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# Community schools: families and communities at the heart of school life

July 2020



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## Foreword

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During the last three months, schools have shown how central a role they play in providing support for their learners, families and wider communities, and I would like to thank staff across all our education settings and partner services for their work in helping pupils and families during this difficult time.

In previous thematic and annual reports, I have highlighted the benefits of schools working with families and communities as community schools. Now more than ever it is vital that schools reach out to their communities in order to support the learning and wellbeing of their pupils and families.

The response of the education community to COVID-19 has shown how schools can do this. Teachers across Wales have built stronger partnerships with parents to support learning at home. Schools have worked with a range of partners to run the hub provision for children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils. Staff in schools and local authorities have made sure that children eligible for free school meals have received food. They have worked with food banks to deliver food parcels to vulnerable families and distributed IT equipment where it is needed. We have seen a 'can do' attitude, innovation and collaboration to support the wellbeing of pupils and their families. Schools have worked closely with other services and third sector organisations to provide a collective, integrated response to the challenges faced by children and families.

I am publishing this report now because I feel it is timely and can contribute to our thinking about how we can work towards a post-pandemic education system that builds on strong community spirit and civic responsibility. Features of effective community schools in this report which are particularly relevant are:

- The role of schools in working with partners to build community leadership and resilience.
- The importance of family learning, particularly programmes which will help parents develop their confidence to support their children with learning at home.
- The value of co-located services organised from a school hub that enables families and residents to access a range of support in an accessible place, close to their homes.
- The benefits of strategic collaboration and shared ownership of community school strategies.
- The importance of strong, tenacious leadership that understands the challenges faced by the community served by the school.

Although the fieldwork for the report was carried out prior to the emergence of the pandemic, I hope that the key messages and case studies in the report will support schools to improve their community focus and harness the power of schools, families and communities working together.

**Meilyr Rowlands HMCI**

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## Introduction

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This report is written in response to a request from the Minister for Education in her remit letter to Estyn for 2019-2020. It focuses on highly effective approaches to community schooling taken by primary, secondary, all-age and special schools. The report is intended for the Welsh Government, headteachers and staff in schools, local authorities and regional consortia.

The focus of this report is on how community schools work in partnership with community organisations, statutory services and a range of specialist agencies to provide services that benefit pupils, their families and the community served by the school. In particular the report considers approaches taken by schools to:

- strengthen family and community engagement
- expand the use of their assets for the benefit of the community served by the school
- provide a range of services, including health and social services, through co-location or the provision of service hubs within the community

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## Background

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### The policy context

*The school of the future will be at the heart of the local community and will encourage all members of the community to participate in lifelong learning.*

(National Assembly for Wales, 2003)

The concept of community schools has been part of Welsh education policy since the early years of devolution. *The Learning Country: a comprehensive and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales* (National Assembly for Wales, 2001) makes explicit reference to community schools. The policy document refers to the desire to see 'a much closer relationship between schools and the communities they serve' (National Assembly for Wales, 2001, p.25). Specifically the policy outlines the ambition that schools should be rooted in a wide community context and 'integral to community capacity building – providing a base for delivering, not just education and training but also a range of other services like family support, health and enterprise promotion'. (National Assembly for Wales, 2001, p.25)

A report on *Narrowing the Gap* (National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Local Government Association, 2002, p.1) commented on 'the ways schools need to work with and within their local communities to raise the status of learning and, in some instances, to work as agents of change in the community'. In the same year, Estyn published *Excellent Schools: a vision for schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (2002).

Two years later, in 2004, evidence from 100 secondary schools in Wales that had shown significant improvement in their outcomes and visits to 12 secondary schools with free school meal entitlements above 20% informed a set of eight defining characteristics of a community school. These defining characteristics were captured in the 2004 report to the National Assembly for Wales Education and Lifelong Learning Committee on the *School of the Future* (2003)

These characteristics are:

- a focus on social, emotional and health needs of all pupils including access to a coherent range of services and personal learning plans for pupils
- engagement with families, often including the development of a family support service in school
- engagement with the wider community, providing both the opportunity and the mechanism to build capacity in the local community
- integrated provision of school education, informal as well as formal education, social work and health education and promotion services
- integrated management often supported by an integration manager
- services delivered according to a set of integrated objectives and measurable outcomes, a significant feature in many cases being co-location
- commitment and leadership
- multi-disciplinary training and staff development

In 2003, Welsh Government established the Community Focused Schools (CFS) initiative. The aim of this initiative was to support schools, through grant funding, to provide activities and services that encompassed childcare, lifelong learning, language provision, health and social services, cultural and sporting activities, play service for children and young people, out of hours learning, work experience, services for the community and access to IT resources (National Assembly for Wales, 2003). This circular defined a community school as 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. This definition has withstood policy changes in that it appears in the 2013 Welsh Government School Governors Guide to the Law (Chapter 27) (2013b). This identifies key services to be provided by a community school as childcare, lifelong learning, health and social services provision, cultural and sporting activities, youth services, out of hours learning and community services.

