The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

ADMINISTRATIVE CIRCULAR	1/2011	24 January 2011

PRIMARY SCHOOL CLUSTER MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

1   Background

1.1   On 19 January 2006 the Education, Culture & Sport Committee considered a report on a Cluster Primary School Management Model. The Committee

(1) noted the progress made with the Cluster Primary School Management Model (ie. Skye primary school pilot).

(2) agreed that the Highland Council should adopt a policy of establishing Cluster Primary Schools as appropriate geographically, and following consultation as set out in Section 3.3 of the report (ie. with Elected Members, teaching and non teaching staff, and School Boards (later, Parent Councils)).

1.2   The Scottish Government recently introduced legislation on the presumption against the closure of small rural schools (Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010).

1.3   The Highland Council, like other local authorities, is experiencing increasing difficulty in recruiting Head Teachers for small primary schools due to a number of factors, including the leadership and management role required of a class committed Head Teacher, and insignificant salary differentials between posts such as Chartered Teacher / Depute Head Teachers in large primary schools and Head Teachers in small primary schools.

1.4   Against this background, in Highland there are currently 141 class committed primary Head Teachers out of a total of 183 primary schools. Of these 141 Head Teachers, 109 are in schools with rolls of less than 72 and so are also not eligible to have a Principal Teacher.

1.5   Following the ECS Committee's decision in January 2006 to adopt a policy of establishing cluster management arrangements where appropriate, and the repeal of the 1956 Schools Code legislation which had required that there be one Head Teacher for every school, a number of primary cluster management arrangements have been established across the Highland Council area. There are currently 26 cluster arrangements providing professional management for a total of 52 primary schools across the 3 administrative areas.

1.6   The Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers has carried out a review of cluster management arrangements, and, while it is acknowledged that there are issues requiring to be addressed in this model of primary school management, the review found no compelling evidence to justify the dismantling of the current cluster arrangements.

1.7   The LNCT review group recommended that, in order to ensure consistency of approach, an Administrative Circular on cluster management arrangements be drawn up, taking account of the experience of such arrangements within Highland to date.

2.   Protocol for the establishment of primary school permanent cluster management arrangements

2.1   General

2.1.1   The option of establishing primary school cluster management arrangements will be considered by the Education, Culture & Sport Service when Head Teacher vacancies occur in primary schools

2.1.2   Consultation will take place with local Elected Members, teaching and non teaching staff, and Parent Councils when considering the establishment of a cluster. Their views will be fully considered prior to establishing a cluster.

2.1.3   The Joint Secretaries of the LNCT will be kept   fully informed about possible cluster management arrangements.

2.1.4   Unless in exceptional circumstances, the maximum number of primary schools to be managed within a cluster will be two.

2.1.5   Factors such as geography, the proximity of neighbouring schools, and relationship to Associated School Groups will be taken into account when considering a cluster arrangement. Unless in exceptional circumstances, a primary school cluster will not be spread across two ASGs.

2.2   Appointment procedures for cluster Head Teacher

2.2.1   Cluster Head Teachers will be appointed in accordance with the Highland Council's agreed policy on Appointments Procedures for Head Teachers and Depute Head Teachers (LNCT Agreement no. 23).

2.3   Management time for cluster Head Teacher and Quality Assurance arrangements

2.3.1   All cluster Head Teachers will be non class committed in order to provide maximum management time across the cluster.

2.3.2   Schools in a cluster management arrangement should have the same Quality Improvement Officer.

2.3.3   Cluster schools within the same ASG will have the same Principal Accounting Technician (formerly referred to as Finance Officer). Where cluster schools are sited across two Associated School Groups, wherever possible the same Principal Accounting Technician will be allocated to these schools.

2.4   Principal Teacher posts in cluster management arrangements

2.4.1   Principal Teachers will be appointed within the cluster school arrangement providing the aggregated pupil roll meets the formula for the appointment of Principal Teachers.

2.4.2   Principal Teachers will be appointed in accordance with the Highland Council's agreed policy on Appointments Procedures for Principal Teachers (LNCT Agreement no. 5).

2.4.3   The duties of the Principal Teacher will be in line with Annex B of 'A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century'.

2.4.4   Job descriptions for Principal Teachers will be drawn up in line with LNCT Agreement no. 2 (Generic PT Remit), and with PT sample remits devised by the Primary Head Teachers' working group.

2.5   Teaching staff responsibilities

The role of teaching staff is defined in Annex B of 'A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century'.

2.6   Communication

2.6.1   Good communication amongst all stake holders will be a key feature in ensuring success in a cluster management arrangement.

2.6.2   A cluster Head Teacher should maintain planned contact with each school on a daily basis. The Head Teacher should be able to be contacted at all times, and teaching staff, support staff and parents should know how to make contact when required. Mobile phones and electronic communication should feature highly.

2.6.3   Where a cluster Head Teacher is not available, there should be clear procedures in place for staff and parents to contact a named person such as Area ECS Manager in the event of an emergency.

3.   Protocol for the establishment of primary school temporary cluster management arrangements

3.1   General

3.1.1   When a primary Head Teacher post becomes vacant, the ECS Service will consider a range of interim management arrangements such as acting up and temporary cluster arrangements.

3.1.2   The Parental Involvement Act 2006 requirement for all local authorities to have in place appropriate appointments procedures for Head / Depute Head Teacher posts relates to permanent posts only. A temporary cluster Head Teacher may therefore be appointed pending a permanent appointment being made without recourse to the agreed Appointment Procedures. However, good practice would include appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders, including parents.

3.1.3   Temporary cluster Head Teachers may also be appointed from time to time to cover situations such as Head Teacher absence or secondment.

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