

## Welcome to the June 2019 Newsletter



*Englefield Primary School*

### An MP's view on small schools

I started my education at the primary school in my village, which at the time had just 11 pupils. The school still exists, somewhat larger, with new classrooms and better facilities, but still rooted and grounded in the local community. There is much to be said for giving children the chance to be educated in their locality. It makes sense on every level, from reducing transport time and cost to building a strong sense of community. West Berkshire is well served by rural primary schools and over my time as MP I have visited many of them and seen first-hand how children thrive in these settings. I fully support the Government's aim to create a fairer funding formula for all schools – the previous 'postcode lottery' made no sense. However, I am aware that some small rural primary schools are being disadvantaged in certain ways by the new system. The school I attended for example does not qualify for additional funding as it is deemed to be not sufficiently far away from neighbouring schools, despite being small and rural and local and requiring the same level of funding as similar schools which are in a more remote situation. I have represented the views of local headteachers to the DoE and arranged for a group of them to meet with the Minister to discuss this.

Another important aspect of early years education lies with nursery schools which, again, provide a vital local resource to parents and children. I have two maintained nursery schools in my constituency and can vouch for the extraordinary and far-reaching work they do. Unlike normal nurseries, these schools have a statutory requirement to

deliver many more areas of service and to focus particularly on vulnerable children and their families. Having benefited from the introduction of the Early Years National funding formula, these schools now feel under threat because that funding is coming to an end although it has now been extended till the end of the summer term 2020. Last July I signed a joint letter with members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools and other MPs with maintained nurseries in their constituencies calling on the Government to make good on its recognition that these schools should be funded on the same basis as all other schools – and, given their particular focus on the most disadvantaged children, that they should also receive pupil premium at the schools rate, including pupil premium plus for looked after children. The Minister has told me that this is under consideration in the next Spending Review. It may be of little comfort right now but for the moment this is a waiting game. Maintained nursery schools are the jewel in the crown of social mobility making a proven difference to the life chances of all the children they work with; I will continue to work with all the other colleagues on the APPG to ensure that they not only survive but prosper.

**The Rt Hon Richard Benyon**  
**Member of Parliament for Newbury**



## Hillesley CofE Primary School

Hillesley Church of England Primary School opened in 1875 at the centre of the village; it has a long and happy relationship with the nearby Parish Church of St Giles.

Although it is a church school, it is open to children of all faiths with priority given to those who live in the parish. It is co-educational for pupils aged between four and eleven years and can accommodate 56 pupils. In June 2006, the Diocese bought and renovated the former Hillesley Baptist Chapel close to the school, which now provides valuable additional space and facilities for the school. There are opportunities for the community to hire the Old Chapel Hall when it is not in use.

NASS received the following note from a long-standing member.

*"I am still a governor at Hillesley; it is 40 years since I joined NASS, when we were having a big fight to save it. Despite everything we continue with 34 pupils and waiting to confirm a rise in September. We had a good Ofsted last summer and now expect a SIAMS very soon.*

*The school reaches out to our community whenever possible. They participated in a Xmas tree Festival at the church in December and also sang for HRH Prince Charles when he visited in December - he is patron of "the Pub's the Hub" I believe and local TV featured us all.*

*Also the school children made me an enormous card for my 80th Birthday on 27th December and the headteacher came to the pub on 30th with an enormous bouquet, given a completely surprise party, which had been secretly arranged by groups of villagers. A December to remember."*

**Margaret Plummer**

## Royal visit to Hillesley



Photo by Matt Bigwood/The Wotton Times

On Friday 14th December His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales visited Hillesley. He was welcomed by the children from Hillesley Primary School who sang songs from their Christmas production 'A Midwife Crisis'. Henry and Lucy presented the Prince with a Christmas card that all the children had signed and spoke to them about school and our allotment.

He then went into the Fleece Inn to meet other villagers and community groups including our Head Teacher, Jayne Pedley and Chair of FOHS Rachel Preece. The children were very excited to play such an important role in the Prince's visit and to appear on the news and in photographs on social media around the country. It was a very memorable and special day for Hillesley.

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## Providing a 'Treasure-Trove' Curriculum

### Getting to the heart of our curriculum offer



Bury CE Primary is situated in a stunning learning environment, with uninterrupted views (except the occasional cow) of the South Downs. Our location became key to us as we embarked on building a curriculum of our own, linked explicitly to the Downs, where relevant.