The benefits of strong family and community engagement by schools are reinforced in the Estyn discussion paper, *Transforming Schools* (2007). This publication acknowledges that, by 2007, schools were beginning to work more closely with partners, opening their doors to the community and building links with families. The report goes on to acknowledge that schools generally recognise that pupils' learning works best as a partnership between parents and teachers. It also notes that a small number of schools had created a base for services that support families as well as children. The report provides suggestions on how schools could develop a community focused approach, including working with strategic partners, raising the profile of learning in the community and opening up their facilities to become a 'centre for social interaction' (Estyn, 2007, p.20).

From 2010 onwards, the increased national focus on addressing the impact of poverty and disadvantage on educational achievement continued to raise awareness of the considerable benefits of working with families and the community to support pupils disadvantaged by poverty. The introduction of the Pupil Development Grant in 2012 highlighted the need for schools to use grant funding to establish effective strategies to engage with families and the community. Guidance included reference to using funding to establish:

- out of school hours learning
- nurture groups for pupils, some of which include parents/carers
- family learning opportunities
- parenting programmes
- on-site multi-agency support
- strong links with local communities and opportunities for community participation
- the commitment of local employers

*Guidance for using the Pupil Development Grant. What really works?* (Welsh Government, 2013a)

The importance of working with families, the community and a range of partners and agencies was reinforced in several Estyn reports. These include the 2012 report on effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools (Estyn, 2012) and the HMCI Annual Report (2012/13) (Estyn, 2013), which highlights Mount Stuart Primary School as a shining example of a community school that, through its work

with families, the community, multi-agencies and businesses, has a positive impact on disadvantaged pupils.

The publication of the Face the challenge together: family and community toolkit for schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015) provides practical guidance to help schools develop and strengthen their approach to family and community engagement. Much of the content of this document reinforces the defining characteristics of a community school contained in earlier Welsh Government research and policy.

Recent Welsh Government policy makes references to the potential of community schools in Wales. Education in Wales: Our national mission (2017-21), refers to the role of strong and inclusive schools committed to excellence and wellbeing as an enabling objective to support the current reform journey (Welsh Government, 2017a). This includes responding to the unique challenges that present themselves to individuals or groups of learners and the importance of partnership to improve the early childhood experiences of children.

At the heart of Prosperity for all: the national strategy (Welsh Government, 2017b) is a recognition that public services and voluntary sector partners need to work together towards common objectives, to focus on the needs of people, at all stages of their lives and in all parts of Wales. The wellbeing objectives of this policy reflect the underpinning principles of many of the community schools visited as part of this survey. These include:

- To support young people to make the most of their potential
- To build ambition and encourage learning for life
- To equip everyone with the right skills for a changing world
- To build resilient communities

In April 2019, the Welsh Government announced a £15 million Community Hubs Capital Grant to facilitate establishing an additional 21 community hubs and learning centres as part of a pilot study funded under the 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme. The primary purpose of this grant is to fund projects that cater for the local community. The funding will also be used to create spaces that meet a specific need within the local community.

Effective community schools, including those that contributed to this survey, demonstrate many of the qualities and attributes that are captured in the ambitious vision articulated in Prosperity for All. This is to introduce a 'new model of Community Learning Centres providing extended services with childcare, parenting support, family learning and community access to facilities built around the school day' (Welsh Government, 2017b, p.16). They also demonstrate the defining characteristics of community schools as defined in earlier Welsh Government education policy that established an ambitious vision for community schools in Wales.

### The legislative context

The Standards and Framework Act (1998) states that a community school is owned

and run by the local authority (Great Britain, 1998). A community school is one of the categories of maintained schools in Wales. Community special schools are community schools that provide education for pupils with special educational needs. Voluntary controlled schools, voluntary aided schools and maintained nursery schools are other categories of community schools as defined by the act.

