



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

Response to
The Department of Education & Sills

Small Primary Schools – Value for Money Review

Submission on behalf of the INTO

28th March 2011

**Consultation on the Small Primary Schools
Value for Money Review**

Respondent's Details

Name	Sheila Nunan
Position (if applicable)	General Secretary
Organisation (if applicable)	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Address	35 Parnell Square, Dublin 1
Telephone	01 804 7700
Email	
Date	28 th March 2011

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of your organisation?

Personal []

On behalf of organisation [**x**]

Introduction

Up to the 1950s, small, multi-grade, schools were an established part of the education infrastructure in most countries, generally though not exclusively in rural areas. However, from that time onwards a view, largely unchallenged at the time, began to emerge in many developed countries that large schools would not only be less expensive to maintain than small schools but would deliver better educational outcomes for children and provide better working environments for teachers. This view took hold in particular when and where improvements in rural transportation infrastructure were undertaken and the state compensated for the loss small local schools by providing school transport to new amalgamated or centralised schools.

At this time many countries began a programme of small school closures or amalgamations which ran for a number of decades. For example, between 1950 and 1970 the number of small rural schools in Norway declined by half. In England and Wales over roughly the same period, nearly 2,000 small rural schools were closed.

In Ireland from the mid 1960s onwards, a similar programme of school amalgamations and closures in rural areas was undertaken. In 1966 an OECD report, *Investment in Education*, highlighted in particular the very poor state of a large proportion of national schools in the country. More importantly, it challenged the feasibility of having such a high proportion of one and two teacher schools, given the relatively high per pupil cost of these schools and their perceived deficiencies in relation to the physical conditions of many school buildings, resource provision and educational outcomes.

However, given modern research which indicates that physical infrastructure and resource provision influence educational outcomes it is arguable that any deficiencies that may have been identified in terms of outcomes (there is a distinct lack of detail in relation to this) were related to the very poor physical state of school buildings and under resourcing at the time rather than to the issue of school size alone.

The amalgamation policy was implemented by then Ministers for Education George Colley (1965- 1966) and Donagh O'Malley (1966- 1968) and by subsequent Ministers. During the period 1966 to 1973 the number of one and two teacher schools was reduced by approximately 1,100 but the policy was not without public debate and controversy. The decline of many rural communities was blamed on the policy of forced amalgamations or closures but it is also true that increasing urbanisation, emigration linked to the economic circumstances of the time and a declining birth rate also contributed to the closure of many small schools.

However, it can be argued credibly that amalgamations and closures were simply accelerated during this period and such a trend was observable in Ireland long before the 1960s as the number of one or two teacher schools steadily declined since the foundation of the state, from 4,560 or 80% of the 5,700 national schools in 1924 to 764

or 24% of the 3,172 ordinary national schools in the school year 1999/2000, to 540 or 17.1% of the 3,160 ordinary national schools in the year 2005/2006.

In Ireland as in most countries there was local opposition to closures and amalgamations. However, at the time parents lacked a cohesive voice to mount a significant opposition except in a small number of cases and there was little if any educational research to contradict claims that educational outcomes would be improved in larger school units.

Nevertheless it is fair to say that opposition from local communities sometimes led to the abandonment of amalgamation plans for individual schools. Indeed following on the highly politicised controversy surrounding the closure in 1970 of Scoil Dhún Chaoin in Kerry and its reopening in 1973, amalgamation policy has been less vigorously implemented. The perceived significance of the local school in rural communities especially in Gaeltacht areas was a significant argument against forced closure or amalgamation.

In 1991 the OECD acknowledged the importance of small rural schools in rural regeneration in Ireland. However, a report at the time encouraged amalgamations aimed at having schools with no fewer than four teachers. This concept, now called “rationalisation”, was supported in a subsequent government Green Paper “Education for a Changing World” published by a Fianna Fail government but it gave rise to considerable debate at the National Education Convention in 1994. The report of the Convention acknowledged the inevitability of rationalisation but advised that it be done in a planned and coherent manner. It drew attention to the important role of many small schools in isolated rural communities and emphasized that “educational quality and not school size per se” should be the “main criterion” for rationalisation.

Most recently the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2009) recommends amalgamations of 659 schools with fewer than 50 pupils, thus eliminating 300 teaching jobs and achieving savings of €18m, and amalgamations of 851 schools in the 50-100 pupil category, thus eliminating 200 teaching jobs and achieving savings of €9m.

