

# Celebrating the unique joy of small schools

October 2022



All too often, we focus on the challenges and problems faced by small schools. We at EPHA recognise them, and try to help small school headteachers cope with those difficulties.

HOWEVER, we also think it is vital to acknowledge and celebrate the amazing achievements of small schools, the advantages of working in them, and the huge benefits they bring to their staff, pupils, families and local communities.

Here are some of the comments that we have received from staff, governors, parents and pupils, that show how much small schools are appreciated.

# Small schools - a world of possibilities

We held a 'Vision Day' and decided on our vision for our school. We all work together everyday to help everyone in our school, and it feels like a big family!



# Headteacher comments

I feel more valued here than I have in bigger organisations.

For me, despite the workload and the budget challenges, I love knowing every child. I also love the opportunity to keep teaching, and feel that this gives me a better connection with what is going on in the classrooms and with the children and staff.

Small schools are often in lovely locations - mine is- I never cease to appreciate the view and where the school is situated.

Best things about a small school - from my experience - you know everyone! A community where everyone contributes and pulls together, no one gets left out!

When I ask staff to try a new initiative, I try it alongside them, so they respond more positively. Everyone is an invaluable part of the team - and we all muck in. No-one ever gets to stick to their job description!

I also love that every day is different, I never get to take anything off my to-do list because something more immediate always comes up, and I am kept on my toes learning new skills, from how to fix a toilet cistern to how to raise an invoice. Its never boring!

# Staff comments



You get to know children and their families well and this allows us to build a better home-school relationship with each of them.

Less staff means closer relationships are built between them and it's easier to work as a team.

It is lovely to be able to see the children as they move through the school learning and growing.

How the children of all year groups are able to come together in their learning in whole school activities and play.

When I have a query about how to support a child, I can talk to different members of staff knowing they are all familiar with the children and therefore more able to offer appropriate advice and support. There is a family atmosphere and community feeling that I haven't experienced in larger schools I have worked in.

Obviously there are challenges to working in a small school but I feel these are outweighed by the rewards.

# The Community<sup>2</sup>

**We chose for our children to attend a small school because it is at the heart of our local community.**

**'In small schools, we can make a difference. We have supported the Chelmsford Food Bank for 3 years now. We ran a marathon for the Food Bank last year and raised over a £1000. This year we have had a non-uniform day and in exchange everyone had to bring something to the food bank collection point in our school. The charity is close to our hearts and we now support all the food banks in their areas. Every little helps.'**

*'We only wanted a small school and would not have chosen a larger one. Small schools are wonderful communities where everyone knows each other, people come from all different backgrounds and are there to create a community feel in good times and bad.'*

We love our community outside our school and we love to help our neighbours. We secretly planted bulbs around our village. We write letters to our neighbours regularly. We deliver gifts to our neighbours. We sent three 18 ton lorries of clothes and blankets to the Ukraine. We have a food bank and help families in our community at the end of every term.



# Pupil



You know everyone, it's a community.

There are smaller classes so you get asked to take part more in class.

It was way harder to make friends in my old, bigger school, everyone is happier here.

I've learned more here as the teachers have more time.

I like the fact it is a small school because you get to know everyone and everyone knows you.

# Comments

**You get to know all of the adults really well. They look after us.**

**You can make friends with people in different year groups so it's easier to make friends.**

**There are less fights and arguments, smaller schools = friendlier people.**

**You feel safer.**

**It's easy to get out in a fire alarm because you are closer to an exit!**



# Parent

The teaching staff know the children and their families individually. Small schools create a warm, safe and inspiring environment for children to learn in, where Individual children's needs can be met within small class sizes, something a large school is unlikely to provide.

Children are visible and treated as individuals, they don't get lost in a bigger group.

Children are well supported and cared for, nice to see friendships through the year groups and feels like an extended family.

. My youngest son especially, would not be the boy he is today if it wasn't for a small village school. He has grown from a shy, anxious, selective mute at nursery into a confident, self assured boy.

Personally I attended a small school as a child and enjoyed it, so I wanted the same for my children. I like that everyone knows each other and helps each other out all the time.

The class sizes and year groups are small allowing an extra special teaching experience as well as pupils in all year groups knowing one another well and looking out for one another.

I have chosen this school because I love the fact that every child knows every child's name, and every teacher knows every child's name! The school really has a lovely family feel and as a working parent I feel I have a supportive network from other parents, teachers, breakfast and after school clubs.



# Feedback

Children can become "bigger fish in a small pond" which helps their confidence, celebrates working to help others and equips them for the next stage of secondary school.

Excellent confidence building opportunities for children are provided from a young age, such as speaking regularly in assemblies. This is particularly valuable for quieter children who would probably be too daunted to do this in a bigger setting.

Responses
Small Friendly Welcoming
Staff are friendly and approachable.
Small school suits my daughters needs Good values to adhere to. Teachers approachable
It's small size. The approachable staff. Communication
Always there to help and support especially Mrs Cooper and Mrs Manning
It's small, some good teachers. nice big field (my sons words)
The children being there for each other. The teachers
Great staff It's small Passionate teachers
*The size *Approachable and professional staff *Mrs Cooper!
Classroom staff and support staff Size
you have SOME committed staff
1. Mrs Manning and Miss Woolgar, who have looked after all 3 of my children during their time at Mistley norman, they know my son very well which helps him when he is a little anxious or upset at school. 2. Being a small school. 3. staff being approachable.

# Curriculum



We have a creative curriculum and a pet horse and we love that our school is small and friendly.



In our small schools we share our expertise. By bringing small groups of children together from lots of small schools, we can enhance their learning and make the curriculum more exciting for them, working more closely with their preferred learning style.

It is like being part of an extended family. Teaching a small class means endless opportunities to teach 'in the moment'- we can develop the children's interests quickly as we build meaningful relationships with them much faster than larger classes. I think small schools give children the perfect start to school life.

My day is slower but has richer opportunities for learning, I can sit in the book corner and share a story, support a child to gather the loose parts they need to build their model at their pace, and spend time in the mud kitchen developing language. Without the worry of having to spend time with 30+ children.

“ The responses that we have had from staff, parents and pupils make it clear that small schools add something extra and unique to the lives and educational experience of their pupils. Every child is well known; can't “hide in the shadows” and has a chance to build relationships with the whole school community, providing an enriching experience for each individual pupil and their families.

None of the success of a small school happens without you. Over almost twenty years as EPHA Professional Officer, working with the amazing primary headteachers in Essex, my admiration for the heads of small schools continues to grow.

Somehow, you meet every challenge thrown at you, from non-stop demands set by the DfE, Ofsted, and the Local Authority, global challenges such as the Covid pandemic and even the impact of war and political turmoil at home and across the globe.

It seems to me that small school headteachers have characteristics shared by many heads, but that you all have in abundance: compassion, resourcefulness, creativity, flexibility, stamina, multi-skills and talents.

Despite the challenges you somehow manage to retain a wicked sense of humour, which gets you through the darkest moments. Thank you - you make your small school an incredible place. ”

Pam Langmead, EPHA Professional Officer

# Thank You

