

Eastern Daily Press

SERVING THE COMMUNITY
SINCE 1870

Looking at the numbers behind the small school debate

This week we are running a series of features examining the position of small schools in Norfolk.

The story starts in the 1800s; by the end of the Victorian era, practically every community had its own school. This boom in education was hugely important, but it also left a legacy the authorities have been wrestling with ever since: are these small schools sustainable, educationally or financially?

Norfolk County Council has now said that small, stand-alone schools are not sustainable. It argues that they do not achieve the same standards as larger schools, and are in effect subsidised by their bigger counterparts. If they want to survive, they will have to lock themselves into larger structures with more than 200 pupils.

In today's coverage, we crunch some of the numbers behind this argument, and a complex picture emerges which supports much of the council's case, but also shows wide variation in the performance of our smallest schools. It suggests those with 50-99 pupils, on average, out-perform those which are bigger, and asks whether schools can achieve good economies of scale below the 200-pupil mark.

But there is another side of the debate that cannot be measured in numbers alone – the social benefits that come from children being educated in their own community. Tomorrow, we explore the situation in one such village.

The council is right in its determination to improve education and achieve value for money, and the move to stronger partnerships between schools has many benefits. But it must ensure that, when vital decisions are made, that each school's individual situation is properly considered.

Right to roam on beach

Those who love our glorious coastline and all its riches have another reason to celebrate today.

Future generations will be free to walk along the sea defences at Snettisham and enjoy panoramic views across The Wash.

Hundreds went and did just that in the sunshine yesterday, as news of the government inspector's decision spread around the village and further afield – bringing an end to a bitter row which stretches back more than 20 years.

With its dazzling displays of bird life and spectacular, ever-changing skies, it's little wonder feelings ran so high on both sides at times in the run-up to the public inquiry.

Now that the legal process is done and dusted, we'd urge all involved to move on and work together, to safeguard the future of this very special place.

We're behind you, Mick

Sharp-eyed Mick Gault has been a credit to Norfolk for decades. We are immensely proud that he now jointly holds the record for the most Commonwealth Games medals.

It is a remarkable achievement that demonstrates skill and staying power. We are sure you will join us in wishing dead-eye Mick the best of luck as he takes aim for another magnificent milestone today.

READER'S PICTURE OF THE DAY

iwitness24



■ This fantastic picture of a goldfinch taking a bath at Honing was sent to us by Malcolm Bubb. If you would like to submit a picture for possible publication in the EDP, visit www.iwitness24.co.uk

Nil desperandum - Americans are adopting Britishisms!

Peter
Trudgill



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While the World Cup was being played in Brazil, there was an interesting little item on National Public Radio in the USA, which I happened to hear.

A presenter was complaining, albeit not very seriously, about the use of the word "nil" in American sports broadcasting, and its apparently rather rapid spread into general public usage in the United States. It is "not American", he protested.

This was of course nil as in "Brazil are losing seven-nil" (or as Americans would say, "...is losing").

Americans never used to say that. They would have phrased it as "seven to nothing" or "seven-zero" or "seven-zip".

However, the employment of large numbers of British commentators and co-commentators on the American TV networks to describe and analyse the World Cup matches ("games" in the USA) has led to lots of Americans using a number of sporting Britishisms, as the presenter called them, at least in the football ("soccer") context.

This complaint about Britishisms is really rather amusing, given the number of complaints there have been over the decades in this country about Americanisms and how dreadful they are.



■ Hopefully, nils and noughts won't feature too highly in Norwich City's scorelines this coming season.

Picture: JAMES BASS

It's rather entertaining to see the boot on the other foot and to hear Americans protesting about evil linguistic influence from our side of the pond.

But nil meaning "nothing" was not originally an English word anyway. It only dates back to the 1830s, and comes from the Latin nil, which was a contraction of nihil "nothing", which we can see in its full form in our word nihilism.

The word zero, as formerly preferred by Americans, is not originally an English word either. It has a rather long history. It came from French zéro, which was borrowed from Italian zero, which came down from Mediaeval Latin zephirum, which in turn originated from Arabic sifr,

which itself was a translation of Sanskrit sunyam "empty place, desert". Sifr is also, via French, the source of our word cipher. That too originally meant zero but was then extended to all numerals, and then to secret codes (because these often involved substituting numbers for letters).

The word nothing, though, really is an ancient English term, and so is naught/nought. In our part of the world we have an innovative version of that which involves a re-interpretation of original "a nought" as "an ought".

Let's hope that this season Norwich City are not going to lose seven to nothing, seven-zero, seven-zip, seven-nil, and especially not seven-ought.

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Be humbled by God's power so
that when the right time comes he
will honour you.

1 Peter 5:6

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