

County Council 18 October 2019

Item 10(a) - Notice of Motion from Dr O'Kelly

Small Schools Federations

Amendment by Mr Simmons

The current financial climate for small schools continues to be challenging. The government strategy for small schools is to aim, **where possible**, to keep them open and includes exploring federation before considering closure. This Council itself recognises the need for small schools to consider federation in its School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-22. Closure of **any** a small school **has the potential to have an adverse effect on** ~~can be devastating for~~ children, families and the rural communities **in which** they are **located** ~~in~~ and the School Effectiveness Strategy recognises **closure** this as only a final option.

The process of federation relies on school governors, who are volunteers, often with full time jobs and other commitments, and who do not always have the time and skill sets needed, to explore and develop the federation options fully themselves. Although the School Effectiveness Strategy outlines that the Council will support and challenge governing bodies who have considered the options, there is no formal process for assisting governing bodies in assessing the options open to them and developing possible federation agreements in the first place.

This Council believes that:

- (a) Small schools are **often located in** at the heart of ~~our smaller~~ **their** communities.
- (b) The federation process is not always straightforward ~~and without significant input~~ **and it can be beneficial to have support** from this Council from the earliest stages of the process, **if** governing bodies **agree that this would be helpful** ~~cannot easily explore federation on their own~~.
- (c) A ~~more~~ proactive approach to federation is more likely to keep our small schools open and viable and at the heart of ~~our~~ **their** rural communities.
- (d) Consulting on the possible closure of a school should only be considered **alongside** ~~where all other options have been exhausted~~.

This Council resolves to ask the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills to:

- (1) Share knowledge about federation and how it can be achieved with all small schools including sharing best practice guidance from other local authorities;
- (2) **Continue the provision of** ~~Provide~~ officer support to governing bodies to consider federation including providing support to find possible partners and facilitate discussions;
- (3) **Continue to p**rovide practical tools and officer support during the partnership phase in helping to make all the transitional arrangements; and

- (4) Not to consult with the public as to the future of any school in West Sussex without having ~~gone~~ **thoroughly considered the benefits of going** through such a process with schools.