

Rural Development Sub-Committee

Inquiry into Reorganisation of Schools in Rural Wales Response from The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Cymru

Introduction.

1. The members of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Cymru comprise over 90% of the leadership teams of the secondary schools of Wales. Thus this response will largely focus on issues of particular interest to the secondary school sector.
2. We welcome the opportunity to submit views to the Committee on the difficult and, at times, emotive issue of the education provision and school reorganisation in rural Wales and we would be pleased to respond to questions that may arise from this and other responses to the committee's Call for Evidence.
3. There is a tendency for debates and policy guidance to assume that schools are homogeneous institutions, whereas, in reality, there are frequently substantial differences and this particularly applies to primary versus secondary schools.
4. The common factor for both sectors and, as the WLGA has noted in its submission, a driving force for reorganisation is that of funding.
5. ASCL Cymru supports the view expressed by the WLGA that the paramount aim must be the provision a high standard of education to all students, whether in rural or urban contexts and whether in primary or secondary school.
6. The challenge for all stakeholders is finding ways forward that do not involve benefiting one group at the expense of another.

The implications for small and rural secondary schools.

7. For secondary schools, the issues of concern arise from sparsity and size rather than rurality per se. In the latter situation, one can have two schools which are both situated in a rural context but which are also relatively close to each other geographically. This is the case for some primary schools.

The problem for secondary schools is less one of the consequences of being in a rural context and more a matter of being geographically isolated and frequently being relatively small in terms of the students on roll.

For example, secondary schools in Gwynedd, Powys or Ceredigion may be more than 10 miles away from the nearest secondary school or

Further Education (FE) College and many have fewer than 500 students on roll.

8. As has been noted by the WLGA in its response, the student population for secondary schools across Wales will fall significantly in the next decade and increase the number of secondary schools that can be defined as small.
9. As research by the ASCL Financial Consultant, on behalf of 40 LEAs in England (source: www.f40.org.uk) has demonstrated, small schools and isolated schools are inherently more expensive. A copy of the outcomes of this research has been provided in the appendix to this response.
10. This combination of sparsity and small size of school has considerable implications for implementing the ambitious 14-19 Learning Pathways curriculum, which is intended to broaden the choice of domains and courses for all learners.
11. The capital costs of facilities, as well as the costs of specialist staff for what may be small classes means that individual schools are unlikely to be able to offer the full range of courses without entering into collaborative arrangements with other schools and FE college(s).
12. The consequence of being in an area of sparsity is that the 14-19 curriculum has significant financial costs for a school. For example, one school in Powys reports that, to provide a group of 10 students with their preferred course of study, it has had to arrange transport for the students to travel to a college for a half day each week. The college is 12 miles away from the school. The additional funding provided by the 14-19 Learning Network does not cover the full costs of the transport and the college fees for the tuition and there are no savings for the school as the smaller classes remaining within the school still have to be taught.
13. In most if not all of the rural areas of Wales, the secondary school plays a significant part in the life of the community. Its facilities are an important resource for the community and the school is frequently called upon to assist parents and students in gaining access to other agencies to assist in resolving matters of concern.
14. This community dimension of schooling is important and valued by staff and the community. It fosters the development, within the young adults, an awareness of the importance that community can have on their lives as well as the skills associated with working collaboratively for the benefit of others.
15. The dilemma for LEAs is that funds are limited. As parents and community groups press to avoid the closure of any school, the consequence is that other sectors have fewer funds available to meet the educational needs of their students. This does not just apply within rural contexts. Thus in RCT, the retention of small primary schools

generates significant additional costs whilst the secondary schools struggle with the financial implications of the revised curriculum.

16. Thus in any consultation on the possible reorganisation of schools in rural areas, it is essential that the factors taken into account include the impact on other sectors within education. Sadly but unavoidable perhaps within the budget constraints, the retention of small and rural primary schools may be at the expense of the educational experiences of students in the small and isolated secondary school.
17. The considerable uncertainty that exists around reorganisation, with frequent changes of policy in the face of protests, as evidenced by the Headteachers in the following section, has its impact upon staff morale and potentially recruitment. There is already a difficulty in many areas in recruiting suitable candidates for Headship vacancies. Potential candidates for Headship are less likely to apply for a post in a school with an uncertain future.

Members Experiences of School Reorganisation Processes.

A Powys Headteacher of a Secondary School in a Rural setting.