These recommendations were made without regard for established criteria for amalgamation including the educational needs of the children, the rights of parents and the lateral adverse effects on the cultural, social, demographic and economic life of small rural communities.

Summary Statement

In summary primary consideration in any proposed amalgamation of schools should be given to the needs of pupils, their parents and the wider community and the views of teachers working in the schools taken into account.

A significant rationalisation of small rural schools has already taken place in Ireland and any consideration of future school provision must bear that in mind and be particularly sensitive to community wishes.

Alternatives to closure and amalgamations should be considered such as examining the possibility of repopulating existing schools rather than constantly expanding already larger schools, often with unsuitable temporary accommodation.

Schools of minority denominations and Irish medium schools should be treated with particular sensitivity in the matter of proposed amalgamations.

Amalgamation should not be considered with schools that have different languages of instruction. The language in many Gaeltacht areas was weakened following amalgamations in the 1960s and 1970s where schools were amalgamated without taking into account the linguistic context in which the schools operated.

The INTO does not and never did oppose amalgamations where this is the expressed wish of the school community. Indeed there are many examples of successful amalgamations where the INTO has played a very constructive role. Unfortunately there are many other examples where because of a lack of official support for the process, schools that have clearly expressed a wish to amalgamate have not been facilitated to do so by the Department of Education and Skills.

The INTO strongly argues that amalgamations between schools where there is a clear consensus among all the education partners for the amalgamation be prioritised.

Finally, value for money must include not only the financial costs associated with providing a network of accessible schools but also the value provided to small rural communities lacking many other community and societal facilities, especially where considerable state resources have already been invested in upgrading rural schools.

1 How well do small schools meet the needs of pupils, parents and teachers?

Numerous studies have been undertaken in many countries on the value of small schools, the efficacy of small schools in meeting education policy and objectives and the educational outcomes of pupils attending small schools. Across the world such studies conclude that pupils attending small schools achieve similar educational outcomes to

pupils attending large schools. In particular, some studies of small schools provide evidence of increased parental involvement in their children's school lives and therefore their education and that small schools attract consistently high levels of community support. Other studies appear to suggest that small schools, despite significant challenges for parents and teachers tend to embrace reform agendas more easily than big schools because they are by their nature, less bureaucratic.

Central issues in the matter of how schools meet the needs of pupils is curriculum implementation and educational outcomes. It is acknowledged that curriculum implementation is significantly different in multi-grade classrooms, the norm in small schools, compared to single stream class units which predominate in larger schools. This poses significant challenges for teachers in terms of the organisation of teaching and learning. However, there is no compelling evidence that curriculum implementation is compromised in multi-grade classrooms.

Evidence in relation to education outcomes in Irish schools can be found from a number of sources.

Whole School Evaluation Reports

The most public and accessible evidence relating to the operation of schools is the significant number of Whole School Evaluation reports by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate on all sizes of schools throughout the country for the past number of years. A review of these reports shows no evidence that educational outcomes are compromised by children being taught in smaller schools. Neither is there significant evidence that curriculum implementation is compromised by school size indicating that teachers in smaller schools in general, implement the curriculum as intended to the same extent that colleagues teaching in larger schools do.

Even a cursory glance through published WSE reports provides clear evidence that small schools throughout the country meet the needs of pupils, parents and teachers. There are frequent and regular references in these reports to the family like nature of support for pupils in these schools. One school is reported as having a "a supporting and familial characteristic spirit that is very effective in facilitating the development of pupils' self-confidence and self-belief". Another is described as "a warm, welcoming inclusive school where all pupils are cherished" while another refers to "high quality of classroom atmosphere giving all pupils a sense of belonging and security".

The reports contain regular references to very high standards of teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum in small primary schools. Such comments include "very good quality learning experiences", "very good standards are reached in many areas of the curriculum, particularly in English and Mathematics" and "very good use is made of ICT". In general, teachers and staff are commended for their efforts in providing a well-balanced curriculum.

There are frequent references to very positive interpersonal relationships and very professional working relationships between the teaching staff in small schools. Such comments include references to the “collaboration that exists among all teachers and the strong work ethic that this has created”, or “a very good collegiate spirit developed among the teachers in this school...” Another praises the “total commitment and professionalism of the principal and her staff in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.”

However, while there are frequent references to the need for improved facilities in many schools there are equally numerous references to the manner in which school buildings and grounds are kept, most acknowledging the support of parents and the local community. There are references to school buildings and grounds being “exceptionally well maintained as a location for the education of children” and to parents efforts and willingness to fundraise for school infrastructure such as additional accommodation and ICT equipment or library facilities. Almost all reports relating to small schools praise pupils behaviour and interest in learning recording the fact that pupils are actively engaged in their learning.

