

# Sponsored Research

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

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\* Since the preparation of this report the Scottish Executive has been renamed the Scottish Government, but references to the old name are retained in the body of the report.

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Scotland has a large number of small schools, defined in the 1996 study of the management of change in small Scottish primary schools (Wilson & McPake, 1998) as those with a school roll of less than 120 pupils and with a *teaching headteacher*. These schools form the majority of primary schools in ten local authorities. This current research is a follow-up study to that research into small schools conducted ten years ago. It focuses on headteachers of very small schools, ie those with a pupil roll of 50 or less, that in 2006 formed approximately 20% of the total number of primary schools in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2006). It was conducted by a researcher from the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Centre, Glasgow University Faculty of Education and funded by the Scottish Executive Education Department under its sponsored research programme.

### **Aims of the research**

The overarching aim of the research is to revisit a sample of the small schools which participated in a large-scale study of small schools undertaken by SCRE between 1996 and 1998 to ascertain the leadership styles developed by headteachers of small schools in the intervening ten years.

### **Methods**

The research was conducted in two phases: first qualitative evidence was collected from interviews and observations undertaken in nine case study primary schools located in three different local authorities in Scotland. The second phase involved a survey of a sample of 100 small schools with pupil rolls of 50 or less, made up of ten in each of ten local authorities in which small schools formed more than 50% of the total number of primary schools. In addition, published literature pertaining to leadership and management of small schools was located by searching three electronic databases and relevant inspection reports by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) were identified.

### **Summary of key findings**

#### **Issues concerning small schools**

- There is still very little published research on small schools in Scotland. The original research commissioned by the Scottish Office Education Department (Wilson & McPake, 1998) remains an exception.
- A small body of research on small schools has emerged from European countries that have a high proportion of small schools, and also from

Australia.

- Most report that small schools in their respective countries are experiencing very similar problems caused by demographic changes, financial pressures, curricular innovation and the duality of the role of teaching headteacher.
- There has been no recent systematic review of the possible savings from closure of small schools. Amalgamations and federations of small schools are also under researched.
- In general terms over the past ten years the debate about headship has shifted from management to leadership.
- By 2006, both England and Scotland had developed standards for school headteachers, which it is expected that all new appointees will demonstrate.
- The duality of the role of teaching headteacher is the predominant feature of headship in small schools in both Scotland and abroad, but this is often not reflected in discussion about standards of headship.
- There are few examples of development opportunities having been tailored to meet the specific needs of small school headteachers. Programmes at the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in England and also in Queensland are exceptions.
- Researchers conceptualise leadership in a number of ways. Some have identified two models (Lumby, 2004), others eight (Bush & Glover, 2003). Both Clarke & Wildy (2004) and Wilson & McPake (1998) stressed the contingent leadership style adopted by small school headteachers to cope with the contextual complexity in which they operate.
- Leadership in small schools is developed within a context of having to lead multiple innovations with few other staff and resources, while at the same time effectively teaching multi-age and -stage classes.

#### **A picture of small schools**

- During the past ten years the number of primary schools in Scotland has fallen by 5% from 2313 to 2194, of which 431 (20%) had school rolls of less than 50 pupils.
- Three-quarters of these very small schools (326) were concentrated in ten local authorities, with the highest number of small schools being located in Highland Council.
- Forty-seven per cent of headteachers (31) of schools with 50 pupils or less included in this research perceived their school rolls to be stable, with 17% (11) reporting that it was increasing. However, over a third (23) reported rolls to be decreasing and perceived the threat of closure was never far away.
- The number of teachers, including headteachers, employed in the sample schools ranged from 1 to 4.5 FTE. Thirty-six per cent of schools (24) had two teachers, the largest single number of schools, but almost a third (21) of schools were led by a single-teacher headteacher supported only by a part-time teacher.

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- Almost all the sample headteachers reported that their schools were located in rural and/or island locations: 74% (49) in rural areas and 24% (16) on islands.
- There is some evidence to associate geographical isolation with feeling stressed. In 1996, just over half (372) of the sample headteachers reported that their schools were geographically isolated, compared to 39% (26) in 2006. Almost a quarter (16) of sample headteachers in 2006 also associated geographical isolation with feeling stressed. A comparable figure for 1996 is not available.
- Accommodation in small schools appears to have improved in the past ten years: only 14% (9) of sample headteachers reported that their school had poor or inadequate accommodation compared to 17% in 1996, but 86% (57) indicated that the facilities for games /PE were inadequate compared to 53% in 1996.
- A small increase in the availability of e-mail within schools can be seen with 39% (26) of headteachers reporting that they had access to it compared to 37% in 1996. (Caution must be exercised with this finding, as it does not correspond with the 89% of headteachers who report using e-mail for managerial support. See Section 6.2.)

### **The characteristics of small school headteachers**

- The overwhelming majority of surveyed small school headteachers are female (92% in 2006, 81% in 1996).
- The surveyed group of small school headteachers was older than their counterparts had been in 1996. The majority (52%) were over 50 years of age, 44% aged between 35 – 50 and only 5% under 35.
- Most (74%) of the surveyed headteachers had attended a Scottish college of education, 27% a Scottish university and 20% other institutions.
- The percentage of surveyed small school headteachers holding a College Diploma in Education had declined from 77% in 1996 to 52% in 2006. There had been a corresponding rise in the number of graduates from a third in 1996 to 45% in 2006.
- For the majority (72% of surveyed headteachers) their current post was their first headship compared to 82% in 1996.
- Most of the surveyed headteachers had been in post for ten years or less, but around third (23) were still in the school they had been headteacher of in 1996.
- 46% of surveyed small school headteachers originally came from a rural area and 32% had been educated in a small school. This is a slight increase over 1996 when 41% came from rural areas and 31% had attended a small school.
- The majority of surveyed headteachers (69% in 2006, 71% in 1996) in the sample lived outwith their school's catchment area.
- Over three-quarters of surveyed small school headteachers (76% in 2006, 79% in 1996) had undertaken some management training, but for most this

was after taking up their appointment.

- A small percentage of surveyed headteachers (12%, 8) had studied for the Scottish Qualification for Headship, 9% (6) had completed it and 3% (2) were near completion.
- Surveyed small school headteachers appeared to be more settled than their counterparts had been in 1996: 52% were content to remain in post (47% in 1996) and only 9% (6) wanted to apply for the headship of a larger school compared to 21% in 1996.

#### **Leading and managing small schools**

- Almost all of the sample headteachers were *teaching headteachers* of small schools. Only 6% (4) led federated or clustered schools, compared to none in 1996.
- The essential nature of being a *teaching headteacher* of a small school is that in effect it entails undertaking two jobs: teaching and leading a school. The predominant feeling expressed by small school headteachers was one of *juggling*, with lack of time identified as a significant obstacle.
- Despite the changes that have taken place during the past ten years, small school headteachers in 2006 expressed more positive views towards change than their counterparts had in 1996: 52% (96% in 1996) thought it was a period of rapid curricular change; 64% (92% in 1996) management change, and 20% (40% in 1996) societal change.
- Most sampled headteachers still reported that these changes produced particular pressure for small schools (94% in 1996, 90% in 2006), and 59% indicated that they felt more stressed than they used to do, a slight decrease from the 66% in 1996.
- Sampled headteachers' main complaint in both 1996 and 2006 was with the pace of change: reported by 52% in 1996, 57% in 2006.
- However, more small school headteachers were prepared to consider each change on its merits: 56% in 2006 compared to 35% in 1996.
- A number of sampled headteachers identified personal qualities that they thought helped headteachers lead and manage small schools. These include flexibility, adaptability, ability to organise and prioritise, and a sense of humour.
- Leading by example, consulting and communicating, being a good teacher and knowing the children they teach were all considered to be essential qualities for a small school headteacher.
- The leadership style that emerged from both survey and case study evidence was composed of three elements: a vision for the school based upon learning and teaching; a collegiate approach to leading and managing the school, and the ability to utilise all available resources both within and outwith the school.
- All the sample heads recognised the need to communicate with the community and appreciated the support they received from it. The percentage of small school headteachers consulting parents formally

increased from 67% in 1996 to 89% in 2006 and informally from 80% in 1996 to 89% in 2006.

- Most small school headteachers were skilled networkers and utilised both formal and informal contacts to support themselves and expand the opportunities for pupils and other staff. The most popular method was informal contact with other headteachers.
- Significant challenges to effective leadership of small schools identified by the headteachers included: uncertainty arising during periods of acting headship; a local authority's policies regarding placing children with additional educational needs in small schools; absent or unskilled teaching colleagues; supporting probationer teachers; and isolation from the main stream of educational practices.

**Sources of support and development.**

- In both 1996 and 2006, the most frequently used form of support by headteachers of small schools was informal discussion with other headteachers (96% in both 1996 and 2006).
- A large majority of small school headteachers relied on advice from their local authority (91% in 1996, 80% in 2006). Typically this entailed termly visits from service managers/quality assurance officers to help them with school development plans and to monitor progress.
- Reliance on their own reading and analysis of documentation from the Scottish Executive had declined from 90% of small school headteachers in 1996 to 76% in 2006.
- The percentage of small school headteachers who mentioned taking advice from HMIE increased from 38% in 1996 to 68% in 2006.
- Three types of schools clusters were identified: 91% of small school headteachers in both 1996 and 2006 used informal exchanges with other schools; 50% in 2006 (61% in 1996) developed joint policies and materials; and 32% in 2006 (25% in 1996) engaged in full sharing of resources.
- The percentage of small school headteachers belonging to small school networks remained constant over the 10 years at 47% of respondents.
- Use of e-mail as a support mechanism had increased among small school headteachers from 38% in 1996 to 89% in 2006, despite the fact that only 39% report that their schools are connected to an e-mail network. (There may be confusion here with local authority intra-nets and different forms of email networks and connections.)
- A significant proportion of small schools shared in-service days, however, this had declined from 92% in 1996 to 80% in 2006.
- The percentage of small school headteachers reporting inadequate clerical support declined from 38% in 1996 to 18% in 2006.
- Small school headteachers consulted their staff both formally (82% in 2006, 91% in 1996) and informally (94% in 2006, 89% in 1996), with a slight shift to informal methods of consultation.



- The percentage of small school headteachers consulting School Boards also increased from 42% in 1996 to 61% in 2006.

## **Conclusion**

The key finding from this research is that despite the changes that have occurred during the ten years between 1996 and 2006, the essential elements of the role of headteacher of a small school remain largely the same. Most are still *teaching headteachers* who must undertake the complex dual role of teaching a composite class and leading a whole school, with few other teaching colleagues and little support. Their philosophy, based upon the primacy of learning and teaching, is still evident, as is their reliance on a contingent leadership style. Most still perceive juggling and time, or lack of it, to be the most significant challenges to effective leadership. However, to this has been added uncertainty about the future of small schools due to possible closure, federations of schools and reported shortage of applicants willing to take on the responsibilities of being a teaching headteacher.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

A large number of Scotland's 2194 primary schools are small. Although the average primary school size was 178 pupils in 2005, approximately a third (751 primary schools) had fewer than 100 pupils. Of these, 431 (or 20% of the total number of primary schools) had fewer than 50 pupils (Scottish Executive, 2006: 10). Many of these very small schools are led by a *teaching headteacher*, that previous research on the *Management of Change in Small Scottish Primary Schools* undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education between 1996-98, had discovered adopt a unique style to lead and manage their schools (Wilson & McPake, 1998). This group of very small schools and the headteachers who lead them are the subjects of this current research commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department through its sponsored research programme. It was begun in September 2006 by a researcher from the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Centre, Glasgow University Faculty of Education and is entitled *Leadership in small Scottish primary schools*.

## 1.2 Aims of the research

The overarching aim of the research is to revisit a sample of the small schools which participated in a large-scale study of small schools undertaken by SCRE between 1996 and 1998 (Wilson & McPake, 1998) to ascertain the leadership styles developed by headteachers of small schools in the intervening years. Specifically the research seeks to identify the following:

- Whether there is a particular leadership style evident in small schools.
- How it is shared and developed with other teachers, support staff, parents and pupils.
- Who or what contributes to the development of this style/ethos/values.
- How leadership in small schools might better be supported in terms of policy and practice by local authorities, teacher education institutions and other stakeholders.

## 1.3 Background

The background to the research lies in the fact that Scotland has a large number of small schools (defined in 1996 as those with a school roll of less than 120 pupils and with a *teaching headteacher*, and in 2006 as schools with fewer than 100 pupils). At least a third of all primary schools in Scotland are small and they form the majority of primary schools in ten local authorities (ie Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Eilean Siar, Highland, Orkney, Perth and Kinross, Scottish Borders and Shetland). Despite the existence of so many small schools, there has been a paucity of funded research into the particular problems which small schools face and how their headteachers might be developed and supported. Much of the existing

literature has focused on English rather than Scottish schools and has reflected concerns about possible school closure (eg Galton, 1993; Sigsworth, 1987; Comber *et al*, 1981), although latterly, this has become a policy concern in Scotland. For example, at least two Scottish local authorities (Dumfries & Galloway and Scottish Borders) have now instituted automatic reviews, typically when a small school's roll drops below 25 and/or when the number of early years pupils falls below 10. The scale of the problem was indicated in a written reply to the Scottish Parliament by Peter Peacock, the then Minister of Education in Scotland, who reported that 77 small schools had closed in the years of his party's administration (Anon, 2006). However, the research evidence on the costs and benefits of small schools is inconclusive (see for example, Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Bell, 1988; Comber *et al*, 1981; Coopers and Lybrand, 1996). In addition what is saved on school building and staff salary costs must be balanced against the increased cost of school transport and the threat to community cohesion in rural communities. These communities may already be experiencing a decline in traditional methods of employment in the farming, forestry and hydroelectric industries and the closure of other services, such as post offices, shops and churches, so that schools are often perceived as the only remaining community resource. It is also noteworthy that Scottish Executive guidance for local authorities (Scottish Executive, 2004b) stresses that an educational case must be made for school closures, and more recently the current Executive has refused permission for the proposed closure of two very small schools – a 4-pupil school in Dumfries and Galloway and a 8-pupil school in Stirling <sup>1</sup>.

Major funded research on small schools was undertaken between 1996-98 (Wilson & McPake, 1998) for the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. The research, the first full survey of all 863 small primary schools, explored the ways in which headteachers in small schools were managing four major initiatives: 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines; School Development Planning (SDP); Devolved School Management (DSM); and Staff Development and Appraisal (SDA). Unusually, over 80% of small schools responded. The researchers found that headteachers in small schools had developed a unique style of management in order to cope with being a *teaching headteacher* with few colleagues to whom responsibilities and activities could be delegated.

Since the publication of that research on small schools, the Scottish education system has continued to develop and launch new initiatives, which may create particular pressures for small schools. The implementation of the Teachers' Agreement (Scottish Executive, 2001), the deployment of additional support staff, individual learning plans for pupils and the continuing depth and breadth of the 5-14 curriculum and differentiation must all be managed. Schools must also plan for the implementation of *A Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004a), which aims to address some of the concerns about the complexity and perceived overcrowding of the primary school curriculum.

There are a number of other factors that may influence small schools. A declining birth rate has also brought more schools into the small school category resulting in

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<sup>1</sup> Reported on 29 June 2007 by BBC Scotland <[www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland)>

more pupils, even those who live in urban areas, being taught at some stage in composite classes. The standard for the Scottish Qualification for Headship, which was put out for consultation in 2005 (Scottish Executive, 2005) may be more difficult for candidates in small schools to achieve (Malcolm and Wilson, 2000) because small schools rarely offer the opportunities to demonstrate the full range of management competencies, and initial teacher education in Scottish universities rarely provides sufficient instruction on how to plan for the differentiation required in multiple composite classes.

In 1998, Wilson & McPake found that seventy schools in their sample were single-teacher schools, which arguably can represent the most complex management challenge, viz coping alone with a range of management innovations while at the same time organising a curriculum for the widest age range of pupils. In addition over 400 schools reported that no more than three teachers, including the headteacher, were employed in the school. Many of the sample headteachers perceived that there was little recognition at national level of their particular circumstances or of the support and professional development headteachers in small schools need to help them be effective headteachers. They also wanted induction programmes for all newly appointed small schools headteachers; curriculum development material which reflects variable composite classes; staff development opportunities which take account of the specific needs of headteachers in small schools and 'rust prevention' programmes for the 44% who wish to spend the remainder of their teaching careers in small schools (Wilson & McPake, 1998).

Although this previous research was novel in that it focused exclusively on small schools, it is now out of date: the Scottish Executive's policy emphasis has shifted from managing schools to effective leadership and establishing values and an ethos of excellence (Scottish Executive, 2005). It is also recognised that effective school leadership is associated with school improvement and requires a combination of knowledge, vision and personal skills which underpin the professional action of headteachers. In addition, others besides the headteacher may contribute to the development of school leadership and there is increasing interest in the relationship between schools and their communities. Small schools are often linked to the sustainability of rural communities and the maintenance of the Gaelic language (two other policy interests of the Scottish Executive).

These issues form the background for this current research, which it should be noted is on a much smaller scale than the larger national study undertaken between 1996-98. The following research methods were used to investigate the issues raised.

## **1.4 Methods**

The research employed a mixed methodological approach, which draws on both quantitative and qualitative methods. (See Table 1.1 below). The first phase of the research was based upon qualitative data drawn from interviews and observations undertaken in nine case study primary schools located in three different local authorities in Scotland. The second phase involved a survey of a sample of 100 small

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schools with pupil rolls of 50 or less, ten in each of ten local authorities in which small schools formed more than 50% of the total number of primary schools. In addition, published literature pertaining to leadership and management of small schools was located by searching electronic databases, such as the British Education Index (BEI) and the Australian Education Index (AEI). Wherever possible, copies of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) school inspection reports for the case study schools were located and downloaded. This final report presents the findings from an analysis of all the evidence.

