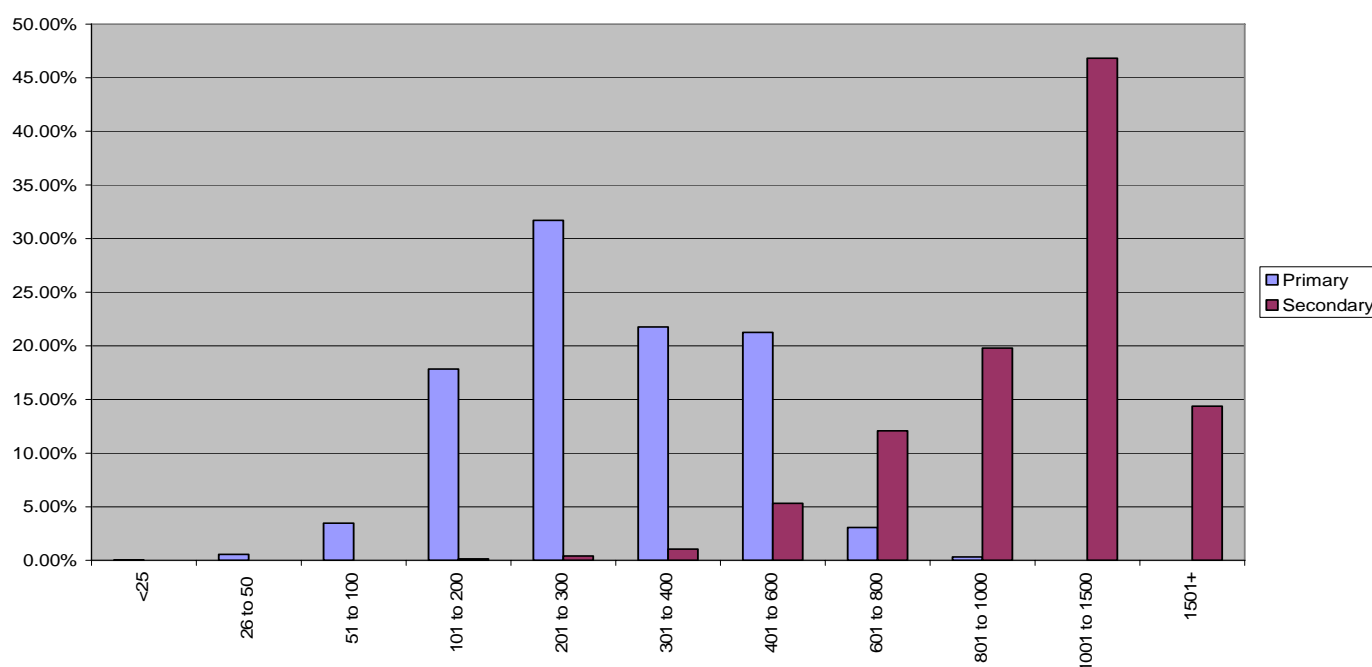
Information sourced from the Primary Review (2008) Research Survey 9/1 indicates a significant reduction in the number of small schools nationally. The Plowden Report (DES 1967) contained information about the number of primary schools of different sizes in 1965. The table below reproduces this information, placing alongside it the most recent figures available (derived from the Annual Schools Census which took place in January 2004). The table shows that there has been a clear decline in the number of very small schools (those with under 100 pupils) and an increase in the number of larger schools (in all categories over 101 pupils, apart from a decline in the number of schools with 301 – 400 pupils).

School size categories	January 1965	January 2004	Change
Up to 100	6,272	2,692	-3,580
101 – 200	5,153	5,566	+413
201 – 300	5,208	5,305	+97
301 – 400	2,703	2,615	-88
401 – 600	1,360	1,445	+85
601 – 800	87	132	+45

801 – 1000	6	7	+1
Total schools	20,789	17,762	-3,027
Total pupils (full-time)	4,003,934	3,972,690	-31,244

