

Rationale

The children of Gunnislake and Delaware schools are mixed together in their year groups across the two sites. This has been a fundamental change, made for good educational reasons, benefitting both schools.

In March 2020 when COVID struck, some small schools struggled to maintain educational provision with small numbers of staff. As a trust we had several larger schools which acted as a hub for smaller ones. Gunnislake children attended the Delaware base since there were three of them attending regularly at this time (meeting the requirements of key worker/vulnerable criteria). These children were spread across the age ranges, so whilst at the Delaware site, they could learn and socialise with children of a similar age. Educational provision matched the children's need in each year group and both Delaware and Gunnislake children benefitted.

Why haven't both schools returned to their original sites with things 'back to normal'?

We have more children on site in both schools and can no longer accommodate all the children in one school building. As educationally all children were making better progress with their learning, we continued the arrangement and consulted the Regional Schools Commissioner's team to see what changes we would be permitted to make to benefit all the children on both sites.

When all children returned, this approach has been maintained due to the uncertainty with the pandemic and as happened, further lockdowns. The benefit was: neither school had to move to remote learning due to low numbers of staffing, since the cross-school approach enabled a more flexible style of organisation.

There have been numerous benefits of working in this way:

- Educationally, the children are all arranged in year groups, learning with children of their own age.
- The children from both schools have widened their social networks and the majority don't identify themselves as a pupil from a specific school, they see the schools as one holistic learning environment with one head teacher.
- The children accept each other and show good attitudes to learning.
- With just Years 5 and 6 being at one site, this has given them a more 'grown up' learning environment and chance to play freely at breaktimes. We have reorganized resources and refitted toilets to suit the new age range.
- The children have chosen outdoor play equipment suitable for their age group with basketball hoops installed, which would not be accessible for younger children.
- Children are keen to articulate how they feel more mature as a result. This has also supported transition to secondary school, making the children ready for their next phase in education.
- The strength in provision of the curriculum has greatly improved with staff working as a whole team across both sites. Subject leaders are flourishing with a quality focus on their areas, to provide a strong education for all children.
- Specific academic programmes have been bought to enhance the curriculum. For example, Read Write Inc has been implemented with children grouped at an appropriate stage. With the children being together, this has given a wider selection of children across the stages, enabled the staff to receive external training and understand, learning from each other, how

to embed this aiming for 100% children passing their phonics. The schools have also been able to afford a mapping programme for geography and a programme for modern foreign languages, for example.

- Both schools are able to thrive. Previously, there were a small number of children on roll at one site, with a sustainability concern. The other site was altering the class structure annually due to varying numbers joining in their Reception year. In the current approach, there are single aged classes which span across both sites. This gives security to children as to who will be in their class. This cannot fit on one site alone. It also provides greater opportunities for staff recruitment and movement.

Some challenges have been:

- Communicating with the school communities when we haven't known ourselves what the roadmap would look like as we emerge from the pandemic
- Not wanting to lose the many positives experienced in the quality of teaching and learning, yet considering the original status of both schools
- Making educational changes which a small number of families did not agree
- Ensuring that children visit the other site and spend time during the school year across both settings

What happens next?

School and wider trust staff are really pleased with the quality of education on offer for children on both sites and are actively looking to decide on next steps. A recent visit from a National Leader for Education confirms statements such as:

'Children report that they like the arrangement of learning across two sites.'

'Those observed (in phonics) were using Read Write Inc accurately and this was having a clear and positive impact on pupils'

'Big books are really appreciated by pupils and staff as a tool to review learning'.

'pupils were polite and helpful with a positive view of their school reflected in the fact they loved to come to school.'

Bridge Schools are in discussion with the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office and hope to complete these discussions in the summer term. A communication will be sent out to parents as soon as possible after that. We aim for this to be at the end of June/very start of July 2022.