**

Seminar on ‘Community schools’

Brussels, 23-24 May 2013

 INPUT FROM EUNEC MEMBERS

# Questions

## Improving the relationship between school – local community and networking platforms

**Is this theme part of the policy debate in your country? Is the definition set forward by EUNEC[[1]](#footnote-1) relevant? Are essential elements missing? Do you recognise the differentiation between community schools and multifunctional schools? What is the perspective from which the issue is raised?**

* **debate on equal opportunities,**
* **raising levels and standards of learning**
* **integration formal and informal learning**
* **multi functionality of school buildings**
* **other**

**How does your council consider the debate on the embeddedness and the partnership of schools with the local community? Do you have any relevant recommendations on this theme?**

## The concept of community schools.

**School level: Is the concept of “community schools” known in your country? Or is it used with another name? Are there schools in your country working with this concept? What priorities have they chosen? What are their experiences of difficulties?**

**Central policy making level: Is the concept integrated at a central policy level? What is the role of the central government, of the community and of the school?**

# Input from EUNEC member councils

## Dutch Education Council

There was a policy debate over this theme in the beginning of the millennium. There was a need for schools that encompassed more than school education only. As a results, schools invested in the development of broad schools (‘brede scholen’). Broad schools are more or less the type of school that the EUNEC described. The term broad schools refers to schools that combine education with child care, health care, welfare, sport and/or culture.[[2]](#footnote-2) The societal function of the broad school should be explicit.

The goals of the broad schools are mainly to enhance learning outcomes and broad talent development, in particular for disadvantaged pupils. There is a tendency to focus more on talent development of the child and less on the involvement with parents and neighbours.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Recommendations of the Dutch Education Council*

Although there are many schools that form ties with partners in the community, this largely depends on initiative of the local partners. It is not a structural policy in the Dutch schools. The Dutch Education Council has therefore advised in 2010 that every school should develop a societal programme: a plan how school and community can strengthen their ties, in particular with the societal elite. People who have successful careers in industry, society, art, music or who are in other ways successful are encouraged to connect with the school.

In another policy paper about Extended Education (“Uitgebreid onderwijs”, 2010, see abstract on internet[[4]](#footnote-4)) the Dutch Education Council recommended that schools should extend their formal and informal learning opportunities.

In the Education Council's view, extended education means that the school (or other education-oriented party) offers something extra which is aimed at 1) meeting the legal requirements (f.e. basic reading and math skills), 2) the broader and deeper development of talent, and 3) broadening the views of pupils or students towards work and society. Examples are schools with an extended school day, schools with special cultural or sport activities, schools with English or Spanish classes. The three goals also reflect the three types of extended education that we can distinguish: extended education aimed at improving learning performance, extended education aimed at enrichment, and extended education aimed at providing an orientation towards work and society. This last goal is more important for disadvantaged pupils.

This plead is repeated in an advice about cultural education (‘cultuureducatie: leren, creëren, inspireren!’, 2012). [[5]](#footnote-5)Schools should more often use the possibilities cultural institutions can offer.

Another relevant publication is the advice about the partnership between parents and education (Ouders als partners, 2010).[[6]](#footnote-6)

There are many broad schools in primary education (ca 2000 or 29% in 2011) and in secondary education (ca 400 or 33% in 2011). In all municipalities there is at least one broad school. The growth is decelerating.

There is no national policy that describes how these broad schools must be organised. This results in a wide variety of schools. Some schools are located in a multifunction building that includes child care organisations and schools, sometimes combined with other welfare organisations. In other cases, organisations cooperate without from stand-alone-buildings. This type of broad school has grown in popularity in recent years, especially in the countryside, whereas the multifunctional building has become less common (from 50% to 33% in recent years). In some cases, education and child care are integrated in one organisation for children 0-12 years old with one board of directors. These organisations are called integrated child centers. The expectation is that their numbers will increase.

The municipalities have a large part in these broad schools (coordinating, housing, preschool education, subsidized provisions), although schools are taking over their role.

Because of the variety in broad schools, there effectiveness is difficult to measure. Other difficulties are the substantive coordination of educational and other programms, and the differences in funding and legal rights and obligations. For example, education and child care are funded by different Ministries.

## Hungarian Education Council

In Hungary the policy debate during the last decade took place in the schools and the local community affair. The discussion of the policy makers and of members of the present government was solved by legislation. Government took over the management, the issue of financing the majority of schools from January 2013. Most of the schools in Hungary from January 2013 became state run schools, (about 3000 schools). There is no real debate between school and local community. The institutions will now solve local professional autonomy in educational programs provided by the designated tasks, but 90 per cent of the local curriculum is a core curriculum which can be reported by only 10 per cent plus by each one school to the content or add more custom tinted.