The school forum is consistently promulgating the view that Powys has politically decided to keep open very small schools. This is a local decision but it means that education in Powys costs more than LEAs with more economic sized schools. As such it should be spending substantially more than IBA in order to ensure fair resources to all pupils. Since it is actually spending less than IBA, an unfair share of resources is going to a number of small uneconomic schools.

A group of primary and secondary heads forcefully expressed a similar view to Estyn. Estyn also discovered that Powys had not properly applied its old policy on closure of small schools, keeping schools open in the North at the expense of the south. As a result of protests, a new and rigorous policy for primary organisation had been consulted upon and accepted.

It was the fact that this policy had been accepted with a timescale for implementation that caused the Estyn report to conclude that Powys had good prospects for improvement in the relevant key Question.

Regarding small schools, in our catchment area there are 10 feeder schools with a total cohort size of between 80 and 120 on average. One school, with 40 pupils, has almost no pupils from its own catchment area, thus affecting the viability of other schools. Another school, with 45 pupils, is 1 mile from a school of 90 that has capacity for 150 pupils. Thus the issue is really one of size rather than being in a rural area.

A consultation on a process for secondary reorganisation has been carried out but the final policy has not been published. Despite this and worryingly for the schools, the LEA, with WAG's support it appears, seems intent on proceeding with a plan to create a new Powys Institute of Education (essentially it will be the old Coleg Powys by another name) to receive all funding and commission all post 16 work.

Estyn is blameless in this respect but in others it fails to understand rural schools. Inspection teams place excessive reliance on Free School Meal statistics and, in my experience, do not understand the problems of sparsity and rural poverty. A family with an income just above FSM entitlement,

because of the need to run 2 cars so both can work and there is no real public transport, can actually have less disposable income than those entitled to free school meals.

The pupil led level of funding for 14-19 is insufficient for small rural high schools to deliver Learning Pathways on their own but, with travelling distances averaging 15 miles, the school is too remote for meaningful collaboration. Even when we try, numbers are an issue. In conjunction with another high school 40 miles away and with Coleg Powys 20 miles away, we have combined timetables on one day a week in year 10 and a different day in year 11 to offer a range of 5 vocational courses.

In reality, only 2 courses started in September 2007 and those could only cater for 12 students in each course which meant that some pupils were unable to follow a course of their choice. The other planned courses had to be cancelled because only 7 or 8 wanted them.

A Headteacher of a Secondary School in Pembrokeshire

This UA has considerable experience in closing uneconomic primary schools. Reorganisation must be on the agenda for the Learning Pathways curriculum: It cannot be done by minimal funding for LEAs and institutions.

Basically, the Learning Pathways curriculum in rural areas cannot be delivered without significant investment in premises and equipment and a considerable increase in revenue. Uneconomic primary schools can be retained but at the expense of the students in Key Stages 4 and 5.

I feel that the key principles are these:

- Small primary schools are viable only in exceptional circumstances. If parents/community want a small rural school to continue, they must be prepared to pay the additional costs.
- Transport costs are already horrendous in Pembs: approx £700,000 p.a. The additional burden of transport costs for Learning Pathways and collaboration between institutions must be fully funded.
- Reorganisation has its own costs, but the principle should be that if institutions reorganize they should be properly funded to do meet future demands. Pembs. has closed a number of primary schools, and the savings have always remained in the Education pot.

A Headteacher of a secondary school in Gwynedd.

some observations on the situation here in Gwynedd, and Ynys Môn. No primary school had been closed here in Gwynedd for over 30 years, and there are a number of very small schools here - less than 25. The council decided on a whole county reorganisation plan, closing a number of the very smaller schools, but, more controversially, merging a large number of the other schools into federations. Half of Gwynedd's primary schools would be affected in some way.

After publishing the original plan, 3 consultation meetings were held in the 14 different catchment areas - a vast undertaking for the officers involved.

However, the final plan was more or less the same as the original.

This plan was very very controversial, especially in the year preceding the local elections and it was claimed that the officers and senior councillors had 'not listened'.

One of the main arguments used was that closing these small village schools would weaken the Welsh language in these communities

Last week, the new council decided to throw out the original plan and start afresh - but 2 of the very smallest schools are being closed (with a total of 2 pupils in September 2008)

Ynys Môn, on the other hand, decided on a piecemeal reorganisation plan, starting with one area at a time. In the Holyhead/Bodedern area there was a proposal to close 2 of the smallest schools. The new council have now postponed the closing of these 2 schools, and have asked the officers to implement a whole-county plan, such as in Gwynedd!

Appendix.

