

Case studies on community cohesion

Betws Primary School

Betws Primary School in Betws, Bridgend, is situated at the heart of a small rural village in the Garw Valley. Betws is the third most deprived ward in Bridgend and is a Communities First area. The proportion of people in the community who are unemployed or on low income, who suffer from poor health or who have limited qualifications is above average. The school has 220 pupils on roll.

Promoting good community relations

The school has established a Partnership Group which includes representatives from local community groups and agencies, Communities First, school governors, teachers, parents and the wider community. The aim of this is to promote joint working, to share information so as to avoid duplication, and to address community needs.

At a previous consultation with young people, Communities First had found that a lack of transport was a huge issue and presented a real barrier to gaining access to services and activities. The partnership decided to address this problem and to increase 'doorstep' opportunities for the community.

Since that time, Betws Primary School has become a whirlwind of activity. The school runs a highly successful breakfast club, as well as family learning classes, and after-school clubs on four afternoons a week.

The school also publishes a community newsletter and holds open evenings. The dentist holds surgeries in the school and the police not only hold Partnerships and Communities Together (PACT) meetings there, but also have a police room on site.

A hall in the school has been converted into a community arts venue. The school is working with local agencies and Play Wales to train volunteers to run open-access play sessions in the school grounds out of school hours.

The school's strength lies in the positive 'can do' attitude of the headteacher and the staff and their willingness to listen to and work with their community in order to make things happen.

Evidence of benefit to pupils and/or their families

- The increased level of 'doorstep' opportunities has had a huge impact on the community of Betws.
- Having the police located in the village has had a positive impact on levels of vandalism and crime and has enabled people not only to discuss crime-related issues affecting the village, but to also work with the police to do something about them.
- Through co-ordinating and putting on more activities for children and young people, the school has given them the chance to try new things and develop skills and hobbies. This has broadened their horizons and has had the additional benefit of reducing instances of young people committing arson or behaving in a way that causes a nuisance to others in the community.
- Opening up the school grounds has provided the children and young people with somewhere safe to play during the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays.
- Holding family learning classes has strengthened links between the school and local families.
- From a health perspective, regular dental checks and procedures have become far more accessible, now that the dentist runs a surgery from the school.
- The community newsletter produced by the school in partnership with local agencies has provided the community with information about local activities and opportunities. It offers a way of celebrating local achievements, and it has improved links between the school, other organisations and the local community.
- The number of parents volunteering in the school has increased dramatically and the relationship between the school and its community is now a much closer one.

Cathays High School

This co-educational 11–18 comprehensive school is the nearest secondary school to the centre of Cardiff. It has the oldest secondary building and the smallest secondary site in the county.

There are over 940 pupils on roll, including 160 in the sixth form. The percentage of pupils who come from minority ethnic communities is 60.7. Over 30 nationalities and languages are represented in the school at any one time. Thirty six per cent of pupils are Muslim. Forty five per cent have a home language other than English. About ten per cent of pupils are asylum seekers/refugees. Some pupils arrive at the school having received little or no education through the medium of English. The school has an Ethnic Minority Achievement department, funded separately by the local education authority, which supports pupils from minority ethnic groups both within the department and in mainstream classes.

Because of the mobility of the local population (due in part to the closeness of the school to the university and the university hospital), up to one in seven of the pupils in Year 11 have not been at the school all the way through from Year 7.

Thirty seven per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

Promoting good community relations

The school uses intergenerational projects to encourage parents and members of the community to get involved with the school. One of these is 'Meet the Mouse', a computer-based series of workshops which encourages adults to improve their basic IT skills, with guidance and support being provided by pupils from the school.

A new project, 'First Steps to Becoming a Teaching Assistant', will shortly be taking place, with help from the Basic Skills Agency, the community education services and a local primary school. This aims to train twelve adults to become teaching assistants. However, the project will also benefit many more people through an open day that will signpost people to additional adult education courses.

The school offers some activities that are aimed at pupils with particular needs – for example, to support pupils for whom English is an additional language, the Community Languages programme provides after-school or lunchtime tuition and examination support so that pupils can gain a qualification in their mother tongue at GCSE or A/AS level. Languages currently offered are Urdu, Persian and Arabic, and pupils from Year 7 to Year 13 take part. This has been hugely successful, with dozens of children gaining qualifications each year, and the school aims to extend the programme to include Bengali, Cantonese, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Czech, Polish and Mandarin. The school is also working to open the classes to members of the wider community, focusing on parents and carers.

To help promote understanding between different cultures within the community, the school puts on a week-long event, 'Cathays Celebration of Sports, Cultures and the Arts'. This includes a concert of music, song, dance and poetry organised by an EMAS (the Ethnic Minorities Achievement Service), with an exhibition of children's artwork. The evening is rounded off with everyone sharing food from around the world, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the children and parents who have provided it.

