**

Seminar on ‘Community schools’

Brussels, 23-24 May 2013

INPUT FROM EUNEC MEMBERS

## General teaching council for wales (Cyngor addysgu cyffredinol cymru)[[1]](#footnote-1)

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**

Tackling Child Poverty and Disadvantage in Schools. Estyn: Cardiff

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National Assembly for Wales, corp creator. (2001)The learning country: a paving document: a comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales.

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

1. By Sue Rivers, Deputy Chairperson General Teaching Council for Wales [↑](#footnote-ref-1)