

National Association for Small Schools

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PRESS RELEASE

SMALL SCHOOLS

ASSETS not LIABILITIES

A year ago this subject was at the heart of media storm very welcome to us as upwards of 100 or more small schools across the UK were up for closure. You took NASS at face value, perhaps because our evidence is so overwhelmingly convincing, and we were very grateful. What has happened since?

- 1 Every Council withdrew its proposals but the scheming still goes on. Many Welsh schools remain at risk.
- 2 Our partners Human Scale Education have begun work to create small scale in large secondary schools, funded by up to £4m by major Foundations like Gulbenkian, Paul Hamlyn and Esmeé Fairbairn.
- 3 Tory Policy now demands smaller secondary schools.
- 4 Gwynedd Council and the Mayor of Barrow lost power in May on policies proposing widespread small school closures, primary or secondary.
- 5 The Hattie Report from New Zealand confirms three other major studies showing that beyond minimum standards of ventilation, sound insulation and working space the quality of school and college buildings has little impact on pupil/student performance. Yet school closure proposals are indelibly coupled at government and LEA level with major new buildings programmes. The cachet "fit for the future" owns not a hint of what future educational provision will actually need in the rapidly-changing world our children face. Taxpayers money is likely to be seriously wasted.
- 6 There remains no enduring evidence that class size influences teaching quality. Research continues to show the key factors governing outcomes remain home background and teaching quality. The Hattie Report analysing 815 small-scale studies over 15 years and 90 million pupils identifies human-scale factors as the key elements of effectiveness, not system or organisation or top-down imposed strategy that damages teaching.
- 7 NASS knows large schools can achieve comparably excellent results to those by small schools but believes it is that much harder as the numbers grow to find the leadership energy, vision and inspiration. The factor identified by inspectors across the UK distinctive in small schools is the quality of the relationships and partnership between parents and teachers, sharing values, standards and effort in ways that make children, especially at the start, feel safe and secure. Those essentially human factors are driving the success of one of the best models of education yet produced. That quality is just not possible with large numbers.
- 8 What Sue Palmer describes as "toxic childhood" has grown worse. The price of identifiable educational failure, especially in larger urban schools, coupled with family and neighbourhood breakdown is now enormous. Our society is seriously threatened by the symptoms and these are escalating, to with "Panorama" on sexual bullying even among five year olds (NSPCC cases) and gang culture imposing itself on schools in the daytime.
- 9 NASS argues we need those glowing inspection reports flowing from our urban schools. Children in our towns and cities need that quality of partnership between the adults who most matter to most young children. It is too late later. We need small schools in our towns and cities and that was first proposed by Len Marsh in 1973. He later became one of our visionary Training College Principals. James Wetz' C4 "Dispatches" documentary argued for future secondary provision to be street-based small units, 5 x 300 for example rather than 1 x 1500. NASS has argued this "urban village" concept for twelve years but nobody is interested in repairing early education yet that is where the damage occurs that produces the later problems.
- 10 The small-school model is unchallengeable, even on cost. We have the evidence and the argument that dismantles the tired reliance on one single financial statistic to justify the false claim small schools drain resources away from the rest. In fact long term they return a profit and significantly promise society well-being. We need to return education to its roots in parents and communities and that is the proper target for the millions proposed foolishly to be spent on bricks and mortar. In that rapidly-changing future few can predict what provision will look like but parents and teachers will still be central and there are clear, easy answers to making both high quality resources.