

What Can A 'Small' Church School Offer Your Child?

Historically, small schools have been a key feature of the education system in the United Kingdom. Often right at the heart of rural village life, small schools create experiences for pupils far greater than their size, or outside appearance would suggest. They offer their pupils equal, if not better, educational opportunity than the more 'traditionally' sized school with individual year group classes - often of 30 or more pupils. A small **church** school offers still more, with the Christian ethos integral to respecting individuality and ensuring that every child has the chance to grow and shine as active learners and responsible, caring members of their communities.

Parents who have moved their children from larger to smaller schools are often amazed at the difference and, over the years, we have had many comments about the positive and happy childhood experiences our pupils enjoy. It has also been noted that our children appear more confident when moving to senior school due to the mixed age relationships they have developed whilst at Norley.

Of course, we don't expect you simply to take our word about the advantages of small schools; many research studies have found that schools of less than 100 pupils often provide exceptionally high educational standards together with huge benefits in terms of social skills and behaviour. Here are just a few quotes from the many research findings:

- Small schools "are more likely to have high standards of pupil behaviour, high attainment and achievement as well as a broad and varied curriculum." - DfES reported statistics.
- In 2003, OFSTED compared 73% of small schools being judged as highly effective with 67% as the average for primary schools.
- A report in the 'Educational Review' reported that "there were relatively more innovative examples of specialist teaching within smaller schools" mainly helped by greater staff flexibility including the use of part timers and, possibly, the closer relationship developed with smaller pupil groups.
- OFSTED point out in 'Small Schools: How well are they doing'? "the proportion of pupils achieving levels 2 and 4 at the end of key stages 1 and 2 respectively, are significantly higher in small schools compared to all other schools".
- In assessing the capability of smaller schools to provide for the national curriculum, the same report states: "Small schools are able to cope with the demands of teaching the full National Curriculum" and "they are able to teach the full range of knowledge, skills and understanding required by every subject in the National Curriculum.'
- In summary the report states: "There is much from the first cycle of inspections to encourage work in small schools. Higher unit costs notwithstanding, 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".

All in all, small schools tend to get a ringing endorsement from any objective research; however, it is well known that there are common misconceptions held about smaller schools. The following table presents some of the traditional statements about small schools and the reality against each statement:

Ten things traditionally said about small schools	The Reality
Mixed age groups are a disadvantage	<p>SATs results show better outcomes from smaller schools overall and, comparing like with like, small schools do as well as any. Small and very small schools appear in OFSTED's top 100 more than could be expected on purely statistical grounds. Further information can be seen here:</p> <p>http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/library/mixedage/</p>
Mixed ability groups are a disadvantage	<p>Not proven either in SATs results or inspection outcomes. OFSTED identifies particularly successful teaching employed in smaller schools.</p>
Not enough subject specialist teachers	<p>OFSTED declares small schools among the best for specialist teaching, not least due to their use of parent / community expertise.</p> <p>We have the additional benefit of a strong Federation which has added to our pool of teaching expertise.</p>
Small schools have limited space	<p>There is no evidence that building size ever improved a young child's reading, writing, mathematics or other work outcomes.</p> <p>In any case, both schools within the Federation have extensive and attractive grounds and additional teaching spaces – much greater than may be found in some larger schools.</p>
Limited resources affect quality	<p>Limited resources are always an issue but the issue is not confined to small schools. SATs results and inspection outcomes argue quality performance and we believe these support our view that we deliver a very high quality of education.</p>

Ten things traditionally said about small schools	The Reality
Not enough children of the same age	Obviously, the number of children in a particular cohort may vary. However, In any primary school, social activity is small group oriented. Children gain a great deal from their adult and mixed-age interactions as well as thrive on the overall humanity of scale found in small and very small schools.
Not enough children of any age	<p>Again, pupil numbers can vary year-on-year, but both schools within the Federation operate on a minimum of three classes supported by at least one teaching assistant.</p> <p>In addition, our Federation and network links with schools within the locality provide our children with many opportunities to meet and mix with a wide range of other children.</p>
Able children lack intellectual challenge	<p>Test and inspection results of small schools reflect this end of the spectrum well. Able children work well with others of different ages and abilities and learn to lead by example. Adult stimulus is often very evident in small schools.</p> <p>In addition, we constantly seek to identify children who are 'gifted and talented' and ensure that their intellectual needs are met through a range of stretching and challenging activities.</p>
Small schools are good for children with special needs	This is generally well-recognised. Parents sometimes choose a smaller setting because of the flexibility within small schools that enables a more individualised approach to be taken with children with special needs.
Closeness to home helps children to be happy, secure and well behaved, with very good attitudes to work and to each other. They are eager and enthusiastic and able to take responsibility.	<p>A consistent thread of small school inspection reports and accounts informed by school visits affirms the high quality of children's personal development. Both schools within the Federation received an '<i>Outstanding</i>' grade for personal development and wellbeing.</p> <p>Within our Federation, we enjoy very positive and supportive home-school links which we believe contributes significantly to our pupils' well-being and our success.</p>