

Policy 1: Models for Primary School Organisation

The maximum size of a primary school in Denbighshire will be two-form entry providing 420 full-time places. A uniform model across the County would not be appropriate due to the geography of Denbighshire, the varying population density, parental preference, language and faith based provision and transport implications.

Four models for primary school organisation have been chosen because they are able to provide all, or the majority, of the benefits described below.

- A headteacher with a minimum 50% time commitment to leadership and management. This commitment will increase in relation to the size of the school.
- Increased benefit to pupils from peer interaction. Increased social opportunities for pupils through the pursuit of a wider range of activities; enhancing children's ability to forge relationships and celebrate diversity.
- A maximum class size of 30.
- No mixed Key Stage classes.
- Increased options for class organisation within schools.
- Staff expertise as teachers are allowed to lead a single subject across the school, thereby gaining more focus on and depth in the delivery of a subject.
- Increased opportunities for professional development among staff, gives the opportunity to develop strengths and expertise in wider areas, including numerous non-core subjects. This can lead to improved recruitment and retention of staff.
- Opportunity for excellent facilities as set out in the Denbighshire '21st Century Schools Vision'.
- A range of community focused services, as identified within Denbighshire's 'Community Focused Schools Strategy'.
- Economies of scale for full time administrative officers.
- Fair and sufficient funding per pupil to enable pupils to reach their full potential, while making the best use of resources.

Future primary school provision within Denbighshire will follow one of the four models described below.

The four models are:

- a)** 2 Form Entry – primary school providing a maximum of 420 full-time places (maximum 60 pupils per year group).
- b)** 1 Form Entry – primary school providing a maximum of 210 full-time places (maximum 30 pupils per year group).
- c)** ½ Form Entry – primary school providing a maximum of 105 full-time places (maximum 15 pupils per year group).
- d)** Federated schools – in accordance with Denbighshire’s ‘Federated Schools Model’.

During an area review, schools that do not currently meet the minimum requirement of 80 full-time places for model c (½ Form Entry primary school with 25% surplus places) may be considered for the formation of a federated school or an area school.

Area schools would be formed in accordance with Denbighshire’s ‘Area Schools Model’ to meet the criteria set out in models a, b or c.

However, changes to school provision will only be carried out if the review process identifies that the outcome of the change would result in equal or improved educational experience for pupils within the schools affected.

Large Primary Schools

The Council's preferred model for large primary schools is a two-form entry primary school, providing 420 places (excluding nursery).

There is recognition that where schools are above this threshold, it is often due to the popularity of the schools and the demand from increased housing development within an area. However the authority believes that where possible, it is within the best interest of pupils for these schools to be gradually reduced in size. The maximum size of primary schools within the county will be a two-form entry primary school.

As a result, it is essential that any school above this threshold be considered within the wider context of the area it serves.

Where schools have more than 420 pupils on roll for three years in succession:

Phase One

The Council will conduct an area review, taking into consideration all neighbouring schools that may be impacted upon by any reduction in the number of pupils enrolled at the school.

Surplus capacity within the area will be identified through the review. A decision will then be made as to whether sufficient surplus capacity exists within the area, or if consideration needs to be given to the building of a new school, or extending an existing school.

Phase Two

A clear strategy for reducing the size of the school will be agreed and adopted. The strategy will ensure that the school does not face a sudden, detrimental drop in pupil numbers.

Small Primary Schools / Sites

There is a need to ensure that all schools and school sites are able to provide children with the widest possible opportunities.

As a result the local authority must consider the educational challenges faced by small schools or sites, including (Estyn – Small Primary Schools in Wales, 2003):

- Teaching mixed age classes containing more than 2 or 3 age groups;
- The restricted size of peer groups and sufficiency of challenge;
- Limited opportunities for social interaction;
- Difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff;
- Excessive burdens on staff;
- Increased expertise required to support pupils with special educational needs.