*Table 1:1 Overview of the work programme*

<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
<b>Phase 1: Preparation</b>		
September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact 10 LAs</li> <li>• Start ongoing search for background references</li> <li>• Identify 9 headteachers</li> <li>• Set up page on SCRE centre website</li> </ul>	Acquire consent Identify participants Collect literature
<b>Phase 2: Qualitative data collection</b>		
October/November 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft interview pro forma</li> <li>• Make contact with schools</li> <li>• Draft headteachers' questionnaires</li> <li>• Pilot schools' questionnaires</li> <li>• Visit schools, conduct interviews &amp; observations</li> <li>• Initial analysis of interview data</li> <li>• Draft interim report</li> </ul>	Collection of all qualitative data      Submit interim report
<b>Phase 3: School survey</b>		
November 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree sample of 100 small schools</li> <li>• Send out school questionnaires to headteachers</li> <li>• E-mail follow up to non-respondents</li> </ul>	Collection of all quantitative data
<b>Phase 4: Analysis and Reporting</b>		
December/March 2006/07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of questionnaires</li> <li>• Synthesis of data from Phases 1, 2, 3,</li> <li>• Write report</li> </ul>	Submit draft final report Submit revised final report
30 March 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit draft final report to SEED</li> </ul>	
July 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revise final report</li> </ul>	

### 1.4.1 Phase 1

A search of relevant background literature was undertaken to identify both published and unpublished literature and recent relevant published studies of models of small schools leadership using combinations of three key words: management, leadership and small schools. Contact was made with the ten local authorities in which were located the majority of small schools in Scotland to seek their co-operation and permission to approach case study schools. A description of the project was posted on the SCRE centre website to facilitate communication and dissemination progress to the wider education community.

### 1.4.2 Phase 2

Phase 2 involved observational visits and interviews with nine small school headteachers and other available staff. These included three schools in each of the three local authorities that agreed to co-operate. The interview schedule explored the issues related to leadership style(s), values and school ethos and how headteachers

had been developed and supported.

### 1.4.3 Phase 3

For the third phase, a postal questionnaire was sent to headteachers in a sample of 100 small schools listed in the 2005 School Census data. The case studies were used to develop the questionnaire by amending, as appropriate, the questionnaire used in the 1996/8 study. In 1996, it had been possible to survey all 863 small primary schools, which existed at that time, and achieve an 82% response rate. It emerged that the typical small school had two to three teachers, including a teaching headteacher, and that small schools were concentrated within ten local authorities, in which over 50% of the schools were small. As the focus of the 2006 research was on the *teaching headteacher* and funding was limited, it was decided to draw the sample from those schools with a roll of less than 50 pupils in the ten local authorities with the highest proportion of small schools, thus ensuring a good representation of typical small schools with two to three teachers. The sample included ten schools in each of the following: Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll & Bute, Dumfries & Galloway, Eilean Siar, Highland, Orkney Islands, Perth & Kinross, Scottish Borders and Shetland Islands. By the closing date 68 headteachers had returned completed questionnaires and three schools had closed, giving a response rate of 70%.

### 1.4.4 Phase 4

The final phase of the research entailed an analysis of the questionnaire data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings from both qualitative and quantitative evidence are presented in this final report, in which comparisons are made with the 1996 results, good practice is exemplified and future implications highlighted. Some caution must be adopted when comparing the two studies of small schools: the timescale of each study, the available resources, the samples and response rates vary. (See Appendix A3 for a description of the sampling strategy.) In 1996, it was possible to include all 863 primary schools with fewer than 120 pupils and achieve an 82% response rate. In contrast in 2006, the research focused on the smallest Scottish schools, ie those with one to three teachers in 100 primary schools with fewer than 50 pupils and achieved a 70% response rate.

## 1.5 Characteristics of the case study schools

The nine case study schools were purposefully chosen from the sample of schools with a school roll of 50 pupils or less drawn from the 2005 School Census in order to ensure that they were led by *teaching headteachers*. The smallest school (Case Study 7) had a roll of 9 pupils and the largest (Case Study 9) had 50 pupils. The schools were all housed in 19<sup>th</sup> century school buildings; some had been refurbished recently (eg Case Study 6) but others had what their headteachers considered to be inadequate facilities (ie central heating had been removed or the attached school houses were damp and unusable). Four of the nine were located in remote rural areas according to the Scottish Executive School Census classification and five were in accessible rural areas. The number of teachers in the sample schools ranged from 1 to 2.4 and the hours of available support staff ranged from 9 to 72 hours per week. As support staff are hourly paid workers and often undertake more than one job in small schools (for

example, clerical assistant in the mornings and classroom assistant in the afternoons) the support has been recorded as hours per week.

*Table 1.2: An overview of the nine case study schools*

<b>Case</b>	<b>Council</b>	<b>Roll</b>	<b>No. of teachers</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>No. support staff hrs per week*</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>HT status</b>	<b>Gender HT</b>
1	D	9	1	Accessible rural	23 hrs	PI-7	Cluster non-teaching HT	F
2	D	24	2.3	Accessible rural	26 hrs	PI-7	Teaching HT	F
3	D	29	2.4	Remote rural	39 hrs	PI-7	Teaching HT	F
4	E	40	2.4	Remote rural	17 hrs	PI-7	Teaching HT	F
5	E	40	2.4	Accessible rural	15 hrs	PI-7 + nursery	Acting Teaching HT	M
6	E	30	2.4	Remote rural	9 hrs	PI-7+ nursery	Acting Teaching HT	F
7	G	7	1.3	Accessible rural	25 hrs	PI-7	Acting Teaching HT	F
8	G	36	2.3	Remote rural	20 hrs	PI-7	Acting Teaching HT	F
9	G	50	3	Accessible rural	72 hrs	PI-7+ nursery	Teaching HT	F

\* Some include only clerical support, others schools have included classroom assistants, support for learning and nursery assistants/auxiliaries

## 1.6 Organisation of the report

This final report presents the main findings from all phases of the research. It comprises seven sections, of which this Introduction is the first. Chapter 2 sets the context for the research by reviewing published literature and Chapter 3 provides a picture of provision in small schools which participated in the research. Chapter 4 describes the view of headship held by small school headteachers and Chapter 5 goes on to explore the ways in which they lead and manage their schools. Chapter 6 identifies the development and support available to small school headteachers and Chapter 7 discusses the conclusions and implications of the research. Finally a list of references is provided and copies of the research instruments, including an annotated questionnaire, are appended.



## 2. Small schools – issues and developments

### 2.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the published research evidence on leadership and management in small primary schools. First, it presents the main points to emerge from the literature at the time the original research on small schools was conducted ten years ago, and second, findings from more recent research published between 1999 and 2006 are presented and new issues are identified. As a background for both reports three electronic databases were searched - the British Education Index (BEI), the Australian Education Index (AEI), and Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) - (see Appendix A1) and the main points to emerge are summarised below. It should be noted that there is a growing number of references to small high schools in urban areas in the USA (eg Holland, 2002) which have been intentionally created to address student disaffection and under achievement amongst minority ethnic groups. These have been excluded from the review. It is also evident that a number of European countries (eg Wales, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Finland) have large numbers of small schools, as do New Zealand and Australia, most of which are characterised by the *teaching headteacher*. Interestingly, their schools are experiencing very similar pressures to those in Scotland created by demographic changes, curricular reforms, the need to make financial savings and the duality of the role of teaching headteacher.

### 2.2 Points from the literature

#### A managerial model?

In 1996 much of the existing research on leading and managing small schools had focused on English rather than Scottish schools. It also reflected concerns about possible school closure (see for example, Galton, 1993; Bell and Sigsworth, 1987; Comber *et al*, 1981). In addition, a new managerial discourse was beginning to permeate education and many headteachers were expected to manage devolved school budgets. Thomas (1990) suggested that terms such as ‘performance indicators’, ‘cost-effectiveness’, ‘value-for-money’ and ‘better use of existing resources’ which resonate with market economics were beginning to be used in educational settings. However, the evidence on the costs and benefits of small schools proved to be inconclusive (see for example Bell and Sigsworth, 1997, Bell, 1988, Comber *et al*, 1981 and Coopers and Lybrand, 1996). In general it was found that rural local authorities tend to have a higher unit cost per pupil than predominantly urban ones, but this is not necessary a conclusive argument for closure on financial/economic grounds as the wider recurring costs of transport, boarding and the resultant, often unquantified, loss to the community are difficult to cost in full economic terms, particularly in the long term. For example, Williams and Thorpe (2001) describe the ‘patchwork pattern of closures, amalgamations, clustering and federation’ in two Welsh counties that have resulted from attempts to rationalise provision. Although one county has chosen a federated school model, it seems unlikely that during the initial stages any substantial savings will be made. Some other countries, such as Sweden, appear to accept that part of the price paid for rural community sustainability

will be a higher expenditure per student in sparsely populated areas (Aberg-Bengtsson, 2001). Guidance on possible school closure issued by the Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive, 2004b) explains that local authorities should take account of a 'mix' and 'weight' of factors before making a case for school closure. These should include:

- the educational 'case'
- pupil travel distance and time
- pupil and population projections
- community planning
- rural sustainability and development
- urban communities and regeneration
- financial considerations
- other alternatives, including sharing management, teaching and other resources and facilities
- 'unique' local factors

but the education case will always be key.

Research suggests that there may well be a threshold figure, viz. the number of pupils and teachers per school, below which costs rapidly escalate. For example, Galton (1993) argued that 'schools with rolls of less than seventy pupils showed disproportions in costs per pupil with sharply escalating additional costs in schools with fewer than twenty-five pupils' (p13). Interestingly by 2006, headteachers in two predominantly rural local authorities were reporting that 25 is the number that automatically triggers a review of small schools in their authority.

### **Coping with change**

How do small school headteachers respond to these changing circumstances? In a study of adult basic education, Wilson and McCullagh (1993) found little evidence that educational managers were familiar with the budgeting procedures necessary to operate effective devolved management. Way (1989) rejected models of leadership and management based upon large organisations. She formulated a unique model for small schools based upon teaching headteachers, that is those who teach and manage by developing an intimate style in close collaboration with their colleagues. Linked to this is the notion of the headteacher as an 'instructional leader'. However, as some pointed out (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Webb & Vulliamy, 1995) the introduction of a new curriculum (eg 5-14 Guidelines in Scotland and the National Curriculum in England) could in effect deskill headteachers as they struggled to come to terms with the changes while at the same time providing leadership for colleagues. This could be exacerbated in small schools in which a headteacher would be expected to teach new schemes of work and implement new management procedures, often with little or no clerical support. However, reviews of the effects of devolved school management on small schools proved to be mixed. McGrogan (1995) argued that in Northern Ireland, where one third of all primary schools have fewer than 100 pupils, headteachers of

small schools had been able to use their devolved budgets to employ more staff to ensure that all areas of the curriculum were delivered effectively. Others had increased the number of hours for secretarial staff. A major study in England (Maychell, 1994) pointed out that there were ‘winners and losers’ from schemes of delegation and much depended on the state of the school when budgets were devolved. In Scotland devolved school management was a live issue in the 1996 research. As we shall see, by 2006 the small school headteachers in the sample appeared to accept it and also the language of performance management as integral parts of being a headteacher. Although their budgets are still relatively small, the big difference is that they now have more support from clerical assistants and often from peripatetic finance staff to help them cope with this aspect of running a school.

#### **An appropriate managerial style?**

Developing an appropriate management style in small schools with few staff and no management team was a concern for respondents in the 1996 research (Wilson & McPake, 1998). Kelly(1995) had argued that extensive innovation had led headteachers to adopt a more activist style based upon action and experience. Increasing pressure to act decisively, quickly and in concert had changed traditional expectations which relied on more thoughtful, reflective styles. In particular school leaders were affected by changes in the curriculum, time scales, the degree of accountability, monitoring and evaluation and the general complexity of running a school. Interestingly, as we shall see later, school development planning, monitoring and evaluation on a cyclical basis have all become an integral part of the small school headteacher’s role but it is also the aspect that gives them most concerns because they perceive it to be so time consuming and a possible distraction from their role as teacher.

#### **Duality of the role**

A continuing theme in the literature reviewed in both 1996 and 2006 is the duality of the role of headteacher. Researchers (eg Wallace, 1988; Way, 1989; Galton, 1993) found that both managing and teaching in smaller schools are significantly different from that in larger schools. The duality of the role of teaching headteacher and vertical grouping of pupils are factors with which all small school headteachers must cope. Dunning (1993) summed up this ‘double load’ as ‘the conflict that inevitably arises between the professional concerns of teaching, and the growing demands of management and leadership’ (p83). In 2006, this was still an issue for small school headteachers. With reference to small schools in Queensland, Clarke (2002) argues that ‘the roles of teaching principal are numerous and diverse and likely to conflict with one another unless managed effectively’ (p1). These challenges, he suggests, can be more daunting for young, inexperienced principals, especially when compounded by the fact that many policy makers underestimate the contextual factors and rarely consider small schools as discrete elements in a diverse educational system. He concludes that standards for leadership should be rooted in what heads actually do and acknowledge the significance of context.

This is also a theme taken up by Wilson and Brundrett (2005) who challenge the popular misconception that leading a small school is considerably easier than running a larger one. They argue that the problems inherent in the duality of the role of the

teaching headteacher have been exacerbated by educational reforms, especially local management of schools, and therefore, management and administrative tasks take their toll on the curriculum leadership role of small school headteachers. Teaching vertical groups is demanding and requires fluid groups to be effective. For example, Mulryan-Kyne (2005) found that teachers in two-teacher schools in Ireland used cross-age, peer tutoring and across grade grouping. However, those who are also headteachers will have little time for the reflection and concentrated thought that this requires during key times in the administrative cycle when developing school plans or setting budgets dominate their thinking. The pressures of an HMIE inspection will also be exacerbated in small schools when there may only be two teachers to observe during a four-day inspection. These issues were certainly evident for small school headteachers who participated in the 1996 research and were continuing issues for the sample in 2006.

### **Changing models of leaderships**

One of the main changes evident in the published literature on the role of headteachers is a complete shift in emphasis from management to leadership. Lumby (2004) suggests that there are two main ways of conceptualising leadership: 'transformational' leaders establish direction, aligning and motivating people; whereas 'distributed' leadership is practice stretched over the whole school. Another typology is provided in a review of the literature on school leadership commissioned by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (Bush & Glover, 2003) which suggests that there are eight different models of school leadership. In sum these are:

- Instructional leadership focuses on teachers and learning.
- Transformational leadership is about building a unified common interest between leaders and followers.
- Moral leadership assumes that the values of the leaders is critical.
- Participative leadership assumes that the decision-making processes of the group are central.
- Managerial leadership suggests that the focus of leaders should be on functions, tasks and behaviours.
- Postmodern leadership suggests that situations are open to multiple interpretations.
- Interpersonal leadership relies on effective engagement with others.
- Contingent leadership recognises the diverse nature of school contexts and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to particular situations.

How shared leadership is demonstrated in practice in small schools is rarely reported. As the NCSL (2006) points out, in larger schools the process of self-evaluation and identification of development priorities is undertaken by the senior management team. In contrast in a small school, members of the teaching staff are 'effective members of the senior leadership team' (p13) even if they do not recognise themselves to be such and are not necessarily remunerated for their contribution. Small school headteachers who participated in the NCSL project rejected the concept of 'distributed leadership' which is implicit in notions of 'delegation' and 'responsibility', describing instead

examples of ‘shared leadership’ of ‘doing things together with the head as key promoter’ (p13). In the original study undertaken in 1996, Wilson and McPake (1998) concluded that small school headteachers in Scotland demonstrated contingent leadership based upon the situations they found themselves in as teaching headteachers, that is having to introduce multiple innovations with few staff to help and limited resources while at the same time taking full responsibility for teaching a multi-stage class. This chimes with Clarke and Wildy’s (2004) assertion that ‘leadership is always context bound and occurs as a result of human interactions’ (p.555), thus highlighting the importance of understanding the impact that contextual factors have on a small school headteacher’s ability to work in a particular setting. In addition, after describing eight separate models of leadership, Bush and Glover (2003) argue that possible ‘integrated models must start with the contingent approach because a specific vision for the school, a hallmark of the transformational model, cannot be independent of this context’ (p 12).

#### **Development for small school headteachers**

In 1996 standards for headship were largely undeveloped in most countries, nor was there evidence that available development activities were being tailored to meet the particular needs of small school headteachers. In fact it was one of the issues raised by the small school headteachers who participated in the 1996 research. By 2006 some changes had been reported. The Scottish Executive had introduced a standard, the Scottish Qualification for Headship, that it hoped all applicants for headship would hold. In 2005, this standard was revised and put out for consultation (Anon, 2005). The document makes clear that effective leadership is more than the actions, beliefs and qualities of the headteacher and includes the leadership contributions of others. Also by 2006, The National College for School Leadership in England was advertising a programme specifically designed for those who lead small schools in order to address what it sees as ‘the specific and unique leadership development needs of this group’. It was run over two terms and involved interactive workshops, a two-day residential session, a series of structured inter-school visits and access to a dedicated online community (NCSL, 2006a). The programme claims to offer ‘opportunities for school leaders and local authorities to work collaboratively together at both regional and local levels. A framework of support and advice is provided by a network of headteachers and lead facilitators’. In addition, the NCSL (2006b) has also published a ‘focus piece’ written by five headteachers from small primary schools on how they perceive their role. The group provided practical examples in a small school context of the ways in which they had demonstrated strategic thinking, communicating a coherent vision, inspiring, challenging and motivating others and modelling values and vision in order to meet the National Standard for Headteachers. Slightly earlier, similar training was being developed in Australia. Clarke (2002) describes two initiatives introduced to support the teaching principal: the Schools and Teaching Principals Project implemented by Education Queensland in 1998, and the Graduate Certificate in Small Schools’ Leadership developed as a collaborative venture between Griffith University and Education Queensland. Three models of small school collaboration were trialled throughout 1999 by 55 Queensland schools. These were:

- The 'Hub Model' that enabled small schools to contract out or outsource services from larger schools or district offices.
- The 'Cooperative Model' in which a group of small schools would share a range of functions.
- A 'Combination Model' an amalgamation of the Cooperative and Hub Model.