A REPORT BY LINDSEY WHARMBY FOR THE f40 GROUP

An initial look at the area cost adjustment and the additional costs inherent in small schools

1. The argument for an area cost adjustment is that costs are higher in some areas of the country. The index is based on salary costs in different local authorities and each local authority is given an overall level on the index. There is a problem with assigning an overall level to an authority authorities are either too large or too small
2. Hampshire gets an adjustment but the authority stretches from the edge of Surrey down to the border with Bournemouth. Bournemouth does not get an area adjustment but you could argue that there is no significant difference between costs in Bournemouth and in the abutting areas of Hampshire. This would, of course, be solved if Hampshire used its area cost adjustment in those areas of Hampshire that are more expensive – but I do not know of a local authority formula that has an area cost within it – please let know if there is one.
3. Then there are the London authorities; these are all very small (geographically) and patterns of travel to work are often across boundaries. There are very big cliff edges at the boundaries – so, for example, Tower Hamlets gets the maximum uplift of 28% but the neighbouring Newham gets only 10% uplift. The same argument about the boundary applies – made more complicated by the relative size of the uplifts and the patterns of travel in London. However we will leave the intricacies within London on one side, and look at the effects across the different regions of the whole country.
4. It is salary costs that are different across the country – utilities and resources are the same everywhere but anything that includes salary costs will vary. The teaching and support staff, site and grounds staff, catering, and cleaning are obvious examples, but any contract that includes a salary is involved. (for example, curriculum support or staff training).
5. The major costs that are independent of salaries are energy, water, educational supplies and exam fees and together these account for about 10% of secondary school budgets leaving 90% that include salaries as at least a part of the cost. So, if an authority gets a 28% uplift for area costs, that assumes that salary costs are about

30% higher (to give a total uplift to the budget of about 28%). Across the whole

London region the uplift is probably of the order of 1214%, suggesting that salary

costs would be 1316% higher across the region.

6. First of all, look at the distribution of area cost uplifts across the regions. In the

table I have used the colours of the rainbow (in the correct order!) to show the varying levels of uplift across the country.

- Red authorities do not get any uplift,
- Pale orange authorities get less than 3%,
- Yellow authorities get up to 6%
- Green authorities up to 9%
- Blue authorities 12%
- Pale violet authorities get up to 15%
- Deep violet authorities get the maximum 28%.

Area Cost Adjustment by Region

North East	North West	West Midlands	Yorkshire/Humber	East Midlands	South West	East of England	South East	London
Newcastle	Lancashire	Staffordshire	Hull	Derbyshire	Devon	Norfolk	East Sussex	Barking
North Tyneside	Blackburn	Stoke-on-Trent	East Riding	City of Derby	Roche	Suffolk	Brighton	Bexley
South Tyneside	Blackpool	Herefordshire	NE Lincolnshire	Notts	Bournemouth	Southend	Hert	Bromley
Sunderland	Cumbria	Worcestershire	North Lincolnshire	City of Nottingham	Devon	Medway	West Sussex	Croydon
Hartlepool	Bury	Shropshire	North Yorkshire	Lincolnshire	City of Plymouth	Essex	Hampshire	Enfield
Middlesbrough	Manchester	Telford	York	Leicestershire	Torbay	Cambridgeshire	Portsmouth	Haringey
Redcar	Oldham	Birmingham	Bradford	Leicester City	Cornwall	Peterborough	Southampton	Havering
Stockton on Tees	Chester	Coventry	Calderdale	Rutland	Somerset	Bedfordshire	Isle of Wight	Newham
Outham	Rochdale	Dudley	Wiltshire	Northamptonshire	Gloucestershire	Luton	Oxfordshire	Redbridge
Carlisle	Salford	Sandwell	Leeds		Wiltshire	Thurrock	Buckinghamshire	Waltham Forest
Northumbria	Stockport	Solihull	Wakefield		Swindon	Hertfordshire	North Herts	Barnet
	Tameside	Walsall			BNVE		West Berkshire	Brent
	Trafford	Wolverhampton			City of Bristol		Reading	Barking
	Wigan	Warwickshire			North Somerset		Wokingham	Harrow
	Cheshire				South Glouce		Bracknell Forest	Hillingdon
	Hatton						Windsor	Hounslow
							Slough	Kingston
							Surrey	Merton
								Richmond
								Sutton
								Camden
								Greenwich
								Haringey
								Hammersmith
								Islington
								Harington
								Lambeth
								Leisham
								Solihull

7. We can see easily that the north east gets no uplift, through to inner London where the uplift is 28% (although the uplift across the whole region of London will be significantly less than this – somewhere in the region of 1214%).

