



**NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING
TUESDAY 27th APRIL 2021
and
ANNUAL REPORT 2020
Meeting to be held on ZOOM at
18.00**

AGENDA

- 1. Welcome**
- 2. Apologies**
- 3. Minutes of Annual Meeting held on Saturday 14th March 2020**
- 4. To receive the Annual Report**
- 5. To receive the Accounts for the period ending 31st December 2020**
- 6. Election of Trustees**
- 7. Any notified business**

Chairman's Report

I began my report a year ago with the following - 'These words are written during turbulent times.'

This was largely in response to the weather conditions when a series of violent storms devastated large swathes of the country with torrential rain, gale force winds, flooding and loss of life. I then continued with the following -

'The latest in a series of almost biblical type events both here and across the world has come with a virus which has the potential to spread rapidly and with loss of life. Again, there has been an impact on schools with some closures and restrictions on travel. The full effects will only become clear over the coming weeks.'

Little did we know how devastating the impact of this virus would be.

Not only has there been a loss of life which would have seemed impossible at that time but the impact upon what was seen as normality one year ago has been seen across the whole strata of society.

The disruptions to 'normality' have been keenly felt in our schools. Rising rates of infection and, it has to be said, conflicting advice from Government, have resulted in three periods of school closure for varying periods of time. The term 'school closure' was misinterpreted by many in the press as the vast majority of schools did remain open to the children of key workers. The swift transition to remote, online learning created many problems but schools quickly 'stepped up to the plate' and provided pupils with a range of strategies to ensure they were able to access a high-quality educational experience.

Colleagues in schools across the country will have recognised the impact of the past twelve months on their own settings and at the support they have received from their parents, communities, Local Authorities and the DfE, amongst others during this time. Much has been written about the 'lost learning' of their pupils and all sorts of solutions have been mooted to address these perceived needs. That is for the future and it is hoped that there will be no 'knee jerk' reaction but a carefully thought-out process which will meet the needs of schools for the future.

But what of NASS during this past year.

Initial thoughts of what was going to be missed during the year in terms of school visits, conferences, Small Schools Month and the close contact with colleagues across the country were soon replaced with other considerations.

It was decided to utilise the usual NASS Newsletters as vehicles to report specifically about Covid-19. From April to February four such documents were produced based on responses to questionnaires sent to members and other colleagues. These have proved very informative and demonstrated the high degree of commitment, expertise and ingenuity from schools in meeting this crisis. The documents have been circulated to colleagues across the world of

education and have been vital in proclaiming the role played by the small school as an integral part of their local community.

NASS also made the leap into the unknown world of technology by embracing the potential of ZOOM meetings. Initially used to enable members of the committee to communicate, there had been a number of meetings where colleagues from across the country have been able to share thoughts, experiences and just 'network'. These have proved very popular, and this AGM will be another step forward.

A conference which fell foul of the Covid-19 situation was one which had been originally planned for June 2020. Later re-organised for August, this was to have been a major event in partnership with Plymouth Marjon University and BERA (British Educational Research Association) and the forced cancellations were very disappointing. Fortunately, technology has again been utilised to enable this event to take place to a wider audience. 'Small school, big issue? Exploring the future for small schools in rural and coastal England' will now take place on Tuesday June 15. Full details should now be with you and it is hoped that many colleagues will be able to participate in this important event.

Technology has also enabled NASS membership of the School Food Plan Alliance (SFPA) to continue and to establish links with schools and individuals across the country. It is clear that the ways of working both for schools and for NASS will evolve as a result of this pandemic although there will be nothing to compare with the joy of meeting colleagues and visiting their schools when we are able to do so.

NASS also joined the great world of Twitter, which has provided many opportunities for communication and support. The 'Small School Chat Group' has proved of immense value in enabling colleagues to co-operate in translating the complexities of DfE guidance into practical solutions within their own schools (and providing opportunities for a good moan!!)

As always, I am immensely grateful to my friends on the NASS committee for their remarkable efforts during the pandemic. At a time when their lives have been on hold, their capacity to be a source of guidance, advice, counsel and sheer hard work have been amazing as you will see from their individual reports to this meeting. My thanks on your behalf to them all.