All three allowed teaching principals to concentrate more effectively on teaching and learning and facilitated their professional growth. Examples such as these were completely absent in Scotland in 1996. The importance of professional development for small school headteachers was also stressed in Finland (Kalaoja & Pietarinen, 2001), as was the role for ICT in Norway (Kvalsund, 2001).

## 2.3 Summary

This chapter identified the main issues to emerge from a brief review of the literature on small schools found in 1996 and up-dated in 2006. These are:

- There is still very little published research on small schools in Scotland. The original research commissioned by the Scottish Office Education Department (Wilson & McPake, 1998) remains an exception.
- A small body of research on small schools has emerged from European countries that have a high proportion of small schools, and also from Australia.
- Most report that small schools in their respective countries are experiencing very similar problems caused by demographic changes, financial pressures, curricular innovation and the duality of the role of teaching headteacher.
- There has been no recent systematic review of the possible savings from closure of small schools. Amalgamations and federations of small schools are also under researched.
- In general terms over the past ten years the debate about headship has shifted from management to leadership.
- By 2006 both England and Scotland had developed standards for school headteachers, which it is expected that all new appointees will demonstrate.
- The duality of the role of teaching headteacher is the predominant feature of headship in small schools in both Scotland and abroad, but this is often not reflected in discussion about standards of headship.
- There are few examples of development opportunities having been tailored to meet the specific needs of small school headteachers. Programmes at the NCSL in England and also in Queensland are exceptions.
- Researchers conceptualise leadership in a number of ways. Some have identified two models (Lumby, 2004), others eight (Bush & Glover, 2003). Both Clarke & Wildy (2004) and Wilson & McPake (1998) stressed the contingent leadership style adopted by small school headteachers to cope

with the contextual complexity in which they operate.

- Leadership in small schools is developed within a context of having to lead multiple innovations with few other staff and resources, while at the same time effectively teaching multi-grade classes.

### 3. A picture of provision

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a picture is provided of the small primary schools with rolls of 50 pupils or less included in this research. Quantitative evidence is drawn from the questionnaires completed in October 2006 by 68 (70%) of the headteachers in the sample. (A copy of the annotated questionnaire is displayed in Appendix A3.) This is illustrated with quotations from responses to open questions on the questionnaire and also from interviews with headteachers and staff in nine case study schools.

#### 3.2 Schools size

All of the schools in this research can be classified as very small by national standards. Of the 2194 primary schools in Scotland, 431 (20%) had rolls of fewer than 50 pupils (Scottish Executive, 2006), three-quarters of which were located within the ten local authorities that participated in this research. The very smallest school in the sample had only three pupils and the largest 53. The number of schools by pupil roll is shown in Table 3.1 below.

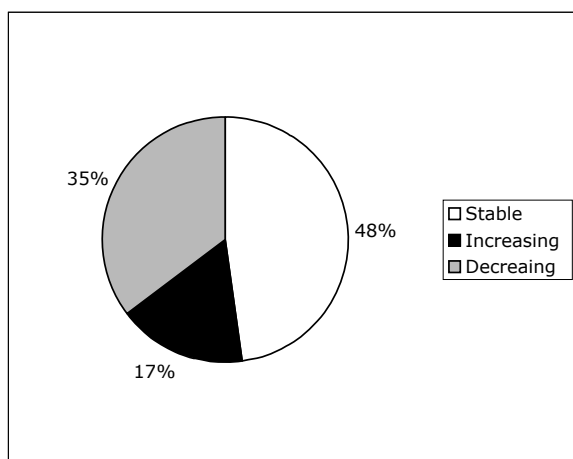
*Table 3.1: Number of schools in the sample by pupil roll (n=65)*

School rolls	No. of schools	% of schools
1-10	14	22%
11-20	11	17%
21-30	17	26%
31-40	11	17%
41-50	11	17%
Over 50	1	1%

Although the sample schools are very small, the majority of rolls were either stable or increasing. Forty-eight per cent of headteachers (31) reported that their school rolls were stable and 17% (11) increasing. This is a small decline from 1996 when 51% were stable and 28% increasing. Over a third of headteacher respondents in 2006 (35%, 23) indicated that their rolls were decreasing. (See Figure 3.1.) It is, therefore, not surprising that 35% (23) of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘the threat of closure is never very far from our minds’. This uncertainty about a school’s future is likely to affect not only teacher morale but also the leadership vision of the headteacher – an issue that will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.



Figure 3.1: Stability of sample small school rolls (n=66)



### 3.3 Teacher numbers

The number of teachers, including the headteacher, in each small primary school ranged from 1 to 4.5 full-time equivalent teachers (FTE). Six per cent (4) were single-teacher schools, which arguably is the most complex management challenge (viz coping alone with a range of leadership and managerial tasks while at the same time organising a curriculum for the widest age range of pupils). Twenty-six per cent (17) other headteachers indicated that they were supported by a part-time teacher (ranging from .2 to .9 FTE), with the remaining headteachers being supported with from 1 to 3.5 other teachers. An overview is provided in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.2: Number of schools in sample with 1-4 teachers including headteachers (n=66)

No. of teachers (fte)	No. of schools	% of schools
1.0	4	6
1.1-1.9	17	26
2-2.9	36	55%
3.-3.9	8	12%
4-4.5	1	1
Total	66	100%

As in 1996 (Wilson & McPake, 1998) the largest single group in the sample is the two-teacher school reported by 36% (24 ) schools (29% in 1996).

### 3.4 Location

The sample schools were chosen at random from the 326 small schools in the ten local authorities in Scotland that have the highest percentage of small schools. Although Highland Council has the largest number of schools with a roll of 50 or fewer pupils, small schools make up more than 50% of the schools in all ten local

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

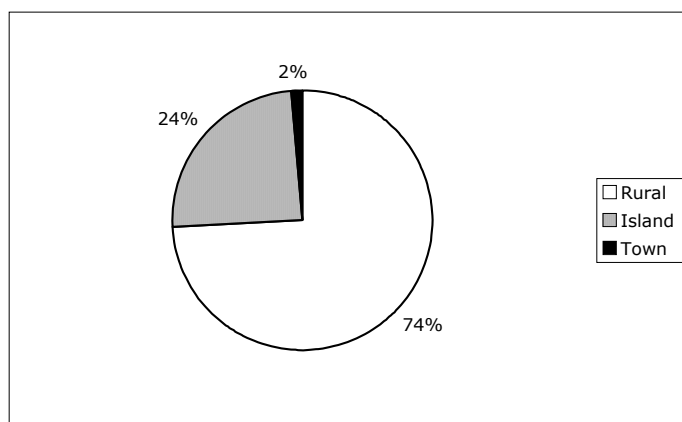
authorities. In 1996, all local authorities were included in the sample, but for reasons of economy this research has been restricted to those with the highest percentage of small schools. (See Table 3.3 below.)

*Table 3.3: Distribution of schools in the sample with 50 or fewer pupils across 10 local authorities(n=68)*

Local authority	No. of schools with 50 or less	No schools in sample	No of responses
Aberdeenshire	58	10	6
Angus	20	10	6
Argyll & Bute	47	10	8
Dumfries & Galloway	40	10	7
Eilean Siar	14	10	5
Highland	80	10	7
Orkney	10	10	5
Perth & Kinross	24	10	9
Scottish Borders	17	10	7
Shetland	16	10	8
Total 10	326	100	68

The majority of responding headteachers indicated that the sample small schools were located in rural areas 74% (49), with 24% (16) in island areas, compared with only 2% (1) in a town. (See Figure 3.2 below.) In 1996 a significant minority 10% (72) of the sample schools were in urban or ‘mixed’ areas.

*Figure 3.2: Location of the sample of small schools (n=66)*



There are two possible explanations for this change: first, the 2007 sample excluded small schools of 51-100 pupils more of which are likely to be located in ‘mixed’ area;

and second, it is also likely that a disproportionate percentage of the 77 small schools that have closed during the Labour/Liberal Democrat leadership of the Scottish Parliament were located in urban or ‘mixed’ areas in which school closure is possible because there are alternative schools for pupils to attend. In general the smallest schools are often sited in the most remote localities. Thirty-nine per cent (26) of the 2006 sample headteachers described their schools as geographically isolated and a quarter of all respondents (16) associating geographical isolation with feeling more stressed. Although the 1996 and 2006 samples are not comparable, it is interesting to note that in 1996 a higher percentage of headteachers in ‘mixed’ or urban small schools had reported feeling isolated than did those in geographically isolated areas (58% in mixed areas compared to 52% in rural areas). This implies that in 1996 possible school closure was also contributing to feeling stressed.

### 3.5 Facilities

Resource management is an important aspect of a headteacher’s role in a small school. As all of the case study headteachers pointed out, they were not allocated the services of a full-time janitor. This could result in what one headteacher described as a feeling that “*I have to cope with everything from putting screws and nails in to putting the toilet seats on*” (Headteacher, Case Study 3). Additionally, lack of suitable accommodation and resources can impact upon the curriculum. In the survey, headteachers were asked if they perceived their schools’ accommodation and facilities to be inadequate. Most appeared to be satisfied with the accommodation generally, but 14% (9) reported poor or inadequate accommodation, with 47% (31) dissatisfied with facilities for games/physical education. Compared to 1996, slightly fewer headteachers in 2006 were dissatisfied with their school’s accommodation (14% in 2006: 17% in 1996), which may reflect school improvement programmes undertaken by local authorities in the intervening years.

Table 3.4: Sample small school headteachers’ perceptions of schools facilities (n=66)

Facilities	No. of schools	% schools
	2006	2006
Poor/inadequate accommodation	9	14%
Inadequate facilities for games/PE	31	47%
Connected to e-mail	26	39%

Evidence from the case study schools showed that although all nine were located in 19<sup>th</sup> century school buildings, some had been refurbished (eg Case Studies 6, 8) and/or extended (Case Study 8) but others had what their headteachers considered to be inadequate facilities. For example, school houses were damp and unusable because the central heating had been removed (Case Study 5); class rooms were crowded or could only be accessed through other rooms (Case Studies 2, 3, 4); there was no separate dining room (Case Study 5), and the local community hall had to be utilised for PE (Case Study 5). In some cases HMIe had already noted these faults and local authorities had taken steps to ensure that the schools had adequate facilities. In other cases, headteachers had devised imaginative arrangements to extend curricular opportunities. For example, the headteacher in Case Study 6 had arranged for pupils to have swimming lessons in a local hotel's pool; some (eg Case Studies 4, 5, 6, 7) were able to utilise facilities in neighbouring secondary schools. A number of headteachers had created resource rooms or workspace for pupils and staff (Case Studies 1, 4,6,7), sometimes in former schoolhouses or corridors. Another had plans to put in oil filled radiators, extend the accommodation, set up one of the rooms as a resource centre and create a room for the headteacher (Case Study 5). Despite the improvements, 47% (31) of headteachers perceived that the facilities for games/PE were inadequate. This is, however, an improvement on the 53% reported in 1996. There had also been a small increase in the number of schools in which headteachers report that they are connected to e-mail networks, from 37% in 1996 to 39% in 2007. (As the percentage who indicate that their schools are connected to e-mail appears to be very low and does not correspond to the percentage of sample headteachers (89%) who use e-mail as a support mechanism, it is likely that there is some confusion here with local authority intra-nets and different forms of email networks and connections.)

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter presents a picture of small schools in Scotland in 2006 and notes the main changes that have occurred since the previous research was undertaken in 1996. The main points to emerge are:

- During the past ten years the number of primary schools in Scotland has fallen by 5% from 2313 to 2194, of which 431 (20%) had school rolls of less than 50 pupils.
- Three-quarters of these very small schools (326) were concentrated in ten local authorities, with the highest number of small schools being located in Highland Council.
- Forty-seven per cent of headteachers (31) of schools with 50 pupils or less included in this research perceived their school rolls to be stable or increasing in 17% of schools (11). However, over a third (23) reported rolls to be decreasing and perceived the threat of closure was never far away.
- The number of teachers, including the headteacher, employed in the sample schools ranged from 1 to 4.5 fte. Thirty-six per cent of schools (24) had two

teachers, the largest single number of schools, but almost a third (21) of schools were led by a single-teacher headteacher supported only by a part-time teacher.

- Almost all the sample headteachers reported that their schools were located in rural and/or island locations: 74% (49) in rural areas and 24% (16) on islands.
- There is some evidence to associate geographical isolation with feeling stressed. In 1996, just over half (372) of the sample headteachers reported that their schools were geographically isolated, compared to 39% (26) in 2006. Almost a quarter (16) of sample headteachers in 2006 also associated geographical isolation with feeling stressed. A comparable figure for 1996 is not available.
- Accommodation in small schools appears to have improved in the past ten years: only 14% (9) of sample headteachers reported that their school had poor or inadequate accommodation compared to 17% in 1996, but 86% (57) indicated that the facilities for games /PE were inadequate compared to 53% in 1996.
- A small increase in the availability of e-mail within schools can be seen with 39% (26) of headteachers reporting that they had access to it compared to 37% in 1996. Caution must be exercised with this finding, as it does not correspond with the 89% of headteachers who report using e-mail for managerial support. (See section 6.2 below.)

In the next section, the careers experiences and aspirations of the headteachers who lead these schools will be explored.

## **4. A view of headship**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In 1996 there was limited published information on the backgrounds, qualifications, experiences and aspirations of headteachers of small schools – all factors that may affect their leadership and management styles. Galton (1993) had reported that in most respects teachers in small schools are similar to those in larger schools. The evidence from this study suggests that this is not the case. In addition, research from Australia (Clark, 2002) reports that small schools headteachers are likely to be undertaking their first headship, which is ironic given the complexity of combining a full teaching commitment with whole school leadership responsibilities.

### **4.2 Characteristics of small school headteachers**

#### **Gender**

In the 1996 survey 81% of small school headteacher respondents were female, 19% male. Although the samples are not exactly comparable, by 2006 the percent of female headteachers had increased to 92% female (8% male). This is much closer to the gender balance of the primary teaching population in Scotland (93% female, 7% male) and higher than the percentage of female headteachers in primary schools in 1996 (81% female). It seems clear from the 2006 survey that the smaller the school, the more likely it is the headteacher will be female. This is reflected in the case studies in which eight of the nine headteachers were female.

#### **Age**

Most (65%) small school headteacher respondents in 1996 were aged between 35 and 50 years of age suggesting that a substantial number became teachers before teaching in Scotland became an all-graduate profession in 1984/85. By 2006 in line with an ageing teaching profession, the number in this age bracket had declined to 44% and the percent over 50 years had increased to 52%. Less than 5% of all respondents were under 35 years. The case study headteachers mirror this division: four were aged from 35-50, four over 50 and only one was under 35 years. This suggests that as these small school headteachers gradually age and retire, there may be a problem attracting experienced applicants.

#### **Qualifications**

In 1996 the overwhelming majority of small school headteachers (85%) had attended a Scottish College of Education. As would be expected with the merger of colleges of education (ie former teacher training colleges) into universities in the intervening years, by 2006 this percentage had declined to 74%. Twenty-seven per cent had also attended a Scottish university, but not necessarily for their initial teacher education<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, almost 20% had been educated in other institutions located, for example in England, Wales or Australia. The percentage holding only a College Diploma in

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<sup>2</sup> Note that these percentages do not add up to 100% as some respondents may have attended all three types of institution for their higher education, initial teacher education and/or continuing professional development.

Education also declined from 77% in 1996 to 52% by 2006. In 1996 only a third held graduate level qualifications (BEd, MA or MEd degrees), but by 2006 this had increased to 45%<sup>3</sup>. In addition, over a quarter indicated that they held other qualifications, such as a PhD, Froebel/Associateship in Early Education, Diploma in Special Education Needs/Inclusive Practice, Graduate Certificate in Educational Management. The indications are that along with the rest of the teaching profession in Scotland, holders of small school headships in this sample were better educated than their counterparts had been ten years previously.

Examples of small school headteachers' educational histories are provided by the nine case study headteachers. Eight of the nine had attended a Scottish college of education or university for their initial teacher training. The one male acting headteacher in the sample had been educated at a university in England. In 1996, the majority of the sample headteachers possessed a College Diploma in Education. In contrast, this group of headteachers was better qualified than the previous group. Four were graduates, and three of the ones with College Diplomas had undertaken a further qualification, such as the Associateship in Early Education and one had a Social Work Qualification. The youngest member of the sample had also completed the Scottish Qualification for Headship, which had not been available in 1996

#### **Previous experience**

In 1996, the case study interviews revealed that small school headteachers had quite diverse career histories. Although the majority had been primary school teachers throughout their careers, a small number had worked in other sectors at the start of their careers, for example in industry, youth work, community development and childcare. Most of the 1996 case study headteachers had taught in several schools before taking up their current posts, and several drew attention to the breadth of their experience: some had worked in very different types of schools, specifically mentioning larger schools and city schools, sometimes in areas of considerable deprivation. Others had worked both in the classroom and as peripatetic teachers, and several had been curriculum development officers. We speculated that there may have been a relationship between the breadth of previous experience and the ability to manage the range of activities demanded of headteachers of small schools. By 2006, the small sample of case study headteachers was a more homogeneous group. Only one had experience of another profession (Case Study 4 headteacher in social work). Two had taught outwith Scotland (Case Study 2 headteacher in Australia and Case Study 5 headteacher for 20 years in London). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, eight of the nine headteachers (Case Study 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, & 9) had experience of teaching in larger schools after which they had deliberately chosen to teach in small schools.