8. Then I looked at salary costs for teachers across the regions. The first set of data refers to small 11-16 schools. The schools all have between 400 and 700 on roll and the data is taken from the 2006-07 financial returns on the CFR database.

9. I looked at five pieces of data:

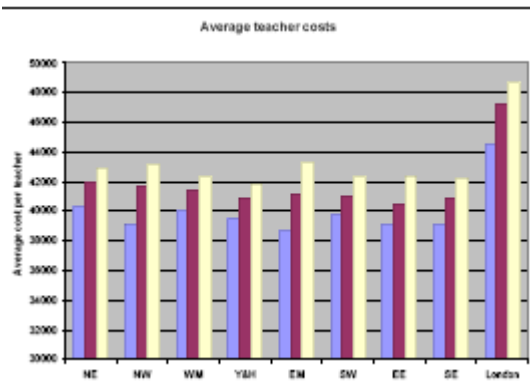
- The average teacher cost
- The total spent on teaching staff as an amount per teacher including supply costs
- The total amount spent on teaching, support and administrative staff
- The pupil teacher ratios and
- The teacher education support staff ratios.

10. Obviously the most direct cost is the average teacher cost in the schools.

However in areas where teacher recruitment is difficult, you also need to look at the supply and agency teacher costs. If recruitment is difficult, it is likely that the schools will use supply, particularly agency supply, to cover teacher vacancies. The pupil teacher ratio will tell us if any particular region spends more on having more teachers, irrespective of the average teacher cost and the ratio of education support staff to teachers is an indicator of the relative importance of these staff costs and the total staff costs include all teaching, education support and administrative staff.

Average Teacher costs

11. In the chart below the interquartile range for average teacher costs is shown for each region. The interquartile range covers 50% of schools in the group but excludes schools that are at the extreme of the range.

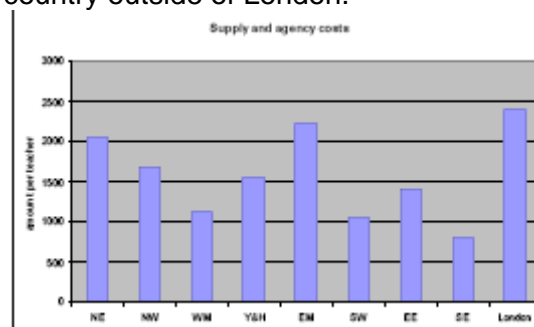


12. Please note that these are average teacher costs not salaries. About 22% of the cost is in employer contributions to pension and NI. Whilst it is clear in this data that the average costs in the London region are significantly higher, it is not possible to distinguish between all the other regions. The average teacher costs in the London region are approximately 15% higher than the rest of the country (representing a 13% increase in total budget).

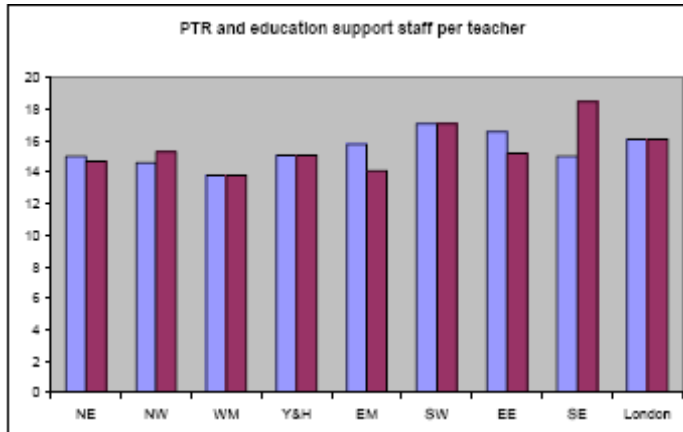
13. The interquartile ranges for all authorities are quite large. If we look at the East Midlands, the region with the largest interquartile range, all the other regions (except London) are within its interquartile range. So this data does not demonstrate that the costs are necessarily higher in the North East than in the South East – but it does show that there are not, for this sample of schools, significant differences between the regions – yet the area cost adjustment in the regions does vary significantly.

14. The amount spent per teacher on supply and agency supply also varies across the regions. The second chart shows only the median value for each region and shows the amount spent on supply and agency staff as an amount per teacher. Again it is obvious that London shows a different pattern from the other regions with a very low spend on supply but a very large spend on agency staff – probably reflecting the very different issues around teacher recruitment in London.

