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An introduction to Community Focused Schools

? What is a Community Focused School?

'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. Across Wales many schools already provide some community services including adult education, study support, ICT facilities and community sports programmes.'

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

Key messages

- A Community Focused Schools approach is not new. Many schools have been working in this way for years. As governors, you may have been involved in supporting and managing such developments, perhaps under another banner.
- Community Focused Schools entail more than just dual use of school buildings.
- A Community Focused School recognises that schools cannot, and should not, work alone to help children and young people reach their full potential. We know that children and young people learn more effectively when they are happy and healthy.
- All schools can develop a Community Focused Schools approach – secondary schools, primary schools, nursery schools, Welsh-medium schools, faith schools and special schools.
- There's no blueprint from the Welsh Assembly Government laying down what a Community Focused School should do or how it should work. However, the toolkit *Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen* is seen as the main reference for development. The approach used for developing Community Focused Schools work will differ from school to school, depending on the school's vision, leadership and capacity, the needs of the school and the community, local and national priorities and existing provision within the school and community.



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- A well planned and developed Community Focused Schools approach will support, and not detract from, the school's core business. Services and activities should be developed as an integral part of school development and improvement. They should be built into the School Development/Improvement Plan; governors have a key role in making this happen.
- A Community Focused Schools approach recognises that schools need to work in partnership with others who have an interest in improving outcomes for children and young people, and for their families and communities. Working in this way not only helps to meet the school's priorities in line with its School Development/Improvement Plan, but also helps to meet the wider needs of children, young people, their families and communities, in a way that a single organisation, working on its own, would not be able to do.
- Community Focused Schools activities and services do not have to take place on school sites. There's no need for a school to compete with existing services, activities or facilities in the community; the school can act as a signpost.
- The focus should be on addressing unmet needs, in order to create better opportunities and enhance the lives of children and young people, and those of their families and communities. That is why carrying out audits and consultations is the key to a well-planned approach – but it does not necessarily have to be the school that carries these out.
- To take forward their development as Community Focused Schools, many schools are collaborating with other schools and partners in their cluster area.
- Working in this way is a vehicle for meeting a range of targets, including those relating to school improvement, providing integrated children's and community services and achieving community regeneration.

A vision for Community Focused Schools

ContinYou Cymru has developed a vision for Community Focused Schools in conjunction with the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). The vision sets out that Community Focused Schools will:

- always be supportive of the core mission of schools;
- provide a range of activities/learning opportunities outside the school day for children, young people, families and adults;
- provide a range of additional services/opportunities and relevant information for children, young people, families and the wider community;
- be sustainable schools.

The full vision statement can be read in Welsh or English at www.continyou.org.uk/cfsvision.

Developing as Community Focused Schools can help schools to achieve the seven core aims set out by the Assembly in *Children and Young People: Rights to Action* and *Extending Entitlement* (see page 1.5 for more information about these).

? Why develop Community Focused Schools?

The benefits for **pupils and schools** of a well planned and developed Community Focused Schools approach are that it can:

- support higher levels of achievement;
- raise pupils' motivation and self-esteem;
- provide support to meet their wider needs;
- bring greater opportunities for working in partnership with the local community;
- enable children and young people to have fun and to develop new skills.

The benefits for **families** are that it can:

- improve children's behaviour and social skills;
- support greater involvement by parents/carers in their children's learning;
- provide more opportunities for local adult education;
- provide local access to specialist family support.

The benefits for **communities** are that Community Focused Schools can:

- provide better access to services;
- improve local availability of sports and other facilities;
- provide local career development opportunities;
- provide things for children and young people to do outside school;
- help build closer relationships between schools and communities.