#### **Experience of headship**

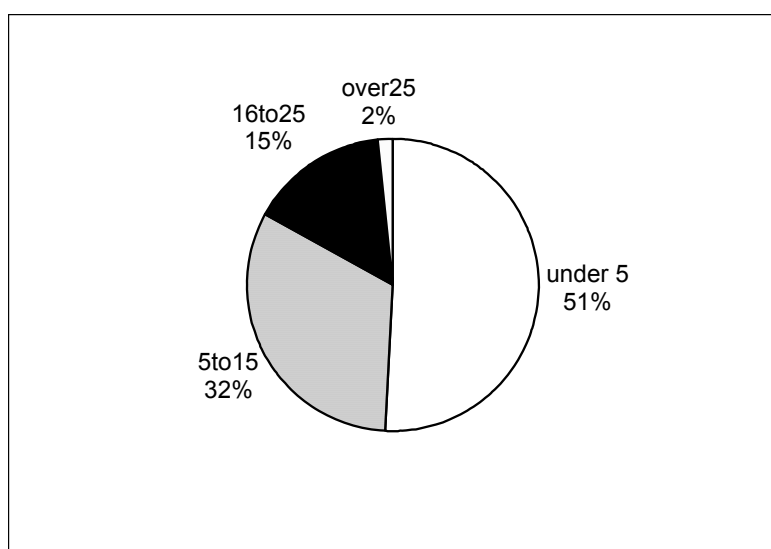
In 1996 relatively few small school headteachers (18%) had previous experience of headship. For the majority (82%) their current post was their first headship. By 2006, the percentage with previous experience of headship had increased to 28% (18),

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<sup>3</sup> The 45% who hold graduate qualifications does not match the 27% who attended Scottish universities, as some headteachers may have gained graduate level qualifications from colleges of education, institutions outwith Scotland or from the Open University.

however, for the majority (72%, 47) their current post was their first experience of headship. Most small school headteachers in 1996 had been in their current post for ten years or less, and a distinctive minority (12%) were particularly new to the job, having taken up post during the past year. A similar small but distinctive group (10%) had been in post for 16 years or more. By 2006, the balance had changed somewhat: an increase had occurred in the percentage of newly appointed headteachers (17%, 11) but also an increase in those who had been in post over 16 years (17%, 11). In fact, around a third (23) had remained in the same school that they had been headteacher of in 1996. While this is consistent with the demographic profile of an ageing teaching profession, it also suggests that differentiated staff development may be required to meet the disparate needs of both the experienced and newly appointed headteachers.

Figure 4.1 Number of years small school headteachers had been in post ( $n=65$ )



The case study headteachers provide examples of the routes to headship in rural or island areas taken by nine individual headteachers. Five of the sample had been appointed to their post as headteacher of the case study school, but four were acting headteachers, either because the previous headteacher had resigned or was on secondment to another post in the local authority, for example to develop enterprise education as in Case Study 8. One Case Study headteacher (Case Study 6) had applied for the headteacher post and was awaiting an interview, three were on secondment as acting headteachers from posts in other schools within their authority, and the one male acting headteacher (Case Study 5) had decided not to apply for the vacant post but instead return to being a class teacher. This resulted in what Case Study 8 headteacher described as being on “a merry-go-round”, when a number of teachers would move around the authority depending on whether the existing headteacher returned to take up her/his original post. All the case study headteachers were experienced classroom teachers and seven had considerable experience of teaching in small schools before taking up their current posts.

Previous research suggests that headteachers of small schools, once appointed, are more likely to remain in post for longer periods of time than their counterparts in



larger schools. This pattern may be changing. Although two headteachers (Case Studies 2 and 3) had been in post for considerable periods of time (17 and 14 years respectively), four headteachers (Case Studies 1, 4, 7 and 8) had all been in post for less than a year and the remaining three (Case Studies 6, 5 and 9) from 1-3 years. This change may be welcomed, as in theory it presents opportunities to introduce new approaches to learning and teaching and management, however in practice, periods of acting headship introduce an element of uncertainty to these small schools – an issue which will be discussed in more detail later.

### **Rural roots**

In 1996 a substantial number of the sample small school headteachers (41%) came originally from rural areas, and 31% had been educated in small primary schools. By 2006 there had been a slight increase in the sample headteachers from rural areas (46%) and those educated in small primary schools (32%). The majority of the case study headteachers (seven of the nine) had also lived in a rural area as a child and six of the nine had attended a small school. For some this background was a strong motivating factor in returning to live and teach in rural areas. Case Study 1 headteacher described how she had come from a farming family in the area and saw the children in her school as “*a big family*” that she was preparing for life. Another, Case Study 3 recalled how she:

*“Went to a small two-teacher school as a child. I think you have to have that background to understand what teaching in a small school is. I absolutely love this school. I don’t know whether it is engrained.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

The headteacher in Case Study 6 had a similar background. She had been brought up in a rural area and after attending college in Aberdeen returned to teach in a small rural school. The only male headteacher (Case Study 5), although born in rural Scotland, had spent over 20 years teaching in a London borough before returning to live and work in the area. This pattern stands in contrast to the route to headship taken by three of the other sample headteachers, who had no previous connection with remote rural areas, but had chosen to leave their teaching posts in larger schools in urban areas to teach in smaller schools. For example, the headteacher in Case Study 8 taught for ten years in the Central Belt before becoming the headteacher of a single-teacher school on one of the Scottish islands, a post she held for five years before returning to the mainland to lead another single-teacher school.

Two headteachers (Case Studies 4 and 6), both women aged 57, made career/life decisions to take on headships in their late 50s, when as one pointed out she thought that she “*should be scaling down, not looking for new challenges*”. The headteacher in Case Study 4 had resigned from a principal teacher post in a large school in a city, sold her house, bought a new house in the village and filled a supply post in the school, in which a year later she was appointed headteacher. The other in Case Study 6 described how she

*“...never had any wish to be a headteacher, and was very happy teaching and still like teaching but was asked to do it [be acting headteacher]. I didn’t go looking for it...the main reason I went for it was that the other teacher would lose her full-time job, the management supply teacher would lose her*

*post. They [the other teachers] all know there might be big changes and they encouraged me to go for it."*

*(Headteacher Case Study 6)*

### **Living in the catchment area**

Despite their affinity with rural/island areas, the majority of small school headteachers in the sample (69% in 2006; 71% in 1996) reported living outwith their schools' catchment area. This decision to live elsewhere may reflect a lack of suitable accommodation, particularly where 'school houses' have been sold by local authorities or used for other purposes. For example the school house in Case Study 7 had been sold, in Case Studies 4 & 6 they were used as resource rooms and staff rooms, and Case Study 2 & 5's school houses were derelict. It may also be a desire by headteachers for privacy for themselves and their families. Clearly if headteachers live elsewhere, this may have implications for community relations – an issue that will be considered in later sections.

### **Management training**

In 1996 most small school headteachers (79%) reported that they had received some form of management training. However, it seemed likely that for many headteachers, training occurred some time after they had taken up post. Those least likely to have had training were those who had been in post for one year or less. Those who had been in post for over 11 years were also progressively less likely to have received training, although the 'falling off' was relatively gradual. By 2006, the situation was relatively unchanged, 76% of the sample headteachers reported that they had had some management training, and it is still likely that for many this occurred after they had been appointed. The exception is for the small percentage (12%, 8) who indicated that they had either completed (9%, 6) or were nearing completion (3%, 2) the Scottish Qualification for Headship, a qualification that was not available in 1996.

For many respondents, their local authority had been the main source of management training, typically one- or two-day induction programmes for newly appointed headteachers. For example headteachers describe how they undertook:

*"Formal half day induction course led by [the authority] – about 4 months after I started the job." (Headteacher, School 001)*

*"I had one induction in the authority to meet and greet, since then I have been too busy doing the job to go on courses about how to do it !!!"*  
*(Headteacher, School 28)*

*"Help from educational advisor when first appointed." (Headteacher, School 24)*

*"When first appointed received 'Preparation for Headship' training and was appointed a Mentor who was a small school Headteacher of many years."*  
*(Headteacher, School 38)*

Some mentioned actual courses or modules such as:

*"I completed the Scottish Qualification for Headship prior to my appointment. I received 'New Head' training from [the authority] 7 months into appointment. I have accessed self-evaluation training from [the council]." School Improvement through Self-evaluation for Headteachers which is very good. (Headteacher, School 53)*

*“Keys to Management; Leadership Training; Variety of courses on Health & Safety law etc.” (Headteacher, School 18)*

*“Education and the Law, 3 days; Introduction to Management, 1 day + 3 twilights (course work for both.)” (Headteacher, School 19)*

*“Styles of leadership course – 2 days; Resource Management course when Strathclyde Regional Council was in operation.”(Headteacher, School 29)*

*“Managing Time/People/Change.”(Headteacher, School 35)*

Unfortunately other headteachers had received none.

*“None was offered! Just given the keys to the school and left to get on with it! No induction, nothing. Though things have improved a bit since then I believe. [9 yrs in post].”(Headteacher, School 99)*

*“None available, no induction.”(Headteacher, School 7)*

*“There was no training available when I became head.”(Headteacher, School 40)*

*“Training was done ‘on the job’. I’ve had to learn as I went along.” (Headteacher, School 49)*

Further details of management training are provided by seven of the nine case study headteachers who described how they had undertaken some management training: unfortunately for most this was offered after they had taken up their current post rather than as preparation for it. For example, the headteacher in Case Study 1 described how she had received *“no training, no induction, the previous Headteacher just gave up and went back to being a teaching head in a two-teacher school.”*

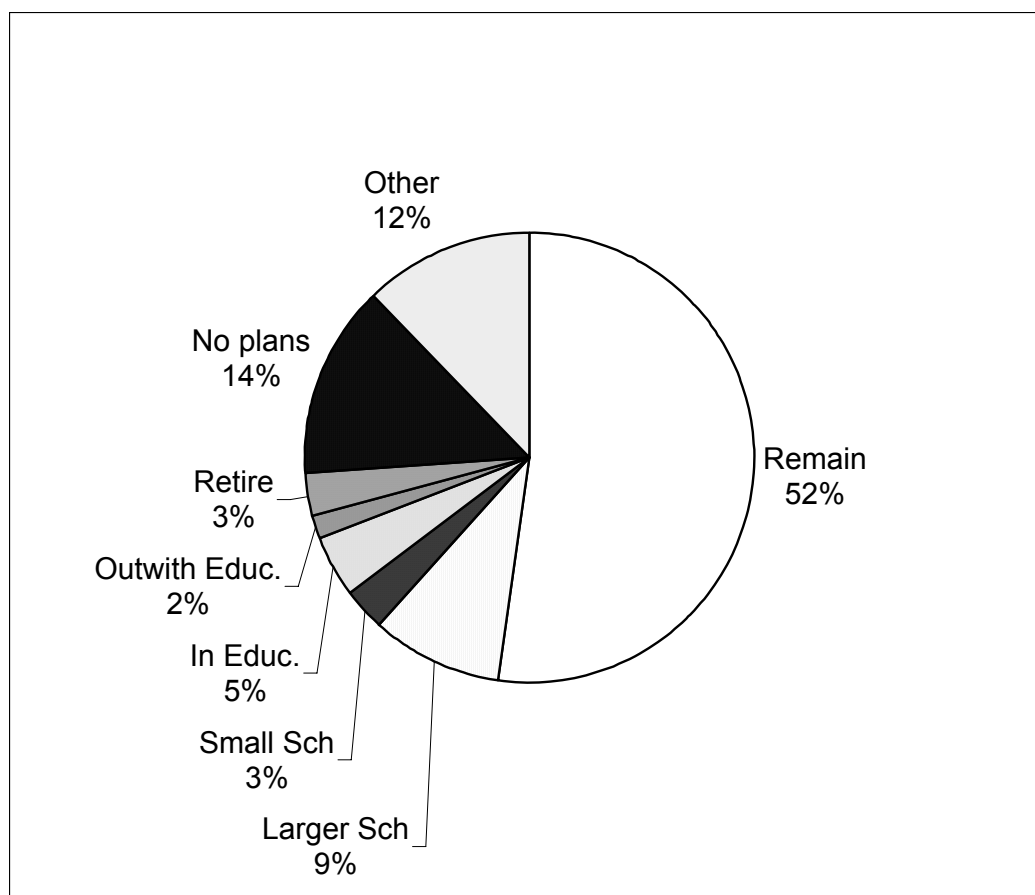
After being appointed, a number of case study headteachers described how they were offered training and support by their authority. One authority had developed an induction pack for all new headteachers. The headteacher in Case Study 7 attended a one-day course for 13 newly appointed headteachers and thought that it was very useful to be able to meet other headteachers and heads of service in the authority. The headteacher in Case Study 6 had attended a two-day course in School Improvement through Self-evaluation (SISE 1) and planned to attend SISE 2 later in the year. Little of the training was geared specifically to the needs of headteachers of small schools. Although the headteacher in Case Study 3 was given an induction from the headteacher of another small school and assigned a mentor, she faced the transition from only having taught Primary 1-2 in a larger school to leading the school and teaching the upper primary stages, of which she had no previous experience.

The headteacher in Case Study 9 had only recently completed the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) two years after taking up her current post. The acting headteacher in Case Study 5 recalled how he had applied for the Scottish Qualification for Headship, but had been told that he was *“too old”* to participate. Others indicated that their authority would not allow existing headteachers to enrol for the SQH which in effect excluded *teaching headteachers* from small schools, including those who were appointed to their posts prior to the introduction of the SQH. This is an issue which will be discussed further in a later section.

### 4.3 Future career plans

Previous research had suggested that headteachers of small schools once appointed are more likely to remain in the same post for longer periods of time than their counterparts in larger schools. In 1996 the single largest group of respondents to the survey (44%) expected to stay on for the foreseeable future as headteachers of the schools in which they were currently employed. In addition, 17% had no clear career plans and 8% intended to seek early retirement. Approximately a quarter of the group was considering promotion: 21% by applying for headship of a larger school, and 3% seeking employment within education. In addition, a small group (3%) of heads were thinking of applying for the headship of other small schools (a sideways move) but less than 1% were seeking employment outwith education. By 2006, the group of small school headteachers appeared to be more settled: the majority (52%, 34) were content to remain in their current school and only 9% (6) wanted to apply for the headship of a larger school. Again a very small minority (2%, 1) were considering posts outwith education, (3%, 2) other small schools, and (3%, 2) early retirement. There had been a small decline in the number of headteachers with no definite career plans from 17% in 1996 to 14% in 2006. A noticeable change over the ten years has been a decline in the number of small school headteachers who plan to move to larger schools (a decline from 21% in 1996 to 9% in 2006). (See Figure 4.2 below.)

Figure 4.2: Future career plans of small school headteachers



In 1996 some sampled headteachers acknowledged that their motives for taking up

small school headships were strategic, seeing small schools as stepping-stones to larger schools – a practice that would be the norm in some countries. (See for example Clark’s (2002) description of the appointment of principals to schools in Western Australia.) In this current research, lack of ambition is probably another consequence of an ageing profession with headteachers being more reluctant to move and/or move their families as they put roots down in rural communities.

It is likely that the location of a school is one determining factor in the mobility and career progression of many small school headteachers. Clearly opportunities for promotion without relocation are more limited in remote rural or island communities. However, in 1996 the evidence suggested that those who remain in post in the same school did so from choice rather than lack of opportunity: only 6% of those taking part in the survey agreed with the statement that ‘small school headteachers never go on to more senior positions in education’. Again in 2006 only 5% (3) believed this to be the case.

More detail is provided by the nine case study headteachers, none of whom expressed any problems motivating themselves, although one was clearly unhappy with her/his current circumstances. Case Study 1 headteacher said, “*it [motivation] is not a problem. The staff are still keen because I’m the new HT.*” Case Study 2 headteacher also indicated that motivation was no problem. She said that she

*“...keeps thinking when does a vision end, but it is constantly changing. You get new pupils in all the time, things in the community are always changing. I don’t just sit here all the time. I have tried other things. We have an acting HT pool and it gives you opportunities [to try leading larger schools].”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 2)*

The headteacher in Case Study 3 agreed. She explained that

*“...motivation was not an issue because we are the school, we all know that we are valuable and very much playing an important role. We don’t have moaning sessions in school here...we try to come in with a cheerful disposition and try to keep the children right.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

Case Study 4 headteacher also reported that motivation was “*no problem and no problem motivating teachers*”, as did the headteacher in Case Study 7 who recounted how she was motivated “*to do a good job for the children, live for the children, that bit keeps you going to enjoy it, the children will always come first.*”

The headteacher of Case Study 9 found the “*SQH motivational*”, but also as a newly appointed headteacher, she thought that other staff could become motivated by your motivation to change the school. She said it was “*intrinsic to improve the life chances of children.*”

This sample of small school headteachers clearly liked teaching, but some expressed the view that having a leadership responsibility added to the job. For example, Case Study 2 headteacher reported that she was

*“...happy here, love it, like teaching, love it, have missed it when I have gone to do an acting headteacher post in a big school. With a bit of management you can have a bit more of an impact than I would have as a class teacher.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 2)*

The fact that this group of headteachers was largely content to be headteachers of small schools did not prevent them from thinking about their future careers. The headteacher of Case Study 9 admitted that as an ambitious headteacher, “*three years in a small school is long enough*”. The headteacher in Case Study 8, while pointing out that she never felt demotivated, did admit that “*when you think you have done everything, then is the time to quit*”. However, she would not be looking to move out of the authority because her own children attended the local secondary school.