To minimise the effects of these challenges schools need sufficient pupil numbers on roll within each Key Stage.

Where the number of full-time pupils on roll at specific school or school site falls below 15 pupils in Key Stage 1 and/or 20 pupils in Key Stage 2 for three years in succession; the authority reserves the right to review the school or site within the context of the area.

Any review would have to take into consideration the availability of sufficient places within an alternative school or site that could provide an equal or improved educational experience for pupils within the schools affected.

Where a review determines that a school is to be closed, statutory notices would need to be published in order to close any primary school including those within a federation.

Statutory notices would not be required when closing a specific site within a primary school.

Federated Schools

The ability to federate under a single governing body could be of particular benefit to small schools or schools in more isolated rural areas, opening up opportunities to share management and governing body responsibility and curriculum expertise, while retaining the separate identities of the schools involved.

This model will be possible once regulations are made in Wales. The Regulations (due to come into force in the spring of 2009) will include provision for forming, joining, or leaving a federation; the constitution and membership of a federated governing body, and how they conduct their business.

Federation can provide numerous benefits. These include:

- Opportunities for improved teaching and learning through increased specialism and range of expertise
- A structured way for schools to collaborate, learn from each other and share best practise
- A cost-effective and coherent curriculum, increasing the opportunity to fulfil individual pupils' needs and extending curriculum entitlement
- Models of good practice to improve teaching, learning and inclusion
- Capacity to have a senior and middle management team
- A stronger teaching team through the appointment of shared staff including specialist teachers, better training and wider career opportunities
- Better support and development opportunities for school governors
- Potential savings in planning, administration time and resources

Setting up a Federation

The final decision to form a federation must come from the governing bodies of all the schools involved. Where schools refuse to consider the option of federating, the Council may look at alternative proposals for the area including the formation of area schools.

The process for setting up a federation will follow the Welsh Assembly Government guidance and regulations on the federation of maintained schools.

Consideration of language and faith provision

Particular consideration will be given to:

- The language denomination of the schools involved. Federation would not be put forward as an option if the federation would weaken Welsh language provision within the area.
- The faith denomination of the schools involved. Federation would not be put forward as an option if the federation would weaken faith provision within the area.
- Federation proposals would have to demonstrate that the current provision will still be maintained.

How would a federated school operate within Denbighshire?

Every federation within the County will be different depending on the area being served. Specific details regarding the structure of the federation would be considered prior to formation. The final decision as to how a federated school operates will be down to the governing body of each individual federation.

Federations can be formed with schools from neighbouring authorities, and where these possibilities exist the Council will consult with the relevant local authorities.

Schools must be prepared to commit both time and resources to ensure that the federation is effective and sustainable. They will also need a commitment to raising standards and achievement in all of the schools in the federation and to continually improving progression for young people.

Area Schools Model

Area schools are formed through amalgamating two or more schools onto one site to deliver improved educational experiences for the children attending those schools.

Where schools have been selected for amalgamation into area schools, it is necessary to close all the schools concerned and open a new school on one existing site or on a new site. This may require investment on an existing site.

Many of the advantages of federating can be found through the establishment of area schools. The benefits of area schools are as follows:

- Improved facilities and equipment.
- Opportunities for improved teaching and learning through increased specialism and range of expertise.
- The headteacher will have a minimum 50% time commitment to leadership and management. This commitment will increase in relation to the size of the school.
- Increased opportunity for community services / facilities in line with Denbighshire's 'Community Focused Schools Strategy'.
- Increased options for class organisation
- Cost savings through reducing the fixed costs associated with maintaining several sites – there is an opportunity to re-direct these savings to provide better educational provision and raise standards;
- Increased opportunities for professional development among staff, gives the opportunity to develop strengths and expertise in wider areas, including numerous non-core subjects. This can lead to improved recruitment and retention of staff.
- Increased capacity for a senior and middle management team.
- Better support and development opportunities for school governors