As I write these words children across the country are back in classrooms, eager to see friends, teaching and support staff and all involved with their school. It is to be hoped that this will be the final lockdown, and all involved with small schools across the country can return to 'normal' life again. As ever NASS will be continuing to develop links and partnerships with individuals and groups across the country remaining as ever the 'Voice of Small Schools'.

Neil Short - Chairman

NASS Early Years Report

Another year has passed by since our last NASS AGM, and what a year it has been for everyone! It's probably been the most difficult, challenging and completely unforeseen year possible. Restrictions upon all of our lives,

alongside changing government guidelines and U turns being issued too last minute for leaders in schools and settings has meant that those who had already sorted out their plans had to re-sort them yet again. My huge respect goes out to you all.

Alongside this chaos came the release of the new Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the revision of the non-statutory Development Matters which landed in our schools. This has been picked up by some 'early adopter' schools to trial. However, no formal training has been provided by the Department for Education so even the 'early adopters' are struggling to find their way using updates on social media! The whole approach seems to have been piecemeal at best and hasn't reached everyone who needs to be informed. Things are being created to fill the void and even the source document is problematic as many experienced and knowledgeable teachers/staff are finding. **Please remember that Development Matters is NOT the EYFS.** Sadly, this again typifies a policy driven approach by political imperatives rather than real evidence. If you want a document created by a wide range of experts in early childhood in the Early Years Coalition, then look no further than Birth to 5 Matters. This is guidance is: 'by the sector, for the sector.'

One thing that definitely needs to change is assessment in the EYFS as it is often inaccurate and burdensome. The baseline is set to return in 2021. However, schools will not be required to carry out the EYFS profile in the summer term of 2021. How I wish we could follow Scotland's lead where the earliest years are beginning to be taken seriously. 'The Royal Foundation' led by the Duchess of Cambridge is a must-read as it emphasises on that we do today in early childhood impacts upon the world of tomorrow. This report was conducted by Ipsos MORI and revealed that only a quarter of parents recognise the importance of early years.

2020 was the year that the movement 'Black Lives Matter' made real headway alongside the pandemic. Awareness of race and culture have really been highlighted and we are now aware of how easy it is to slip into unconscious bias. We must keep the Unique Child central in our pedagogical provision and practice alongside remembering that the world of tomorrow should be at the forefront of our thoughts. We must get into the habit of thinking what impact all these developments will potentially have on our provision, practice and professionalism for our children and families in particular.

During all three pandemic lockdowns, early years provision in schools and settings were deemed 'low risk' in England on the basis of purely economic reasons so that parents could continue to work, rather than on the basis of science and health grounds. Many staff have been left feeling anxious and fearful about going to work, with little PPE or social distancing and the let down over regular testing and vaccines. Whilst the PVI sector, nursery classes and schools are open, occupancy is down and there are severe effects on funding. Some children may stay home-educated and not return to school. Whilst we know that early education and childcare are absolutely vital for the economy, it is also crucial for the children themselves, and the staff have been

working flat out to continue to support the children and families both face-to-face and by remote learning online.

Meanwhile the effects of lockdown particularly on the wellbeing and mental health of some families has created 'hidden harms' as parental stress has risen alongside child protection issues. Over 6,000 UK parents and carers have reported symptoms of anxiety and depression. In some situations, sensitive leaders of schools and settings have offered places seeing that these children were potentially vulnerable. With higher numbers of key/critical care workers attending school during the third lockdown this has created pressures elsewhere. During the pandemic the creativity, hard work and dedication of leaders and staff in schools and settings is to be applauded as they dealt with increasing levels of infection from Covid 19. Estimates of 1 in 10 adults testing positive were being quoted in Nursery World but in some cases whole schools rather than just bubbles needed to close temporarily. Meanwhile the government declined to make infection rates in schools and settings, public. One wonders if they have really got the best interests of those who work with young children?

