

What are the challenges small primary school leaders in the UK face, & what may be the potential solutions to these?

Did you know...

...small rural schools seem to be better at establishing strong links to their community (Fargas-Malet & Bagley, 2022)

...however, the number of small primary schools in England halved from 1980 to 2018 & rural schools are twice as likely to close as the national average (O'Brien, 2019)

What are the challenges leaders at these small schools face & what could be potential solutions?

What is the definition of a small school?

In primary schools:
101 pupils or less (Carter, 2003)
with schools under 50 pupils considered as "very small"
(Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009, p. 102)

"Rural primary schools tend to be small"
(Walker, 2010, p. 713)

Challenges

Nature of the leadership role

- Dual/multi-role (e.g., teaching & leadership)
- Time pressure, mental wellbeing (e.g., loneliness) & workload

Finances & resources

- Financial pressures & lack of funding
- Declining pupil numbers & threat of closure

Relationship & partnership management

- Managing school staff (e.g., attitudes & relationships)
- Working with parents, local authorities, other schools, local community

Teaching & learning

- Teaching quality & academic performance
- Implementation of new initiatives (e.g., National, LA, pace of change)

Schools' location & accessibility

- Lower accessibility of staff, facilities, infrastructure, & resources
- Geographic isolation

Potential Solutions

Developing relationships & partnerships

- Intra-school (e.g., building parental trust, staff relationships), inter-school (e.g., clusters, networks, federation, MAT), community (e.g., village using school space)
- Shared facilities (e.g., with local community)

Inclusive and focused leadership

- Inclusive approach (e.g., collegiate approach) & flatter leadership structure (e.g., non-hierarchical)
- Reducing teaching commitment

Providing leaders and staff with effective support & CPD

- Increasing capacity of staff (e.g., NQT mentoring, CPD, increase admin support, shared CPD) & headteacher (e.g., mentoring, acting HT support)

Enhanced finances & pooled resources

- Pooling resources (e.g., sharing costs in partnerships)
- Funding & financial understanding

Enhanced school provision

- Out-of-school-time (e.g., breakfast club)
- In-school (e.g., nursery, flexi-schooling)