While the development of Community Focused Schools in Wales is different from that of extended schools in England, the ethos and aims of the two programmes are similar. The findings of the *Evaluation of the Full Service Extended Schools Initiative: Final Report* (DfES, 2007) included the following:

- Most schools developed additional provision in order to overcome pupils' 'barriers to learning', which were seen as related to family and community problems.
- Promising partnership arrangements, genuine involvement by pupils and communities, and strategic initiatives at a local level were emerging.
- Extended schools were having a positive impact on the attainment of pupils – particularly those facing difficulties. Extended schools were also having an effect on other outcomes for pupils such as those relating to engagement with learning, family stability and enhanced life chances.
- Extended schools were generating positive outcomes for families and local people.

? What's the current situation in Wales?

WAG has made funding available to all 22 local education authorities (LEAs) in Wales, between 2005 and 2008, to support the development of Community Focused Schools in their areas, making £10.2 million available over this period. In November 2007, the WAG announced that further funding is being made available for three years from 2008 to 2011 to support Community Focused

Schools developments. This does not mean that Community Focused Schools cannot be developed without this funding. Indeed, many schools have already been working in this way for years.

This funding does mean that each LEA has a nominated contact for Community Focused Schools work, and has some funding to allocate to schools. The role of an LEA is, broadly, to facilitate the development of Community Focused Schools on the ground, through creating an infrastructure to support this. All LEAs have developed, or are developing, local strategies for Community Focused Schools. The LEA should be the first port of call for schools, or partners, wishing to discuss ideas for developing a Community Focused Schools approach. Some LEAs have already developed, or are in the process of planning, training sessions for governors on Community Focused Schools. For information about the nominated contact in your LEA area, email info.cardiff@continyou.org.uk.

? What about future funding for developing and sustaining Community Focused Schools?

Developing and sustaining a Community Focused Schools approach is not just about funding. One of the reasons for carrying out audits and consultations is to find out what needs exist, what provision already exists and who is providing what services. This can help the school to set priorities and identify partners that it can work with to meet local needs. When schools make such links, this can often bring access to resources – both financial and of other kinds. Part of the LEA's role is also to develop an infrastructure to support the development of Community Focused Schools, which includes sustainability. Here are some points that it may be helpful to remember when you are considering funding issues:

- Different activities that contribute to Community Focused Schools will be funded from different sources.
- Some activities will already be in place and may just need joining up.
- Possible sources of funding include school-specific funding, other community initiatives, the Lottery, and trusts and charities.
- Partner organisations may have access to pots of money that schools do not.
- Schools could register the PTA as a charity. It will then be able to apply for funding from sources that would not accept an application from a school. Look on the NCPTA's website (www.ncpta.org) for more information on registering as a charity.

? What is the policy context of Community Focused Schools?

This type of approach, under a number of different names, is being developed across the UK and in many other countries. In England, the extended schools policy is well developed in all local authorities. In Scotland, there has been many years experience of integrated community schools. In Northern Ireland, the first full-service integrated schools are being established.

In Wales, there are a number of developments which support and complement the role of Community Focused Schools:

- The **Children Act (2004)** sets out a new statutory basis for partnership working and planning at LEA level to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. *Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes* (WAG, 2006) gives guidance on how this should be done.
- **Children and Young People: Rights to Action** (WAG, 2004) sets out WAG's vision and its seven core aims for all children and young people to:
 - have a flying start in life;
 - have a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities;
 - enjoy the best possible health, and be free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation;
 - have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities;
 - be listened to and treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised;
 - have a safe home and a safe community which supports their physical and emotional well-being;
 - not be disadvantaged by poverty.
- **Extending Entitlement: Support for 11–25 Year Olds in Wales** (WAG, 2002): this is the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship policy for youth support services in Wales. It includes all services, support and opportunities for young people between the ages of 11 and 25. There are ten entitlements, which aim to help young people make the best choices, gain personal development and lead fulfilling lives.
- **Children and Young People's Plans:** from September 2008 the Assembly is proposing that the Children and Young People's Plan will be the vehicle for planning services for children and young people in a local authority area. All services and activities included in the plans will have to meet, and show how they are meeting, the seven core aims of Rights to Action.
- **Making the Connections: Delivering Beyond Boundaries** (WAG, 2006) sets out the Assembly's action plan for improving public services in Wales. Its themes include 'putting citizens first' and 'working together to deliver'.
- **A Shared Responsibility: Local Government's Contribution to Improving People's Lives** (WAG, 2007): this policy statement sets out WAG's expectations of local authorities, including ensuring that public services are centred on the needs and experiences of citizens, and encouraging integration and responsiveness through cross-sector collaboration.
- **Transforming Schools: a Discussion Paper** (Estyn, 2007) discusses the role of Community Focused Schools in meeting the needs of the community.