There's a very lively Amnesty International Club, which meets each week and organises a programme of activities. Members of the club have presented in assemblies, written articles for the local press and travelled to London to lobby parliament. Most recently they have highlighted the plight of refugees during Refugee Week and produced an article for a local community magazine.

The school has links with Malopo Secondary School in Lesotho and regularly organises events to raise money for its 'cow appeal'.

Evidence of benefit to pupils and/or their families

In the report following the Estyn inspection of Cathays High School in January 2007, the out-of-school-hours learning programme was highlighted as 'an outstanding feature'. The report said that: '... wide range of activities broadens and enriches pupils' learning experiences. The school promotes very successfully pupils' personal, spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, both within lessons and by means of a number of additional learning experiences. These enhance pupils' self-confidence greatly.'

Twenty three pupils achieved GCSE or AS/A level qualifications in their home language last year, and a further 30 are expected to do so this year.

Ensuring inclusion

- The school aims to provide a diverse programme of events which will engage primary and secondary school pupils, young adults, families and members of the wider community.
- Each project is discussed in terms of its appeal, aims, staffing, venue, costs and value for money.
- The final programme contains one or more projects which will meet the needs of each of these groups.
- Efforts are made to provide activities which will encourage interaction between groups, such as the youth club, the intergenerational project, and the Cathays Celebration Week.
- The school provides some clubs such as 'Boys' Dance', 'Bangladeshi Homework Club' and 'DJ Skills', which aim to attract very specific groups of young people who might otherwise be marginalised and miss out on the opportunities on offer.

Mellor Community Primary School

The school is based in the Belgrave area of Leicester, which has a very diverse population. It has additional premises off-site – the Cross Corners Community Arts Centre.

The school has 436 children on roll. Eighty five per cent of children in the school have a first language other than English.

There is a focus on meeting the basic skills needs of children, their parents and the wider local community.

The school has a strong relationship with the British Council and takes part in international study trips and teacher exchanges.

Community provision at Mellor and Cross Corners

- The school has a pro-active home-school liaison officer (fluent in six languages), who responds to the needs of parents and members of the community.
- The school offers significant extended school provision, both on the main site and at Cross Corners.
- It offers parents support for their own learning through work experience placements (for example, for NVQ in childcare courses).
- There's a long history of employing community workers to establish and work with local community groups, such as an Encounter women's group and a Somali women's group.
- Community work focuses mainly on organising free family learning and lifelong learning courses for community members.
- Cross Corners is successful in engaging hard-to-reach service users, who often join activities having learnt about them through word of mouth.
- The Cross Corners manager provides support to community members, to help them organise their own groups and activities.
- Cross Corners runs a botanical painting/drawing group, funded by grants from organisations such as the Arts Council aimed at encouraging women, mainly from ethnic minority groups, to participate in artistic activities.
- The majority of community activities and courses at the centre are free so that people are not limited by financial constraints.
- The school actively promotes the Centre to organisations catering for adults with special needs. Currently two disability groups operate from the Centre.

The impact

- Large numbers of people have taken part in courses at Mellor and Cross Corners, and have progressed to do other accredited courses such as childcare NVQs.
- After having enrolled on the 'Journey for all through Cross Corners' project, many learners have moved into employment.
- There are a large number of anecdotal reports, mostly from women, reporting increased confidence.
- Many parents/carers who have attended courses have reported that they now spend more quality time with their children and that they feel better able to support their children's learning.
- The end-of-year audit showed that the children whose parents had attended courses had made progress in both literacy and numeracy.
- More parents have expressed interest in becoming volunteers in the school – for example, by offering reading support or support at the Foundation Stage.
- After attending courses over a period of time, a group of women felt empowered to set up their own group to offer free courses to local women.

Ensuring that activities are inclusive

- The school encourages people to bring their friends and families along to courses.
- It provides language support for many adult courses.
- Children whose second language is English, and children who are new to the country, are given language support throughout their time at Mellor.
- A support/discussion group for parents/carers has been set up by the SEN co-ordinator – parents meet on a regular basis to share their views.
- A free crèche is provided for most of the courses.
- Crèche workers and support workers speak a range of community languages and live in the local community.
- The school promotes the celebration of different faiths through the faith assemblies and at festival times. Parents/carers are invited to take part in the assemblies at festival times.

Camp Primary and Nursery School, St Albans, Hertfordshire

Camp is a growing community primary school. It has 230 children on roll, including 60 places at the nursery. It is based in an area of high social deprivation, with a high level of pupil mobility and rich cultural diversity. Fifty three per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language.

The school has long held a key position in the local community, working to promote integration and inclusion.