This definition set forward by EUNEC, of course, is relevant, but at the current transformation of the entire public educational system, there are mainly the central questions of equality in the treatment of identity, and overall fairness.

In Hungary there is the economic autonomy of the individual schools is lacking. Everybody knows that professional autonomy without an economic playing field is just a blank password, and the law gives only professional autonomy to the schools, and nothing in the field of decision about the financial part of the regulation. The budget without freedom is not dependent on any local institution, which is a highly centralized system, and it is not able to respond to local needs and specialties. It is also evident that the advertised minimum conditions of quality improvement for sure, cannot be guaranteed in a 120 thousand teachers employed maintaining large public organization.

In Hungary, the Community Schools staff is primarily religious or celestial, this may appear as a foundation maintenance. From this point of view it is radically different from the multifunctional schools. It is likely they will survive if the operation can be centrally controlled. The school is a multi-purpose local capacity building. However, for the maintenance of the present highly centralized economy, transparency, predictability of funding makes it difficult for them to survive.

Basically, the debate on equal opportunities is the main current perspective. At the same time the educational policy constantly emphasizes raising the standards and raising the levels of learning issues, but without the economic aspect of the question. It is treated as a theoretical problem.

Formal and informal learning are integrated, but but it is mainly only in some institutions where innovative workshop operate with real practice.

Multi-functionality of the school buildings is very often talked about. However, without considerable financial investment in the development of school buildings due to a lack of funding, this is not a relevant issue in most parts of the system. Even the new national "daily exercise" can only be realized in a limited way, because there is no suitable size equipped gymnasium and sports hall in a substantial part of the public schools. Changing school buildings is almost impossible without planned investments into education, what is not visible at the current period.

The members of the National Public Education Council consider basically that decentralized solutions are technically adequate. They find important the embeddedness and the partnership of schools with the local community, but the local community lost its importance during the last few years period of strong centralization. The "partnership" in the current period rather acts as a slogan, or political campaign vocabulary.

At the moment, we observe with a great interest in international, particularly the European Union's proposals, the implementation of which our country could only be present at the level of professional debate. In the next two years in our country a radical centralization of the system as a whole takes place.

## Union of Schools Associations Czech Republic [[7]](#footnote-7)

Is this theme part of the policy debate in your country?

Yes, it is, but we can see that it is more important and more actual in the regions, districts or parts of bigger towns where there are not so much social problems, with lower rate of unemployment, where people are not poor and don´t have the basic existential concerns. In the region with social problems it sometimes seems as an “irrelevant luxury” for the people with the basic existential problems. It is clear that the main task of the school that wants to be the centre of local community is to persuade people, both parents and pupils (students) that it can be fine and very useful for them to join the activities of THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL They can find there very good relevant support for their needs which costs very little money or nothing. It is very important to attract people, institutions and small entrepreneurs and craftsmen to cooperate with the community school. It will also help them in the future.

Is the definition set forward by EUNEC relevant?

Yes, it is relevant from the perspective of lifelong education needs.

Are essential elements missing?

 We think that it is alright.

Do you recognise the difference between community schools and multifunctional schools?

At first we think and understand the community school is less formal than multifunctional school. The activities there can be wider or vice versa very narrow. It depends on opportunities of all schools. Community school can consist of more parts – like a library, theatre, afters schooling activities etc.

What is the perspective from which the issue is raised?

The debate on equal opportunities is number one, because a lot of talented pupils and students leave schools early without any education. The background of the problem is the low support to pupils who are not encouraged by parents and familyraising levels and standards of learning – as a part of next steps.

Integration of formal and informal learning is at the very beginning in our country. Mostly informal education isn´t well developed, and isn´t formally accepted.

Do you have any relevant recommendations on this theme?

The headmaster of the school must be absolutely persuaded that the cooperation with the local community is necessary; the school is able to offer much more than traditional education – many after schooling activities for pupils and their parents, grandparents and for their younger brothers and sisters as well. The school is a multigenerational institution. And education is a lifelong process. All members can use all strong points of them and have to know about their weakness, they want to find all opportunity and dangers of the environment. There must be strong and wide support of local political and educational authorities. Start from smaller goals. Get ready to accept the first failures and jeers. Remember:

* The most important is always cultivation of pupils. There are both levels IQ and EQ . (knowledge and social skills together)
* Connect education and activities inside of the community
* All communities´ activity must be part of the school’s concept
* Embodied energy and efforts must be reasonable
* Feedback and annual evaluation are not only good, they are necessary. Use wider forms of it. Ask the bystanders as well. Use all examples of good practice.
* Try to inform about the life at community school as more as possible. Celebrate a lot.
* Ask people inside the community what they like, what they need what is good for them.
* Take advantage of locally embedded learning – for example projects which are connected with the area- history, nature, locally famous people
* Encourage all type of local positive partnership.