There are also frequent references to schools promoting positive attitudes to reading through stimulating display and good quality children’s literature in classroom libraries. One report records “the board of management is supportive of the teachers and pupils and has ensured that the school buildings are of a high order and that teachers have a range of suitable resources to assist them in the process of teaching and learning”.

The Investment in Education in 1966 argued that in large schools it would be easier “to give remedial attention to delayed pupils”. However, recent WSE reports frequently praise the special education and learning support provision in small schools. Two examples of such comments include, “a good level of care and attention is afforded to pupils with learning difficulty and special educational needs” and “there is excellent work being implemented in the area of special education through the use of very suitable teaching approaches and strategies.”

Neither do WSE reports support the view that pupils in small schools are precluded from participation in sporting or other extra-curricular activities and reports frequently acknowledge work in this area in terms such as “a range of extra-curricular activities is offered to pupils in particular football and athletics” while there are numerous references to participation in sporting, cultural, social, environmental and community activities. The involvement of parents, generally through Parents’ Associations is regularly recognised in this regard.

Difficulties associated with the role of the teaching principal are well documented. Teaching principals are generally employed in three quarters of all Irish schools. Notwithstanding the significant challenges associated with the role, WSE reports frequently comment on the good leadership of teaching principals and the assistance

provided in this regard by other teachers. They also report frequently that positive working relationships are an attractive feature of the overall work. This is achieved despite the lack of support for teaching principals. A straight forward example of this is the lack of sufficient release time from teaching duties provided for principal teachers in the south compared to the provision of two days per week in the north.

In summary it is clear that WSE reports are supportive of the educational provision in small schools and provide evidence that educational outcomes are not compromised by small school size.

Educational Assessments

Similarly, research carried out by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on curriculum implementation does not support an argument that curriculum implementation is influenced by school size. Neither has any evidence been advanced from numerous national assessments in the area of mathematics and literacy in primary schools to support an argument that educational outcomes are influenced by school size.

The Report Of The Commission On School Accommodation claimed that amalgamation continues to be a way of providing enhanced facilities for pupils in areas such as physical education, art music, sport and technology but fails to offer any evidence to show that provision of these curricular elements is deficient in small schools or indeed that they would be delivered to a higher standard in an amalgamated school. Indeed there is evidence to contradict the Commission's implied criticism. Mulryan Kyne (2001)¹ finds that no significant difference exists in either cognitive or non-cognitive learning outcomes for combined versus single grade classes.

Many small schools are Irish medium schools.

Tá toadhcháí na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht ag braith go mór ar chúrsaí oideachais. Tá an Ghaeilge ag laghdú mar theanga chumarsáide go láidir i ngach ceantair agus siad na scoileanna Gaeltachta an seans deireadh ag an teanga. Is scoileanna beaga iad an chuid is mó don na scoileanna Gaeltachta agus cuidíonn sé seo leis an teanga. Tá sé i bhfad níos easca teanga a mhúineadh le grúpaí beaga go hairithe má tá teanga eile ag cuid de na páistí atá sa scoil. Tá sé le feiceáil go soiléir go bhfuil dul chun na Gaeilge bainte amach ag scoileanna beaga agus nach mbeadh an Ghaeilge chomh láidir i gceantracha airithe gan na scoileanna beaga.

¹ Mulryan Kyne, C, (2003) 'Teaching and Learning in Multigrade Classrooms: More Questions Than Answers, Oideas 51.

Therefore while it may be indisputable that curriculum implementation in smaller schools and therefore in mixed classes requires considerable additional work from teachers in terms of planning, classroom management and resource management there is no evidence that educational outcomes are compromised by small school size. In addition it must be borne in mind that the curriculum in Irish schools is compulsory and is offered to all students and there are no optional or elective subjects as there are at second level. Therefore the argument that students would be able to take advantage of and benefit from additional courses that may be offered in larger settings does not apply at primary level.

There is a growing body of evidence around the world that small schools can and do deliver a comprehensive education. One example of this is found in Britain in an Ofsted document "Small Schools: How well They Are Doing." The document, released in 2000, is based on analysis of inspections reports across a four year period and National Curriculum tests results, and it states that pupils in small schools are not disadvantaged in comparison with those of larger schools in terms of quality of education. It further states that small schools are among the most effective in the country.²

North American and European research which affirms the efficacy of small schools is cited by Turner.³ In the case of the former there is now a growing movement to break up larger schools into smaller units. In many European countries there is a growing acknowledgement of the important role played by small schools in communities.