Sections 27 and 28 of the Education Act (2002) give an enabling power to school governing bodies to provide community facilities (Great Britain, 2002). The Control of School Premises (Wales) Regulations (2008) issued under section 31 of the Education Act (2002) outline the responsibilities of school premises during and outside of school hours (National Assembly for Wales, 2008).

### Defining a community school

The Public Policy Institute for Wales Report on the use of school facilities (2016, pp.1,3) observes that, 'community schools come in many forms and can serve many purposes ...it should be used as a convenient umbrella term rather than as a designation of a precisely-defined approach'. The report confirms that a community school should find a unique way to serve the needs of the local community and population.

In a similar vein, Cummings *et al.* (2007a) in a review of the full service extended schools (FSES) initiative in England notes that full service extended schools were characterised by considerable diversity but with common features. These were:

- a focus on overcoming pupils' barriers to learning and a recognition that these were related to what were seen as family and community problems
- the development of additional provision to overcome these barriers
- the deployment of additional staff and the formation of partnerships to deliver this provision
- the manipulation of multiple funding streams to support provision and a tendency for schools to go their own way in pursuing their aims

The report also notes that, 'full service extended schools have the potential to bring together a range of services within and beyond education ... they can work not only with their own pupils, but also with families and local residents' (Cummings *et al.*, 2007a, p.7). This report goes on to outline several challenges for full service extended schools. These are:

- ensuring the sustainability of provision
- difficulties of partnership working with other agencies and organisations
- working within area strategies
- developing appropriate management and governance structures

In order to develop similar approaches in future, the report makes a series of recommendations, some of which are relevant to the context in Wales. In particular, these relate to:

- policy coherence and stability, enabling schools to develop over longer periods of time
- clear conceptualisations emerging from a debate about the nature and purposes of FSES approaches

- strategic frameworks developed at local level in order to link the efforts of schools with those of other organisations and agencies tackling similar issues

Despite the extensive literature, policy and evaluation of the broad concept of community schools, it has proven difficult to provide a clear definition of a community school that is well understood and shared by school leaders, local authorities and strategic partners. Cummings *et al.* (2007b), in an article that explores how well the concept of ‘extended schools’ is understood by education professionals, concludes that people’s understanding of the concept rests on different assumptions about fundamental social and educational issues. This appears to be a similar position to one that has been evident in Wales since the early days of devolution and possibly one of the reasons why government policy that supports the concept of community schools has not gained sufficient or sustained traction.

Currently, the term, ‘community school’ is used very broadly by schools in Wales, sometimes in name only and with few of the defining characteristics of the type of community school envisaged in the research and evidence referred to in this section. For instance, in 2020, 14% of schools in Wales use the term ‘community’ or ‘gymuned’<sup>1</sup> in their official name. However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the vision, values and day-to-day activities of all these schools meet the principles of community schooling as outlined by research or whether the school name is a legacy from initiatives such as community focused schools or the outcome of a local decision made by the governing body.

The schools that participated in this survey provide examples of how, by working in this way, they embody the defining characteristics of a community school that brings benefits to children, families and the wider community.

For the purposes of this survey it has been necessary to establish a view of what constitutes a community school. Based on the evidence considered during the completion of this survey, including research and Welsh Government policy, the following description best captures schools that we believe are effective community schools.

A community school is defined as one that has the best interests of learners, families and the community at its heart. These schools reach out to engage families and work with the wider community, knowing the difference this can make to the success of all pupils in the school, particularly those who are disadvantaged by poverty. These schools work in highly effective strategic partnerships with a range of organisations, where possible co-locating services to enable families and the community to access them easily. Community schools utilise their facilities and resources effectively to benefit the communities they serve. This includes ensuring that they have the staffing and expertise to address the needs of families and the community. Through the co-location of services and effective use of their assets they enable residents to engage with activities otherwise unavailable to them. All of this contributes to exceptional engagement with families and the community served by the school. Community schools work relentlessly to improve the lives of children, strengthen their families and contribute to building strong communities for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Cymuned’ is the Welsh for ‘community’.

This view of a community school is supported by Jenkins and Duffy (2016) in their research on community schools in practice. Their research observes that 'community schools' is an umbrella term to describe schools that adopt a broad range of services to address the comprehensive range of students, families and communities. Each community school should find a unique way to serve the specific needs of the local population. The research describes common elements of community schools, such as after-school or extended hours programmes, on-site childcare, health services, counselling, job and housing assistance and food assistance initiatives. Nearly all of the schools we visited as part of this survey gave examples of how they effectively provide nearly all of these elements, as appropriate, for their community.