A key part of this is our outside learning that takes place each week. Early on we made the decision to move away from Forest Schools and renamed our sessions 'Bury Rangers'. This was done because our sessions are not Forest School sessions. They are always explicitly linked to the curriculum. All children spend a minimum of

one afternoon per week learning in and about our environment. An example: whilst learning about Anglo-Saxons, the children used their time in the environment to learn about the natural dyes which were created from the local flora and then set about creating their own. Whilst learning about music the children used the natural sounds of the woodland to create musical scores.



By having such a focus on utilising our environment it has opened up further opportunities for us as a school. In early 2018, I took a call out of the blue from someone who was tasked with engaging children with the Broads, as part of their work they wanted to engage with children from outside of Suffolk and asked me whether we would be keen to be part of a pilot exchange with another small school. I thought this was a great opportunity to compare and contrast geography of our local areas; looking at our chalk downland with its rare heathland and comparing this to the flat of the broads.

*The children from Somerleyton sitting on top of the hill.*



Along with Bury CE Primary, Somerleyton Primary was selected to be the first pair of schools as a National Park exchange visit. Our oldest children spent three days up in the Broads learning first-hand about the geography of the area before welcoming the children from Somerleyton back to us two weeks later and teaching them all about the geography and habitats of the South Downs.

We had recently been learning about the rare heaths around us as part of our John Muir Award and the children were able to share this learning with the visiting children from Somerleyton.

We took the children on our annual school walk across the Downs with the children from Suffolk marvelling at the 'mountains' we were climbing!

We have an excellent team at Bury, all of whom have a love of the outdoors. They are also wholly committed to providing the best opportunities for our children and those from other schools who come to visit. When visiting the Broads, three of my team took care of everything whilst we camped at a scout camp close to Somerleyton.



We were joined on this adventure by a member of our South Downs National Park team, Jonathan Dean, who was effusive of praise for my staff. Jonathan and the SDNP have been hugely supportive to us since my appointment at the school and not only agreed to join the team in Suffolk, getting stuck in with tent building, cooking and cleaning, he also very kindly helped lead aspects with Somerleyton on their visit back to us – meaning that the children were gaining his expertise as they learnt about the local area.

The opportunity to work with local experts, children learning how to care for the species on their doorstep and sharing their work at exhibitions has engaged the wider community in the process. Parents were very supportive of our drive to utilise the environment around us and to teach the children how important it is to gain a knowledge for it now, before it is too late. The exchange visit is just one example of what Ofsted described as a 'treasure-trove of exciting learning opportunities for pupils'. The whole experience was only possible due to the flexibility of our small staff and their willingness to give up their time to make this all happen. You could argue that having such a small staff (we only have three classes), would make opportunities like this difficult to achieve. However, I believe it is having a small team with everyone pulling together and creating close-knit bonds that makes small schools able to offer something that is very much harder to achieve in a larger school. In a short period of time we have steadfastly held on to the belief that we can not only provide a broad and balanced curriculum, but one that offers opportunities far beyond that of the national curriculum. Our small size has allowed us to do just that. I am not naïve enough to think that our curriculum is better than anybody else's, but I do know that what we are building (because it will never be complete), is working for our children and our wider community. Most importantly, as the families, community and Ofsted have seen; a small school can provide a broad and balanced curriculum that is 'a treasure-trove of learning opportunities'.

**Thomas Moore, Headteacher, Bury CE Primary School**



## Clapham Primary School to remain open after fight by parents

One of our member schools, Clapham Primary School, successfully fought the threat of closure. Their approach certainly reflected our founder, Molly Stiles' philosophy in dealing with this threat 'I can give you the ammunition but you have to do the fighting' and Clapham community certainly did this.

Article below and photo taken from The [Lancaster Guardian](#)

*More than 200 written submissions were sent to the council in response to the proposed closure of the small primary school.*

*The issues raised by local people echoed the deep-seated anxieties within rural communities at the loss of vital infrastructure, such as primary schools and GP surgeries.*

*At the meeting of the North Yorkshire County Council Executive in Northallerton today, Tuesday April 30, it was agreed to stop the closure process and allow the school governors to implement the recovery plan which was developed jointly with the Community Action Group.*

*The councillors expressed their satisfaction with the reasonable and measured response from the community.*

*Iain Crossley, Community Action Group chair, parent Rob Willett and Rev John Davies presented the case with the support of Coun David Ireton.*

*Mr Crossley said: "We are delighted that for the first time councillors have taken the option to stop a closure and keep Clapham Primary School open.*

*"We look forward to working with the governors to continue to develop the school for the benefit of local children.*

*"Already parents have expressed their confidence in the school and this can only continue to develop."*

*Mr Willett said: "Clapham Primary School provides an excellent education in a rural setting for our daughter.*