One assumption in the economies of scale argument often advanced is that reduced per pupil expenditure would translate into greater pupil achievement because the money saved could be invested in school improvement. However, where programmes of school amalgamations or closures have been undertaken there is no evidence to support this finding.

There is in fact a growing body of research that far from seeking to defend the retention of small schools actually seeks to examine the success of small schools. In general, this research points to

- the human scale of small schools
- a satisfied and willing cohort of pupils
- socially independent school leavers transferring to post primary schools
- committed teachers
- the opportunity for parents to exercise choice of school that numbers of small schools typically afford
- relative autonomy and distance from bureaucracy
- excellent responses to the local community

² Ofsted, *Small Schools: How Well Are They Doing*, (2000), as in Turner, Liam. (2008), *An Examination of Pre-service and In-service Provision for Multi-class Teaching in Ireland*, Oideas 53, Government Publications, Dublin.

³ Ibid

- a good school-pupil and school-family match.

There is substantial agreement emerging from the research as to the centrality of a number of issues that influence all of the above. These are an organisational structure that departs significantly from conventional large organisational structures and a setting that operates more like a community than a bureaucracy. Small school size permits and invites a number of practices and arrangements that have been found to be desirable.

Small schools comfortably accommodate a great deal of what is known about effective school organisation. Tom Sergiovanni (1995) argued that even if small schools do cost slightly more per pupil than do large schools, small schools could still be more efficient if they were more productive. He argued decision makers should consider the ratio of productivity to cost rather than simplistic unit cost comparisons.

All of the above must be carefully examined as part of any study on the effectiveness of small schools.

Provision of a mechanism to save money is the overriding concern which informs the amalgamation proposals of the McCarthy Report. According to the Report. Amalgamations of 659 schools with fewer than 50 pupils, would eliminate 300 teaching jobs and achieve savings of €18m.

Financial concerns, taken in isolation, present a potent argument for some in favour of the amalgamation of small schools, but it is important that such argument is counterbalanced by other considerations such as the adverse effect for the child who is being bussed to a different environment, the sociological importance of the rural school to the community, its role in the preservation of local history, culture, and folklore, its significance in the pride of the little village and the attachment of the people to the school.

Are the current minimum enrolment thresholds appropriate in terms of the distances between neighbouring schools?

Evidence gathered by the INTO from teachers in small schools indicates a high level of community support for small schools. This appears to be equally strong in newly established small schools and in long established small schools. In many cases this support is linked to the pivotal contribution of the school towards forging a distinct community identity. Most of these schools are vibrant and effective educational institutions with stable enrolments into the future. In general terms due to previous amalgamations and closures these schools serve distinct local communities and are well above enrolment thresholds.

However, there are and always have been a small number of schools where enrolments have declined. In most cases this is the result of local demographics. There is evidence that teachers in general do not support the long term continuance of very small schools, particularly one teacher schools. Among the reasons given for this viewpoint include health and safety issues, teacher isolation and limited opportunities for pupils to socialise. Generally, in such cases teachers are critical of a lack of proactive planning for amalgamation at both local and national level.

Therefore the INTO proposes that the DES prioritises schools where there is community support for amalgamation. In the case of schools which appear to be on the verge of becoming a one teacher schools the DES should following receipt of the annual returns correspond with these schools by November 30th requesting realistic projections for the next 5 years with schools required to respond by December. Schools with an increasing long term enrolment should continue. But if enrolment projections are decreasing, the DES should initiate the consultation stage of amalgamation process in early January, with the intention of completing the process by the following March. A number of other issues might be addressed such as giving consideration to incentivised retirement packages for teachers with significant years service where amalgamations are being considered.

Redeployment panel arrangements would have to be organised at local level, should amalgamation warrant a teacher being placed on the redeployment panel.

The reasoning behind this proposal is that the teachers believe that there are significant difficulties associated with one teacher schools such as teachers working in potentially unsafe environment with no adult back up in an emergency situation. Often, despite the fact that reduced enrolment results from population decrease, there is often an incorrect perception that the decline in numbers is related to the teacher.