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## Main findings

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- 1 Leaders of successful community schools communicate a strong vision and sense of purpose, unpinned by a deep understanding of and regard for the communities served by the school. These leaders have strong values, based on a belief in inclusivity and the need to address inequity, and a determination to overcome challenges. The leadership in these schools is bold and tenacious, working in close partnership with families and communities to improve the life chances of children and young people. Leaders understand the specific social and economic challenges faced by their community, and the impact these have on their pupils and their families.
- 2 School improvement in effective community schools places family and community engagement at the heart of the planning processes. Parental and community engagement is recognised as one of the most important school improvement strategies, and is seen as integral to improving the wellbeing and achievement of pupils. There is a clear focus on engagement with families and with the community, on partnership working, and on the use of school facilities for the benefit of the wider community.
- 3 Successful community schools regularly evaluate the impact of their strategies to engage with families and the community. They keep abreast of changes in the community, such as trends in anti-social behaviour, and revise their approaches so they can mitigate the impact of these changes on their pupils.
- 4 Effective community schools provide targeted professional learning for all staff and governors. They recognise that the school's community approaches are the responsibility of all staff and partners, and understand their staff's and partners' development needs. These schools involve partners and the staff from other agencies in their professional learning, recognising that, in order to be a successful community school, all these professionals need to share common values, understanding and commitment to fulfil their joint vision.
- 5 Leaders and staff in community schools that have strong parental engagement build the skills, confidence and self-esteem of their parents. Well-designed family learning programmes help parents improve their ability to support their children. These programmes are often targeted to support parents to move onto employment or further learning.
- 6 Parent involvement is a key feature of effective community schools. These schools provide a range of support and advice and engage parents as partners in education. Parents are made to feel that, whatever their circumstances, they can turn to the school for support. Successful community schools treat all parents, irrespective of the challenges they face, with dignity and respect. In response, parents are proud of their school and want to work with staff to secure the best life chances for their children and for others in the community. Parents see the school as a place where they can access advice and support to help them resolve issues relating to their children or to wider concerns around housing, money, skills or family wellbeing.

- 7 Staff with specific responsibility for family and community engagement are key to the success of a community school. Leaders of effective community schools recognise the importance of appointing an individual or team to lead family and community engagement. These staff possess particular skills, aptitudes, knowledge and commitment, which ensure that they carry out their role with drive and sensitivity.
- 8 Effective community schools value their partnerships with a range of agencies including statutory and third-sector organisations. They know that without these partnerships they will not be able to provide integrated care, support or a wide range of experiences for pupils, families and the wider community. The relationship between these schools and their partners is characterised by mutual respect. School leaders and staff working in effective community schools understand the contribution that local and national organisations can make to their school and community.
- 9 Schools that establish strong relationships with families make it easy and safe for parents to access the school building. They create a specific area in the school for parents and families to use, sometimes without the need for an invitation or appointment. These spaces are accessible, but in a location away from areas occupied by pupils, and are used in a variety of ways. For example, parents may use a family room to meet informally, engage in family learning, meet privately with family engagement staff, or attend parent group meetings.
- 10 Effective community schools make thoughtful use of school assets to improve the lives of children and families in the local community. They work in partnership with local groups and organisations in enterprising and creative ways. They seek to address gaps in local sport, cultural or care provision, including during the school holidays. Although the use of school facilities and resources by community groups brings income to the school, this is not its main purpose. In the best examples of asset use, leaders open up the school because they believe in the role of the school as a force that can help improve the community.
- 11 Schools with co-located services such as health, welfare and adult learning are committed to working with these partners to improve the lives of children and their families. These schools develop a tailored approach to co-locating services that meets the needs of the school, families and community. For instance, not all schools with co-located services have purpose-built facilities to house the services. In these cases, schools provide 'hot-desk' space for partners or access to parts of the school building on a regular basis.
- 12 The co-location of services enables community schools and their partners to share information and work collaboratively to address common challenges. This enables schools to provide swift support for vulnerable families and prevent the escalation of their difficulties. This is particularly evident when schools work closely with co-located Flying Start provision or other local authority services. Families who receive this support value the difference it makes to their quality of life.
- 13 Despite the evidence for the potential of community schools in the research literature and in government policy, the vision for community schools in Wales has not been realised in a comprehensive or sustained way. Over time, the concept of community schools has been interpreted in a variety of ways and this has left a legacy of

different forms of provision. This provision was described in a report by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016, p.14) as 'largely un-coordinated at a local or national level'. Most developments are at school level, usually driven by individual leaders who have a strong moral purpose and an understanding of the value of working with families and communities.