*"We do not feel the size of the classes is in any way detrimental to her schooling, and indeed the mixing of different age groups is beneficial as it teaches her social interactions with both older and younger pupils."*

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## Higher rates of Dyslexia identified in UK population



Professor Margaret Snowling's research on Dyslexia has identified a reason why more children in Britain are identified as having this. She explained that the English language does not look as it sounds. She looked at children who were learning to read in English compared to Spanish and Czech. The study found that children learning to read in English were slower. The results from the Enhancing Literary Development in European Languages study were striking in that "in England we teach children to read when they are rising five and some twelve months later in the Czech republic and Spain"

She said that Dyslexia was harder to detect in countries with languages which were more consistent in the way that the letters and sounds related. The English language has much

more inconsistencies, for example road and broad should be pronounced in a similar way as should Reading and reading. This makes it harder for children with the learning difficulty.

*Professor Margaret Snowling is President of St. John's College, Oxford.*

*Her research focuses on children's language and learning. She is specifically interested in the nature and causes of children's reading difficulties and how best to ameliorate them.*

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## Forthcoming Conference

NASS has been working with other organisations in planning a conference for small schools

We are aware of the implications of the cost of supply cover, so after consulting a number of headteachers, it was decided to hold it on August 30th 2019 so that it would not impact on the start of the school year. However, we thought it would be close enough to be counted as an in-service day.

### Programme

10.00	Registration and refreshments
10.10	<b>Welcome and introduction</b> <i>Neil Short, Chair of the National Association of Small Schools and <a href="#">Prof Tanya Ovenden-Hope, SIG Convenor</a></i>
10.30	<b>The impact of the new Ofsted framework on small schools</b> <i>Professor Daniel Muijs, Head of Research, Ofsted</i>
11.25	<b>Parallel workshops:</b>  Small school effectiveness – challenges and successes, led by Prof Tanya Ovenden-Hope  Creating a Small Schools Manifesto, led by Neil Short
12.40	Lunch
13.30	<b>Small schools' big issues in England and Europe: Cautionary tales and strategic moves</b> <i>Dr Linda Hargreaves, University of Cambridge</i>
14.25	<b>Parallel workshops:</b>  Small school effectiveness – challenges and successes  Creating a Small Schools Manifesto
15.10	Refreshments break
15.20	<b>Plenary Panel – A Small Schools Manifesto</b> <i>Rev Simon Cade (Director of Diocese Education, Cornwall), Professor Carl Bagley (Queens University, Belfast), Dr Cath Gristy (University of Plymouth), Dr Ian Luke (Plymouth Marjon University)</i>
15.55	Completion of evaluation forms
16.00	End of conference

For more information see attached flyer.

## The problem facing a rural school as part of an Multi -Academy Trust.

NASS recently received a message saying a small village school with 118 pupils had just been informed by their academy trust that they are proposing to merge the school with a neighbouring school from September - and the village school will close.

The school was listed on the DfE Rural primary schools designation but on joining the academy trust, it was removed from the list. We have found that DfE has published new advice for all types of academy trusts in October 2018.

The community is challenging the proposed closure and NASS awaits the outcome.

**If you have any contributions for our newsletter please email us on [info@smallschools.org.uk](mailto:info@smallschools.org.uk) or write to us at:**

National Association of Small Schools  
'Quarrenden' - Upper Red Cross Road,  
Goring-on-Thames, Oxfordshire RG8 9BD  
Tel: 0845 2235029.

# SMALL SCHOOLS, BIG ISSUE?

## EXPLORING THE FUTURE FOR SMALL SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Friday 30 August 2019  
10am-4pm

The Old Cathedral School  
Truro, Cornwall, TR1 2FQ

### DELEGATE FEES

BERA student member	£25.00
BERA member	£30.00
Student	£35.00
Non-member	£50.00

Lunch and refreshments are provided.

Small schools have been championed for the value they bring to their typically rural communities. The future of small schools in England is in question due to policy changes and austerity for public services funding (the National Funding Formula not offering the significant increases in funding needed by small schools). Some Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) tried to set a minimum pupil number for schools to remain viable and run at an 'acceptable cost'.

There is no nationally agreed definition of what constitutes a small school, with categories ranging from fewer than 210 pupils on roll to fewer than 101. Research on small schools has also been limited since 2000, with a need evident for more large scale, peer reviewed and funded investigations. This conference will explore the future for small schools and attempt to establish a manifesto to influence thinking about the difference small schools make to education in England.



**BURSARIES ARE AVAILABLE. FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER:**

**[WWW.BERA.AC.UK/EVENTS](http://WWW.BERA.AC.UK/EVENTS)**