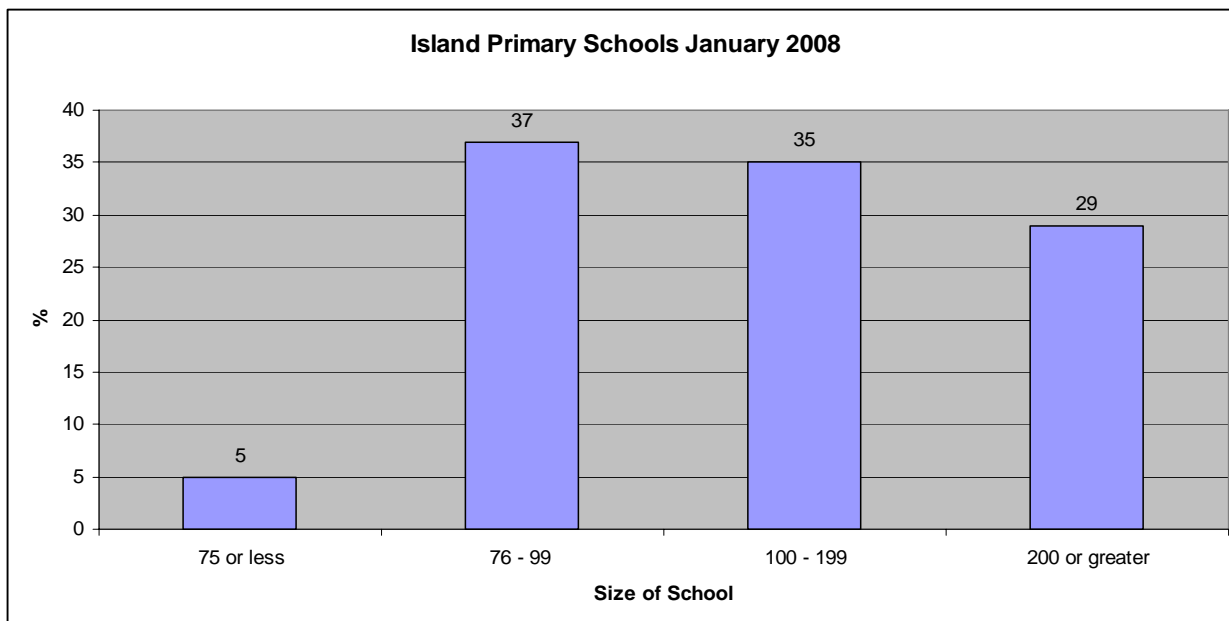
Data sourced from the DCSF survey of schools in January 2006, shown below, demonstrates a similar picture i.e. that the most common size of primary school (4-11) has between 201 – 300 pupils on roll.

Percentage of Pupils by Size of School 2005/06 (Source DCSF)



5. Island Context

In comparison, the Island picture demonstrates a far greater number of schools with between 76 and 99 pupils on roll.



Currently there is an inequitable distribution of funding within the Primary sector. 5% of Island primary pupils attend schools with under 75 pupils on roll (less than ½ form entry). On average they receive nearly one and a half times the Island average primary per pupil funding.

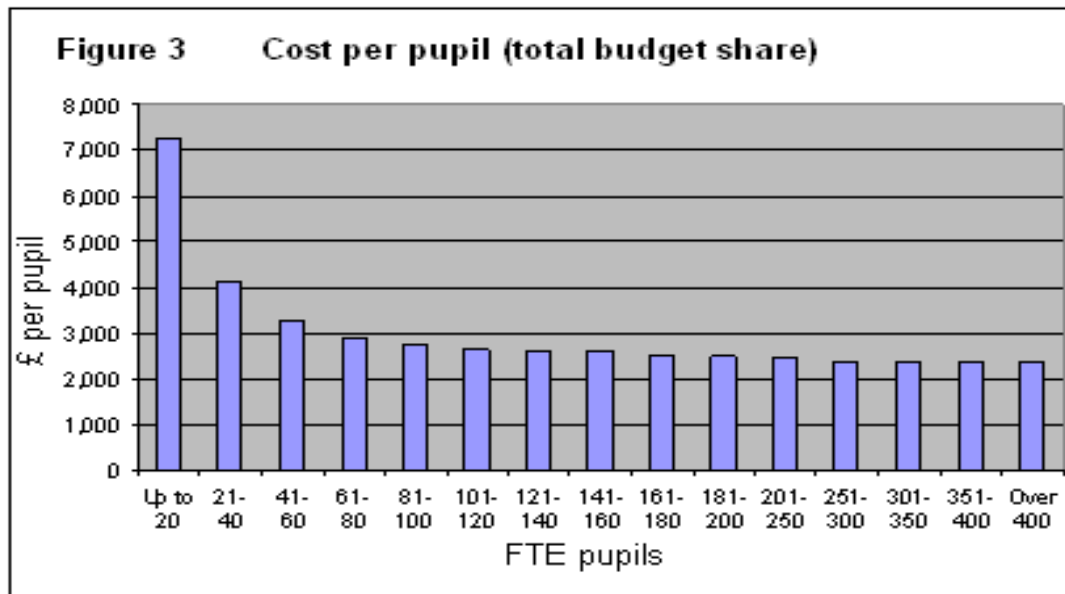
6% of Island primary pupils attend schools with between 76 and 99 pupils on roll (½ form entry). On average they receive 12% more than the Island average primary per pupil funding.