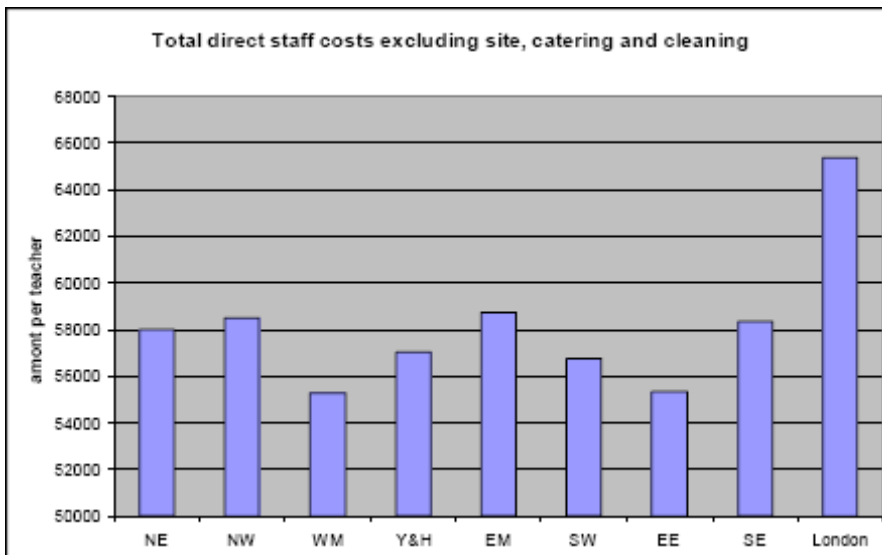
15. If we look at the combination of supply and agency costs and the average teacher costs across the regions, the picture in London is clearly more costly. The difference between the total spend on teaching between London and the average in the other regions is around 16.5% or 14% of the total budget – very close to the average uplift in the London region. Differences between the other regions do not, in this data, reflect the different area cost uplifts in the different regions. What this data suggests is that we need a much clearer understanding of the differences, if any, on staff costs across the country outside of London.



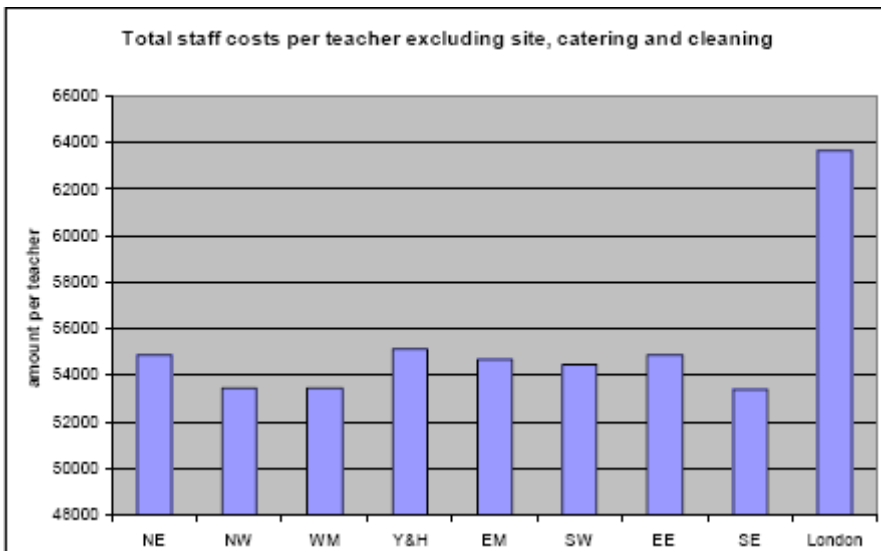
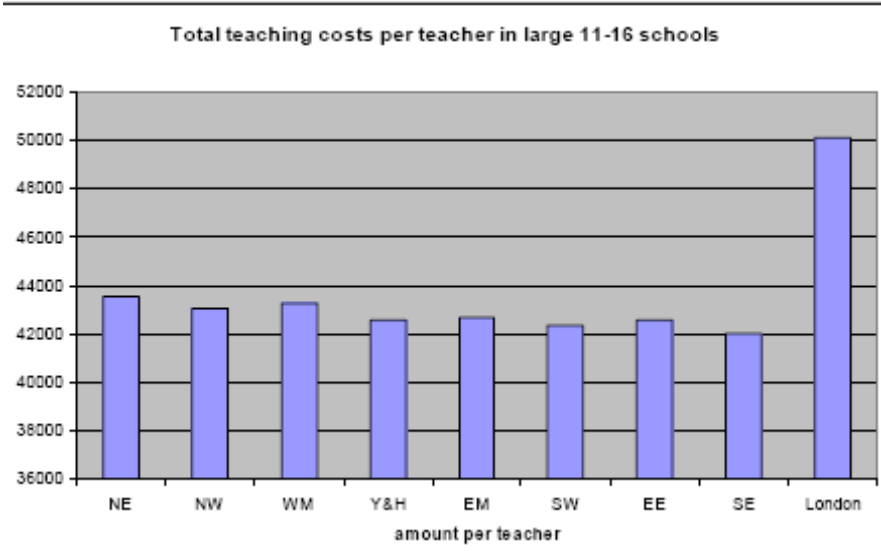
16. The pupil teacher ratios across the regions and the ratio of education support staff to teachers show no significant differences between the regions. Similar schools are using roughly the same number of teachers and having similar education support staff available. The only unusual region is the South East where there seems to be a more generous allocation of education support staff.



