



A report on the proposals of the Isle of Wight Council for rationalising primary schools to raise achievement for all

October 2024

Executive summary

The Isle of Wight is facing two severe and chronic challenges: poor educational outcomes and a rapidly decreasing pupil population. There is an increasingly urgent need for the council to take action to address these challenges. Failure to do so will lead to poorer educational outcomes and increasing school debt over time.

Schools receive funding, from the government, predominantly based on the number of pupils they have on roll.

The falling birth rate on the Island means some schools are facing a significant income loss as their numbers on roll decrease year on year. This means they have less money to:

- Provide the good quality of education that is expected for the Island's children.
- Pay salaries – so increasing numbers of staff need to be removed from the school establishment, resulting in a loss of curriculum expertise and specialisms.
- Provide extracurricular activities – so the opportunities for children to develop their talents and interests are not fully accessible to all. In some schools there are so few pupils on roll that they are denied access to team games and competitive sports, for example.
- Access the most modern equipment and resources – so pupils are unable to take full advantage of high quality and innovative resources.

It also means that some schools, especially small schools on larger sites, can no longer afford to continue to pay for maintenance, and escalating heating and lighting costs. Over time this will result in children being educated in substandard buildings.

Pupils in very small schools (schools with less than 100 children on roll), have to be taught in mixed age-group classes. Whilst this in itself is not necessarily leading to poorer educational outcomes, it does have some limits for example in terms of the breadth of social opportunities for pupils and it has some significant challenges for teachers (in planning learning activities that meet the needs of all children) but it is an option where the school is rural and remote.

Cuts to school funding; falling pupil numbers; a significant increase in children with special needs; increasing numbers of child and young people with mental health challenges; the need for more children to be cared for by the local authority; child poverty and household economic disadvantage; are likely to have combined to adversely impact on levels of attainment across the Isle of Wight's schools.

Tackling the issues facing the Island's children, young people, families and communities will therefore require leaders to take decisive, bespoke action to holistically address the education needs of the Island as a whole, in the context of increasingly limited, available resources. It is clear the council understands the challenges it faces and is committed to taking decisions that balance benefit and risk, not only for the improvement of schools but for the health, well-being and economic prosperity of individuals, communities and the

Island as a whole. The council's published plans as outlined in its draft Education Strategy (July 2024)¹ and School Place Planning Strategy (July 2024)² seek to do this.

Findings and recommendations:

Considerations of Local Authority proposals for school place planning (July 2024):

1. The council's plans to reduce the number of schools, through a carefully planned and coordinated, strategic approach over time, is the only available solution to the current challenges. This will lead to improving the educational outcomes of the children of the Island and, at the same time, ensure best use of the limited resources available to tackle the Island's chronic and severe education attainment problems and ensure remaining schools are financially sustainable into the future.
2. No viable alternatives could be proposed which would provide a better solution than the council's proposals as set out in the Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions on School Place Planning 18 July 2024 .
3. Mitigating action will be required in order to ensure the plan achieves maximum success and minimum disruption to children's education.
4. The plans should be mindful of the impact on the Island's communities as a whole, not solely in terms of the educational impact, but also the impact on the future economy of the Island, the social life and vitality of communities and the impact on the environment.
5. The time scales are important. Those recommended by the council are appropriate. The proposed timescales meet the legislative requirements and allow time for consultation but at the same time enable the process to be concluded effectively with minimal disruption.
6. The council's current proposals will enable the Island's headteachers and school leaders to plan for the future with a greater degree of certainty in order to enable them to attract, develop and maintain a strong workforce and tackle the Island's educational attainment issues.
7. It is recommended that the council takes the principals of the council's school place planning proposals as set out in the Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions on School Place Planning 18 July 2024 and, following scrutiny and consultation across the Island's communities, approves them subject to mitigations that can be made to minimise the risks to individual learners their families, communities and the Island as a whole.

¹ Isle of Wight Draft Education Strategy July 2024

² Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions on School Place Planning 18 July 2024

1. Background

- 1.1. In terms of education and schools in particular, the Isle of Wight Council is facing two severe and chronic challenges, which if remain unaddressed will deteriorate further. These are: poor educational outcomes and a rapidly decreasing pupil population.
- 1.2. The first point is clearly an educational quality issue and has a strong moral imperative attached to it. The second is a logistics, resource and finance issue for the Council and is impacting significantly on the first point. With finite resources available to the council these two issues are intrinsically linked and should be considered together. Importantly, if the Island fails to be a place where younger people can be attracted to live and work it will cease to attract inward investment or indeed a schools' workforce both of which over time will exacerbate these two issues. The Council is seeking to address these issues holistically.
- 1.3. The challenges that the Island faces are severe. Table 1. illustrates this, in that the Island's schools overall rank last for the percentage of schools judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted³. It should be noted however that one of these schools

Table 1: National Data from Ofsted Inspections - Updated 25 September 2024 https://www.watchsted.com/tables					
	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Rank Good or Outstanding Against all Local Authorities in England
Pupils attending schools (Primary, Secondary or Special)	2.5%	66%	31.4%	0%	153/153
Pupils attending schools Primary	4.8%	70.3%	24.9%	0%	152/152
Pupils attending schools Secondary	0%	61.2%	38.8%	0%	147/152
Schools Ofsted Judgements All Schools	2.3%	65.7%	27.3%	0%	153/153
Schools Ofsted Judgements Primary	2.7%	73%	24.3%	0%	152/152
Schools Ofsted Judgements Secondary	0%	57.1%	42.9%	0%	149/152

³ Whilst there are 153 Local Authorities in the country, 1 local authority only has secondary schools and another only has primary schools. Hence the 152 comparator in some lines.

has just been judged as Outstanding which indicates that there is nothing intrinsic to the environment or child population of the Isle of Wight that prevents schools performing at the highest standard.

- 1.4. Using this criteria, not only could the Island be judged to be the worst performing Local Authority in England it is also set to have more than 3,000 surplus primary school places (close to a third of available school places). Therefore, radical action is now clearly, urgently required. It is recognised that schools have very close ties to their local area and communities, which is why closing schools is a difficult decision and a last resort for a council. However, the quality of education for children, and the strength of the whole school system on the Isle of Wight, must take priority. Undoubtedly this will result in significant change which will impact on communities. Nevertheless, rightly, the Isle of Wight Council is seeking to address these interlinked issues.
- 1.5. In the current climate of generally highly charged public discourse, seen especially on social media, there seems to be a proclivity for attaching blame to a person, organisation, or group of people for any perceived shortcoming. This blame often rapidly becomes intense and can become aggressive. In the assessment of the root causes of the school and education issues that the Island faces many observers may well engage in this type of activity and have already identified their own villain: the government, the council, Hampshire County Council, teachers, headteachers or unions. The reality is that what the Isle of Wight is facing was not and is not something where blame can be apportioned to any one group, person or organisation. It is complex and a product as much of geography, technology, societal change and macro economics as it is of any previous shortcoming by any politician or officer. Some of the issues are specific to the Island, others are shared across England.
- 1.6. Specifically, the Island has a baseline of significant national challenges which are faced by many other rural, coastal and urban areas which include financial challenges for both public services (notably schools and the local authority) and for low income families. However, these are exacerbated by local challenges largely generated by its geographical dislocation from the mainland and include ferry services, housing, poverty and of course education.
- 1.7. Tackling the issues facing the Island's children, young people, families and communities will therefore require leaders to take decisive bespoke action that works holistically to meet the needs of the Island as a whole and its various communities, mindful that it simply has a limited amount of resource available. It is clear that the council understands the root causes of the challenges that it faces and is committed to taking decisions that balance benefit and risk not only for the improvement of schools but for the health, well-being and economic prosperity of individuals, communities and the Island as a whole. The council's published plans as outlined in its Education Strategy⁴ and School Place Planning Strategy⁵ seek to do this.