Community relations

The school encourages the participation of parents and community members by providing:

- ESOL classes (including work on ICT, maths and literacy)
- 'ladies-only' keep-fit classes to promote healthy lifestyles for women who are unable to attend public classes because of their religion. This class has now been running for two years. It is very popular with both Muslim and non-Muslim women. It has been one of the most successful initiatives for promoting positive cross-community relations.
- computer skills classes that are open to parents – these have included classes for parents as well as sessions where parents can work alongside their children
- a 'Rainbow Club' – a pre-school project that encourages parents to play with their children and prepare them for school – families from all ethnic groups are encouraged to take part in this
- an allotment project, which enables members of the community to rent a section of the school allotment plot. This is beginning to attract Muslim mothers, as well as providing access to the local community beyond the school. Many low-income families are supplementing their family meals with produce from the allotment.
- one-off special events to promote community cohesion, such as a 'pampering' day for mothers.

Benefits

- Those attending ESOL and 'Keeping up with the Children' classes over the last two years have achieved accreditation in English and Maths. This has had an impact on parents' self-esteem and skills and has meant that they are better able to support their children.
- The children who have entered the nursery after attending the pre-school project are reported by the staff to be more settled and to have become used to routines quickly.
- Camp School has a better than average turnout at school events, compared with similar schools.

Inclusive activities

- Provision is made according to the needs of the children. This is set out on a detailed provision map.
- Camp School is concerned with the needs of vulnerable groups and targets support in the classrooms according to the needs of pupils – for example, it runs a writing project for boys, offers movement therapy, and provides a disguised and reduced curriculum for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- The governing body regularly reviews and monitors the impact of the school's equal opportunities policy.

Hannah More Primary School, Bristol

This is an inner-city community school. Massive redevelopment is under way in the area, including new housing and huge new office and quay-side developments. The immediate area ranks at nineteenth out of 32,482 on indices of deprivation. Income levels come out at 56th and employment at seventh within these indices

The school has 154 children on roll. The mobility rate of the school is high (approximately 68 per cent); the roll never remaining static. This is due, largely, to the housing situation in Bristol, as families are placed in temporary accommodation and then moved on to further temporary accommodation. As a result, children have frequent changes of school.

Fifty six per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language. The school currently has 27 per cent Somali and nineteen per cent African Caribbean pupils in attendance. Between 25 and 30 per cent of pupils have special educational needs. Eighty children at the school (52 per cent) are entitled to free school meals.

Activities and initiatives to promote community cohesion

- 'Reading buddies' and 'Numeracy buddies' from local businesses visit the school each week, to support children with literacy and maths.
- The school has developed close links with Goodrich and Iron Acton schools, both are in rural locations which contrast vividly with Hannah More's inner-city setting.
- There is a Somali Achievement worker, who provides extra support for Somali children in the school.
- The school has actively sought to establish partnerships with practising artists, who have enabled the school to offer an exciting curriculum. Many artists have been of African or Caribbean heritage and their skills and enthusiasm have been inspirational to both children and adults.
- In 2006, Ofsted reported: 'Visits, including the close links with local museums, and visitors to the school, support the curriculum extremely well. For example, pupils in Year 5 working with a visitor on African drumming techniques increase their appreciation of the rich cultural diversity around them.'

Parental involvement

- The school offers a range of activities for the wider school community, such as English for speakers of other languages, crèche work training, first aid training, and courses in computing and maths.
- Some courses target parents of children in specific year groups, while some are open to the wider community as well as parents and carers. All courses are actively promoted to the whole school community, including families from different religious, cultural and racial backgrounds.

- The school's family activities, including trips and visits and termly storytelling events, are consistently well attended. Monitoring of these activities shows that a cross-section of families is involved.

Working with local residents, local voluntary and community groups

- There is a developing relationship with the Adult Learning Service – evening courses are taking place at the school. Adult learners living and working locally attend these classes.
- The school's facilities are available for private hire at weekends, in the evening and in school holidays.

Evidence of benefit for pupils and/or their families

- Feedback from family learning has been very positive.
- Attendance on courses has been very good.
- During the last year, four parents have gained paid work as a result of the training or voluntary placements they have undertaken in the school.
- About 38 parents gained some form of accreditation through school-based learning during the year 2006/07.
- Children have benefited from seeing their parents involved in learning.
- There have been increased levels of parental involvement in all aspects of school life, including attendance at parents' evenings and school meetings, as well as at courses, activities and informal events. Greater involvement means that parents are more confident about talking to teachers, and teachers feel more at ease with parents as well.
- Strong evidence shows that our 'Reading buddies' scheme has a positive impact on children's SATs results.

Ensuring inclusion

- Flyers and posters use plain English, include positive and culturally diverse images, and are translated into community languages, wherever possible.
- There is information around the school in all community languages.
- The school website has signposted information for speakers of other languages on its front page (in Somali, Arabic, Hungarian, Polish, Spanish and French).
- The school spreads information by word of mouth through its parent co-ordinators, who have good links throughout the school.
- Activities for parents are monitored and recorded quarterly.
- It is recognised that the school has not as yet engaged as many fathers as it would like in family/school activities, so it is offering Saturday science sessions as a way of bringing fathers and their children into the school together.