17. Looking at the total staff costs – again as an amount per teacher this total includes teaching staff, all supply costs and all educational and administrative staff costs. It does not include the direct costs of site, cleaning or catering staff or any indirect staff costs in other contracts.



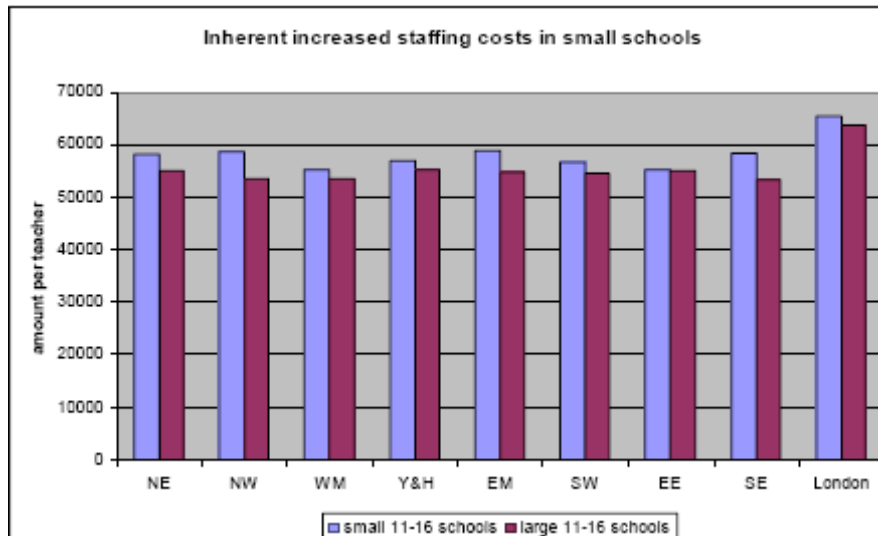
18. In this data, the total costs in London are about 14% above the rest of the country. This data is from about thirty schools in each region, all 11-16 schools with between 400 and 700 pupils on roll. I repeated the exercise using large 11-16 schools – with between 1000-1500 pupils on roll. The charts below show the total teaching costs per teacher and then the total staffing costs per teacher in each region.



19. Again the total costs in London are higher than the rest of the country (about 17% for both teacher costs and staff costs including education support and administrative staff). There is also the same high expenditure on agency staff. Again it would appear that total costs in the North East exceed those in the South East – but the interquartile ranges are similar to the small school data, so all we can conclude is that this data does not demonstrate a difference in staffing costs in proportion to the differences in area costs.

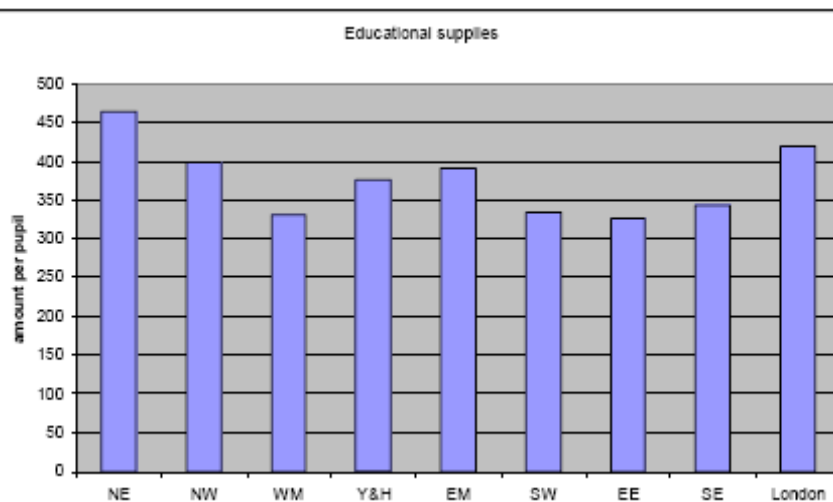
20. What is also interesting is that in most (but not all) regions the inherent increased salary costs in small schools are apparent. In the chart below all regions show that smaller schools have higher per teacher salary costs. This of course is not unexpected. We are looking at the average costs across all the leadership and teachers.