2. Background Issues: Educational quality and outcomes

- 2.1. The quality of schools as judged by Ofsted has been covered already. However in addition currently the Island's educational outcomes are also amongst the

⁴ Isle of Wight Draft Education Strategy June 2024

⁵ Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions on School Place Planning 18 July 2024

worst, if not the outright worst, in the country. It has ranked lowest of all English local authorities for level 4 and above at GCSE and grades C and above at A-level in every year since 2018. There are 153 Local Education Authorities in England; Island primary schools were placed last in 2022. By the age of 11 children should reach an expected standard in maths, reading and writing; 71% achieve the standard in maths, 74% in reading and 69% in writing. 59% of children reached the expected standard in all three areas; the best LEA, Richmond Surrey, scored 75% on this measure, the Isle of Wight scored lowest with 47%.

- 2.2. The Island has the highest gap in educational attainment between poorer students and their peers at Key Stage 2 (15.5 months)⁶. The graph below highlights this as the bar at the extreme right indicates the Isle of Wight's gap between the children from more deprived households and their peers.



Disadvantage gap in months in 2022

- 2.3. At post 16 it has the 149th widest gap in attainment amongst 152 Local Authorities and at the end of Key stage 4 the gap stood at 21.4 months which placed it broadly in-line with many other Local Authorities.
- 2.4. When compared to many of the national indicators the Isle of Wight is in the bottom 5% of all Local Authorities nationally and when these indicators are clustered together it could be argued that the Island's performance educationally combines to be the worst in the country.
- 2.5. These conclusions are not highlighted to unduly worry parents that their children are receiving a poor-quality education because, as most will testify, this is not the case. Neither is it to vilify teachers, headteachers, and governors because most schools across the Island continue to be safe, happy learning environments but to set the scene for the challenges that face the Council, Headteachers, Teachers and Governors. Simply put, it should and could be so much better, something that the Island's Education Strategy 2024-2030⁷ is seeking to address. The Island's schools face a range of challenges, including increasing levels of poverty and high levels of additional need that results in the population as a whole not making the level of educational progress that the Island aspires to for its children. This is

⁶ Data from the Education Policy Institute and Nuffield Foundation

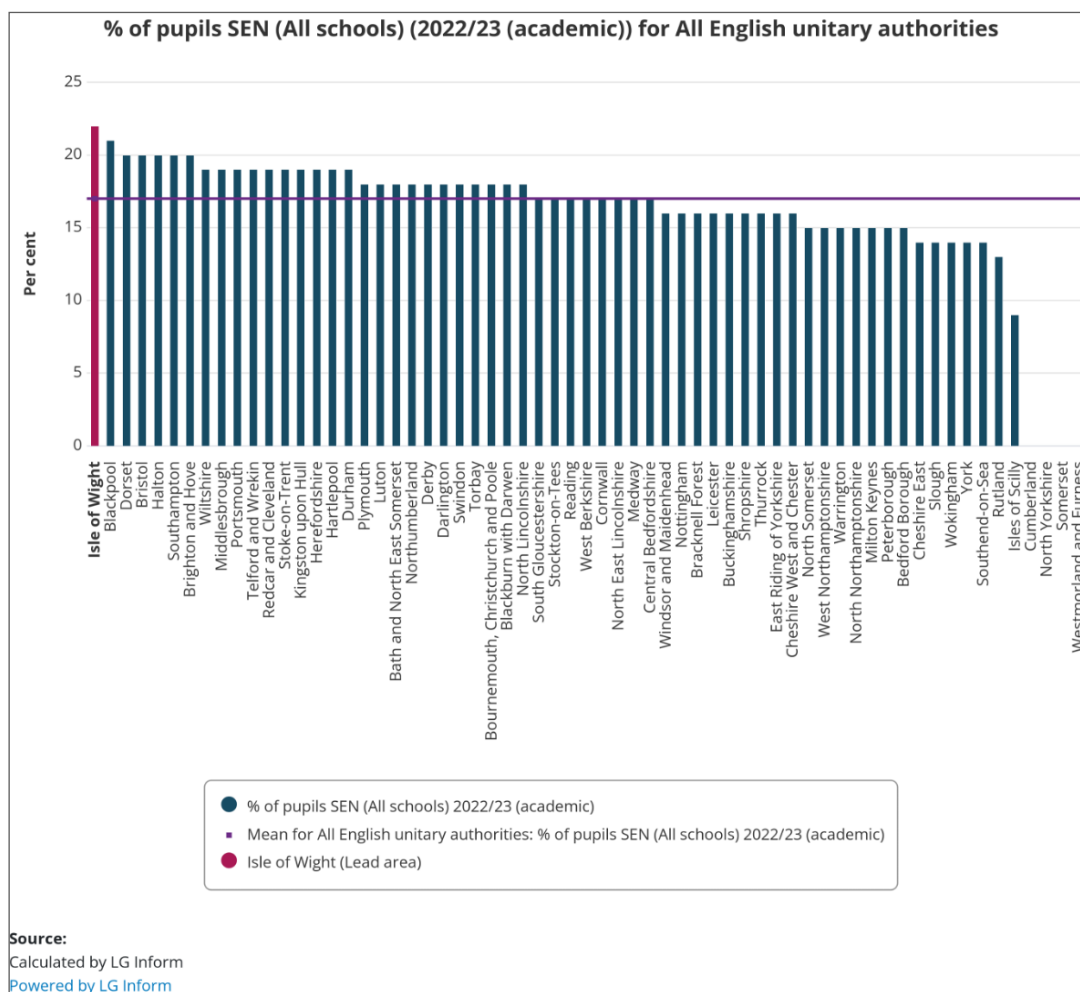
⁷ <https://www.iow.gov.uk/schools-and-education/island-education-plans-and-policies/education-strategy/>

not an excuse for underachievement but is a series of challenges that all schools and the Island as a whole must address with rigour and urgency.

- 2.6. Poverty is not an excuse for underachievement in education but can contribute to underachievement and so cannot be ignored by effective education systems.
- 2.7. There is a clear and proven link between poverty, levels of disadvantage and educational outcomes. The Island's unusual population demography is exacerbated by additional factors that are causing the poor outcomes. These undoubtedly include the geography of the Island, the fact that it is an Island and thus difficult to attract a workforce, and the economy of the Island which relies heavily on a mixture of low paid, part-time work in health & social work, wholesale & retail, tourism related services and education. In addition there are a higher than average number of adults that are self-employed and a lower average level of adult education overall. It has a high level of unemployment and a significant number of seasonal employees. It thus has an atypical age and socioeconomic profile⁸ by comparison with the region and England as a whole.
- 2.8. Whilst overall the Island is the 80th most deprived authority in England (out of 317) according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 this statistic hides a much more complex population and a much more deprived child population. Firstly, there are pockets within the Island that fall within the most deprived areas in the country, namely Pan and Osborne.
- 2.9. Secondly and more significantly there could be considered to be two distinct populations of need across the Island that are widely contrasting. This is illustrated by two supplementary indices that are produced alongside the income deprivation domain which explore income deprivation specifically affecting children (0 to 15 years) known as the IDACI, and older people (aged 60 years and over) which is known as IDAOPI.
- 2.10. Whilst IDACI ranks six areas on the Island within the 10% most deprived areas in England, IDAOPI ranks no areas on the Island within the 10% most deprived areas in England. This would suggest that the relative wealth of the Island's older populations hides a relatively highly deprived child population.
- 2.11. These data suggest that in-line with many coastal areas that are close to urban centres the Island has high levels of relatively affluent older people retiring to the Island that cause some significant challenges to the public sector in terms of care and health alongside a relatively poor working age and child population which also has a higher level demand on public services.