'Schools are well placed to . . . provide a base for locally delivered childcare, play, family and child support, health services, youth services and adult education. Schools can also act as a location for delivery of services to those with specialised needs. This role is particularly important in deprived areas where alternative facilities often do not exist . . . As a result in some areas one multi-agency team may need to serve a cluster of schools.'

Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes, National Assembly for Wales
Circular No 35/2006

? What kinds of activities or services can be provided through a Community Focused Schools approach?

There is not a prescribed list of services or activities that schools have to provide. When considering whether to provide a particular service or activity, a school should ensure that:

- it fulfils local needs;
- it does not duplicate existing provision unnecessarily;
- the school, either on its own or through working with partners, has the capacity to provide the activity;
- the activity supports priorities in the School Development/Improvement Plan.

The list given below is not a definitive one, but gives an idea of the kinds of services and activities that a Community Focused School can offer:

- out-of-school-hours learning activities;
- family and adult learning activities;
- parenting support;
- healthy living activities and services for children and young people, their families and the wider community;
- hosting drop-in sessions run by other organisations, such as Citizens Advice, Working Links or organisations offering counselling sessions or health advice;
- signposting people to local services and activities, such as adult and community education opportunities or childcare;
- co-located community facilities, such as a library, community centre or leisure centre;
- providing a base for multi-agency teams – this might include staff from social services, health agencies, the police, Youth Offending Teams, the educational psychology service, local housing associations, community development agencies, the Children’s Information Service (CIS) or even the local post office!

? Doesn’t developing a Community Focused Schools approach detract from the school’s core business?

A well planned and managed Community Focused Schools approach should support, and not detract from, a school’s core business. We know that children and young people learn better when they are happy and healthy. We also know that teachers and headteachers spend a significant amount of their time dealing with the wider needs of pupils and families. Services and activities provided through a Community Focused Schools approach can deal with these wider needs, giving teachers more time to teach, and enabling children and young people to engage with learning more successfully. Community Focused Schools can also support the school’s core business when services and activities are built into the School Development/Improvement Plan. Schools can only do so much during the ‘formal’ school day. Engaging with families and the wider community to build a community where learning is valued both inside and outside the school will make a difference.

Here are some questions to ask when you are planning a Community Focused Schools approach:

- What have you found out from the needs analyses and consultations you have undertaken?
- What advice can school staff give you about how Community Focused Schools services and activities can support pupils' learning?
- With whom do you need to work to address the needs that have been identified?
- How can services and activities support the priorities of the School Development/Improvement Plan?
- How will the services and activities be monitored and evaluated to see whether they are supporting the school's core business?

Further support

- For more information on the objectives and benefits of Community Focused Schools, look at *Community Focused Schools – a Joint Vision* (ContinYou Cymru, WAG and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales – www.continyou.org.uk/cfsvision) and at 'Section 1: Introduction' of *Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen – a Toolkit*.
- For more information on planning Community Focused Schools activities and services, look at 'Section 2: Becoming a Community Focused School' in *Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen – a Toolkit*.
- For more information on funding and other practical issues, look at 'Section 4: Community Focused Schools in action' in *Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen – a Toolkit*.
- For more information on practical issues, look at section 4 of this guide: 'Developing Community Focused Schools'.