School level: Is the concept of “community schools” known in your country?

Yes, it is. There are schools which work as a community school, but we can´t say that there is one model or one shape of the community school. There are differences between schools in bigger towns and villages, in the western part of Bohemia and south Moravia.

Or is it used with another name?

Yes, some of them are for example named – Healthy school or green school. Lesní školky jako komunitní zařízení.

 Are there schools in your country working with this concept?

 Yes some of them respect the so-called “Ten Commandments”

WHAT THEY WANT

1.They want to change schools

2.They want to get rid of wrong views

3.They want more than just part knowledge

4.They want to build on the natural human needs

5. They develop individual assumptions and take into account the particularities of each individual

WHAT THEY OFFER

6.Greater degree of freedom for pupils

7.Greater freedom in deciding

8.Good psychological climate, good relationships and tolerance

9. They support all kinds of creativity, cooperation and openness

 10. They are ecological, healthy, esthetical, open, economy and friendly schools.

 What are their experiences of difficulties?

They often meet with scepticism. Parents are afraid that students can only play and don´t learn the important things for their next life.

Central policy making level: Is the concept integrated at a central policy level?

There are some efforts on the government level but the results are mostly not too big and too good. Sometimes there are some proposals on the level of ministry of education which allows also to community schools to get some extra money for their projects and actions.

What is the role of the central government, of the community and of the school?

They should create a legislative framework and help them get money or other support. To help them integrate them to the official structure of state aid.

## Flemish Education Council [[8]](#footnote-8)

The development of community schools in Flanders and Brussels is relatively new. Of course there existed schools that collaborated with other partners, that widened their scope, that wanted to support the integral development of children and youngsters. But at the policy level, interest in the concept developed in 2004. Community schools are a typical ‘bottom-up’ process that cannot be forced by regulations. But, at the same time the government can facilitate the development by eliminating judicial obstacles, making it easier to combine different financial sources etc. From 2006 until 2009 the Flemish minister of Education granted subsidies for 17 pilot projects. In the final report recommendations about the implementation of community schools in Flanders and Brussels were written. The pilot projects showed that the local authorities play an important role in what the focus of community schools is, as they focus on the immediate needs of children and youngsters in a specific environment. Further research by the Centre for Diversity and Learning (Ghent University) shows that municipalities work on different tracks to support community schools. In four bigger municipalities, community schools are supported by the municipality, not only in funding, but also by giving training, providing a coordinator etc. Not every municipality has a common framework supported by the council. If this is the case, more cooperation between different services at the municipality level is possible and different schools are included in the network of community schools.

The idea of a city starting up a community school arises mostly in underprivileged areas. Community schools are seen as a way to tackle inequalities in society. However, community schools do not want to stigmatize underprivileged groups or keep them in their deprived situation. It is exactly the mix and exchange of experiences, visions and ideas that create enrichment. That is why a broad target group is deliberately aimed at, that is all children en youngsters. Community schools therefore also widen the outlook of children and youngsters from well-to-do and sheltered environments. Everyone contributes to a rich exchange and helps to build bridges and close gaps.

The text boxes below contain a summary of the Community schools starting points and touchstones. They make out the Community school reference framework.



The aim of the community schools: broad development of children and youngsters. For children and youngsters not to be in the margin of society, they have to develop an enormous amount of competencies. A Community school stimulates and promotes these competencies. The total development of the personality occupies centre stage. Diversity is a key element in that respect: a variety of manners, talents, learning styles, interests and needs. The variety of the public is important as well. Community schools want to participate in the realisation of a broad development for all children and youngsters. However, this does not exclude attention being paid to equal opportunities.

The content: a broad learning and living environment. Children and youngsters mover through a multitude of learning and living domains, and learn within formal as well as informal contexts: school, sports associations, cultural initiatives, youth work, neighbourhood, peer group, family.. Community schools stimulate and link the experiences and competencies they acquire everywhere, by increasing interaction between these different domains.

The organisation: getting to network. In a Community school, partners equally collaborate with a common goal in a broad network. Partners actively look for possible connections and opportunities, common goals, shared concerns and joint actions. A Community school cannot but take shape at the local level. This movement can also be instigated top down. Municipalities and/or organisations that are active at supralocal or meso level can play an inspiring and stimulating role.