⁸ <https://www.iow.gov.uk/azservices/documents/1433-Isle-of-Wight-Economic-ProfileFinalFebruary2020.pdf>

2.12. It is particularly noteworthy that the Island has the highest number of children with



special education needs of all the 153 local authorities in England.

2.13. Furthermore, 77% of the Island’s schools have lost funding since 2010, a total of almost £3M with an average reduction of £350 per pupil, at a time when costs have been rising nationally and in an Island system where the costs associated with the estate of the Islands schools are now being spread across fewer and fewer of them.

2.14. In summary, the combination of cuts to school funding, falling pupil numbers, rising levels of special needs, child and adolescent mental health, the need for more children to be looked after by the local authority by being placed into its care, child poverty and household economic disadvantage are likely to have combined to wear away at attainment.

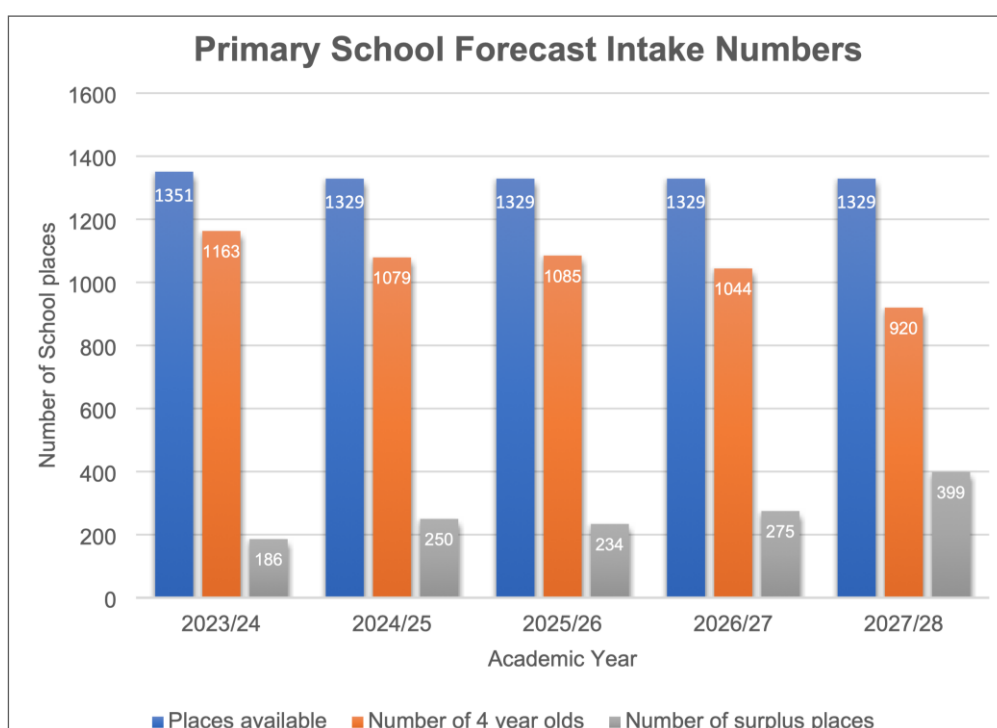
3. Background Issues: School capacity

3.1. The situation relating to school places on the Island is stark. The Island’s education system is seriously impeded financially by having a physical capacity of a third too many school places than there are pupils. This is impoverishing the system as a whole and is undoubtedly a contributory factor to the overall inadequacy of the schools’ system on the Island to adequately address the low attainment rates.

3.2. The Island currently has physical capacity for 10,724 primary aged children across 37 Primary Schools and 1 All-through school. In October 2023, it had

1,898 unfilled school places. By September 2027, it is forecast that the number of unfilled school places will increase to 3,056.

- 3.3. Longer term pupil trends show the decline in births having a direct impact upon the number of children arriving into the primary phase. In 2027 only 876 children will be starting reception, 528 fewer than in September 2018 and the forecast for September 2028 reception intake is 864, 540 fewer than in September 2018. This equates to 18 fewer classes (assuming 30 per class, in-line with HM Government class size legislation for Key Stage 1). The overall number of primary pupils is therefore forecast to continue to decrease.
- 3.4. The graph below, taken from the council’s strategy paper on school place planning⁹ shows that by 2027/28 the Island will have 1329 reception places available for pupils but there will only be a need for 920 places. Whilst the graph is based on known birth rates on the Island there is nothing to suggest that the demographic shift will take an upturn or plateau, it may actually continue to



decline for the foreseeable future.

- 3.5. The decline to pupil numbers in primary has been known for some time. Nationally, there is a decline in pupil numbers in the primary phase but the decline to the Island’s population is more extreme than that of England as a whole.
- 3.6. The management of the surplus places across the Isle of Wight has been a continuous work stream over the past five years, consisting of reducing the number of planned pupil admissions to schools (PAN reductions) on an ad hoc basis and the closure of two primary schools.
- 3.7. Whilst it is expected that child population numbers will see a fall, as identified in section 1 above, there is increasing demand and growth of children and young people designated as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and being awarded an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), following statutory assessment, which impacts on the need for SEND provision in the school age

⁹ Island School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2030, Isle of Wight Council, July 2024

population. Whilst this is a national picture currently 6.5% of the school population (4 to 16 year olds) has an Education Health and Care Plan. The growth in Education Health Care Plans has created a significant pressure on the Island's existing special schools. Due to this increase the council is conducting a strategic review of SEND provision across the Island to identify any shortfall of provision and to review the suitability of some of the school accommodation. The strategy will assess the Island wide need for SEND places against current provision. Alongside the school age population there has been growth in pre-school children having identified needs that has resulted in an increase in statutory assessment and awarding of Education Health Care Plans which have identified the need to access specialist educational provision on entry to school.

