



# Delivering Quality Education to Rural Areas

The Challenges and Opportunities facing Schools  
in Rural England

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# The Commission for Rural Communities

- Focus upon tackling Rural Disadvantage
- Expert Adviser – Independent Watchdog – Rural Advocate
- Priority policy areas:
  - Rural Services
  - Sustainable Rural Communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
  - Strong and prosperous Rural Economies
  - Inclusive representation and decision making



English policy context is one of wholesale public service reform.

The key drivers include:

- Top down Performance Management
- Competition
- Choice
- Place based collective voice



# The context for schools in Rural England

- Primary pupil numbers falling 1999-09.
- By 2028, some 35% of rural population >50.
- Overall, rural areas see continuing higher levels of performance in education except in sparsely populated areas.
- Presumption against closure of rural schools.
- Central Government accepts that rural authorities will need to maintain smaller primary schools.  
Encouragement to raise standards and improve viability through schools working together.



## The context for schools in rural England (continued...)

- Substantial multi year strategic capital investment programme driving major re-assessment of school infrastructure.
- Pupil-led funding means that some schools will lose resources.
- Review of Dedicated School Grant formulae underway for post 2011.
- Perception of threat to rural schools has risen over recent months.
- More evidence needed on the wider community benefits of rural schools.



# The newer opportunities for schools in rural England

## Federations, Collaboration and Co-operation

- A formal agreement between 2 or more schools
- Each school maintains its own legal identity.
- Require strong levels of trust and confidence.
- Degrees of hard and soft arrangements.
- Potential to raise standards through stronger management.
- Potential for savings in overheads.



# Callington Federation, Cornwall

- 3 schools form 'soft' federation. Share Strategic Committee and common vision.
- Further 9 primary schools share resources and ICT. [link](#)
- Shared catering and specialist teaching.
- Centrally managed support services.
- Joint staff development.
- Extensive community education programme.
- Educational standards raised.



# Amalgamation

- Formation of new school to replace existing.
- Usually involves closure of existing school.
- Enhanced head teacher role makes it easier to recruit/retain a good leader.
- Greater flexibility and efficiency in staff and resource management.
- Less isolation/more sharing of ideas amongst staff.
- Greater resilience to fluctuations in pupil numbers.
- Larger peer group for pupils.



# Whitesheet Primary School, Wiltshire

- Merged 2 village schools with total of 64 pupils.
- Both closed and reopened as amalgamated school with 2 sites. Now 99 pupils.
- Pupil transport provided between sites.
- Better opportunities for staff.
- Widespread consultation throughout.



# Extended Services

- Offers additional services for pupils, families and community.
- Wide range of potential activities from childcare to study support.
- Leads to improvement in performance.
- Generates economies of scale.
- Requires significant planning and expertise.



## East Yorkshire.

- Guidance provided through specialist coordinators.
- Driven by community need rather than filling space.
- Generated more integrated service provision.
- Better relationships between schools.



# Some real challenges

- Real choice is often restricted in rural areas.
- A risk of ‘urban bias’ in the commissioning of schools – including issues of size and proximity.
- Need to properly rural proof the review of the funding formula.
- Needs real commitment to integrate other services with rural schools .
- Need to pilot innovative solutions at a community level and share good practice.
- Support for rural schools needs to be seen in a wider context of sustainable development.