Other, older headteachers, were no longer thinking about future promotions. For example, despite liking her job, the headteacher in Case Study 3 admitted that after 14 years as headteacher

*“...ideally, I would like early retirement. At this stage, I would relish a challenge or retire. In a small school something is always coming forward to challenge you, but you are like a one-man band.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

By implication she thought that the job can only be performed for a limited period. Another in Case Study 4 pointed out that at 57 she felt that she was in her final post but that she would “*give it five years*”. One acting headteacher (Case Study 5) wanted to return to being a class teacher in another school:

*“I don’t want to take this school forward. This school needs someone to put in at least six years, to give it and guide it through changes, tremendous changes. Need time to take ownership of Curriculum for Excellence.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 5)*

## 4.4 Summary

The profile of small school headteachers to emerge from this research includes the following characteristics:

- The overwhelming majority of surveyed small school headteachers are female (92% in 2006, 81% in 1996).
- The surveyed group of small school headteachers was older than their counterparts had been in 1996. The majority (52%) were over 50 years of age, 44% aged between 35 – 50 and only 5% under 35.
- Most (74%) of the surveyed headteachers had attended a Scottish college of education, 27% a Scottish university and 20% other institutions.
- The percentage of surveyed small school headteachers holding a College Diploma in Education had declined from 77% in 1996 to 52% in 2006. There had been a corresponding rise in the number of graduates from a third in 1996 to 45% in 2006.
- For the majority (72% of surveyed headteachers) their current post was their first headship compared to 82% in 1996.
- Most of the surveyed headteachers had been in post for ten years or less, but

a third (23) were still in the school they had been headteacher of in 1996.

- 46% of surveyed small school headteachers originally came from a rural area and 32% had been educated in a small school. This is a slight increase over 1996 when 41% came from rural areas and 31% had attended a small school.
- The majority of surveyed headteachers (69% in 2006, 71% in 1996) in the sample lived outwith their school's catchment area.
- Over three-quarters of surveyed small school headteachers (76% in 2006, 79% in 1996) had undertaken some management training, but for most this was after taking up their appointment.
- A small percentage of surveyed headteachers, (12%, 8) had either completed (9%, 6) or were near completion (3%, 2) of the Scottish Qualification for Headship.
- Surveyed small school headteachers appeared to be more settled than their counterparts had been in 1996: 52% were content to remain in post (47% in 1996) and only 6 (9%) wanted to apply for the headship of a larger school compared to 21% in 1996.

## 5. Leading small schools

### 5.1. Introduction

In previous chapters we presented a picture of small schools and the headteachers who lead them, highlighting the distinctive features of each. This chapter considers the nature of headship in small Scottish primary schools, in particular attitudes towards change and leadership styles and argues that there are unique features to being a headteacher of a small school.

### 5.2. The Nature of the job

The main factor that distinguishes headship in small schools is that the headteachers are usually *teaching headteachers*, typically of composite classes in addition to leading the whole school. All of the headteachers in the 2006 sample survey either were or had recently been teaching headteachers. The only exceptions were the very few (6%, 4 in 2006, 0 in 1996) who led federated or clustered schools in which they had responsibility usually for two or more small neighbouring schools. For example, the headteacher of Case Study 1 was headteacher of two small primary schools plus a pre-school facility on a travellers' site.

Only one of the nine case study headteachers was non-teaching; the remainder taught either composite primary 1-3 or 4-7 classes as well as managing the school. Most of the case study headteachers had at least one, and some had two days' support from a relief teacher during which time they could undertake their management activities, although as a number pointed out, in practice this did not always work as planned because they could be called upon to answer the telephone, see parents or support nursery assistants. The headteachers tried to work closely with both their management relief teachers and their clerical support staff to maximise their non-teaching time. However, some only had clerical support in the mornings and others reported that their management relief teachers still considered themselves to be supply staff and expected the headteacher to plan work for them to do, as well as addressing management issues.

The dominant feature of the job is a sense of 'juggling' and for some this has been exacerbated by the need to reduce teachers' contact hours to comply with the Teachers' Agreement (SOED, 2001). The headteacher in Case Study 6 explained how on Tuesdays

*"I feel I'm here, there and everywhere. I go to the nursery for 1-1.5 hours, come back to school at 12:00 for CCR [class contact reduction] time for management, teach after lunch, go back to the nursery for planning for 1.5 hours and at 3:00 return to take my own class for the last half hour. Thursday is all day management except for 12:00-12:30. It is never enough...to cope with all the paperwork, read all the documents that come."*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 6)*

This feature was confirmed by the headteacher in Case Study 3 who explained that as well as teaching and managing the school, she needed the knowledge to deal with a



child with Asperger's Syndrome and to team teach as a tutor for French in the primary school when on Thursdays she has

*"...no clerical assistant and the phone rings, the doorbell goes, the farmer up the road asks you for photocopying. I have to answer them. I like to be hands on but I resent the intrusion. You have to do everything, cope with it, everything from putting screws, nails and toilet seats on."*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

In essence, the sample headteachers were performing at least two different jobs: being a teacher and being a headteacher within the same school. It was evident that trying to balance the competing demands of each was a cause for concern. Before she became a non-teaching headteacher, the headteacher in Case Study 1 spent one year as a teaching headteacher which she reported *"nearly killed me."* During that time she applied for seven jobs and was ready for *jacking it all in*. She was *"working all hours, in the firing line and dealing with all situations."*

Most complained about the shortage of time and the growth of paperwork particularly the need to record and report activities. The headteacher in Case Study 5 said that

*"...you can't run a school like this on one-day management time per week. I manage to get every Thursday and alternate Friday mornings off. It is very hard work, all these initiatives, the bidding system, ICT is supposed to make it easier but it is overload. You fall between two stools. You think that you are not as good a teacher as you used to be, and not as good a manager as you want to be. I have levels A to E in my Primary 4-7 class. I need time for marking, for curriculum meetings, all these things others can share, but the buck stops here [with the headteacher]."*

*(Headteacher Case Study 5)*

Another headteacher in Case Study 7 explained that faced with this dilemma she thought that

*"...teaching is always that part I can do, but the paperwork, I am just getting into that as a newly appointed Headteacher. It doesn't matter if it is a big school or a small school you still have to fill in the paper, put it into folders, collect evidence to show what children have done, this, that and the other. It is all in the filing cabinet, assessing it, dating it: most of the time no one ever looks at it."*

*(Headteacher Case Study 7)*

The headteacher in Case Study 8 thought that a number of initiatives in teaching during the past 13 years had been *"cart before horse"* in that the initiative was launched before teachers had been given briefings or curriculum materials developed. The effects were exacerbated in small schools in that if a headteacher had been out all day at meetings, they couldn't *"just walk in to the classroom, a supply teacher can't just walk in, the amount of work has to be done before you can get out."*

A number of the small schools had a high percentage of children with additional support needs. Headteachers reported that this was putting additional pressure on small schools. The headteacher in Case Study 1 described how

*"...the authority is putting children in small schools who have major behavioural difficulties, can't cope in bigger schools. M gets a taxi here,*

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

*eight miles from [named town]. The policy of the authority is that all kids have individual programmes, but if you have one kid like M who kicks off on a daily basis, it is horrendous [in a composite P1-7] class.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 1)*

Another in Case Study 5 confirmed that the number of children with additional needs in the school was increasing and included six children with special needs. This the headteacher attributed to “*people looking for a family environment [in a small school] if they have a child with special needs.*”

Others were more positive and appreciated the fact that leading a small school had not taken them away from teaching. Headteacher 18 advised others to *keep a sense of humour*. The headteacher in Case Study 4 described how she

*“...loved teaching. Some days I think that I want to be out of the class and be a manager, but other days I know I don’t want to be a big school head.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 4)*

The headteacher in Case Study 6 said she was

*“...very happy teaching and still likes teaching. I like being with the children. Although there are times when it can be very stressful. The worse things are the number of forms; e-mails you get in and can you return them by Friday when they forget that you haven’t got clerical assistance.”*

*(Headteacher Case Study 6)*

Despite this stress she also thought that it was “*nice to work through the action plan.*” Even though this group of small school headteachers must lead schools with few colleagues and little clerical support, it is clear that they still took a delight in learning and teaching. This was summed up by one as

*“...it is always the children. It is exciting, developing their inquisitive nature, giving them opportunities to try everything out, to build on their strengths and develop in children loads of opportunities out there and also make them good citizens. It is thinking about the whole child.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 2)*

The extra insights that teaching gives a teaching headteacher were highlighted by a class teacher in Case Study 6 who observed

*“...I think it is important to be a teaching headteacher. It depends how long the headteacher has been out of the class. They forget what you are trying to juggle. She [her headteacher] is still very aware of each child as an individual rather than the school as a whole. She knows every child well. She is a manager and a teacher. She is very aware of the problems of being a teacher. She understands that if something doesn’t work, it isn’t because you haven’t tried.”*

*(Teacher Case Study 6)*

### **5.3. Attitudes towards change**

Writers on managing change (eg, Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992) recommend that

changes should be ‘owned’ by those charged with the implementation. The extent to which small school headteachers can lead by innovation can be limited by their perceptions of change. In 1996 the sample headteachers believed that the past decade (1987-1996) had been a period of rapid curricular and management change, and that these had outstripped changes in wider society. This was a period in which four major educational initiatives: 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines; School Development Planning; Devolved School Management, and Staff Development and Appraisal had been launched in Scottish education. Ten years later, perceptions of change had changed. Fewer small school headteachers in 2006 perceived that the past ten years (1997-2006) had been a period of rapid curricular change (96% in 1996, 52% in 2006); management change (92% in 1996, 64% in 2006), and societal change (40% in 1996, 20% in 2006). However, there was still a perception that the changes that had taken place during both decades placed particular pressures on small schools (94% in 1996, 90% in 2006). In addition, reported levels of stress amongst small school headteachers was high and had improved only slightly since 1996 (66% in 1996; 59% in 2006.) A majority of respondents thought that the problem with innovation lay primarily in the pace of change (52% in 1996, 57% in 2006). However more small school headteachers in 2006 were prepared to ‘consider each change on its merits’ (35% in 1996, 56% in 2006) and more were enthusiastic about change, thinking it ‘long overdue or simply formalising existing good practice’ (11% in 1996, 30% in 2006). Despite this, the percentage who thought that it was ‘change for change sake and that too much had been thrown at us already’ increased from 3% in 1996 to 21% in 2006.

How can these findings be interpreted? There certainly have been educational changes during the past decade: classroom assistants and additional support staff have been introduced; teachers have accepted a new contract of employment that affects the terms and conditions of their work; children with additional support needs are now included in mainstream schools and pupil guidance has been reorganised. At a national level a Scottish Parliament was created, HMIE was given agency status, the Scottish Curriculum Council was rebranded as Learning and Teaching Scotland and many schools were connected electronically to the World Wide Web. It could be that small school headteachers have just become better at managing change, or perhaps more likely they do not perceive that their daily work as a teaching headteacher has been affected in the same way that the 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines affected them and continues to create problems in terms of the depth and breadth of knowledge required of teachers of composite classes. Small schools appear to be on the cusp of further changes, ie *A Curriculum for Excellence*, but for many this remains a document yet to be implemented.

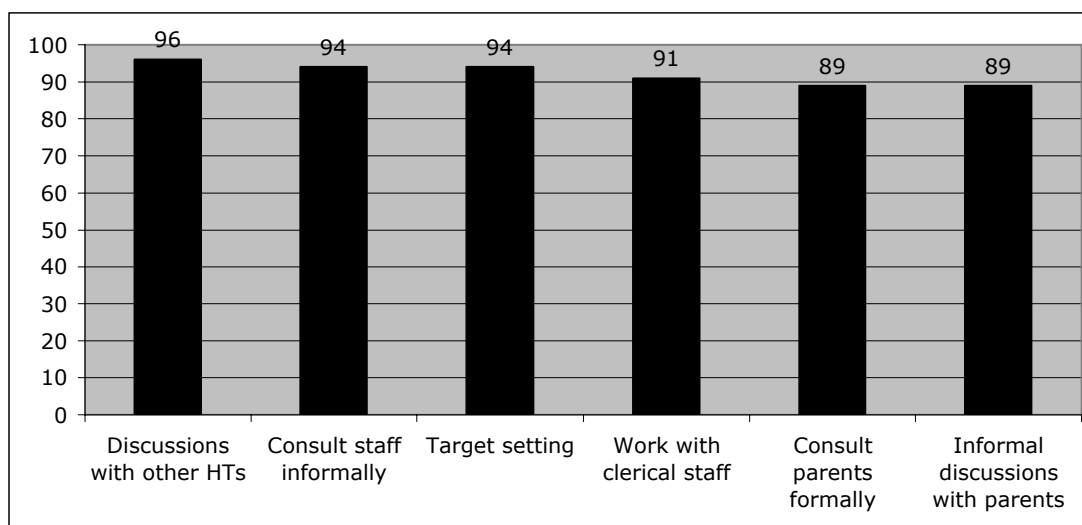
Some headteachers suggested that small school headteachers require certain personal qualities to help them manage change. Headteacher 35 stressed “*adaptability, flexibility and a good sense of humour.*” Headteacher 40 suggested that headteachers should “*accept that change does not happen overnight*” and that heads should “*listen and observe before making decisions.*” Some also pointed out the need to “*organise and prioritise tasks*” and to avoid being persuaded that something is “*urgent but not*

*necessarily to you or your priorities for the school*” (Headteacher, 75). Headteacher 80 recommended *“only touching a piece of paper once.”*

## 5.4 Leadership styles

Headteachers in both 1996 and 2006 reported a range of activities that they draw upon in order to lead and manage their schools. The most popular overall is to have informal discussions with other headteachers (96% in both 1996 and 2006). (See Figure 5.1 below.)

Figure 5.1 The percentage of most frequently used leadership activities by small school headteachers (n=66)



Networking of various kinds (discussed further in Chapter 6) was highly valued and may provide a means of overcoming the geographical isolation experienced by 39% (26) of the sample in 2006. In 1996 relatively low numbers of headteachers drew on advice from School Boards or HMIe. This was not the case in 2006 when 61% of sampled headteachers reported taking advice from their School Boards and 68% from HMIe. Target setting had also increased from 84% in 1996 to 94% in 2006. Delegation of specific tasks to others remained constant at 72% in 1996 and 73% in 2006, and is probably a reflection of the fact that in most small schools there are few other staff to whom tasks can be delegated. More detailed examination of the responses to the open questions on the questionnaire and from the nine case study headteachers demonstrates a style of small school leadership composed of three elements: having a vision for learning and teaching; operating with a collegiate style of management, and utilising all available resources, especially community support.

### Vision

The overwhelming majority (94%) of respondents to the survey wanted *“to create a safe and happy environment in this school”* and 67% aimed to offer *“a good Scottish education.”* A growing number agreed with the statement *“the kids keep me going”* (38% in 1996 and 49% in 2006). Vision for most, therefore, was rooted in what the respondents saw as the core purpose of the school, ie learning and teaching. This was

described in a number of ways by different respondents. Headteacher 5 believed *“it was the best job in the world! Keep thinking that and putting the children at the centre and all will be well!!!”* The headteacher in Case Study 1 expressed her vision as *“learning and teaching is at the heart of everything, alongside learning life skills.”* She believed that a school is what you do in the school – the learning and teaching. That particular headteacher saw herself as *“preparing children who are in a big family– preparing them for life, preparing children for the future and getting staff to buy into the vision.”* This was also the vision of Case Study 3 headteacher who said that *“learning and teaching is the focus, I am trying to produce responsible citizens.”*

Most of the headteachers were content to develop their own vision for the school based upon the centrality of learning and teaching. However, the Headteacher in Case Study 5 while agreeing *“yes it is possible to have a vision”*, also thought *“that possibly this is most dissatisfying part of the job”* because of the perceived lack of a shared authority-wide vision.