The Flemish Education Council has no recommendations on this subject. The Council organized a seminar on the theme of ‘Community schools’ in December 2011. A report and presentations can be found (in Dutch) at <http://www.vlor.be/verslag/seminarie-de-brede-school>.

## The Lithuanian Education Council

 Is this theme part of the policy debate in your country?

The programme of the 16th Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2012–2016 envisages the establishment of multifunctional centres for the provision of preschool, pre-primary, primary and other forms of informal children’s and informal adult education. The Programme also governs the creation of the conditions for the provision of cultural, social and other services for the local community. This is a relevant subject, as is reflected in our legislation and activities (for more details, see answer to the next question).

Is the definition set forward by EUNEC relevant? Are essential elements missing?

Currently, municipalities in Lithuania, especially in rural areas, are establishing universal multifunctional centres (UMCs) as well as schools–multifunctional centres (SMCs) that, among other functions, also offer either primary or basic education. The aim of establishing both types of centres is to address the problem of insufficient quality, supply and accessibility of educational and social services in rural areas by creating, implementing and developing a modern infrastructure of educational and social services.

The Pre-primary and Pre-school Development Programme for 2007–2012, approved by Government Decision No. 1057 of 19 September 2007, defines the UMC as an institution providing educational, cultural and social services to children and local communities. The UMC activities may include: pre-primary, pre-school and informal education for children, child day care, informal adult education, educational assistance, special education, distance learning under formal and non-formal education programs (curricula) or modules, entertainment, socio-cultural and artistic activities for children and adults and other services. The target groups and functions of UMCs are determined by the local municipal authorities in view of the needs of the local community. UMCs are also seen as a tool to increase access to pre-primary and pre-school education, especially in rural areas, as illustrated in paragraph 1.8 of the Action Plan of the Pre-primary and Pre-school Development Programme for 2007–2012. The Programme provides for both the establishment of new UMCs and the adjustment of the existing facilities for running pre-primary and pre-school education programmes and for offering other educational, cultural and social services for children and local communities.

The School Improvement Programme Plus (hereinafter referred to as SIP Plus) was approved by the Minister of Education and Science by order No. ISAK-2331 of 3 December 2007. SIP Plus is designed to reach the objectives under priority 2, Lifelong Learning, of the Human Resources Development Action Plan for 2007-2013 and priority 2, Public Service Quality and Availability of Health, Education and Social Infrastructure, of the Cohesion Promotion Action Plan for 2007 – 2013 drafted in order to reach Lithuania’s priorities, goals and objectives under the Strategy for the Use of the European Union Structural Support in 2007–2013.

In SIP Plus, the concept of UMC does not differ from the way it is defined in the Programme approved by the Government referred to above. SIP Plus defines the UMC as a new and innovative unit of the educational system and a new tool to ensure better access to and quality of educational services in view of the existing problems of schools being closed, pupils not being assured of learning options, and lack of adult education services. SIP Plus also stipulates that establishing UMCs in rural areas will help to build active communities and strengthen the existing ones, as well as create conditions for social partnership, develop social capital, give an impetus to innovative solutions and improve networking capacities. Thus, the UMCs are seen not only as an embedded segment of the educational system, but also as institutions established in specific localities in order to analyse and meet the needs of the local communities, support the community-building process and strengthen relations between the members of every community.

In addition, under points 15 and 24.2.1.3 of the Rules for Establishment of Formal Education Schools approved by decision of the Government No. 768 of 29 June 2011, schools with vacant premises may change their mission and be reformed to serve either as schools–multifunctional centres (hereinafter SMCs) or special schools–multifunctional centres.

The Lithuanian SMCs are most likely to be compared to community schools (as UMCs do not run any formal curricula). The Rules for Establishment of Formal Education Schools stipulate that schools with vacant premises may be reformed into SMCs and that multifunctional centres can be established in former school premises to provide informal education, education assistance, cultural and health care services as well as meet social needs of the community. SMCs are intended to cater for pupils aged between 7/6 and 16 by offering primary and basic education. In addition, SMCs offer informal education programmes for children and adults and enable the local community to cater for its cultural, health, social, and other needs. Thus, in the case of Lithuania, apart from networking and improvement of the quality of education and training, there is an additional aspect, namely, lifelong learning. The activities of the said multifunctional centres are oriented not only at pupils, but also at meeting the needs of the local community.

Do you recognise the differentiation between community schools and multifunctional schools?