- 3.8. Thus, current demands indicate up to 201 additional SEND places are required across the Island which will range from places within schools with resourced provisions, expansion of special schools, expansion of medical provision, and creation of alternative provision.
- 3.9. The Local Authority has statutory responsibilities to meet the place demands of children with SEND. However, these additional demands place increased burden on the council and one reason is because of improvements in medical technology and the need for enhanced equipment to support children with the most complex of needs. This has led to some school and class bases being physically inadequate to accommodate the numbers of pupils that they were originally designed for, leading to both sufficiency and suitability issues. The cost of building SEND school places is high compared to other provision and places a significant strain on capital budgets. Funding of basic need specialist places through School Condition Allocation (SCA) leaves a significant shortfall for the council in the amount of capital required for the expansion of the special school estate.
- 3.10. An analysis of data available indicates that demand for SEND places is increasing across the Island and in-line with that seen nationally. This means that mainstream schools have to provide increased levels of expertise and provision in addition to that provided by Special Schools. The increase in need will require a culture shift amongst the Island's schools, something that is being faced on the mainland. Improving the inclusive practice in mainstream schools is required to address the rise in the number of children identified as having SEND including those requiring an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). In addition, it is clear that many parents do not yet feel that the Island's mainstream schools provide the level of support that meet their children's needs (including SEND) and this is a situation that data indicates is much worse than that seen in England as whole. For example, on the Island 23.2%¹⁰ of those parents that elect to home educate their children do so because of dissatisfaction with the school. Whilst many parents philosophically believe very strongly that electing to educate children at home is the right thing for their child, and they do this with commitment and expertise, the Council is conscious that some parents feel reluctantly forced into home education options on the Island because of the lower quality of education provided at the Island's schools. It believes that parents should be able to make a positive choice in this regard. Sensibly, the council is additionally conducting a full review¹¹ of its SEND provision to address these issues and align that provision to

¹⁰ IoW Council Presentation 17 May 2024: Elective Home Education (EHE) and Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS)

¹¹ <https://www.iow.gov.uk/schools-and-education/island-education-plans-and-policies/education-strategy/>

its ambitions and needs. The school place planning proposals¹² are an integral part of that plan and would support this transition to a holistic education system that better meets the needs of a wider range of the Island's children with high quality schooling.

- 3.11. The way that the council collects data to inform its school place planning as set out in its strategy is appropriate and will provide the best available information to assist decision makers to reach well informed conclusions.
- 3.12. Given that these pressures have been building for some time and are so significant the pressures on very many individual schools have developed to a point where some schools are already unsustainable. Many schools have experienced not only falling roles but falling budgets year on year, which has meant that headteachers and governing bodies have had to take difficult decisions with regard to making savings. Many of these have included the planned loss of members of staff, redundancy or cuts to services to children or both. Because the issue is quite ubiquitous across the Island it means that there has become a situation whereby there is a high degree of uncertainty and instability across the Island's school system. This is something that has been picked up by governors and headteachers, 22 of whom submitted an open letter to the council in September 2022 and which was reissued by 34 headteachers again in July 2024.
- 3.13. The council's school place plans set out clear criteria for decision making for individual schools and groups of schools. The groups are based on the Primary Place Planning Areas. The plans appear broadly to comply with legislation and guidance. There are clear criteria for decision makers. However, this will inevitably be contentious and to this point, understandably, decision makers (including local councillors, national politicians and dioceses) have steered away from wholeheartedly supporting what will inevitably lead to a proposal for the closure of a significant number of schools across the Island.
- 3.14. In analysing the process to date, there are few omissions to the process. There has been widespread engagement with individuals and groups across the Island and there are clear linkages with school improvement, SEND provision and the needs of the community and economy of the Island as whole.
- 3.15. However, it is important that the council considers the government's guidance on the closure of rural schools and applies it to all Island schools so that an impact assessment on the local communities can be made should a school be proposed for closure.
- 3.16. It should be noted that as in other parts of England, some parents choose to send their children to small rural schools, choosing to drive away from the place where they live, past one or more schools, to take their child to a small village school. This is their right and there is no criticism of that. However, it is not the duty of the council to provide for that particular lifestyle choice. Similarly, some parents choose to send their children to a faith school, under English legislation this is also their right. However, it should be noted that it is the duty of the council to provide good quality educational provision for every child within reasonable access not to provide access to good quality education in a preferred size, type of location (rural, village or urban) or indeed faith.

¹² Island School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2030, Isle of Wight Council, July 2024

4. Other issues

- 4.1. Schools are central to all our lives, those of individuals and the community they serve. Whereas some, if not many, people recall their secondary school experience as pleasant at least an equal number recall it as unpleasant. This is not the case for primary schools, which for most people were a place of some fondness. Thus, it is often the case that primary schools can reach out and work with young parents in ways that secondary schools cannot. Given that the Island is proposing the closure of several primary schools it is likely there will be near ubiquitous upset and strong emotion amongst individuals and communities attached to the schools that may be proposed for closure. It is possible that many generations of the same family have attended the same school, grown close to it and to the staff that work there. So there may be strong emotional ties for many people and this makes the decisions that need to be taken all the more challenging. The council has stated that it will use qualitative information about schools' effectiveness to inform proposals as well as data about admissions but it will be difficult for the council to explicitly state what those pieces of qualitative data are.
- 4.2. Criticisms and concerns seen in the Island's press and stated at some council meetings by some people on the Island relate to some of the following issues.

Council role, duties, powers and responsibilities

- 4.3. The Council, as an education authority, has a duty to promote high standards of education and fair access to education. It also has a general duty to secure sufficient schools in its area, and to consider the need to secure provision for children with SEND. This includes a duty to respond to parents' representations about school provision. These are referred to as the school place planning duties.
- 4.4. However, the council powers are limited and the council cannot act *ultra vires*. So its powers can only refer to maintained schools. It is the case that Academy schools sit outside this and whilst the council has a *duty* to ensure sufficient capacity it does not have a *power* to close academies. The Council should therefore seek the support of the DfE in this respect.

Small schools and small classes

- 4.5. There has been some confusion about class sizes and school sizes expressed by some people that are concerned about the council's plans.
- 4.6. There has been much debate about small schools in England and internationally. What is the optimum size of schools? At Appendix 1 is an extract from possibly the most powerful review of English primary education, the Cambridge review, which sets out most of the issues. It identifies that there isn't absolute clarity, there is no optimum size of school and other than in the case of micro schools (under 20 pupils in total) there is no evidence that the size of schools (either small or large) have overall really detrimental affects. At the end of the day, it often comes down to parental choice for a type of school and education that they think is right for the needs of their child.
- 4.7. However, there is often some confusion between small schools and small class sizes. It is important to note that in the case of the English primary education system and how it affects the Isle of Wight a small school does not mean small class sizes but on the contrary may actually mean slightly larger mixed age, class sizes. It is for this reason that an attempt to rationalise the school estate on the Island makes sound educational sense because it will maximise the use of

resources and funding and minimise the number of mixed ages learning together in classrooms.

- 4.8. At Key Stage 1 the maximum class size is 30 by law. So the problem arises if 31+ children turn-up. Under most circumstances a school will simply not be funded to manage a class of 16 and a class of 15 so will have to make classes of 30 and this would be done by combining year groups. At Key Stage 2 meanwhile the same legal requirement is not in place so it is easier for headteachers to manage the situation, they simply have a class of 31+. So somewhat counter intuitively, small schools can lead to larger class sizes and almost always lead to classes where children are in mixed ages.
- 4.9. Whilst there can be many benefits to mixed age classes their management can provide additional stress to headteachers and teachers that try to manage them on a daily basis given the high stakes accountability of the English education system.
- 4.10. Mixed age teaching can be good for younger children as they learn from older pupils. In a single year class in Key Stage 1 (Age 5-7) children could be born 12 months apart. As we all know children grow and mature at inconsistent rates, so on any one day you could have an immature 5 year old child in a classroom with a mature child who is one day away from their sixth birthday. Some small schools can be forced to put two or even three year groups together. Once special educational needs are factored in and the wide range of maturity across two to three year groups is considered, teaching in order to stretch the most intellectually developed becomes very challenging when the same teacher is also trying to nurture and develop a much more socially, physically and intellectually less developed child and without recourse to additional support.
- 4.11. To explain further, the English education system is quite explicit about the English National Curriculum and what is taught at specific points in a Key Stage across a number of its subjects. Most subjects build learning basing one set of skills and concepts on a base set-down in previous years, this builds progression in learning. This applies in subjects such as English, maths, science, history, humanities and PE. So whilst it is possible to manage wonderful learning environments and many small rural schools have highly skilled and committed teachers who have mastered this form of teaching, as a system it is not optimal for raising standards whilst ensuring staff well-being to promote recruitment and retention.
- 4.12. Some concerns expressed through social media and to the Island's press have suggested a concern for the development of very large schools. The Island doesn't seem to have plans for very large schools. However, experience of large schools in other areas are not actually negative because most are managed in ways that mean that the interpersonal relationships between teachers, pupils and families are still strong and at the heart of their ethos.