#### **Collegiate approach**

Most of the sample of headteachers tried to achieve their vision of focusing on learning and teaching by adopting a collegiate style of school leadership. In 1996, 69% of respondents agreed *“I did not see myself as a manager, I see myself as head of a team.”* This remained constant at 68% in 2006. Headteacher 22 advised *“working as part of a team, leading by example and taking the staff with you through change, don’t force it upon them.”* Headteacher 98 recommended *“great teamwork – it is the only way to survive.”* Case Study 1 headteacher described how she came in every day and *had a chat* to the teachers and initially involved them in the planning process by focusing on the topic, listening and talking in her first few weeks as headteacher - a topic that she thought was central to learning. This process of engaging all staff was also adopted by the headteacher in Case Study 2. She said that

*“...it is key that everyone plays a part and has ownership of what we are doing here. Everyone has been here a long time. The secretary 10 years, the classroom assistant 10 years. We have formal meetings and include everyone, depending on the nature of topic. We use the School Improvement plan – work towards it, meet once per term with different combinations of people. Consult the children, parents, and teachers. Send questionnaires out and got [a] good response from [the] community 90-100%”.*

*(Headteacher Case Study 2)*

Case Study 3 headteacher described her style as:

*“Very much team building.*

*Very much managing the team.*

*Not in a dogmatic way.*

*Lots of planning and discussion going on.*

*Everyone in team feels valued.*

*My style is not autocratic.*

*Try to establish a family atmosphere.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

This was also the approach to leadership adopted by the headteacher in Case Study 4 who explained that her approach to leadership in a small school was based upon “*a lot of teamwork.*” She said that she tried:

*“To work hard myself, so that she could be seen as an example to others.*

*To take time to communicate with all staff on an informal basis.*

*To give staff good clear strategies for teaching and learning without overloading staff.*

*Take a collegiate approach to decision making.*

*To communicate with parents both formally through newsletters and informally at the school gate.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 4)*

Modelling hard work and good communications was also the approach taken by the headteacher in Case Study 8. She believed that although the headteacher is responsible for high attainment, this couldn't be achieved without a content, happy staff. Therefore, she tried to work hard at that by “*making sure communications are there, the way we want this school to be, the learning and teaching and ensuring that everyone is in the loop.*” Case Study 9 headteacher summed up her approach as

*“...one of shared leadership, no hierarchy, got to pull together as a team, got to be available, give your support straight away. It is very different in a small school. You have got to adopt lots of strategies, have an open door policy, and get a balance. It is very informal, very much a community feel.”*

*(Headteacher Case Study 9)*

A class teacher in Case Study 6 summed up what she thought were the qualities required of a good small school headteacher. It would be someone who:

*“Values you as a person and your skills and efforts.*

*Speaks to you.*

*Is in the same humour everyday, so you get the same reaction everyday, is consistent.*

*Has ability to deal with the parents – establishes a good rapport with all the parents, if someone comes with a problem, it is sorted out, every parent is listened to and it is acted upon.*

*You have to respect them as a teacher and she [the headteacher] tries the best for every child, if a high flyer or a struggler and discusses curriculum development with you.”*

*(Class teacher, Case Study 6)*

## 5.5 Support from the community

In 1996 the extent to which headteachers of small schools drew on community support to help them lead and manage their schools appeared to depend very largely on the headteacher's attitudes towards community relations. Headteachers were less likely than they had been to live within their schools' catchment areas and they were also anxious both to maintain their own privacy and also to encourage

parental/community involvement. This need to achieve a delicate balance between parental involvement and possible interference was still evident in 2006 and is probably inherent in leading and managing small schools. Despite this, in 2006 89% (59) of small school headteachers utilised both formal consultations with parents and 89% (59) informal discussions. This is an increase over the ten years since 1996 when 67% of small school headteachers consulted parents formally and 80% informally. There had also been an increase in the number consulting School Boards from 42% in 1996 to 61% (40) in 2006, although the Boards are to be abolished from the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007 under the terms of the Scottish School (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 and replaced by Parent Councils.

A number of headteachers highlighted the need to get on both with staff and the community. The headteacher in Case Study 4 explained that she stood at the school gate at the end of the school day so that parents could approach her informally. Headteacher 73 warned “*don’t fall out with the parents*” and headteacher 99 thought that heads should be careful to keep a professional ‘distance’. Headteacher 26 advised “*keep parents and community on-board by giving frequent information/access.*” Another in Case Study 7 said it is

*“...really important to get along with people in such a small, intense place – a wee bit of a tight rope in that you want to keep everybody on board but keep your own standards. You have got to do everything gradually. Ensure that parents are kept on board and everyone else involved.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 7)*

Schools did, however, benefit from good community relations and a number of headteachers reported that parents would “*turn out for everything*”, act as volunteers in the schools, and for example drop off supplies so that pupils could work towards implementing eco-school policies. Community cohesion was even stronger in some schools. In Case Study 7, for example, the cook was also a parent and School Board member. The researcher also observed a grandparent as a volunteer in Case Study 4, and in Case Study 6 a retired member of the community was supporting the school and a member of a local charity was giving a slide presentation. Multi-tasking was also evident. In Case Study 2, one person was dining room assistant, playground supervisor and school janitor. In Case Studies 4 and 7, different posts were combined (ie clerical assistant and classroom assistant) to make up one full-time job. Support staff were also shared with other schools.

However, uncertainty was an ever-present obstacle and this was reported to produce strong feelings amongst parents. Over a third (35%) of headteachers agreed that “*the threat of closure is never very far from our minds.*” Although, overall parents were reported to support small school headteachers, some were concerned that if school rolls fell too low, parents might decide for social reasons to send their child (children) to other larger schools. Two of the schools (Case Studies 1 and 2) were under review because their rolls had fallen below 25 pupils in total or below 10 in the early years. Case Study 2 anticipated that it would become a one-teacher school in the near future which would mean losing a teacher with whom the headteacher had developed a rapport over the past 15 years. She also pointed out that having members of the local community on the review group could be divisive.

In addition, uncertainty is increased when an authority appoints an acting headteacher. The acting headteacher in Case Study 7 indicated that

*“...It is very difficult for me, thinking I might not be here after June, I just think I’m going to get through this year. I want to do a good job, but what if I’m put back to where I was originally [Principal Teacher in another school]. I couldn’t bear to settle for less than doing a good job.” (Acting Headteacher Case Study 7)*

The inaction that can result from periods without a permanent headteacher was demonstrated in Case Study 5 school. The acting headteacher reflected that “*if I was staying, I would look at the budget, look at the long-term, look to have a contingency fund, put in oil filled radiators, extend the accommodation, set one of the rooms as a resource centre, create a room for the headteacher.*” The implication was that an acting headteacher could not address these issues.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter presents the views of the sample headteachers on leading and managing small schools. The main points to emerge are:

- Almost all of the sample headteachers were *teaching headteachers* of small schools. Only 6% (4) led federated or clustered schools, compared to none in 1996.
- The essential nature of being a *teaching headteacher* of a small school is that in effect it entails undertaking two jobs: teaching and leading a school. The predominant feeling expressed by small school headteachers was one of *juggling*, with lack of time identified as a significant obstacle.
- Despite the changes that have taken place during the past ten years, small school headteachers in 2006 expressed more positive views towards change than their counterparts had in 1996: 52% (96% in 1996) thought it was a period of rapid curricular change; 64% (92% in 1996) management change, and 20% (40% in 1996) societal change.
- Most sampled headteachers still reported that these changes produced particular pressure for small schools (94% in 1996, 90% in 2006). In addition, reported levels of stress amongst small school headteachers was high and had improved only slightly since 1996 (66% in 1996; 59% in 2006.)
- Sampled headteachers’ main complaint in both 1996 and 2006 was with the pace of change: reported by 52% in 1996, 57% in 2006.
- However, more small school headteachers were prepared to consider each change on its merits: 56% in 2006 compared to 35% in 1996.
- A number of sampled headteachers identified personal qualities that they thought helped headteachers lead and manage small schools. These include flexibility, adaptability, ability to organise and prioritise, and a sense of humour.



- Leading by example, consulting and communicating, being a good teacher and knowing the children they teach were all considered to be essential qualities for a small school headteacher
- The leadership style that emerged from both survey and case study evidence was composed of three elements: a vision for the school based upon learning and teaching; a collegiate approach to leading and managing the school, and the ability to utilise all available resources both within and outwith the school.
- All the sample heads recognised the need to communicate with the community and appreciated the support they received from it. The percentage of small school headteachers consulting parents formally increased from 67% in 1996 to 89% in 2006 and informally from 80% in 1996 to 89% in 2006.
- Most small school headteachers were skilled networkers and utilised both formal and informal contacts to support themselves and expand the opportunities for pupils and other staff. The most popular method was informal contact with other headteachers.
- Significant challenges to effective leadership of small schools identified by the headteachers included: uncertainty arising during periods of acting headship; a local authority's policies regarding placing children with additional educational needs in small schools; absent or unskilled teaching colleagues, probationer teachers; and isolation from the main stream of educational practices.

## 6. Available development and support

### 6.1 Introduction

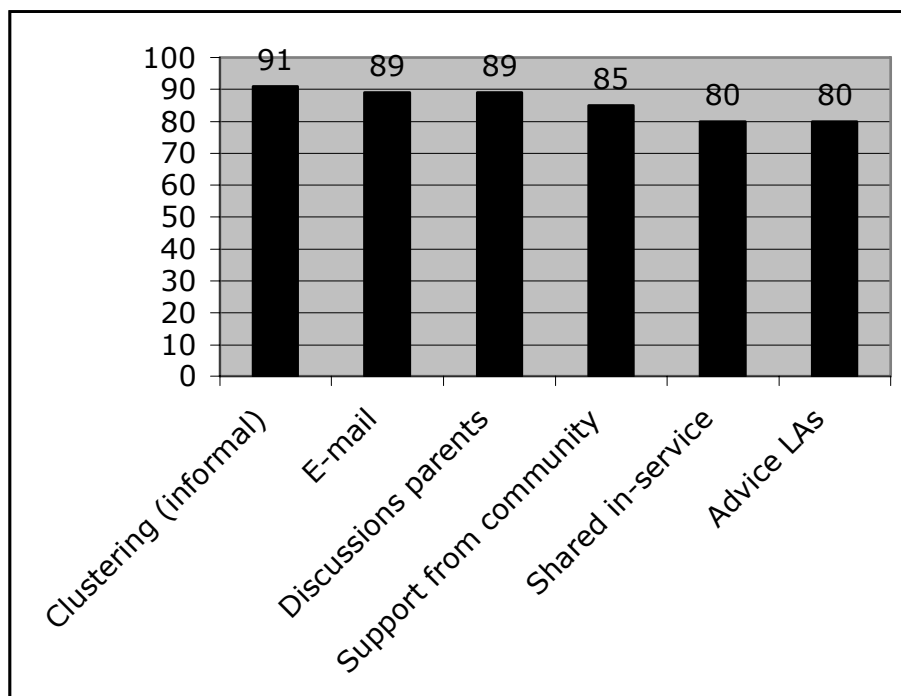
In this chapter we look at the range of available support and development activities that help headteachers of small schools lead and manage their schools. These include:

- Local authority-based support
- National provision for support and development.

### 6.2 Local authority-based support

One of the main findings from the 1996 research was that the nature and scope of support for small school headteachers varied across all Scottish local authorities. Those with either large numbers of small schools or a high proportion of small schools clearly had more reason to cater specifically for the needs of small schools. There were, however, exceptions. For example, the former Lothian Region had produced a training pack designed specifically for headteachers in small schools. Variations are less evident in 2006, largely because the sample is drawn exclusively from the ten local authorities with the highest percentage of small schools. An overview of the most frequently used sources of support is provided in Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1: The percentage of most frequently used sources of support by small school headteachers (n=66)



### Service managers/quality assurance officers

In 1996 headteachers in small schools within the eleven local authorities that had the highest proportion of small schools made extensive use of their Educational Advisory Services. Ninety-one per cent of respondents reported that they utilised the Educational Advisory Service. Despite the changes and reduction in the number of local authority advisors that has occurred in the past ten years, by 2006 the picture remained largely unchanged. Eighty per cent (53) of the sample small school headteachers reported that they utilised advice from either their education authority and/or advisers. In many cases the job title of the person supporting small school headteachers had changed from the subject advisers in 1996. Typically case study headteachers in 2006 reported that this advice took the form of termly visits from a local authority head of service/quality assurance officer who reviewed progress against the school's development plan. From descriptions provided by case study headteachers, the role of the local authority support is primarily twofold: one, to help headteachers develop realistic school development plans that reflect local authority priorities, and two, to monitor headteachers' progress against those plans using established performance indicators. In 2006, there was more awareness amongst case study headteachers of monitoring performance and the standards expected by both local authority service managers and HMIE than their counterparts had shown in 1996.

#### Clusters

In 1996, the use of school clusters and other networking structures had been widespread in those local authorities with the highest percentage of small schools. (It ranged from 55% to 85%.) Typically a cluster focused on a secondary school and its associated primary schools. Unfortunately, in this type of cluster the teaching headteacher was often in the minority. A cluster could also consist of groups of neighbouring primary schools or a network of small schools across an authority. Clusters also varied according to the function they performed and in 1996 three types were identified. These included those which:

- Develop informal links across a group of schools
- Devise joint policies and schemes of work
- Share teachers and resources.

In 1996, clustering by developing informal exchanges with nearby schools was the most popular form (91%) and this remained the same in 2006 (reported by 91%, 60, of respondents). There was a decline in the number of small school headteachers devising joint policies and schemes of work (from 61% in 1996 to 50% in 2006) but an increase in those clustering to share joint teaching and full sharing of resources (from 25% in 1996 to 32% in 2006). The popularity of clusters amongst small school headteachers remained despite the fact that some case study headteachers indicated that their local authority was no longer providing funding for such activities. One described how:

*"I have developed and used money for a cluster group development plan, the cluster being six small schools. Unfortunately the funding for this has ceased*

*and each of the schools continues to support one another, when we can, but all in our own time.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 1)*

Other case study headteachers described how they had extended clustering to include joint activities for other staff and pupils in local schools, with whom they met after school, planned joint activities such as sports days and ‘food labs’ for the pupils, and engaged in collaborative staff development activities. These initiatives were welcomed as they not only reduced headteachers’ workloads but also offered a wider range of opportunities both to pupils and to staff.

#### **Small school networks**

The percentage belonging to small school networks remained constant at 47% in 1996 and 2006. Most of the case study headteachers reported the existence of authority-wide single-teacher support networks, to which some had belonged in the past. Informal small school networks were also common and widely perceived as a source of support. The headteacher in Case Study 3 described how she met with

*“...a happy little band of headteachers, once per month immediately after school on Fridays, generally to discuss our week and anything that had landed on us. There is always one person who has had a major incident and it is nice to discuss this...best to have a group of your own choosing.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

Interestingly a significant minority of respondents still wanted more networking. Twenty per cent indicated that they required a small school network compared to 16% in 1996, and 18% wanted more clustering in order to exchange policies and schemes of work (16% in 1996). However, the overwhelming majority still managed to share in-service days with neighbouring schools, albeit a decline from 92% in 1996 to 80% in 2006. This may be a reflection of the need to account more formally for collegiate time within schools following the Teachers’ Agreement in 2001 (SEED, 2001).

#### **Electronic networks**

In 1996, only 38% of small school headteachers used e-mail to aid management and there was some evidence to suggest that electronic networking supported clustering, ie in those authorities in which headteachers made the most use of electronic mail, clustering was also strongest. By 2006, e-mail was more widely used as a management tool (by 89% of respondents), even though only 26 (39%) reported being in an electronic network. (This difference may have resulted from confusion about the term ‘electronic network’ in terms of local authority intra-nets and other forms of email networks and connections.) Headteacher 10 advised others to “*check e-mails daily and clear as much as possible on the day.*” It is now much easier for small school headteachers to make contact not only with their local authorities but also with other headteachers. Headteacher 95 highlighted “*liaison by e-mail and phone with other local small school heads*” as one of her strategies. One headteacher explained how she had developed

*“A small isle headteacher group to develop policies/for discussion. Small isles group also plan joint activities for the pupils. Both help with isolation.”*

*(Headteacher, School 64)*

Another stressed the

*“use of ICT both as a means of communication but also as a tool for teaching and learning ...this is important to me and for pupils as a means of overcoming geographical isolation.”*

*(Headteacher 93)*

### **Clerical support**

Adequate clerical support is of great importance to small school headteachers, not least in terms of providing cover for office duties while the head is teaching. There are indications that this has improved over the past ten years. In 1996 38% of small school headteachers reported that they required additional clerical support. By 2006, this figure had dropped to 18%, and is most likely a consequence of increased funding for additional support staff provided by the Teachers' Agreement (SEED, 2001). Nevertheless in practice it is rare for a small school to have full-time clerical support (39% indicated that they had less than one full-time equivalent support staff and this included classroom assistants). In 2006, two schools reported that they had none. From the case study schools it emerged that typically, support staff were employed on multiple contracts. For example, the clerical assistant in Case Study 7 worked as a clerical assistant in the mornings and a classroom assistant in the afternoons, and the headteachers in Case Studies 3 and 5 had to undertake clerical and reception duties on their management relief days in the absence of full-time clerical support.

### **Other staff**

In 1996, small school headteachers had little to say about support from senior teachers, largely because of the absence of promoted staff in small primary schools. By 2006, there had been significant changes in teachers' contracts of employment and the presence of other staff was much more evident in all nine case study schools. One was federated with another school and another employed a principal teacher, a newly created post in primary schools. Overall, 82% (54) of the sample headteachers consulted staff formally and 94% (62) informally. This compares to 91% formally and 89% informally in 1996. It is also clear from the interview evidence that case study headteachers drew on a range of resources and support to help them achieve their vision, the most prominent being the skills and expertise of the other teaching colleagues in their schools. Headteachers appreciated working with experienced staff, even if it was only one other colleague, typified by one who referred to the other teacher as *“my right hand.”* Case Study 1 headteacher thought that this was because the other teacher was *“of her era”* and they shared common values and approaches to learning and teaching. This desire to work with people with similar, high standards was expressed by another headteacher who said

*“...I rely on my support so much; I'm really choosy about who I have in the school to do my teaching. Teachers have got to be more like me. I have a quiet manner and this leads to a quiet class and this is what I try to achieve.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

She described the other teacher whom she worked with as *“a super teacher”*, and their combined effect on pupils' classroom behaviour was noticeable. The headteacher in Case Study 4 indicated that her management support teacher just *“picked up all the things that she couldn't get to as a teacher”*, such as making labels

for resources and seemed to do this instinctively. The acting headteacher in Case Study 5 thought that

*“...the reason I can do this job is that we are a very strong team in this school. Whole staff involved. I consult everyone. Consulting - just talking to them... If anyone has an issue we get together, make it more a planned meeting altogether. Our cook, she would join us in a general get together, to make everyone feel part of it.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 6)*

While having a good teacher could provide a small school headteacher with invaluable support, a poor teacher, one who was absent or a probationer seemed to have a disproportionate effect on small schools. Case Study 1 school employed a teacher who had been on sick leave for 19 weeks and this added to the headteacher's workload. Case Study 9 had a management relief teacher who was reluctant to undertake planning, as she considered herself after many years at the school to be a supply teacher. Case Study 5 had a teacher with four years to go to retirement and a recent HMIe inspection indicated that the structure of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching process and pupils' learning experiences were weak. The headteacher in Case Study 4 described how when she was appointed she saw that:

*“...it very easy in a small school to get out of the main stream of what is happening in education, teachers worked well together [in this school] but were in a rut. The place looked very dull, dark brown bookcases up the walls, children were being taught in year groups rather than ability groups, there was no flexibility, no golden time, and no positive discipline. It was easy to get a vision. You need more colleagues to talk with; teachers shouldn't stay too long in a small school.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 4)*

This highlights the need for fresh ideas, which can be brought to a small school by changes in headship, support from local authorities, other staff including peripatetic teachers or networking with other schools.