Any proposed amalgamations or school closures must be considered in the context of school accommodation in the community. If an amalgamation is considered desirable and capital funding is required to progress the project then this should be provided immediately. As a consequence it is essential that a proportion of the capital budget should be dedicated each year to this purpose. Any decisions to close a school or to amalgamate schools should be accompanied by guarantees from the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the availability of capital funding to ensure the completed of the required accommodation prior to the amalgamation being effected.

Is the current provision efficiently organised in terms of

- **Use of resources (human, financial and capital)**
- **Distance between schools?**

Those who generally support school amalgamations or a programme of closures of small schools tend to base their arguments around the notion that larger schools are more economically efficient (they offer better value for money to the taxpayer) and larger schools are able to offer their pupils a broader, more balanced curriculum because of the concentration of resources, including teachers, on one site. For example, the Investment in Education Report argued that “a re-organisation of school size would of course make it easier to supply all schools with the necessary physical facilities...” The issue of curriculum is dealt with above.

However the research on school size indicates that both the economic and curricular advantages of larger schools are often exaggerated. Researchers caution against simplistic per pupil spending arguments and instead argue for a wider number of factors to be considered. It is argued that school size per se is not a direct causal factor influencing the quality of teaching and learning. Rather school size is indirectly related to pupil outcomes through its relationship to a variety of other variables. In other words the relationship between school size and outcomes is complex.

Much of the value for money argument relating to small schools is borrowed from the world of business where there is a common assumption that larger organisations function more efficiently than smaller ones, that increasing size decreases unit costs as economies of scale come into play. This thinking is directly applied to schools with the belief that larger schools are more cost effective than smaller schools.

However this assumption is not even true for business. For example, research by Gooding & Wagner (1985) into the relationship between organisational size and economic efficiency concluded that increasing the size of a business increased total output, but that the ratio of output to input remained largely the same, an outcome attributed to increased coordination costs associated with the need for an increased workforce which offset production efficiencies produced by increased size. Indeed in some labour intensive service organisations a negative relationship between large business size and efficiency was recorded, particularly in enterprises that relied upon human effort rather than machinery. In education, as in business, additional administration costs in large schools reduce economies of scale.

Research by Fox (1981) found that that per pupil expenditures dropped as long as increasing school size resulted in larger pupil-teacher ratios or larger class sizes. But once maximum class size is reached, no additional savings are possible. But, increases in school size continue to increase administrative costs.

Therefore the assumption that larger schools are more economically efficient than smaller schools is simplistic despite its apparent validity. Support for the economies of scale argument is not universal.

In addition, in deciding whether or not school amalgamation is feasible or desirable, factors such as the impact of large class size on educational outcomes, increased administrative costs and transportation costs as well as the social impact of removing a school from its community and relocating it as a small constituent part of a larger, amalgamated and artificially constructed community must be considered.

For the foreseeable future Ireland will continue to see a significant growth in school enrolments. Based on these projections it is likely that there will be significant demands on the education budget at a time of limited exchequer resources. Therefore imaginative solutions are needed to ensure that a school place is available to every child. The INTO believes that alternatives to amalgamation such as maximising the use of existing available school places should be actively explored and supported if feasible.

Unit capital costs are smaller for larger schools. However such costs refer to new buildings and take no account of existing provision in a locality. Such costs would need to be contrasted with the cost of developing or leveraging maximum enrolments from existing school stock.

The following table produced by the Department of Education and Skills provides an estimate of the unit capital costs in the various standard sizes of new school buildings and is presented in this report so as to indicate the significant capital costs associated with establishing new schools.

The cost of amalgamation where a new school is required must be factored into any consideration of future policy. The following gives an example of the capital costs associated with new schools and it is clear that in most cases amalgamation of two teacher schools would result in the creation of a new four teacher school which is at the more expensive end of the spectrum of unit costs relating to construction.

Estimated Capital Building Cost of Selected Standard School Sizes						
	Number of mainstream classrooms					
Standard Size:	4	8	16	2 x 16	24	32
Total square metres:	790	1,353	2,208	4,416	3,494	4,439
Cost on basis of €990 per sq m:	€0.78m	€1.3m	€2.2m	€4.37 m	€3.5m	€4.39 m
External Costs @	€0.1m	€0.2m	€0.3m	€0.5m	€0.4m	€0.5m

maximum of 12.5%:						
Ideal minimum size of site	2 acres	2 acres	3 acres	5 acres	4 acres	5 acres
Estimate average Site Purchase cost: (€400,000 per acre)	€0.8m	€0.8m	€1.2m	€2.0m	€1.6m	€2.0m
Total Estimated Cost:	€1.68m	€2.3m	€3.7m	€6.9m	€5.5 m	€6.9m
Estimated Cost per pupil place:	€14,998	€10,299	€8,168	€7,721	€8,172	€7,750

The Department of Education and Skills has also produced an estimation of the recurrent costs of schools of various sizes in 2009/10. This shows that one teacher schools are significantly more expensive to run than any other size of school and two teacher schools are marginally more expensive, there is no significant difference between any other size of school.