Redundancies

- 4.13. This leads to another concern that has been expressed which is for teacher redundancy. In reality, given that schools can really only adequately fund classes of around 30 this is what they do. The number of schools reducing does not then equate to the number of actual classes reducing which in turn does not lead to the number of teachers reducing. Simply put, the English education system works on units (classes) of a multiple of 30 of which the Island has a finite number that it can afford.

4.14. It will however equate to fewer headteachers and senior leaders because there will be fewer schools. Most headteachers especially of smaller schools are teaching heads. That is they teach classes for part of the week and undertake management and administration of the school for rest of the week. In reality, teaching heads of small schools spend huge amounts of personal time (weekends, holidays and evenings) servicing all the management, governance and leadership functions that are often undertaken as part of the working day by the leadership teams of larger schools. These teaching headteachers often love their jobs but they still have to ensure that their schools have all the same number and type of policies annually developed and agreed as would even the largest school. In addition small school teaching heads may also be the school's SENCo, child protection officer and subject lead for a number of National Curriculum, subjects or be a Key stage lead as well as teaching, marking and planning for much of the week. Reducing the workload of head teachers can directly improve recruitment, retention and the quality of education.

Why have other councils not yet put in place similar plans to close schools?

4.15. Across the country there are very many unviable schools. In some counties there are many tiny schools. Recently North Yorkshire County Council closed a school, against some protest, that had no pupils enrolled into reception and which had a total of only 13 pupils on roll. Like many shire counties North Yorkshire has many small and tiny schools in both its primary and secondary phases yet it is not embarking on a planned policy of school closures. So why should the Island do so if these places have a much more dire problem? The answer is probably that counties such as North Yorkshire have an economy of scale that means they can still balance the budget and also have much more remote communities than is the case on the Island. North Yorkshire has 360 schools almost 10 times the number of the Island and overall the county's schools realise an overall surplus balance to the schools' budget. Furthermore, that county's schools have an achievement and inspection profile that is much stronger than that of the Isle of Wight. In the case of the Isle of Wight, the Council's budget (Direct Schools Grant) for schools is overspent due to the existing pressures placed on that part of it that is designated for SEND it's High Needs Block.

4.16. Politically, as we have seen in relation to the Island, it does not make 'political' and by that one might mean 'electoral popularity' sense for politicians to vote to close schools, as it is always contentious, it makes for unsympathetic newspaper copy and it always makes social media go into a toxic frenzy. Ultimately it could hurt them at the ballot box if not at their regular ward surgeries or indeed daily life for them in their own communities. So, few politicians are ever going to be brave enough to step into this particular zone unless the case is compelling and that is the main reason why most other councils have yet to take this route. It is therefore all the more to their credit that the politicians of the Island have unanimously agreed to proceed to consultation to address these issues holistically.

Timescales

4.17. The timescales for a programme such as this are important. Clearly children, their parents, the communities that schools serve, the staff that work in schools and the foundations that own and run the schools all need to be consulted. The Island as a whole should be engaged about how this will make life on the Island better or worse. However, there comes a point at which once individual schools are named events start to unfold rapidly. For example, some parents and some members of staff will seek to find alternative schools and leave before the proposed planned

closure day to make sure they have a place in a school of their choice or a secure job in a school of their choice. This last point is inevitable and the reality is often less severe than planning might imply it will be, nevertheless it is important to plan for such eventualities. This might include: predicting movements and preparing other schools in the neighbourhood for an influx of new pupil arrivals mid year, and to give some general advice on good practice for receiving schools about the integration of new learners. It will also be important to consider contingency planning for putting in place support to schools who suddenly lose an essential member of staff such as a Year 6 teacher at Christmas or Easter rather than at the year end.

5. Options Appraisal

5.1. In considering the Island's options from a distance and dispassionately it seems that the council could move in a number of directions. Four possible directions are illustrated below along with some of the strengths and risks of the four options. In reality, these are just for illustrative purposes and other options could be developed or a hybrid of these four options may emerge. The existing proposal from the council is considered as option 4. In each of the cases should any option be chosen then action would need to be taken to mitigate the risks attached to that particular option.

5.2. Four options are considered here:

1. **No planned Action:** support and react as schools struggle.
2. **Actively work to keep all school sites open**
3. **Localise decision making** to clusters of schools in individual communities
4. **Rationalise the school estate** and close a number of schools

1. **No planned Action:** support and react: In this option the council would take no central decision but leave market forces to work. The council might seek to manage the fall-out as schools fail to recruit pupils and become bankrupt or go into deficit and ultimately become unviable and close so this is largely a reactive option.

Some Potential Strengths	Some Potential Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Politically easy - minimal criticism of politicians ✓ Weaker schools fail and stronger schools survive ✓ Schools and local communities are the decision maker themselves determining their own future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Island continues to run with too many schools and the system continues to have a large number of insecure schools - The central funding for schools becomes bankrupt as the majority of schools have to post deficit budgets and more schools have to turn to Schools Forum for bail-outs - Parts of some buildings have to be mothballed but still managed and become dilapidated though a drain on resources as basic maintenance for safety has to be undertaken. - Schools struggle to recruit headteachers and staff to schools that are reducing in size and many headteachers resign due to the stress of having to make year on year cuts including staff redundancies - Governors and headteacher have to make the final decision to close schools so either become villains in their local community or campaigning vigilantes against the council to put in place additional financial support. Many governor bodies will split at this point and become dysfunctional and fail to concentrate on school improvement issues - Some schools spend disproportionate amounts of money on marketing activity to recruit pupils whilst others resort to raising money through charitable activity diverting them from educational improvement activity - The Council inherits debt levels that reduces its ability to fund other services to children including children in need and those at risk of harm. It reduces the council's ability to provide effective school improvement and it's ability to support schools that temporarily face crisis

2. **Actively work to keep all school sites open:** this might mean that schools enter into partnerships or federations with other schools and with other services and agencies so that school premises can be used by other organisations as well as the schools themselves.

Some Potential Strengths	Some Potential Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Politically easy - minimal criticism of politicians ✓ All communities maintain their schools for local use ✓ Repurposing of school sites engages local community groups ✓ Additional transport costs can be minimised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potentially very expensive as some of the positive and negative aspects of option 1 are still in place but exacerbated by an intensity of work to support schools to develop sustainability plans - The Island continues to run with too many schools and the system continues to have a large number of insecure schools - The central funding for schools becomes bankrupt as the majority of schools have to post deficit budgets and more schools have to turn to Schools Forum for bail-outs - Parts of some buildings still have to be mothballed and possibly become dilapidated though a drain on resources as basic maintenance for safety has to be undertaken. - School headteachers and governors spend a lot of time managing the use of schools by partners. - Federations of schools emerge in some places and in some federations children and staff have to move between sites across a week. - Schools struggle to recruit headteachers and staff to schools that are reducing in size and many headteachers and resign due to the stress of having to make year on year cuts including staff redundancies - Governors and headteacher have to make the final decision to close schools so either become villains in their local community or campaigning vigilantes against the council to put in place additional financial support. Many governor bodies will split at this point and become dysfunctional and fail to concentrate on school improvement issues - Some schools spend disproportionate amounts of money on community development as well as marketing activity to recruit pupils whilst others resort to raising money through charitable activity diverting them from educational improvement activity - Safeguarding issues on some school sites become an issue as the school site is open to public use.