There are no community schools in Lithuania in the sense defined by the EUNEC. However, schools in the regions and rural areas may also traditionally act as centres offering cultural services, sports and education to local communities. Nevertheless, this is not formalised as a school type. By and large, this depends on the initiative of the communities at individual schools. Joint activities of schools and local communities, such as running various projects, social services, etc. may also be initiated by the local authorities, e.g. wardens and municipality representatives. However, this only amounts to initiatives of individual communities of individual schools. As for cooperation between schools and local communities, school councils play an important role as the supreme institution of self-government of schools. Under Article 60.3 of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the role of the school council is to represent pupils, teachers, parents (foster parents, guardians) and the local community. Notably, the engagement of the local community in school management through the school council is an officially established and regulated form of cooperation.

Both UMCs and SMCs are new to Lithuania. They came about as a result of addressing the problem of the falling numbers of pupils, especially in rural areas. The UMC means more than just multifunctional use of the existing premises, which the name seems to suggest. In our case, the Lithuanian UMC is comparable to the community school because of the partnership between UMCs and social partners, joint coordination of activities, design of a joint vision and analysis of the needs of the local community that informs the planning of the relevant activities by the UMC. Currently, the Education Development Centre is running a project entitled Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas funded by the European Social Fund and national budget of the Republic of Lithuania. In the framework of this project, the concept document on UMCs (including SMCs) is being drafted, which will offer a definition of the UMC and cover its objectives, principles of operation, organisation, engagement of the local community, specificity of the work with various target groups, and other matters.

What is the perspective from which the issue is raised?

Enhancing the availability and quality of educational and other services (schools are being closed, the opportunities to choose learning are not ensured for pupils, the availability of adult education services is insufficient, etc.)

How does your council consider the debate on the embeddedness and the partnership of schools with the local community? Do you have any relevant recommendations on this theme?)

In the framework of the project Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas run by the Education Development Centre in 2012–2014, twenty municipalities, alongside the universal multifunctional centres or school–multifunctional centres, set up coordination groups comprising local community representatives and local bodies or institutions providing public services. The mission of the coordination groups is to help the multifunctional centres to identify the real needs of the local community, offer proposals on ways to meet the potential needs and solve the problems. On the basis of the experience and the insights from the project, proposals on the most effective ways of cooperation between schools or informal education institutions and the local community will be drafted and presented.

Is the concept of “community schools” known in your country? Or is it used with another name? Are there schools in your country working with this concept? What priorities have they chosen? What are their experiences of difficulties?

Since the concept of community schools is not defined in the legislation, schools do not use it. It can be seen in the context of the project Development of Lifelong Learning Opportunities in Rural Areas mentioned above and in the examples of joint activities of schools and local communities (see materials attached). Currently, Lithuania has 26 multifunctional centres, including 7 universal multifunctional centres, offering no formal education, and 19 schools–multifunctional centres offering primary or basic education. Schools–multifunctional centres also include three special schools–multifunctional centres. Twelve (both universal multifunctional centres and schools–multifunctional centres) out of 26 centres mentioned above have been opened in municipalities in the framework of the projects under the measure Establishment of Universal Multifunctional Centres in Rural Areas under priority 2 of the Operational Programme for promotion of Cohesion for 2007–2013 titled Quality and Availability of Public Services: Health Care, Education and Social Infrastructure. In line with this measure, 78 universal multifunctional centres should be opened in Lithuania’s municipalities in 2015.

We believe that cooperation among schools (networks, teams) is addressed under the eTwinning programme run by the Centre of Information Technologies in Education. Recently, the results of a case study of teacher collaboration, eTwinning School Teams, have been published. They describe cooperation experience of 24 European schools on the basis of the following parameters: institutional factors and organisational climate in schools (school context, school innovation history), human factors (eTwinning team), institutional factors (team activities, opportunities and challenges), influence of eTwinning teams in schools and future plans. Although there are no Lithuanian schools among the 24 aforementioned schools, similar processes can be observed in Lithuania, too. The results of the study show that:

1. Schools have a wide variety of eTwinning teams, where the support of school leadership for the establishment and functioning was essential. It allowed for more flexible planning of activities of school teams not only between teachers and pupils but also with parents and other external stakeholders.

2. eTwinning school teams form part of school vision and are conducive to innovation in schools. Two groups of schools could be identified in the study. Some schools already had considerable experience of cooperation with other schools in Europe before engaging in eTwinning projects, while for other schools, eTwinning projects were the first step towards European cooperation. The study revealed that it does not matter were cooperation begins, most importantly, both ways lead to the same objective.

3. The level of development of eTwinning school teams varies. Some teams are only at the point of formation, while others continue an old tradition of cooperation. It is known from previous experience that innovation is not a one-off phenomenon but rather a complex process, which develops in time and involves many actors (Forkosh-Barush, 2008). The study has also demonstrated that the activities of eTwinning school team influence the pedagogical objectives of a school by contributing to the existing activities and bring about either some minor or radical changes into the learning environment. The flexibility and adaptability of the eTwinning programme is basically compatible with both the introduction and adjustment of pedagogical innovations and transition and transformation.