### **6.3 National provision for support and development**

At a national level, leadership and management support for headteachers in both large and small schools can come from a number of sources. These include:

- Scottish Executive Education Department documentation
- National training courses
- Advice and support materials prepared by Learning and Teaching Scotland
- HMIe through their feedback and inspection process.

In 1996, 90% of small school headteachers reported that they drew on their reading and analysis of national documentation to help them lead and manage their schools. By 2006, the percentage had dropped to 76% compared to the 96% who relied on informal discussions with other headteachers. In 1996 small school headteachers had two principal concerns about national documentation: first, they were concerned

about managing the volume of paperwork emanating from the then Scottish Office Education Department, and second, whether sufficient account had been taken of small schools in the planning assumptions that underpinned national initiatives. By 2006, there appear to have been subtle changes in the ways in which small school headteachers' perceptions have shifted from the national to local levels. Although a few case study teachers mentioned national initiatives, such as *A Curriculum for Excellence*, they also admitted that as yet they knew little about it. Furthermore, none of the case study headteachers indicated that they had consulted the Learning and Teaching Scotland website or received resources or teaching materials from it. Their focus was on leading their own schools by using target setting and informal discussions with their own staff (both methods used by 94% of sampled headteachers). The influence of HMIE was strong, ironically more so than in 1996 (68% in 2006 compared to 38% in 1996) when arguably HMIE's role in educational development was stronger. In the case study schools that had been inspected since 1996, headteachers were well aware of the HMIE feedback and could point out how they or their authorities had taken actions to comply. Often this referred to the accommodation, for example, in Case Study 2 a classroom had been partitioned to form a school office, Case Study 6 had been refurbished to create a dining area and indoor toilets and the Headteacher in Case Studies 4 and 5 were informed that it was unacceptable to serve hot food in a classroom. In other cases, HMIE complimented a headteacher on her/his leadership (as in Case Study 2), criticised others for lack of it (Case Study 5) or indicated that improvements were required to teaching or the curriculum (eg Case Study 5).

## 6.4 Summary

Headteachers in small schools utilised a number of sources of support and development. The main points to arise are:

- In both 1996 and 2006 the most frequently used form of support by headteachers of small schools was informal discussion with other headteachers (96% in both 1996 and 2006).
- A large majority of small school headteachers relied on advice from their local authority (91% in 1996, 80% in 2006). Typically this entailed termly visits from service managers/quality assurance officers to help them with school development plans and to monitor progress.
- Reliance on their own reading and analysis of documentation from the Scottish Executive had declined from 90% of small school headteachers in 1996 to 76% in 2006.
- The percentage of small school headteachers who mentioned taking advice from HMIE increased from 38% in 1996 to 68% in 2006.
- Three types of schools clusters were identified: 91% of small school headteachers in both 1996 and 2006 used informal exchanges with other schools; 50% in 2006 (61% in 1996) developed joint policies and materials; and 32% in 2006 (25% in 1996) engaged in full sharing of resources.

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

- The percentage of small school headteachers belonging to small school networks remained constant over the 10 years at 47% of respondents.
- Use of e-mail had increased among small school headteachers from 38% in 1996 to 89% in 2006, despite the fact that only 39% indicated that their schools were connected to an e-mail network. (There may be confusion here with local authority intra-nets and different forms of email networks and connections.)
- A significant proportion of small schools shared in-service days, however, this had declined from 92% in 1996 to 80% in 2006.
- The percentage of small school headteachers reporting inadequate clerical support declined from 38% in 1996 to 18% in 2006.
- Small school headteachers consulted their staff both formally (82% in 2006, 91% in 1996) and informally (94% in 2006, 89% in 1996), with a slight shift to informal methods of consultation.
- The percentage of small school headteachers consulting School Boards also increased from 42% in 1996 to 61% in 2006.



## 7. Discussions and implications

### 7.1 Introduction

A number of countries have a high percentage of small schools, often located in sparsely populated rural areas. In this chapter the principal findings relating to this study of small schools in Scotland are brought together to answer the research questions. Comparisons are made between the findings from the previous research conducted in 1996 (Wilson & McPake, 1998) and this current study. However, these must be approached with caution as the scope, sample size and response rate of each varied. Use is also made of the published literature on small schools and HMIe school inspection reports. The report concludes with a discussion of some of the implications of these findings.

### 7.2 The principal findings

#### Small primary schools

*Question: What are the issues facing small schools?*

Only a small body of research on the issues facing small schools emerged from this study. Some emanates from other European countries, such as Norway and Finland, that have a high proportion of small schools, and also from Australia. There is still very little published research on small schools in Scotland. The original research commissioned by the Scottish Office Education Department (Wilson & McPake, 1998) remains an exception. Most studies report that small schools in their respective countries are experiencing very similar problems caused by demographic changes, financial pressures, curricular innovation and the duality of the role of teaching headteacher. There has been no recent systematic review of the possible savings from closure of small schools. Amalgamations and federations of small schools are also under researched. In general terms over the past ten years the debate in the literature about headship has shifted from management to leadership. By 2006, both England and Scotland had developed standards for school headteachers, which it is expected that all new appointees will demonstrate. The duality of the role of teaching headteacher is the predominant feature of headship in small schools in both Scotland and abroad, but this is often not reflected in discussion about standards of headship. There are few examples of development opportunities having been tailored to meet the specific needs of small school headteachers. Programmes at the NCSL in England and also in Queensland are exceptions. The main point to emerge is that leadership in small schools is developed within a context of having to lead multiple innovations with few other staff and resources, while at the same time effectively teaching multi-age and -stage classes.

#### A picture of small schools in Scotland

*Question: What is the profile of small primary schools in Scotland?*

During the past ten years the number of primary schools in Scotland has fallen by 5% from 2313 to 2194, of which 20% (431) now have school rolls of less than 50 pupils. Three-quarters of these very small schools (326) are concentrated within ten local authorities, in which at least 50% of their schools are small. In the research sample,

47% of responding headteachers (31) of schools with 50 pupils or less perceived their school rolls to be stable or increasing in 17% of schools (11). However, over a third (23) reported rolls to be decreasing and around a third perceived the threat of closure was never far away. The number of teachers, including the headteacher, employed in the sample schools ranged from 1 to 4.5 FTEs. Thirty-six per cent of schools (24) had two teachers, the largest single number of schools, but almost a third (21) of schools were led by a single-teacher headteacher supported only by a part-time teacher. Almost all the sample headteachers reported that their schools were located in rural and/or island locations: 74% (49) in rural areas and 24% (16) on islands. In 1996, just over half (372) of the sample headteachers reported that their schools were geographically isolated, compared to 39% (26) in 2006. Almost a quarter (16) of sample headteachers in 2006 also associated geographical isolation with feeling stressed. A comparable figure for 1996 is not available. Accommodation in small schools appears to have improved in the past ten years: only 14% (9) of sample headteachers reported that their school had poor or inadequate accommodation compared to 17% in 1996, but 86% (57) indicated that the facilities for games /PE were inadequate compared to 53% in 1996. A small increase in the availability of e-mail within schools can be seen with 39% (26) of headteachers reporting that they had access to it compared to 37% in 1996. (Caution must be exercised with this finding, as it does not correspond with the percentage of those who claim to use e-mail as a management tool in 6.2.)

### **Profile of small school headteachers**

*Question: Who are the small school headteachers and what characteristics do they share?*

A profile of small school headteachers emerges from this research. The overwhelming majority of sampled headteachers were female (92% in 2006, 81% in 1996). The surveyed group was older than their counterparts had been in 1996. The majority (52%) were over 50 years of age, 44% aged between 35 – 50 and only 5% under 35. Most (74%) had attended a Scottish college of education, 27% a Scottish university and 20% other institutions. The percentage holding a College Diploma in Education had declined from 77% in 1996 to 52% in 2006. There had been a corresponding rise in the number of graduates (not necessarily from a Scottish university) from a third in 1996 to 45% in 2006. For the majority (72% of surveyed headteachers) their current post was their first headship compared to 82% in 1996. Most of the surveyed headteachers had been in post for ten years or less, but approximately a third (23) had remained in the school in which they were headteacher in 1996. Forty-six per cent of surveyed small school headteachers originally came from a rural area, and 32% had been educated in a small school. This is a slight increase over 1996 when 41% came from rural areas and 31% had attended a small school. The majority of surveyed headteachers (69% in 2006, 71% in 1996) lived outwith their school's catchment area. Over three-quarters of small school headteachers in the sample (76% in 2006, 79% in 1996) had undertaken some management training, but for most this was after taking up their appointment. A small percentage of surveyed headteachers, 12% (8) had either completed (9%, 6) or were near completion (3%, 2) of the Scottish

Qualification for Headship. Headteachers in small schools appeared to be more settled than their counterparts had been in 1996: 52% were content to remain in post (47% in 1996) and only 9% (6) wanted to apply for the headship of a larger school compared to 21% in 1996.

### **Leading and managing small schools**

*Question: Is there a small school leadership style?*

Almost all of the sample headteachers were *teaching headteachers* of small schools. Only 6% (4) led federated or clustered schools, compared to none in 1996. The essential nature of being a *teaching headteacher* of a small school is that in effect it entails undertaking two jobs: teaching and leading a school. The predominant feeling expressed by small school headteachers was one of *juggling*, with lack of time identified as a significant challenge. Despite the changes that have taken place during the past ten years, small school headteachers in 2006 expressed more positive views towards change than their counterparts had in 1996: 52% (96% in 1996) thought it was a period of rapid curricular change; 64% (92% in 1996) management change, and 20% (40% in 1996) societal change. However, most sampled headteachers still reported that these changes produced particular pressure for small schools (94% in 1996, 90% in 2006) and reported levels of stress were high (59% in 2006; 66% in 1996). Sampled headteachers' main complaint in both 1996 and 2006 was with the pace of change: reported by 52% in 1996, 57% in 2006. Despite this, more small school headteachers were prepared to consider each change on its merits: 56% in 2006 compared to 35% in 1996. A number of sampled headteachers identified personal qualities that they thought helped headteachers lead and manage small schools. These include flexibility, adaptability, ability to organise and prioritise, and a sense of humour. Leading by example, consulting and communicating, being a good teacher and knowing the children they teach were all considered to be essential qualities for a small school headteacher. The leadership style that emerged from both survey and case study evidence in 2006 was composed of three elements: a vision for the school based upon learning and teaching; a collegiate approach to leading and managing the school, and the ability to utilise all available resources both within and outwith the school. Within schools, experienced and empathetic teaching colleagues were the biggest source of support to small school headteachers. All the sample heads recognised the need to communicate with the community and appreciated the support they received from it. The percentage of small school headteachers consulting parents formally increased from 67% in 1996 to 89% in 2006, and informally from 80% in 1996 to 89% in 2006. Most small school headteachers were skilled networkers and utilised both formal and informal contacts to support themselves and expand the opportunities for pupils and other staff. The most popular method was informal contact with other headteachers. Significant challenges to effective leadership of small schools identified by the headteachers included: uncertainty arising during periods of acting headship; a local authority's policies regarding placing children with additional educational needs in small schools; absent or unskilled teaching colleagues; probationer teachers; and isolation from the main stream of educational practices.

## **Support and development**

*Question: What support and development opportunities are available to small school headteachers?*

Headteachers in small schools utilised a number of sources of support and development. In both 1996 and 2006 the most frequently used form of support was informal discussion with other headteachers (96% in both 1996 and 2006). A large majority of small school headteachers relied on advice from their local authority (91% in 1996, 80% in 2006). Typically this entailed termly visits from service managers/quality assurance officers to help them with school development plans and to monitor progress. Reliance on their own reading and analysis of documentation from the Scottish Executive had declined from 90% of small school headteachers in 1996 to 76% in 2006. The percentage of sampled headteachers who mentioned taking advice from HMIE increased from 38% in 1996 to 68% in 2006. Headteachers identified three types of schools clusters which could help them: 91% of small school headteachers in both 1996 and 2006 used informal exchanges with other schools; 50% in 2006 (61% in 1996) developed joint policies and materials; and 32% in 2006 (25% in 1996) engaged in full sharing of resources. The percentage of surveyed headteachers belonging to small school networks remained constant over the 10 years at 47% of respondents. Use of e-mail had increased among small school headteachers from 38% in 1996 to 89% in 2006, although caution must be exercised with this finding. (See Section 6.2.) A significant proportion of small schools shared in-service days, however, this had declined from 92% in 1996 to 80% in 2006. The percentage of small school headteachers reporting inadequate clerical support had declined from 38% in 1996 to 18% in 2006. Small school headteachers consulted their staff both formally (82% in 2006, 91% in 1996) and informally (94% in 2006, 89% in 1996), with a slight shift to informal methods of consultation. The percentage consulting School Boards also increased from 42% in 1996 to 61% in 2006.

## **1.0 Discussion**

### **Changes over the ten years**

Clearly major changes have occurred in the ten years between 1996 and 2006 that separate the two studies of small school headteachers in Scotland. Devolution and a Labour and Liberal Democratic Partnership had introduced a host of new educational policies, and more changes are promised in the manifesto of the Scottish National Party's new administration (SNP, 2007). Both groups of small school headteachers in the two studies were trying to implement initiatives, albeit different ones. In 1996, we (Wilson & McPake, 1998) argued that successful management of change required headteachers who could undertake a realistic appraisal of their current situation, develop a shared vision of the future, and plan the first few practical steps for implementation. For many of the headteachers working in small schools, this was implicitly understood. The 1996 respondents articulated a vision of the future firmly based on benefits for the children and communities which they served, and achieved this largely through their efforts as curriculum leaders. They neither perceived

themselves to be, nor referred to themselves as, educational managers but pragmatically led their schools by continuing to develop as teachers on to which they had bolted a set of specific leadership and management activities to meet the particular circumstances in which they operated. They demonstrated a contingent management style which took full account of the particular circumstances in which most small school headteachers found themselves as *teaching headteachers* with few other colleagues or resources to help them. Their main concerns at that time were the pace of change, the growth of management activities, the amount of paperwork, the lack of clerical support and the invisibility of small schools in national educational policy.

Have things changed in the intervening ten years? In fundamental ways the answer is 'No'. The main element of the job remains one of being a *teaching headteacher*, with all its attendant pleasures and difficulties. Most small school headteachers were still operating with a contingent style of leadership that took account of their particular situations, albeit there was more reference to consulting supportive colleagues and using clerical staff than there had been in 1996. Most of the small school headteachers who participated in the 2006 research operated with a very similar philosophy to the one that underpinned the work of the group in 1996. (35%, 23, of the 2006 sample, were still in the posts they held in 1996, and therefore, participated in both studies.) Most still enjoyed teaching and leading small schools and were clearly committed to maintaining small schools for the benefit of children and rural communities in Scotland. Case Study 4 headteacher encouraged others to be "*very positive*". She actually liked being "*the boss, not having to follow someone else's management line*" and felt there was more scope for action in small schools. Most still preferred to consult informally with other headteachers than use any other source of support. Others pointed out that there were few if any discipline problems, that local communities were extremely supportive and that parents were more than willing to provide additional resources. Most also thought that pupils in small schools became independent sooner than those in larger schools and were willing to take responsibility for themselves and for younger children. However, these positive aspects did not prevent respondents from recognising that many small school headteachers face serious problems; time (or lack of it) was still perceived to be the most disabling. Case Study 4 headteacher identified the lack of it – "*time just isn't there*" – as a serious problem facing small school headteachers. She also recognised the need to have a strong team and said that "*things were great when it works but you can imagine in a school that didn't get on, it would be very difficult.*" The consensus appeared to be that when things were going well a small school headship could be one of the "*best jobs in the world*" but the question remains: is it sustainable given the demands currently being made of headteachers?

#### **A sustainable job?**

Case study headteachers were asked whether they thought the job of teaching headteacher was sustainable: their answers were qualified. Reluctantly, respondents expressed concerns which focused on the pressures of juggling, the need for additional resources, recruitment difficulties and wider societal expectations of education. Although headteachers' attitudes towards change had changed for the

better since 1996, there was still a perception that the changes had placed particular pressures on small schools (94% in 1996; 90% in 2006). In addition, the reported level of stress amongst small school headteachers was high and had improved only slightly since 1996 (66% in 1996; 59% in 2006.) Case Study 1 headteacher thought that in the future *“it will become more difficult to fill posts [in small schools], the last job advertised around here only got one application, the acting HT won’t apply for it.”* Reluctantly, she concluded that

*“...the teaching head job is not sustainable. The only reason I took this job [as a cluster headteacher] was that I couldn’t sustain the level of quality in learning and teaching and management that I have given all those previous years.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 1)*

Another headteacher who was highly committed to small schools, reflected on the job of teaching headteacher.

*“Is the job sustainable? In all honesty, no. Just the way education is, just the way society is, we are teaching children to go into a very different world, we have to think out of the box. Curriculum for Excellence is making us think about it, it is the quality, the quality of teaching. We have to be in the classroom 90% of time. It is about giving them quality. I feel that I am juggling plates. A manager of a school needs to be focused on managing a school – all aspects. It is about your health as a manager. I sometimes think I never get off the mark with the paperwork. Got to prioritise it, but there is so much of it nowadays, all this instant access, the pace of it is too fast”.*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 2)*

A similar decision had been reached by the headteacher in Case Study 3.