3. **Localise decision making** to clusters of schools in individual communities. This will put in place a decision making body at a more localised level than the council as a whole so that the local community decides the future of its schools

Some Potential Strengths	Some Potential Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Politically easy - minimal criticism of the Council and politicians ✓ Weaker schools fail and stronger schools survive ✓ Schools and local communities are the decision maker themselves determining their own future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local communities do not take the “Turkey voting for Christmas” option and they choose to keep all their schools open, expecting other areas (that are less deprived, less rural, have fewer needs etc) to take the 'lion's share' of cuts. - A new structure for localised decision making is required and arbitration between schools will be required at some cost - Would take a long time to put in place - Decision making and implementation support will be required by schools, groups of schools and communities. - Local disputes flare-up - The Island continues to run with too many schools and the system continues to have a large number of insecure schools at least in the short to medium term - The central funding for schools becomes bankrupt as the majority of schools have to post deficit budgets and more schools have to turn to Schools Forum for bail-outs - Local people such as Governors and headteacher have to make the final decision to close schools (or not) so either become villains in their local community or campaigning vigilantes against the council to put in place additional financial support. Many governing bodies will conflict with other governing bodies at this point and become dysfunctional and fail to concentrate on school improvement issues - Some schools spend disproportionate amounts of money on campaigning activity or marketing to recruit pupils whilst others resort to raising money through charitable activity diverting them from educational improvement activity

4. **Rationalise the school estate** and close a small number of schools: Plan a managed response that links to the Island’s needs to improve educational attainment outcomes, maximises the use of income and resources and supports the needs of the disparate communities by planning closures in a managed way to minimise disproportionate impact.

Some Potential Strengths	Some Potential Risks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A cohesive plan that enables the Island to tackle its long term educational issues ✓ Enables best use of resources ✓ Strengthen the ability of schools (Headteachers, governors, teachers etc) to focus on improving education outcomes ✓ Ensure SEND needs are considered ✓ Can align with the needs of diverse communities as well as the Island as a whole ✓ Enables the Island to consult with employers and aim to put in place an education system that is aimed at improving quality and meeting the needs of learners, employers and communities ✓ Enables the travel to learn patterns to be monitored ✓ Minimises wasted cost on buildings eg mothballing and maintaining empty buildings ✓ Minimises energy on restructuring ✓ Fewer schools will fail or go bankrupt ✓ Governors, Headteachers, teachers and LA officers can concentrate on school improvement issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Politically challenging for Council politicians as much campaigning and criticism will likely ensue especially from specific “save our School” campaign groups - Some groups or individuals will use legal methods including Judicial review and may campaign for a long time looking at every possible recourse for appeal: DfE, Schools Adjudicator, Ofsted, Press, social media - Some communities will lose much valued and potentially historical community centres - Some children will have to travel further to learn - Disruption to learning or valued relationships: some children will have to move schools mid way through a Key Stage - Some staff will have to move schools either as part of redeployment or redundancy - There will be a short term investment in planning to minimise risk to children and communities as the plan is enacted - A lot of time and resource will be needed to be put into consultation and communication

Mitigating action

- 5.5. Whichever model the council had chosen to go with whether it is a “no action” no change model or a change to the education system model there are risks attached. In the case of the no change model this includes school failures either financial failure or educational failure or both. Whichever one of these the council were to have chosen they would have to put in place a safety net and also action to prevent either financial collapse or educational failure.
- 5.6. Financial collapse might require funding taken from other schools (though it's difficult to see how that can happen technically), funding from other budgets, loans. Individual and groups of schools will require advice regarding: financial management, HR Personnel support to manage redundancies and staffing reduction processes, Governance and legal advice. When schools do close, as they inevitably will in any of the scenarios, the council would have to relocate children and work with receiving schools as well.
- 5.7. **In short, there is no ‘no cost’ and no ‘zero closure’ solution. All the possible actions and inaction of the council will result in; some school closure, some fall-out and some cost and change.**

- 5.8. It is therefore pragmatic that the council has made an option proposal that enables it to quantify the risk in advance and manage it to maximise benefit.
- 5.9. It is recommended that, the council should consider plans to mitigate the negative impacts of:
- Changes to travel to learn patterns across the Island.
 - Any environmental and sustainability costs.
 - Pastoral and welfare implications for children moving school mid Key stage and mid school phase.
 - The viability of remote communities and especially poor communities with few other facilities

6. Academy options

- 6.1. One of the options that seems to have surfaced in some media surrounding the debate about school closures is the potential for schools to be subsumed into multi academy trusts (MATs). This may be possible if the schools are financially viable. However, if a school is not viable it would be difficult to see how a mainland and therefore remotely based MAT could justify establishing a foothold in a school which would bring little asset to the MAT and actually only be a drain on resources and funding. Many MATs currently suffer from depleting finances themselves and in recent years too many have had to be taken over by other MATs due to financial challenges. Many of the Island's unviable smaller schools come under the unfortunate label of 'untouchable'. This description applies to many small and remote schools that MATs simply think are too costly to run and therefore (the MATs) are not prepared to take into their control.
- 6.2. It is true that a small number may be able to join a church MAT or a MAT with presence already on the Island. However, over time these MATs would have to take action either to strengthen the school so that it has viable numbers and in this case the school would then cause a movement of pupils away from another neighbouring school thereby actually only moving the problem to another Island school rather than addressing the problem. Or the MAT themselves would have to rationalise their provision, i.e: close the school and disperse the assets.

7. Report Process

- 7.1. This report was produced remotely following a brief meeting with the Director of Children's Services and a request to the Local Government Association (LGA) for an external view of the proposals for school place planning on the Isle of Wight. The report was written following an analysis of the evidence base listed at the end of the report during August and September 2024.

Authors of the report

- 7.2. The authors of this report have neither visited the Island nor do they, to their knowledge, know (personally or professionally) any Island officer, headteacher or politician. They were chosen by the LGA because of this remoteness and the likely impartiality but also because they have both had substantial experience of school place planning as senior LA officers (Directors of Children's Services) and school leaders themselves. Both are or have been multi academy trust directors; both have led education services for Local Authorities. Both have experience of the

opening and closing of schools and both have recent experience of working with rural and urban disadvantaged communities, including coastal communities.