However such costs deserve a more detailed analysis as even within bands of school size there must be significant variations. For example the unit cost in a two teacher school with 40 plus pupils must be significantly lower than a two teacher school with less than twenty pupils. In addition the unit cost recurrent cost for a three teacher school with fifty pupils must exceed a two teacher school with 47 pupils.

Estimated recurrent costs of schools of various sizes in 2009/10						
Number of Teachers	Capitation	Ancillary Services	Estimated Teacher salaries and allowances	Supervision	TOTAL Estimated expenditure	Estimated Annual Expenditure per pupil
1	12,000	9,300	65,310	4,953	91,563.00	13,080
2	12,000	9,300	125,079	1,165	147,544.00	4,918
4	18,400	14,260	240,848	0	273,508.00	2,973
6	30,600	23,715	355,133	0	409,448.00	2,676
8	42,000	32,550	474,296	0	548,846.00	2,614
16	85,000	65,875	957,843	0	1,108,718.00	2,609

24	130,000	77,500	1,434,287	0	1,641,787.00	2,526
----	---------	--------	-----------	---	---------------------	-------

TABLE 2.4 — NUMBER OF NATIONAL SCHOOL PUPILS IN ORDINARY CLASSES, TEACHING TEACHERS AND TOTAL TEACHERS CLASSIFIED BY PUPIL SIZE OF SCHOOL (2008/2009)

	<i>Pupil size of School</i>						<i>Total</i>
	<i>Less than 50</i>	<i>50-99</i>	<i>100-199</i>	<i>200-299</i>	<i>300-499</i>	<i>500 +</i>	
Schools	650	837	821	483	294	90	3,175
Teaching Teachers	1,352	2,905	4,855	4,646	4,469	2,064	20,291
Total Teachers	1,553	3,860	7,046	6,977	6,506	3,009	28,951
Pupils	20,050	62,100	116,393	116,089	113,707	54,254	482,593
PTR	12.9	16.1	16.5	16.6	17.5	18.0	16.7
Average Class Size	14.8	21.4	24.0	25.0	25.4	26.3	23.8
Teachers per School	2.4	4.6	8.6	14.4	22.1	33.4	9.1

Would you suggest alternative policy or organisational approaches?

Proposals on amalgamations have already been outlined in the Report of the Commission on School Accommodation (2001) and in the INTO/CPSMA Agreement on school amalgamations. The Report of the Commission on School Accommodation (2001), identifies the established criteria for amalgamations of first level schools: the educational needs of the pupils, pupil access including transport, teacher placements and cultural issues of school identity, history and insertion within the community, while

reasons for amalgamations include declining enrolments, desire for co-education, financial concerns and parental/teacher demand. The INTO continues to support these grounds for amalgamations.

Decisions in relation to the provision of schools in rural communities in Ireland should be underpinned by a number of key principles. These must include:

- Provision that ensures the optimum educational outcomes for pupils
- respect for the interests of all of the education partners at local level
- the promotion of support for the education of pupils regardless of location.

Staffing arrangements for schools that result from a process of amalgamation must be negotiated between the INTO and the Department of Education and Skills. These must include agreement on the appointment of the principal including provision for privileged assistants, the appointment of the deputy principal, in-school management posts, determination of length of service and seniority, enhanced staffing provision, redeployment and addendum to the panel (where no scheme exists) and where appropriate early retirement. Training of the new board of management must be provided. Professional development opportunities must be provided for teachers to prepare them for amalgamation.

Research in an Irish context needs to be conducted on several key issues before a significant process of amalgamation is undertaken. This should be commissioned by the Commission on School Accommodation and should include

- adequate educational provision, given the particular needs of disadvantaged pupils
- geographic location
- socialisation needs of pupils
- pastoral care of pupils
- school organisation
- staffing allocation
- implications for staff
- teaching/learning methodology
- school effectiveness
- developments in the educational use of technology
- schools in areas of high/low population density
- characteristic spirit of the school
- level of financial support
- resourcing
- costs.