*“I don’t think the job is sustainable. I’ve come to this in the last year. The workload is huge, demands on both jobs so huge [teaching and managing], can be very stressful. Burn out has not happened to me, my background helps, so it hasn’t happened. The job is changing.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 3)*

The headteacher in Case Study 9 didn’t know whether small schools were sustainable. She pointed out the disproportionate effect that a demotivated teacher, for instance a management support teacher who views herself as a supply teacher, and/or a probationer, who requires more support can have on a small school and the workload of its headteacher. She questioned her own authority’s practice of putting probationer teachers in small schools and then not employing them which resulted in a constant turnover of a third of her staff on an annual basis. These factors have a disproportionate effect on very small schools, as do HMIe inspections.

There were also wider influences affecting small schools. The acting headteacher in Case Study 5 explained that demographic trends were causing the school roll to drop: *“people don’t have children, a lot of people come from the south, stay 2-3 years and move on.”* Employment trends were also affecting the school roll of Case Study 6 in whose catchment area the number of workers employed in the forestry and hydro-electric industries had declined.

The lack of available training for those who wish to teach in or lead small schools was

raised by a number of headteachers. The headteacher in Case Study 7 thought that

*“...the trouble is that a lot of training is tailored for bigger schools. People produce resources but I wonder how are we going to use this in small schools. It raises problems. We have to cover all topics and still be fresh for children even when they have covered the topic before. I sometimes find it lonely if there is no other teacher you can talk to about the curriculum.”*

*(Headteacher, Case Study 7)*

A similar problem, related to initial teacher education, was raised by a student on placement from an Institute of Higher Education in Case Study 2.

*“The tutors [of the BEd course] never even mentioned teaching in a small school. They never say one day you might have a class of primary 1-4. I was really nervous [coming on this placement]... We should at least talk about teaching in a rural school.”*

*(4<sup>th</sup> year BEd student)*

Many of these issues, outwith the control of small school headteachers, will need to be addressed if the enthusiasm and commitment which many of them show towards their schools, pupils and communities are to be harnessed fully. We would argue that a key to the success of small school headteachers and their ability to cope lies in the support and training they are given.

#### **Available support**

This research questions whether the support available to small school headteachers has increased during the past ten years to a level that enables them to manage a school effectively and also deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum without experiencing undue stress. In some respects support has increased but in other ways it has failed to develop. Clerical support staff are more evident than they were in 1996, but in many small schools this is still not provided by means of a full-time post. In both 1996 and 2006 the most frequently used form of support by small school headteachers was informal discussions with other headteachers (96% in both 1996 and 2006), although a very high proportion also used their local authority’s quality assurance officers. The implication is that small school headteachers tend towards being a self-reliant group who value most the advice of colleagues in similar posts. The obvious danger is that this group may find itself not only geographically isolated but also cut off from the mainstream of educational ideas. There are already signs that the national influence on small schools has declined over the period. Fewer small school headteachers read and analyse Scottish Executive documentation than they did ten years ago (76% in 2006 compared to 90% in 1996). Very few used LTS’s website. Few had received any form of management training before their appointment. Very few had completed or were undertaking the SQH – an issue that may need to be considered in any future evaluation of the standard for headship and its relevance to small schools. A large majority relied on advice from their local authorities, through which national priorities may have been filtered. Typically, small school headteachers looked to local authority service managers to help them with school development plans and quality assurance. In addition they were aware of HMIE’s standards (an increase from 38% in 1996 to 68% in 2006) over a period when HMIE’s influence in educational policy

making is thought to have declined. Reliance on supportive colleagues, clerical staff, parents and the community were also evident.

Disappointingly, given small school headteachers' preference for networking, clustering has not developed as might have been anticipated in 1996. The percentage of small school headteachers belonging to a small school network remained constant over the past ten years at 47% of respondents, although some report that their local authorities have withdrawn funding for such activities. Informal clustering of schools remained high at 91% in both 1996 and 2006. However, the popularity of clusters as groups in which to develop joint policies and materials has declined from 81% in 1996 to 50% in 2006, and less than a third of respondents report full sharing of resources, which would help them teach a multi-age and -stage curriculum. These arrangements are areas that could be developed further in order to relieve the pressures reported by small school headteachers.

### **7.4 In conclusion**

In conclusion one of the respondents to the survey pointed out the need to “*talk up*” small schools at a time when around a third of them feel that they are under threat from possible closure and 70 small schools have closed during the past ten years. It is certainly not the intention of this research to fuel that debate, nor to criticise the effectiveness of small school headteachers, but rather to consider objectively the role of the small school headteacher. By any standards the current role of *teaching headteacher* is a complex one. Small school headteachers need to demonstrate a high level of expertise in teaching multi-age and –stage classes while at the same time providing effective whole school leadership, usually by operating with a contingent leadership style. Successful leadership of small schools requires an ability ‘to juggle’ a wide range of competing priorities, with few colleagues or resources. In some ways the people who hold these posts are a self-selecting group, whose qualities fortuitously match the essential requirements for the job. Currently many come from rural areas; their diverse experiences help them cope and they are committed to the pupils. It cannot be assumed that this set of circumstances will remain unchanged. Current incumbents are also an ageing group, who have learnt their skills largely by teaching in small schools. The message from this research is that they need adequate support if they are to maintain their unique style effectively for the benefit of the children who live in some of Scotland’s more remote communities.



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# Appendices

## A1: Search Strategy

### A1. Databases

The following three electronic databases were searched in September 2006 in order to update the original research:

- ERIC - Educational Resources Information Centre
- BEI - British Education Index
- AEI - Australian Education Index.

### A2 Keywords

The following keywords were used in combination with each other:

- Small school
- Small primary school
- Small elementary school
- Small school and year of publication (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006)
- Small school and country (Scotland, UK, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, New Zealand).

### A3 Results

The number of references in each database was:

ERIC 244

BEI 9

AEI 4

Total 257.

### A4 Application of inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria (ie small school, only primary/elementary schools, developed countries, refereed articles, published in English) were applied in a series of steps to the 257 references.

Step 1: Duplicate titles removed.

Step 2: Removed articles published prior to 1999.

Step 3: Scanned titles to remove ones not relevant to small primary schools (ie reports of the small high school movement in the USA).

Step 4: Read remaining abstracts and removed ones referring to developing countries.

Step: 5 Removed last remaining non-refereed articles.

Step 6: Read and included remainder.

## **A2: Interview Topic Guide**

### **Leading small primary schools Topic guide (headteachers)**

As you know, SCRE Centre has been commissioned by the Scottish Executive Education Department to carry out a sponsored research study into leadership and management in small primary schools in Scotland. The study aims to identify leadership and management strategies and activities adopted by headteachers. This interview is intended to explore some of the issues.

#### **1. Self**

I'd like to begin by asking you about yourself. Firstly, can we focus on your background and in particular the route you have taken to headship.

Could you tell me about your qualifications and previous experience?

PROMPTS:

- qualifications?
- teaching experience?
- experience in promoted posts?
- encouragement to apply for a headship?
- specific training for headship?
- any career plans?

#### **2. Style**

Can I ask you to reflect on your own approach to leadership and management?

PROMPTS

- the main elements?
- vision?
- obstacles?
- planning?
- consultation?
- influences and role models?

#### **3. Motivation**

Could we talk about motivation, both for yourself and your staff?

How do you motivate yourself? Your staff?

PROMPTS:

- any particular ways?
- is resistance to change an issue?
- how do you overcome resistance?

#### **4. Activities**

Turning towards your experiences of leading this small school, have you developed any particular strategies or activities that you think help?

PROMPTS:

- any special support mechanisms? (eg networking, clusters, ICT, E-mail links, informal links)
- any training?
- any resources?
- role of your local authority?

**Finally, are there any other comments you would like to make about leading and managing a small school?**

Thanks, and explain arrangements about confidentiality.

## A3: Sampling Strategy

### The sampling frame

The sample for this research was drawn from the School Census 2005 data (Scottish Executive, 2006<sup>4</sup>). The number of primary schools in Scotland with fewer than 50 pupils is recorded as 431 in Table 1.2 (Scottish Executive, 2006: 10).

### Sampling method

The earlier research on the *Management of Change in Small Schools* (Wilson & McPake, 1998) surveyed all 863 small primary schools in Scotland with schools rolls of 120 pupils or less. It found that the typical small school had two to three teachers and that small schools were concentrated within ten local authorities, in which over 50% of the schools were small. Lack of resources prevented the replication of a national survey, and a random sample of ten small schools with fewer than 50 pupils was selected from the ten local authorities with the highest percentage of small schools. This generated a list of 100 schools, ninety-nine of which had from 1 to 7 teachers: the number of teachers in one school was not recorded.

### Sample achieved

A postal questionnaire was sent to the 100 schools in the sample. Non-respondents were sent an e-mail reminder plus an electronic copy of the questionnaire. Sixty-eight completed questionnaires were received from 97 schools (70% response rate in 2006; 82% in 1996): a further three questionnaires were returned marked 'school closed'. Table 1 below shows the percentage of schools with fewer than 50 pupils nationally, within the sample frame and within the achieved sample.

**Table 1: The percentage of schools with fewer than 50 pupils with 1-4 teacher, including the headteacher, in national, drawn and achieved samples**

No. of teachers in the school (including the headteacher)	% of schools with fewer than 50 pupils in national sample	% of schools with fewer than 50 pupils in drawn sample	% of schools with fewer than 50 pupils in achieved sample
1	3	4	6
1.1-1.9	17	23	26
<b>2-2.9</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>55</b>
3-3.9	20	12	12
4+	13	8	2

In all three samples, 2 to 2.9 teachers is the most common number of teachers in schools with fewer than 50 pupils. There is, however, an under-representation of schools with 4+ teachers in both the drawn sample and the achieved sample, which may affect the generalisability of the findings outwith the ten local authorities that participated in the research. In addition, it is not possible to make exact comparisons between the results from the research undertaken in 1996 and 2006 as the samples varied.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Executive (2006) *Pupils in Scotland, 2005, Statistical Bulletin*, Edn/B1/2006/1, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

## A4: Annotated Questionnaire

### Leadership in Small Primary Schools A questionnaire for primary school headteachers

#### A. About your school

1. What is the current roll of your school? 3-53 pupils

2. Is the roll?

*Tick one box*

increasing	11 (17%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
decreasing	23 (35%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
fairly stable	31 (48%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

3a. How many teachers (full-time equivalent) (including yourself) are there in the schools?

1-4.5

a. How many support staff (FTE) are there in the school? 0-6

4. How would you describe your school's catchment area?

*Tick one box*

rural	49 (74%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
town	1 (2%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
city	0 (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
mixed	0 (0%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
island	16 (24%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. In which education authority is your school sited? 10 LAs\_(see Table 3.3)

1. Do any of the following factors pertain to your school?

*Tick one box*

geographical isolation	26 (39%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
poor/inadequate accommodation	9 (14%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
inadequate facilities for games/PE	31 (47%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
connected to e-mail network	26 (39%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### B. Headship in practice

7. Looking back over the past 5 years would you describe it as a period of rapid...

*Tick one box*

curricular change?	34 (52%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
management change?	42 (64%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
societal change?	13 (20%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

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1. Have these changes placed particular pressure on small schools?

*Tick one box*

yes	56 (90%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
no	2 (3%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
varies/don't know	4 (7%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Which of the following methods/activities have you used to lead your school? *Please tick as many as apply.*

Formal consultation with staff	54 (82%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal consultation with staff	62 (94%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formal consultation with parents	59 (89%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal discussions with parents	59 (89%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Target setting	62 (94%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delegation of specific tasks	48 (73%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Utilised advice from EDS/EAs	51 (77%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joined development groups outwith school	43 (65%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reading/analysis of documentation	50 (76%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal development activity (eg study, teacher placement)	44 (67%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal discussion with other headteachers	63 (96%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preparation of written strategy	36 (55%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working closely with school clerical staff	60 (91%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informal discussion with friends/acquaintances	48 (73%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice from School Board	40 (61%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice from HMIEs	45 (68%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____	6 (9%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Which of the following support mechanisms:

*Tick as many as apply*

	have you utilised?	do you require?
Email	59 (89%) <input type="checkbox"/>	3 (5%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Video conferencing	14 (21%) <input type="checkbox"/>	9 (14%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Clustering at the level of informal exchanges with nearby schools	60 (91%) <input type="checkbox"/>	4 (6%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Clustering at the level of joint policies and work schemes	33 (50%) <input type="checkbox"/>	12 (18%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Clustering at the level of joint teaching and full resource sharing	21 (32%) <input type="checkbox"/>	8 (12%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Small schools network	33 (47%) <input type="checkbox"/>	13 (20%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Shared PAT sessions with nearby schools	38 (58%) <input type="checkbox"/>	5 (8%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Shared In-service days with nearby schools	53 (80%) <input type="checkbox"/>	4 (6%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Advice from EDS/EAs	53 (80%) <input type="checkbox"/>	1 (2%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Additional clerical support	22 (33%) <input type="checkbox"/>	12 (18%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with parents	59 (89%) <input type="checkbox"/>	1 (2%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Discussions with school board	52 (79%) <input type="checkbox"/>	3 (5%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Support from the community	56 (85%) <input type="checkbox"/>	2 (3%) <input type="checkbox"/>

Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_ *USE 10 (15%); NEED 1 (2%) Shared collegiate times)* \_\_\_\_\_



**A. Headship in a small school**

**We are interested in your opinions about the experience of leading a small school.**

11. Below is a list of statements drawn from individual interviews with headteachers. Which of them reflects your own experience as head of a small school?

*Tick as many as apply*

Headship is like sitting on a lonely crag	9 (14%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I don't see myself as a manager, I see myself as head of a team	45 (68%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Small school heads never go on to senior positions in education	3 (5%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I felt more confident after an HMIE inspection	31 (47%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Having to teach my own children was a difficult time	10 (15%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I want to offer a 'good Scottish education'	44 (67%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I want to create a safe and happy environment in this school	62 (94%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I get to the paperwork when and if I can	36 (55%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Parents support me in my aims here	54 (82%) <input type="checkbox"/>
The children are more confident with the computer than I am	12 (18%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Geographical isolation is not really a problem	25 (38%) <input type="checkbox"/>
The threat of closure is never very far from our minds	23 (35%) <input type="checkbox"/>
It is difficult to leave the classroom	23 (35%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I don't have a team, I am the team	7 (11%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Management training needs adapting for small school headteachers	37 (56%) <input type="checkbox"/>
The kids keep me going	32 (49%) <input type="checkbox"/>
I feel more stressed than I used to	39 (59%) <input type="checkbox"/>

1. Which of the following statements best describes your attitude towards recent changes?

Change is long overdue; many of the new initiatives imply formalise good practice	20 (30%) <input type="checkbox"/>
Each change has to be taken on its merits and adapted according to need	37 (56%) <input type="checkbox"/>
The problem lies in the pace of change; there just aren't enough hours in the day	31 (47%) <input type="checkbox"/>
It's a case of change for the sake of change; we've had too much thrown at us already	14 (21%) <input type="checkbox"/>

**D. About you**

13. Are you: Male 5 (8%)  Female 59 (92%)

14. Please indicate your age:

under 35	3 (5%) <input type="checkbox"/>
35–50	28 (44%) <input type="checkbox"/>
over 50	33 (52%) <input type="checkbox"/>

## Leadership in small Scottish primary schools

15. Do you currently live within your school's catchment area?

Yes 20 (30%)  No 44 (69%)

16. As a child, did you attend a small primary school?

Yes 21 (32%)  No 44 (68%)

17. Were you originally from a rural area?

Yes 30 (46%)  No 35 (54%)

18. Were you educated in a:

*Tick as many as apply*

Scottish University 18 (27%)   
Scottish College of Education 49 (74%)   
Other 13 (20%)  Please

*specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

19. What educational qualifications do you possess?

*Tick as many as apply*

College DipEd 34 (52%)   
BEd 14 (21%)   
BA, BSc, MA 15 (23%)   
MEd 1 (2%)   
PGCE 18 (27%)   
Other 17 (26%)  Please

*specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

### E. Your route to headship

20. How long have you been headteacher in this school? \_\_\_less than 1 yr-26yrs\_\_\_ years

21. Have you previous experience of teaching in a small school?

Yes 47 (72%)  No 18 (28%)

22. Is this your first headship? Yes 45 (73%)  No 17 (27%)

*If NO, please specify previous experience:* \_\_\_\_\_

23. Have you received any leadership/management training for headship?

Yes 50 (78%)  No 14 (22%)

**Comment: Could you briefly describe the nature of the training or the reasons why none has been received.**

24. From which of the following sources did you receive encouragement to apply for your current post?

*Tick as many as apply*

self	49 (74%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
friends	37 (56%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
colleagues	33 (50%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
the former headteacher	17 (26%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
the headteacher in my previous schools	25 (38%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
EA advisers/other members of the directorate	22 (33%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
other	5 (8%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Please

specify: \_\_\_\_\_

25. Which of the following best describes your career plans for the future?

*Tick one box*

remain in current post	34 (52%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
apply for headship of a larger school	6 (9%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
apply for headship of another small school	2 (3%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
seek other employment in education	3 (5%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
seek employment outwith education	1 (2%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
seek early retirement	2 (3%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
no clear plans at the moment	9 (14%)	<input type="checkbox"/>
other	5 (8%)	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If OTHER, please specify\_3*

(5%) \_\_\_\_\_

## F. Finally

26. Please describe any strategies for leading small schools that you have developed:

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Thank you for the time and trouble you have taken to respond to this questionnaire – your help is very much appreciated. Please return it to me electronically as soon as possible. [valerie.wilson@scrc.ac.uk](mailto:valerie.wilson@scrc.ac.uk)

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