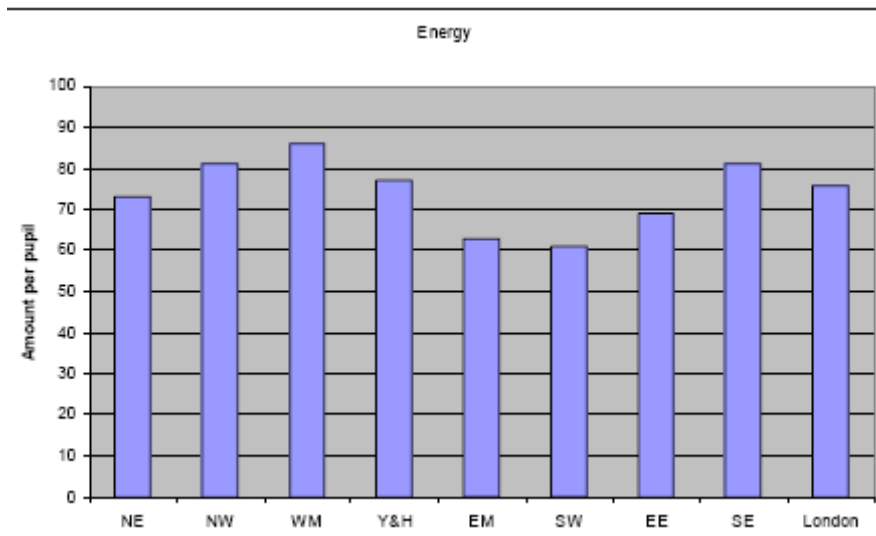
21. Headteachers and other senior leaders are paid more in larger schools – but not in direct proportion to the size of the school. A headteacher has some load that is directly proportional to the number of pupils – but all schools have the same number of initiatives and pieces of paper from the local authority and the DCSF to deal with.



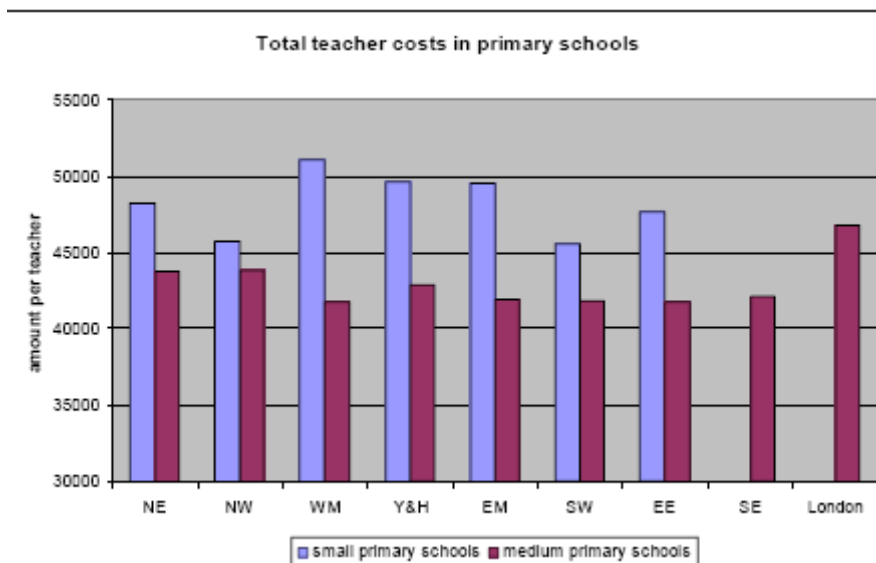
22. So a large part of the roles of senior leaders are independent of the size of the school. In a smaller school this proportionally higher cost of the senior leadership is spread over a smaller total staff so the average is higher. In the same way, all schools require a basic minimum of support and administration but this is shared over a smaller number of teachers. This gives a very neat way of looking at the inherent costs of small schools, particularly primary schools where the effect is even more noticeable. The chart shows the difference in total staff costs (teacher + support + administration) in each region. The differences may not look very big but the average across all regions is over £2,800 – which is about £100,000 total additional cost for the smaller schools.