Now as we look forward to a return to school by all, some inevitable concerns exist. Many of us have listened to the media giving messages about the need for children to 'catch up' and fill their 'lockdown gap'. These phrases will require sensitive handling as that whilst children may need time to rebuild and recover this should be centred in the joy of learning through play indoors and out. By using kindness, compassion and letting the children drive what you do should be central. Some children will have experienced losses in terms of routines, structure, friendships, opportunities and freedom which will generate consequences. There will be also very sadly those who will have experienced bereavement, hunger, poverty, trauma, attachment and anxiety issues. The wise leaders will be supporting these frail, fragile and fragmented learners (5%) with extra special care having audited what each family has experienced. Then they will use creativity, care and compassion in their teaching and learning to rebuild relationships, engage with communities, scaffold learning to regrow confidence via a transparent, relevant co-constructed active and personalised curriculum which gives children the time, space and advocacy that they need. Then the children will be able to participate with learning again and be re-motivated to engage.

Kathryn Solly - Early Years Champion

Information Officers Report

My work has been the usual help and advice to schools campaigning against closures. This is despite the difficulty, for example, of holding the Statutory public meetings in ways easy for parents and communities to manage - not least the requirement to consult anyone potentially affected by the closure proposed - the pace has hardly slowed. We are advising in cases in Wales and Southern England after earlier pressure in the North of England.

In those latter cases we came across for the first time a statute under which other involved e.g. dioceses and councils can just ask for premises and land to be given to them regardless of founding document trust details. For two schools we managed to squeeze from the DfE that they had a right to oppose such applications – the first two we helped were diocesan closures – and we have not heard of any final decisions yet and in both cases the situations seem to have become protracted as if the dioceses may be having second thoughts at such awesome behaviour. It came after a growing trend for dioceses to try to close schools using a strategy of telling their Chairs, diocesan appointees, their schools really were no longer viable so close them yourselves.

In North Yorkshire we had cases in a diocese publicly shown to be a million pounds in debt, and largely urban in character with little responsible awareness of the rural areas it also managed. Then in Surrey, Guildford wanted to close and take over the premises of a school because the cathedral needed repair.

So, we advise Church of England schools to be very wary and to engage in serious early lip-reading and between-the-lines signs of such entirely self-interested motivation threatening the future of usually very good schools. The small school model has several unique virtues lending long-term educational effectiveness. Where governors finally withdraw their own closure proposals the diocese turn then to the usual enemy, the local authority, to pursue the usual route. In advising Governors to close their own schools they not only use flawed but predictable arguments but also fail to advise the governors that there are long-standing different terms of action that affect such self-willed decisions that do not apply in a normal Local Authority case, for example, a longer period to any final closure date. So, Governors are easily misled by powerful bodies with all access to the real requirements and heavily motivated to ride roughshod through them.

Occasionally, as this March, we are asked to advise on small secondary schools in the context of local people wanting to open one because their villages are poorly served by different provision. This gives a real opportunity to share all the positive literature we hold that backs our claim the small school remains the most effective model of educational and social effectiveness yet developed. We have featured a school of just 380 pupils which every year came in the top five schools in all the categories of success used nationally for comparison. Small-scale is human-scale and that works with public services based on people not systems. We continue to lobby Parliament, MPs and organisations potentially sympathetic to our members and their work using all that we know about those afore-mentioned virtues.

We advise still as it is true that keeping close, warm relationships with ward councillors and members of relevant Parliaments well ahead of any potential harm planned is vital. Such people aware of that you are doing can be very helpful if asked in good time to represent you in the high places where issues of policy and provision are emerging – such as funding – and not least if closure starts to threaten. They need that local awareness of quality to intervene effectively in the otherwise stereotypical flawed ways usually tried to persuade

diocesan and local authority decision-makers to wipe out perfectly good schools invariably popular with parents.

Parents need to be seen as potential support both in such cases and in general as early closure strategies often involve wilful airing of doubts, early small-scale consultations called 'informal' designed to leak out and undermine parents support before launching a full formal closure proposal. When that happens the maximum support immediately of parents is vital. It stands to reason that parents remaining supportive of the school's work drives any such ultimate impressions and action.