8. Summary

Findings and recommendations

- 8.1. The council's plans to reduce the number of schools in a coordinated way over the coming months and years is the best option out of a range of possible ways forward. This is because it links directly to improving the educational outcomes of the children of the Island and seeks, at the same time to maximise the limited resources it has available to tackle the Island's chronic and severe education attainment problems whilst ensuring that SEND provision improves and the needs of individual communities and the economy are met.
- 8.2. No alternative approaches could be envisaged that were better than the council's proposals of July 2024.
- 8.3. Mitigating action will be required in order to ensure the plan achieves maximum success and minimum disruption to children.
- 8.4. The plans should be mindful of the impact on the Island's communities in a holistic sense not just in terms of the educational impact, but also the impact on the future economy of the Island, the social life and vitality of communities and the impact on the environment.
- 8.5. The time scales are important and those recommended by the council are appropriate, they work within the legislation and ensure a good level of consultation but at the same time enable the process to be concluded effectively with minimal disruption. It is critical for decision makers to note here that sometimes decisions relating to school place planning have necessary long run-in times, are very tightly tied to statutory guidance and legislation and linked to rigid annual cycles. The last point is critical, if decision makers miss a critical decision deadline, in many instances it can derail the project by a whole year, this is because schools run on rigid academic year cycles. For example, children rarely start school at points other than in September, regardless of their age, there is a national timetable for admissions to both secondary and primary schools, the funding of schools is also set nationally and annually and based on the numbers on roll at a set point in the year, all children sit tests and exams at exactly the same date and time nationally etc.
- 8.6. The proposals outlined¹³ are the best foreseeable way of enabling the Island's headteachers to plan for the future with certainty in order to enable them to attract, develop and maintain a strong workforce and tackle the Island's educational attainment issues.
- 8.7. It is recommended that the council takes the principals of the council's school place planning proposals and following scrutiny and consultation across the Island's communities approves them subject to mitigations that can be made to minimise the risks to individual learners their families, communities and the Island as a whole.

¹³ Island School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2030, Isle of Wight Council, July 2024

Appendix 1

Extract from Children, their world, their education, Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review Ed Prof. Robin Alexander Routledge 2010

Small schools

SCHOOL SIZE

In 1965, four million children attended 20,789 English primary schools. Each had, on average, 193 pupils. By 1991 this average had risen slightly to 199. Since then the average school size has risen more steeply to 224, putting England ahead of Scotland (128 pupils), Germany (185), New Zealand (188), Sweden (217) and the Netherlands (222).

School size relates in part to organisation. Plowden commended the two-form entry school as being the ideal size organisationally, educationally and communally. In 2008 this would produce, using average class sizes and adding a nursery class, a school of nearly 400 pupils.

The national average of 224 reflects the dominance of one-form entry schools.

While overall pupil numbers dropped by 25,974 between 1965 and 2008, school numbers fell by 3,428. Small schools suffered the greatest - and most contentious - losses. At the time of Plowden, there were 6,272 schools with fewer than 100 pupils. In 2007, there were 2,605, a fall of more than 3,600. Numbers of schools with 301-400 pupils also fell, down by 203 since 1965.

Those with between 101-200 pupils saw their numbers decrease slightly by 13. Schools with 400-600 pupils saw the most substantial rise - up by 342. The majority of primaries - more than 10,300 out of 17,361 - had 100-300 pupils. At the same time, the size of the largest primary schools increased to approximately 1,000 pupils.²⁷

Questions of viability

Debates about school size continued to swirl around whether small was viable, on educational and financial grounds. Opponents argued that, like village post offices, village schools were desirable, but maybe not cost-effective. Others worried that they could not offer pupils a broad and stimulating curriculum. Plowden recommended 240 pupils as the ideal number for a first school and between 300-450 for a middle school. But, despite being a champion of separate first and middle schools, Plowden proposed that they be combined to safeguard small village schools. This option was pursued only in respect of 8-12 middle schools 'deemed primary' and by 1981 there were 388 combined 5-12 schools in 26 local authorities,

Recognition of fierce local commitment to village schools persuaded the government to announce its 'presumption against closure' in 1998. Despite this, small schools remained vulnerable. Pressures on local authorities to cut surplus places at a time of falling rolls and in difficult economic circumstances provoked battles with rural communities in, for example, Shropshire and the Isle of Wight. In 2008, Herefordshire withdrew proposals to shut or merge 37 small schools, citing concern about damaging rural communities, as well as the cost and environmental impact of transporting pupils to alternative schools. Also in 2008 the Scottish government launched a consultation on how best to protect its rural schools, arguing that:

*Local schools are an important part of ensuring vibrant local communities and local economies in villages across rural Scotland ... This government wants their future safeguarded.

Small wonders?

In 2000, Ofsted reported that primary schools with fewer than 100 pupils achieved markedly better test results at key stages 1 and 2 than larger schools. Even after adjusting for the children's socio-economic backgrounds, small schools remained, marginally, ahead. Quality of teaching was praised as generally better than in larger schools and inspectors said they had a positive ethos with a family atmosphere, close links between staff and parents, an important place in the local community, and good standards of behaviour. Overall, they concluded that 'a good case emerges for the place of small schools in the education system as a whole, when the quality of their educational performance is added to the broader contribution they make to their communities' This pattern of higher achievement at key stage 2 continued - government figures for 2004 quoted by the Commission for Rural Communities confirmed that schools with fewer than 100 on roll obtained the best results.

From achievement to economics: one estimate was that schools with 80-100 cost 16 per cent more per child than larger schools, while costs escalated substantially for those with fewer than 50 on roll. However, as the Scottish government was told in 2007 there was not necessarily a conclusive argument for closure on financial/economic grounds as the wider recurring costs of transport, boarding and the resultant, often unquantified, loss to the community are difficult to cost in full economic terms, particularly in the long term'

Cost was a factor raised in the Review's national soundings for organisations, as was the need for small schools to attract good teachers and offer pupils a rich and varied curriculum. The drive towards extended schools was seen as likely to exacerbate these problems as small schools might find it hard to provide what the government terms the "core offer" of clubs for children, childcare, family support, access to specialist services and community use of facilities. Federation, whereby small schools share a governing body and pool some resources, was suggested as a possible solution, though the submission from the National Association for Small Schools (NASS) argued that this was often just a slow route to closure. In 2008, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) suggested small schools should federate under an executive head' able to shoulder some of the burdens weighing down individual head teachers. This would provide, said the NCSL, 'a sustainable model that will preserve our small schools, their individual character and their place in our communities'.

The NASS argued in its submission that the evidence has been moving towards us for the past 10 years'. It would be hard to disagree. In terms of ethos, many small schools were excelling through close links with parents and the community, their family atmosphere and their high standards of behaviour. In terms of educational achievement and quality of teaching, they had been more than vindicated by Ofsted. Also, other characteristics such as a teaching head, mixed-age classes, flexibility and innovation in teaching, and clustering - while often adopted out of necessity - had been shown to have advantages. Even in financial terms, higher unit costs had to be balanced against the transport bill in times of high fuel prices, and against the longer-term social costs of dying villages and alienated children. Certainly, Herefordshire took these into account when it withdrew plans to shut or merge 37 small schools, and countries such as Sweden appeared happy to maintain small schools in exchange for sustainable rural communities.

There were some contrary notes. An 'idealised' view of a rural past could provoke baseless fears of the death of a community, according to a study of the impact of small school closures on culture, community and language undertaken in Wales in 2007. It could also lead people to ignore the many advantages of larger schools. 'The needs of children - not their parents, communities or any other public interests - should be considered above all others,' said former government adviser David Reynolds who led the research and

concluded that the impact of the closures he had studied had been 'overwhelmingly beneficial'.