4. The role of a lead teacher (teachers) is another important factor. These people inspire other members of the team and bring some fresh ideas into school life. Previous studies have shown that leader’s motivation is the main stability component in innovation and one of the most effective factors of pedagogical innovation based on the use of ICTs. It is equally important to motivate and support leaders and focus on building school teams.

5. Uneven distribution of innovation models among schools is determined by time and context, i.e. school environment, teachers, pupils, content, etc. It also depends on the author of the innovations (one of the teachers or school leadership).

6. eTwinning is referred to as the community for schools in Europe that helps not only to build e-communities, but promotes the establishment of local school communities or school teams and enables local school teams to collaborate with e-communities of other schools in Europe.

Currently, over 1,100 Lithuanian schools and 2,700 education specialists (teachers, head teachers, librarians, social workers, etc. working with 3–20 year-old pupils and students) are engaged in the programme with 1,690 projects (369 running and 1,324 completed).

On the European level, the programme is run in over 104,000 schools by 200,500 education specialists from 35 countries and involves over 27,800 projects.

Teachers engaged in the eTwinning programme are encouraged to integrate the projects into the curricula and informal education and invite their colleagues, pupils, parents and the local community or local authorities to join. The activities and results of the projects are published on the European website, at: www.etwinning.net, on the national website of the programme, at: www.etwinning.lt, the education portal, at: http://portalas.emokykla.lt, the websites of the schools engaged in the projects, as well as in local, regional and national press, on the municipal websites, at events organised in the framework of the programme (over 50 events are held annually), etc.

Every year, the best projects are awarded the National Quality Label or the European Quality Label. The projects are evaluated according to the following criteria:

* Pedagogical innovation and creativity: can certain aspects of the project, such as content, objectives, methods, activities and methodologies, end products, promotion and publications, be considered as more innovative and creative than others?
* Curricular integration: integration of project activity into the existing curricula.
* Collaboration between partner schools: interaction and collaboration of teachers and pupils from different schools when running the project. (e.g., not simply sharing results, but also engaging in active cooperation).
* Use of ICT: creative ways of using ICT during the project apart from e-mail.
* Sustainability and transferability: ensuring the continuity of the project by engaging the entire school and sharing benefits with other stakeholders, such as the local community and local authorities.

## General teaching council for wales (Cyngor addysgu cyffredinol cymru)[[9]](#footnote-9)

Improving the relationship between school-local community and networking platforms

Is this theme part of the policy debate in your country?

The theme of Community Focused Schools has been at the centre of the devolved Welsh Governments’ strategy in tackling poverty and disadvantage in education for many years.

“We want to see a much closer relationship between schools and the communities they serve. We want schools to act as a community resource – not just in school hours but out of hours and in vacations as well. We see them as being integral to community capacity building – providing a basis for delivering, not just education and training … but also a range of other services like family support, health and enterprise promotion …”

*(“The Learning Country” National Assembly for Wales, 2001)*

It was included in the Education Act 2002 and identified as:

 ‘A community focused school is one that provides a range of services and activities often beyond the school day to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community.’

*(Community Focused Schools. Circular No. 34/2003, National Assembly for Wales)*

The report on the first phase of ‘Narrowing the Gap in the Performance of Schools Project’, published by the National Assembly in October 2002 identified key factors that contributed to the success of schools working in challenging circumstances. The study found that where schools engage with their local community this has a direct impact on pupils’ attainment and raises their aspirations to progress from school to further education, training and employment. It is and has been for many years, a Welsh Government priority to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Evidence exists across Wales of schools whose pupils come from areas of high deprivation and make excellent progress and achieve high levels of attainment. These schools often enhance learning outcomes through parental engagement with the school and supporting the development of effective home learning environments.

In 2005, the Welsh Assembly Government made funding available to the Local Authority education departments to develop Community Focused Schools. This specific funding came to an end in 2011 and was replaced by the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant.

In 2012, these grants became the Welsh Government’s principal means of providing financial support for the three national priorities for schools:

* + improving standards in literacy;
	+ improving standards in numeracy, and
	+ reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

The Welsh Government now associates Community Focused Schools work more narrowly with its third priority above, as follows:

“Reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement”

Research indicates that effective family and community engagement can have a positive impact on outcomes for all but especially for learners from more deprived backgrounds. Schools should identify interventions that are effective in supporting parental and community engagement from the earliest opportunity. In particular, those in Communities First areas should look for opportunities to work with the Communities First Clusters. Schools’ strategies for the PDG should actively support the Learning Communities theme of the Communities First Programme and ensure that there is coherence and join-up with Families First and Flying Start provision to support families in their communities.

