

RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

SOEID-FUNDED PROJECTS

MANAGING CHANGE IN SMALL SCOTTISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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The last decade has been one of multiple innovation for Scottish primary schools. This has included implementing 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines (5-14); School Development Planning (SDP); Devolved School Management (DSM) and Staff Development and Appraisal (SDA) recently relaunched as Staff Development & Review. All of these initiatives made significant demands on headteachers, as managers and administrators. But how headteachers in small schools have coped with the changes, given their substantial teaching commitment, was the subject of this major SOEID funded research project. The research was undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) from February 1996 to January 1998. For the purposes of this research, a small school was defined as one with fewer than 121 pupils and usually a teaching headteacher. In 1996, when the research began, there were 863 small primary schools in Scotland: 38% of all Scottish primary schools were small resulting in a not insignificant issue for the effective management of primary schools. Research findings are based upon a questionnaire sent to all headteachers of small primary schools and 18 case-studies which explored perceptions of effectiveness with headteachers, teachers and School Board members.

Unsurprisingly, small schools are predominantly a rural phenomenon: 89% of the total are located in rural or island areas. However, a small proportion (11%) are to be found in more urban locations—a fact which is often overlooked in previous research on small schools. Another significant group consists of headteachers of one-teacher schools: 10% of all small schools in Scotland are one-teacher schools, where the head often undertakes everything from unblocking drains to teaching all the children in one composite class from age 5 to 12.

Overall the researchers detected no fundamental opposition to change but concern about the lack of time in which to achieve it. Of the four initiatives, heads were furthest ahead with the full implementation of School Development Planning, although a very small proportion (1 %) had not implemented this at all. All schools in the sample had at least partially implemented 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines (90%) and a minority of headteachers (10%) claimed to have fully implemented them. Almost half (49%) of headteachers said they had fully implemented Devolved School Management, and 18% had partially implemented it. A quarter of all reported the full implementation of Staff Development and Appraisal.

In order to manage change headteachers reported using a range of management activities to implement each of the four initiatives, drawing on available support and expertise, both internally within their schools and externally from education

bodies, professional networks and parents. Interestingly the most popular activity overall is to discuss implementation informally with other headteachers. Networking of various kinds is very highly valued and may provide a means of overcoming the feeling of isolation prevalent amongst some headteachers. Overall, heads of small schools appear to have developed a unique style of management based upon a realistic assessment of context, tasks and available resources. They are pragmatic, able to prioritise, operate with focused plans, utilise their networks and most importantly, lead from within their teams using their professional teaching experience upon to which they have grafted specific management skills.

The researchers conclude by recommending a number of specific measures which would support the continuing development of a small school management style. These should be addressed at school, education authority and national levels and include ensuring that representatives of small school headteachers are on all national development groups, providing induction training for newly appointed heads, tailoring future initiatives and training to meet the particular needs of heads in small schools, encouraging 'clusters' and networking and providing adequate levels of clerical support to all teaching headteachers.

COST OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION PROVISION

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In September 1997, The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department Educational Research Unit commissioned a study of the cost of pre-school education in Scotland. A detailed exploration of eleven pre-school establishments, drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors within both rural and urban areas, was undertaken to identify the range and variety of factors which affect the financial costs of provision across different establishments and sectors. A number of factors impinge on this study. It should be placed in the context of Government's increased interest in the pre-school sector, the effects of the recently abandoned voucher scheme, the wide range of providers and the fact that costs may be treated differently by various providers. In some private nurseries and education authorities fairly sophisticated accounting systems are in place. These may be absent from, for example, a voluntary sector playgroup.

The research aimed to establish firm and comprehensive information on the current costs of pre-school educational provision for children in Scotland, in particular the determination of the principal 'cost drivers'. Data were collected primarily through a post survey of a sample of 20 per cent of education authorities and 40 per cent of private and voluntary establishments. The sample was drawn from The Scottish Office database of providers registered as eligible for Government grant for pre-school education, but did not include individual registered childminders or the one self-governing school. This provided information which enabled both intra- and inter-sector comparisons to be made.

The study identifies the most significant cost driver—in this case staff costs—giving some indication as to ways in which the pattern of costs might change under a new funding regime. Overall, it appears that centres in the private