Size and the pressure to compete

Small schools do face challenges. They are vulnerable to being thrown off course by the departure of a dedicated head or a key teacher. Clustering may yield imaginative and cost-effective sharing of resources and expertise, but it can also impose a heavy administrative load. There is also a tension, which surfaced during the Review's community soundings between the pressure (and desire) to collaborate and the need to compete. Since inter-school collaboration and parental choice - which fuels competition between schools for pupils - are in 2008 both matters of policy, it might be suggested that government has placed schools in a no-win situation. For small schools - where the advantages of professional collaboration are most obvious yet the consequences of even a marginal drop in pupil numbers can be catastrophic, this double bind is deeply unsatisfactory. It should be resolved in such a way that professional collaboration, and hence the improvement of educational quality, are never compromised.

Finally, small schools - again - reported that they were often warned that the 'extended school' agenda, with its emphasis on community use and longer hours, would prove beyond them. Yet the NASS argued that the concept is rooted in the type of relationship that could exist between a village and its school. There were imaginative examples of community use of small schools: one had opened a shop, another a community-managed nursery classroom, and another, bucking national trends, a post office.

Appendix 2

Report Of A Scoping Study On The Contribution Of Engineering And Planning To Education Strategies

November 2001

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20031221015752/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/AboutDFID/Education/Publications/Scoping/School%20Size.htm>

2.6 SCHOOL SIZE

Positions about notions of "optimum" school size tend to be taken from one of the following two perspectives:

An "optimum" size to achieve lowest per capita costs

An "optimum" size to achieve the best learning outcomes

Unfortunately, what is ideal from one perspective is not ideal from the other and compromises may be necessary to arrive at a notion of an "optimum" size of school for any particular circumstance.

In addition, sometimes, real policy choices will be constrained by the demographics involved. This is best illustrated with reference to a small "Island" situation - though the "Island" could just as easily be a discreet community in, say, an isolated area. If the community concerned requires, say, a secondary school, once a decision is taken to provide this, there may be little or no further choice. The number of students within the catchment who want to attend will determine the size of the school. It will only be when numbers reach a certain critical point, that a policy decision may be required as to whether it is appropriate to open a second school.

Furthermore, notions of optimum size need to be traded off against considerations of convenience and access. In respect of primary schools, for example, attempts are often made to ensure that pupils will have no further to walk than, say, one kilometre or one-and-a-half kilometres. This may be a national policy.

2.6.1 Low per capita cost arguments

Considerations associated with lowest per capita costs, tend to favour the provision of larger schools. Large schools introduce economies of scale. The provision of specialist facilities such as workshops, laboratories, information communications technology suites, and so on, is very costly. With more students, overall unit costs are reduced. In larger schools there will be more opportunities for maximising usage of general teaching classrooms through timetabling. There will be similar economies of scale in respect of the provision of school administration. All things being equal, other important unit costs will be reduced, too, the larger the school, such as: land preparation costs and construction costs. Other day-to-day costs, such as cooling or heating or lighting (if applicable) or the provision of school meals programmes will be cheaper on a per-capita basis, the larger the school.

2.6.2 Educational Arguments

When it comes to educational considerations, there are only a few, but nonetheless extremely important, factors that might create advocacy for the desirability of a larger school.

To avoid a multigrade teaching situation, for example, numbers would need to be sufficiently large in all grades, to allow one teacher per class according to whatever are the desired norms of teacher/pupil ratio.

Crudely put, therefore, the minimum optimum enrolment for primary schools is:

the desired teacher/pupil ratio X the number of Year Grades

This assumes, of course, equal numbers of students in each grade, and no dropout. The reality of many developing country schools is that by far the largest number of pupils will be in Year 1, with substantial attrition thereafter.

In secondary schools, where students typically make curriculum choices, numbers need to be sufficiently large to make the provision of a wide range of subjects and associated choices viable: again, usually, on the basis of achieving classes sufficiently large to achieve the desired teacher/pupil ratio.

A total enrolment of 400 students is usually thought to be sufficient to allow a secondary school to provide an adequate curriculum.

Once a minimum viable size has been achieved, where the above considerations are met, almost all other educational arguments favour trying to keep schools smaller, rather than making them larger.

In general, research evidence - though prominently examining a developed country context, it should be stressed - points to a correlation between increasing size and:

Declining student achievement

Higher rates of absenteeism

Higher rates of dropout

Increased problems of discipline, disorder and violence

The reasons behind these findings are mainly to do with the fact that it is easier to create a sense of community/family, the smaller the school. When, for example, teachers or headteachers know the names of all students in the school, students at risk are less likely to fall through the "net" of anonymity and are much more likely to be supported on all fronts. Educational, social, and behavioural problems are likely to be picked up and dealt with more quickly.

Moreover, as McGinn and Borden (1995) point out:

Where population is dispersed, as in rural areas, construction of large schools means each building is further apart. The greater distance between schools requires students to travel farther. This reduces enrolment and increases dropout, especially among the poor, and girls.

2.6.3 Objective Data and Procedures

Manifestly, any decisions about whether to establish or rationalise schools should be made on the bases of objective data and sound and appropriate procedures.

Appendix 3

Context of the Isle of Wight in Numbers

Children and Young People on the Island

- 18,181 Children and Young people in education on the Island, including in Early Years
- 1646 In Early Years
- 8537 in Primary
- 6308 in Secondary
- 1290 in All-through
- 307 in Special
- 93 in a Pupil Referral Unit
- 1635 (6%) with an Education Health Care Plan
- 2488 (15%) at SEN support
- 650 (4%) are Electively Home Educated
- 4101 (24.8%) are eligible for Free School Meals
- 4229 (25.6%) are eligible for a Pupil Premium grant
- 795 (4.8%) have English as an additional language
- 86 (0.5%) are Service children
- 944 (5.7% are Children with a social worker
- 146 (0.9%) are Children Looked After
- 723 (4.4%) are designated as Children in Need under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989
- 221 (1.3%) are on the Child Protection register

The School System

37 Primary Schools

6 Secondary schools (4 with Sixth Forms)

1 All-through school

1 Primary Special

1 Secondary Special

1 Pupil Referral Unit

1 FE College (with some Higher Education provision up to Level 6)

2 Independent Schools

2 Independent Non-Maintained Special schools

Schools' governance

4 Catholic Schools

11 Church of England

2 shared denomination

7 academies

6 federations of schools

Evidence base

- Two virtual meetings with the Director of Children's Services
- Isle of Wight Economic Profile 2019 (Version 3. 8 November 2019)
- Children, their world, their education, Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review Ed Prof. Robin Alexander Routledge 2010
- Report Of A Scoping Study On The Contribution Of Engineering And Planning To Education Strategies (Department for International Development DFID) November 2001
- Isle of Wight Draft Education Strategy July 2024
- Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Corporate Functions on School Place Planning 18 July 2024
- Headteachers and Chair of Governor representations to Isle of Wight Council 2022 & 2024
- IOW Primary School Place Planning Areas
- Draft Island School Place Planning - Final
- Opening and closing maintained schools: Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers, DFE January 2023
- Streamed webcasts of the July 2024 full council, policy scrutiny and Children's Services Scrutiny panels.
- Analysis of Ofsted school inspection outcomes (Watchsted August 2024)
- Papers from Schools Forum, January 2023, March 2024
- School Place Planning Presentation February 2023
- Presentation: Schools and Education Attainment Support Panel 26 June 2024
- Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Self-Evaluation, June 2024 (DRAFT)
- IoW Council Presentation 17 May 2024: Elective Home Education (EHE) and Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS)
- Articles and comments on the Isle of White County Press Website