International research demonstrates the potential long term benefits of investment in childcare and early education, especially for disadvantaged groups. The evidence concludes that good quality early years (0-7years) education can boost children’s cognitive and social skills, which gives them a better foundation for success at school. It is this potential for educational success that is followed by increased success later on in life through employment.

No one factor is key to enhancing children’s outcomes; it is the experience over time that matters. The Welsh Government is of the view that parents and carers need to understand their responsibilities in supporting their child’s education, not just in the early years but throughout their education, and consortia should be considering what activities schools can undertake in ensuring this message is communicated and in drawing parents into the learning process.”

*(School Effectiveness Grant and Pupil Deprivation Grant 2013–2015, Guidance document no: 101/2013)*

Is the definition set forward by EUNEC relevant?

The definition put forward by EUNEC complements the Welsh Governments’ definition in that it is focused on networking as many partnerships for the benefit of all and raising the quality of learning and standards of performance.

‘A community focused school is one that provides a range of services and activities often beyond the school day to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families

and the wider community.’

*(Community Focused Schools. Circular No. 34/2003, National Assembly for Wales)*

The benefits of community focused schools have been identified as follows:

*For pupils and schools:*

* + higher levels of pupil achievement
	+ increased pupil motivation and self-esteem
	+ specialist support to meet pupils’ wider needs
	+ additional facilities and equipment
	+ enhanced partnership working with the community
	+ enhanced status for learning in the local community
	+ reduced pupil disaffection

*For families:*

* + improvements in child behaviour and social skills
	+ greater availability of specialist support for families
	+ easier access to relevant services
	+ greater parental involvement in children’s learning
	+ more opportunities for local adult education and family learning.

*For communities:*

* + better access to essential services
	+ improved local availability of sports, arts and other facilities
	+ local career development opportunities
	+ better supervision of children outside school hours
	+ promotes community cohesion by re-engaging adults (and in particular parents) in learning – reinforcing relationships between school and home
	+ helps regenerate and strengthen communities
	+ The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) states that ‘Schools are the bedrock of a lifelong learning society’.

Are essential elements missing?

The contribution of Community Focused Schools to community cohesion could be greater in the EUNEC definition.

The UK Government’s formal definition of community cohesion is that which

‘…must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another’.

Within this context, the link between Community Focused Schools and Community Cohesion is that both seek to promote inclusion for all and the objectives are to promote integrated and cohesive communities where:

* + learning is used as a powerful tool in promoting integration and mutual respect;
	+ there is a clearly defined sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities;
	+ those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and access to Community Focused Schools services; and,
	+ there are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

Do you recognise the differentiation between community schools and multifunctional schools?

Community schools are those at the centre of the community whereas a multifunctional school may not necessarily provide for the community need, may not be centred on raising the quality of learning and raising standards of performance.

What is the perspective from which the issue is raised?

There are a number of relevant perspectives in which Community Focused Schools can be seen, including:

* + the debate on equal opportunities
	+ raising levels and standards of learning
	+ integration formal and informal learning
	+ multifunctionality of school buildings

By nature, Community Focused schools should be accessible for all, by all, irrespective of background. All members of the community should have access to learning opportunities and this is most successful where formal and informal learning complements each other

How does your council consider the debate on the embeddedness and the partnership of schools with the local community?

The General Teaching Council for Wales endorses the role Community Focused Schools play in reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement through developing strong partnerships and in raising the aspirations of learners through a range of opportunities.

Professor David Egan states

“Schools cannot maximize the reduction of the poverty gap unless their work is supported by strong engagement with their parents and communities.

Parental engagement can have a significant impact on reducing the poverty gap, but it is unlikely that there is sufficient high quality parental engagement in place in Wales.

Significant opportunities exist to improve the links between schools and communities in the most disadvantaged parts of Wales through closer working with Flying Start, Families First, Communities First and Community Focused Schools.”

*(Prof. David Egan, Communities, Families and Schools Together: a route to reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement in schools across Wales)*

Is the concept of “community schools” known in your country?

The concept of the Community Focused School has been at the heart of the Welsh Governments’ policy on addressing poverty and educational disadvantage for over twelve years. Welsh Government provided funding to local education authorities from 2005-2011 to assist schools in their areas in developing their Community Focus initiative.

The funding to support the Community Focus initiative now exists through the School Effectiveness Grant and the Pupil Deprivation Grant and is distributed to schools through a grant application.