We are well aware that for children born today the future is changing radically and rapidly and, though technology promises them long lives, 100+, what are their prospects for life and living? We note technology doing what Steven Hawking warned a year before he died: *"if AI and robots reach levels predicted possible it will be the end of humanity."* They are and he is right, and it seems likely to face those children born today.

NASS believes that self-supporting communities are the model for the long-term survival of all that we know and value. This priority for the small-scale models our members represent is rarely discussed even in the most developed "think-tanks." It may be the necessary outcome of an otherwise powerfully enslaved technological world.

Mervyn Benford - Information Officer

Headteacher Liaison Officer Report

The pandemic opened up more opportunities to communicate with other small school headteachers around the country and it has been brilliant to interact with heads from Yorkshire, Cumbria, Cornwall and all places in between at our ZOOM meetings. Not only do we get better attendance and involvement, but there are more meetings than we ever had before.

There has been the same trend on Twitter and the Small Schools Group has discussed many topics and asked each other advice ranging from sparsity to curriculum and assessment in a small setting. The NAHT has been following up its focus on small schools and although the original meeting that Neil and I were to attend was cancelled, I attended a focussed meeting on 25 March 2021 with the DfE re the consultation on sparsity funding.

A headteacher in West Sussex had written a very detailed article about the winners and losers from the proposed new way of calculating sparsity funding and we sent it out to all NASS members as well as the link to the consultation.

The meeting was very useful and they listened to our concerns, as although raising sparsity funding from £45,000 to £55,000 and changing the criteria from distance by road, rather than as the crow flies, sounds attractive – most small schools do not qualify, as they are not also remote and yet they are losing out because the lump funding sum has reduced.

I asked that the DfE also review quickly the impact of this lottery of funding on small schools and said we will be canvassing both our NAHT and NASS members next year to give our own feedback to them.

Julie Kelly - Headteacher Liaison Officer

Social Media

NASS have now set up a twitter account for the charity and a Facebook page is coming also. This allows us to stay in contact with our members at the hit of a button. We are now aware with so many younger teachers within small schools and the organisation; this is a great way to stay in touch and get our news out to people. Currently, it is being used as a way of staying in touch and passing on new information. However, we want to develop this into a tool for sharing information and help get those working in small schools in contact with each other. Follow us on twitter at @NASmallSchs.

Nicola Townsend

Treasurers Report

Total income for the year was £2557.72 and expenditure was £1163.45 giving a surplus for the year of £1394.27. Income from subscriptions reduced by £214, income from HMRC was down because the claim for tax relief on personal subscriptions was for a shorter period than in 2019. Expenditure fell by £1624 due in the main to the effects of Covid-19 with only two Trustees physical meeting taking place, and also lower costs associated with visits to schools. In addition, we have reduced the cost of production of Newsletters by a greater use of email. Going forward, we very much hope that the constraints of lockdown will reduce in 2021 and costs will increase. Because of the reduction in expenditure we decided that subscriptions for the 2019 members would be waived.

Andrew Taylor - Treasurer

Receipt and Payments account for the period 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020 Registered Charity No. 1169002

2019	Unrestricted	Restricted	Glasshouse	Total
	Funds	Funds	Trust	Funds
	£	£	£	£
Receipts				
Subscriptions	2475.00			2475.00
2689				
HMRC	82.72			82.72
134				
Total Receipts	<u>2557.72</u>		<u>2557.72</u>	<u>2823</u>
Payments				
Meetings	148.60		148.60	901

Newsletters	136.00		136.00
285			
Chairman's Expenses			
139			
Information Expenses			
45			
School Visits	312.40		312.40
249			
Governor Training			
90			
Administration	566.45		566.45
Conferences			281
597			
Total Payments	<u>1163.45</u>		<u>1163.45</u> <u>2787</u>
Net of receipts/payments	1394.27		1394.27
Cash funds last year end	<u>6109.84</u>	<u>5.70</u>	<u>12.53</u> <u>6128.07</u>
Cash funds this year end	<u>7504.11</u>	<u>5.70</u>	<u>12.53</u> <u>7522.34</u>
Represented by			
Co-op Bank	<u>7522.34</u>		<u>7522.34</u>
Signed DR Woodage - Examiner			