23. Finally, it is worth looking at the amount spent per pupil in the different regions on the two main items, not including salaries – that is on educational resources and energy. The charts below show the median spend on educational resources and energy in the small 11-16 schools in each region. These two items together take about 10% of the budget and are independent of salary costs. The interesting point is that London is very similar to the other regions. The differences between regions are not large and there is considerable overlap when the interquartile ranges are considered. The difference in median energy costs between the extremes, South West and the West Midlands, is about £10,000 at school level.





24. I did a similar exercise with primary schools. Again there are two groups of schools both groups are primary schools with infant and junior. The first group has between 20 and 100 pupils and the second group has between 300 and 350 on roll. The first chart shows the total teacher costs (so including all supply costs) across the regions for the two groups of schools.

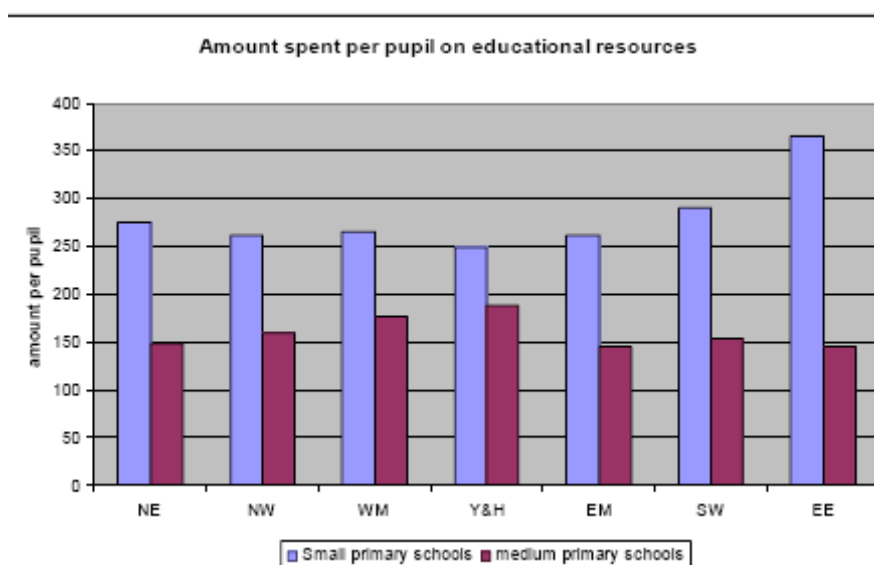


25. If we look at the medium primary schools (maroon) then we see, as with the secondary schools, that there is a variation across the regions but again, London is about 12% higher than the other regions. The same pattern is there with the small schools (blue) with London and the South East missing – because they have fewer than three schools in this group (London doesn't have any of these small infant + junior schools).

26. As we would expect, the differences between small and medium primary schools are clear and consistent across the regions. On average the difference appears to be about 13% so it costs an additional 13% per teacher in a small primary school or about £5,500 per teacher. On the same basis the other staff costs will be proportionately higher as the basic minimum of site, support and administration has to be shared over fewer teachers.

27. What is also interesting is that there is a marked difference in the costs per pupil of educational resources between small and medium primary schools. The chart below shows this and again the outcome is not surprising. All schools need a basic number of computers and other technology (expensive) and a basic number of reference materials, and these are almost independent of the number of pupils in the

school or, at least, not proportional to the number of pupils.



28. So the increased costs in running a small primary school are not only in the staffing costs but will be there in all the other costs including energy (it costs the same to heat a classroom whether there are 15 or 25 pupils in it).

29. Small schools are expensive so there have to be very good educational reasons for having these schools. In rural areas, where the alternative is to bus young children for long periods or distances, there is an obvious need for small schools the arguments in favour of small schools in urban areas are less clear.

30. In terms of funding from central government to local authorities, there needs to be a distinction between areas where small schools are a necessity and areas where small schools are a choice. The sparsity argument needs to be based on the time/distance for children to travel to school because this is the distinction between small rural schools and small urban schools. The additional costs in providing small schools are easy to see and quantify. On teaching staff alone, in the North West, a small school on average spends 8% more per teacher or about 5% more in their total budget.

31. This data is only a very small sample, but the consistent pattern shown in variation in staffing costs between the regions for small and large 11-16 schools and small and medium infant + junior schools at least demonstrates that there needs to be a much more detailed analysis of the real costs of running schools across the country – which leads us straight to an activity led formula.