60% of Island primary pupils attend schools with between 100 and 199 pupils on roll (1 form entry). On average they receive the Island average primary per pupil funding.

29% of Island primary pupils attend schools with more than 200 pupils on roll (2 form entry). On average they receive 10% less than the Island average primary per pupil funding. (Data source: Education Budget Statements 2008-09 April 2008)

6. High cost of smaller schools

The local authority must take action in respect of mainstream schools which have significant surplus places as these schools incur disproportionately high unit costs at the expense of other schools on the island. Evidence gathered from Teachernet on the efficiency of small schools indicates that the annual cost per pupil increases as school size falls. Figure 3 below shows that: primary schools (4-11) with between 80 and 100 pupils cost 16% more per pupil. Schools with a pupil number below 50 pupils, the cost per pupil increases substantially. Primary schools with fewer than 20 pupils are three times as expensive per pupil.



The information suggests that there are two main reasons why small schools cost more per pupil to run:

- They have a greater proportion of fixed costs. Fixed costs vary according to the size of school. For smaller schools, the percentage of the budget is higher but the absolute amount of money smaller.
- They tie up more of the local education resources in unspent balances as a % of the delegated budget.

A school's size is a major factor in determining its cost-effectiveness. It also has a big influence on internal school organisation, particularly whether mixed age classes are necessary. Primary schools with a minimum of 210 pupils (one form entry) have sufficient resources to enable them to deliver the primary strategy effectively and fund:

- a broader curriculum and the spread of good practice across the school;
- enrichment activities for pupils;
- ICT and other teaching resources essential in order to deliver a curriculum for the 21st Century;
- SEN provision and counter-measures to deprivation;

The authorities opinion is that this is unlikely to be the case for schools with fewer than 175 pupils on roll.

7. Quality of Provision

Small schools are expected to deliver the full curriculum and manage the same range of administrative tasks as larger ones. The quality of the Headteacher is a key factor in the success of any school but Headship can be particularly challenging in a small school when the Head can also bear a heavy teaching load and also have limited administrative support.

For some years now, Headship posts in Island primary schools have attracted a limited number of applicants. The trend recently has to been to appoint from within or from other

Island schools rather than attracting leaders with significant leadership experience from the mainland. 20 appointments have been made since September 2005, of which 18 were from island schools. This is possibly as a result of the challenges facing Governors when considering the Individual School Range (ISR) for each school and the need to manage finances appropriately.

There is relatively little research evidence on the impact of school size on learning and teaching. One fairly recent study (Spielhofer et al. 2002). considered the performance of pupils in schools with different characteristics. The analysis revealed the best results were obtained in medium-sized schools with a cohort of approximately 180-200 pupils and the worst in very small schools or very large schools.

8. Summary

The local authority believes the research and data indicates that primary schools of at least one form of entry provide the most efficient educational model in terms of value for money for the following reasons;

- Schools with a larger intake address the issue of financial inequality;
- More children will be educated in schools of a sufficient size ensuring appropriate staffing levels and consistently good curriculum delivery. This will also ensure diversity of opportunity for Island children;
- Increased potential to recruit suitably qualified school leaders whilst also providing strategic leadership succession opportunities with more senior posts being available due to the size of schools;

9. References and websites

- Primary Review (2008) Research Survey 9/1 <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk>
- Plowden Report (DES 1967)
- DCSF <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk>
- National School Census
- TeacherNet <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/>
- Spielhofer <http://www.nfer.ac.uk>