

**GOVERNORS WALES**  
**ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**16<sup>th</sup> June 2007**

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you some thoughts on Community Focused Schools (CFS). It is very encouraging that this forms the theme of your conference today. However, that, in itself, raises important issues about how we view the whole development of CFS in Wales.

First of all a short practical challenge is required. Following on from that it is clear that this is not new and has, in fact, been a feature of educational development since the 1920's. It is, therefore, important to provide you with the necessary context and today I want to cover:

- The background and principles to our work
- The relevance to the current agenda
- Practical developments
- Some issue for governors.

**Background and Principles**

The history of community schooling is a series of peaks and troughs and conflicting views. Let me illustrate this by two references, both of which were written in the same year.

The nationally agreed definition of 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.

In RCT we have throughout our short history, sought to establish the principle that all our schools function as community focused schools. We have set this out in successive policy documents as clear expectations. Our guiding principles are, therefore, that we expect an effective school in RCT to work towards:

- Increasing educational attainment and achievement for all by providing access to wider opportunities.
- Providing a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the needs of children, young adults and their families and the communities in which they live.
- Providing additional services that would not normally be available in a locality by developing a school beyond its traditional use.
- Working with its community as an important element in raising standards for all.
- Building partnerships with other organisations that can contribute to the education of pupils.

- Helping to strengthen the community through providing opportunities for lifelong learning, personal development and the pursuit of sporting, artistic and cultural opportunities.
- Serving the families of pupils as well as local businesses, voluntary groups and individuals who live and work in the schools community.

It is clear, therefore, that this is not simply a question of the extended school or a check-list of extra curricular activities. It is fundamentally about the nature, attitude, approaches and belief of a school which should be reflected in the way the institution behaves and presents itself. Only by accepting and subscribing to the principle can schools genuinely become community focused.

### **Community Schools in Action**

Clearly, in reality the school will not do everything. A common misconception is to regard CFS as 'another initiative' whereas it should be something that is embedded in the life of a school. Equally important to recognise is that the principles translate into action in different ways and in different scales. A fully fledged youth and adult programme may be one element, a small scale parents group another. Both have different scales but equal value.

The elements of the community school in practice can be varied and will depend on the nature of the community and the knowledge that the school has of its community. However, we can identify some key elements:

- Home-school relationships
- Pre-school provision
- Family and adult learning
- Curriculum
- Use of resources.

The implications from this are significant but not surprising. Taken to its logical development, we must consider

- Governance and management
- Physical resources
  - Environment
  - Parent/community space
  - Facilities
  - Usage.
- Human resources
  - Staffing
  - Workload
  - Deployment
  - Time.

We recognise that this set of implications translates into a continuum and all schools will be at different points. The importance of the agreed principles, therefore, helps to provide a consistent interpretation of the nature of the community focused school. It also supports the way in which these principles can be interpreted at local level. This shared understanding is essential to the effective provision of services in any given community. Consequently, the network of schools becomes a key element of development. This can be demonstrated through:

- Collective understanding of community needs
- Collective and collaborative power
- Knowledge
- Synergy with other partnerships.

In RCT, we have, therefore, tried to support these networks to take decisions at local level, to allocate funding and to share resources. It seems to us that this approach is very relevant to the current agenda.

### **The Current Agenda**

If we consider the seven core aims of Rights to Action:

- Have a flying start in life.
- Have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities.
- Enjoy the best possible health and are free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.
- Have access to play leisure sporting and cultural activities.
- Are listened to, treated with respect and have their race and cultural identity recognised.
- Have a safe home and community, which supports physical and emotional well-being.
- Are not disadvantaged by poverty.

It is clear that all of them are relevant to schools and to education and children's services. Take any individual aim and it is possible to say, for example, that schools are essential to the delivery of that aim. Essential, however, does not mean wholly responsible and it will be important for the network of community focused schools to clearly identify the outcomes they can achieve and the contribution they can make to the wider picture. Clarifying this contribution takes us in to the area of making things happen.

The key is to extract, identify and clearly state the outcomes, which arise from the aim. The task then is to recognise the role of the community focused school and be clear about the outcomes which can be achieved and also the ways in which the school can contribute to the wider picture. This focus on outcomes is becoming a mantra at all levels and one which, rightly we can't ignore. It is however, very important to recognise that there are 'soft' outcomes related to process which are as important as 'hard' measurable

ones. The community focused school represents the vehicle for making this happen.

### **Implications for Governors**

Governors have a crucial role in providing the leadership, vision and support to schools which are developing as community focused schools. In many cases, governors will offer that continuity when headteachers, who are particularly committed to an extended schools approach, leave. Other roles include ongoing monitoring and overseeing of the extended activities, maybe as part of a steering group; helping to locate supplementary funding sources for initiatives; safeguarding the delegated budget; securing suitable insurance and appointing extra staff.

Governors will also need to take account of who is involved and the nature of the school. The key characteristics of a community school are that it:

- Is a listening school
- Is partner-rich
- Is healthy
- Devolves leadership
- Re-models the workforce.

Management and governance, therefore, needs to reflect those who are involved including:

- Parents
- Staff
- Stakeholders/partners
- Community
- Students
- Governors.

The benefits of developing such reflective models of governance have been found to include:

- Shared leadership and workload
- Building on strengths
- Continuity of vision
- Joined up activity
- Improved service delivery.

## **Conclusion**

We are very happy to share our experiences with colleagues and look forward to learning from others. The inescapable conclusion from my position is that if we are to avoid the peaks and troughs of historical development, it is absolutely essential to focus funding and energy on:

- Building capacity
- Embedding practice
- Extending commitment and expectation
- Supporting innovation
- Ensuring appropriate training and development across formal service sectors.