Many case studies of excellent Community Focused Schools exist, highlighted by agencies working towards full participation in the concept such as Continyou, RAISE and Estyn (School Inspection Service)

What priorities have they chosen?

The core priorities are those of:

* + Tackling poverty and educational disadvantage
	+ Raising the quality of education and standards of performance
	+ Parental and Community engagement.

What are their experiences of difficulties?

There are many difficulties to overcome in order for Community Focused Schools to be successful, the main one being the ‘’hard to reach’ section of the community and ensuring their engagement in the activities on offer. In order for this to be successful there needs to be coordination of multi agency working, recruitment of staff, securing funding through grant applications and the sustainability of such grant funding.

Is the concept integrated at a central policy level?

The concept of Community Focused School has been recognised at central policy level for many years. Its importance has been developed through many government circulars and guidance materials. See answers to Q2.1.

What is the role of the central government, of the community and of the school?

Central Government produces the policy and provides funding through grant applications from schools.

 Schools produce implementation plans with community agencies, distribute funding accordingly and provide a range of activities and projects under the umbrella of Community Focused Schools.

“Schools have a vital part to play through the day-to-day work they do withdisadvantaged students**.** Schools, the people who lead them and teachers make a difference.

But schools are only part of the solution. They are a necessary but not sufficient part of a system-wide and sustainable approach. Just as important is gaining the involvement and support of the families and communities these young people live in. Family- and community-level influences have the strongest impact on young people’s educational achievement.

What we need, therefore, are holistic policies to tackling the influence of poverty on educational achievement, which join together interventions at family, school and community level”.

*(Egan, D. (2013) How to cut the education – poverty link. Bevan Foundation)*

**References**

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## 2.7 Education Council Portugal (CNE)

Improving the relations between schools, local community and networking platforms

This is not a relevant topic in our present political agenda. Schools are free to develop projects and activities involving local communities, municipalities, local associations or enterprises.

We would suggest that EUNEC definition could be wider, since when involving other partners, schools should not only aim at improving learning outcomes but also promoting the social development of the community they serve.

The debate on this issue should consider

* equity, equal opportunities for students from different social and cultural origins;
* integration of different learning contexts – formal, informal and non formal;
* better results – students with better learning performances.

School can be better if the cultural level of the local community as whole is higher.

The National Council of Education (CNE) addressed the theme of school – community partnerships in several published statements arguing that organizations with an educational potential (formal, non-formal, informal) within a particular school community should establish partnerships and promote networking activities in order to devise education and training offers to respond to local needs. Thus, schools, training centres, firms, municipalities, associations, museums or science centres for example, that operate at a particular territory school collaborate to involve locals, youngsters and adults, in lifelong learning activities.

The concept of community schools

The connection between schools and communities has been implicit in public policies concerning decentralization and school autonomy implemented since 1975.

Despite the fact that the concept of “community schools” is not a current concern in Portugal, there are some institutions with practices that could be associated to such an approach.

The expression “integrated territorial approaches” is commonly used to refer to educational projects that associate formal and non-formal and promote learning experiences using the local as the reference or the starting point. Such projects tend to establish partnerships with different local actors, mainly municipalities.

Nowadays the Ministry of Education runs different programs involving several community partners in order to improve school performances. These programs are usually implemented in economic and socially deprived areas with severe problems of poverty, violence and school failure. In these contexts schools are integrated in TEIP – Educational Territory of Priority Intervention. Starting in 1996, this approach involves about 9% of the schools.

Other projects involving mainly rural and isolated schools were developed during the 90s trying to promote social and cultural development of the community by using the school as the reference or the starting point. With a perspective of integrated development, these projects tried to promote culture, education, health and environment within the local community, using the school as a development pole.

However, school merging policies and migration to urban centres would result in the extinction of those isolated and rural schools.

1. “A community school invests in networking and cooperation with relevant partners in and outside the school in order to broaden the scope of learning, to enlarge the educational time and raise the quality of the educational offer, in order to improve performances of all pupils.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. www.rijksoverheid.nl [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the yearly report of Oberon, 2011. http://www.oberon.eu/Beheer/DynamicMedia/publicaties/BS-jaarbericht2011.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Abstract: http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/english/publications/extended-education.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Abstract: http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/english/publications/cultural-education.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Abstract: http://www.onderwijsraad.nl/upload/english/publications/parents-as-partners.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. By Miloslav Hons, Headmaster of Basic school Chomutov, Na Příkopech 895 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Based on the vision text ‘Community Schools in Flanders and Brussels. A framework for development’, under the authority of the Minister for Work, Education and Training of the Flemish Government, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. By Sue Rivers, Deputy Chairperson General Teaching Council for Wales [↑](#footnote-ref-9)