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## Recommendations

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### **To realise the vision for effective community schools in Wales in a strategic and sustainable way:**

#### **Schools should:**

- R1 Build strong partnerships with families as an integral part of improving the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils
- R2 Refer clearly in strategic plans to how they will work with families, the community and partners to improve the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils
- R3 Employ family and community engagement staff to work with families, the community and wider partners
- R4 Work with the local authority and with statutory and third-sector partners to provide services that address the needs of families and the community, including co-locating services and utilising school assets
- R5 Evaluate the impact of community school strategies

#### **Local authorities should:**

- R6 Include in strategic planning actions on how they will develop authority-wide initiatives to support schools to be effective community schools
- R7 Strengthen cross-directorate working to plan ways of locating a range of services in schools
- R8 Ensure that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools planning considers the need for spaces / base rooms for family and community access
- R9 Support schools to appoint family and community engagement staff, including developing a role description for these staff
- R10 Provide professional learning opportunities for support school staff, governing bodies and strategic partners to develop community schools

#### **The Welsh Government should:**

- R11 Develop a set of agreed, defining characteristics for community schools, and consider how schools are classified as 'community schools' and how this term is used to identify specific schools
- R12 Promote the benefits of community schools, particularly in areas of disadvantage, with schools, local authorities and regional consortia
- R13 Strengthen the expectation for including actions on family and community engagement in school strategic plans

- R14 Refresh national guidance on community schools, using the Family and Community Engagement Toolkit (FaCE), and provide guidance on how schools can evaluate and improve their community school strategies
- R15 Ensure that 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme planning, guidance and building standards take into consideration the need for spaces for family and community access

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## Strengthening family and community engagement

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- 14 Parental engagement in children's learning is a powerful tool for school improvement. By working in partnerships with parents, the local community and a range of agencies, community schools promote the value of lifelong learning, and build confidence, resilience and self-esteem in pupils, parents and the community.
- 15 Research and effective practice studies, including those by Estyn, refer to the impact effective parental and family engagement has on achievement and wellbeing. Harris and Goodall (2007, p.70) state that effective parental engagement is 'the most powerful school improvement lever we have'. Parental engagement is linked to socio-economic status as well as parental experience of school. The power of parental engagement is emphasised by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) who found that, at the age of seven, the degree to which families engage with their child's learning has six times the influence over the child's educational attainment than the quality of the school. Highly effective family and community engagement, driven by leaders with a strong vision and moral purpose, is a common feature of effective community schooling. The findings of our survey suggest that this is particularly the case in schools that serve disadvantaged areas.
- 16 A thematic report on involving parents in education (Estyn, 2018) concluded that almost all schools establish useful relationships with parents and that many schools are adopting an increasingly wide range of strategies to communicate with parents. However, effective community schools do more than establish relationships and communicate with parents. These schools work with parents as equal partners by encouraging them to spend time in the school, treat problems they may have as a shared challenge, provide effective and relevant family learning and know that involving families has a positive impact on the behaviour and attitudes to learning of pupils.
- 17 Schools that have at their heart the wellbeing and success of pupils, families and the community make effective use of a wide range of strategies and approaches to support families and the wider community. This includes co-locating services and using their school assets for community use. These schools best demonstrate the defining characteristics of a community school.
- 18 Nearly all of the schools we visited during the survey value the powerful role of family engagement in helping children thrive in school. These schools build strong partnerships with families and members of the wider community. In many cases, these partnerships have an impact on improving outcomes and building resilience in children, families and the community.
- 19 A toolkit for family engagement, published by Barnsley local education authority, provides a useful overview of the stages of family engagement. These are:
  - the process of attracting or engaging a family to access the service or school for the first time

- enabling the family to recognise the benefits, goals and expectations of the service or support
- building a relationship between the practitioner and the family to engage them sufficiently to begin delivering meaningful and beneficial support that is accessible and suitable to the individual and their family

20 These stages are evident in the approaches to family engagement taken by schools participating in this survey. Often a trusting relationship is formed by an individual in the school whose values, beliefs and attitudes enables them to be sympathetic to the context of the families they are working with.

### **Strong leadership, vision and belief in working with parents and the community**

21 In the most effective community schools the most important driver is the commitment, vision and belief of the headteacher in the benefits of building strong relationships with families and the community.

22 In the most effective community schools, leaders establish a vision for the school that places the community and its families at the heart of the school. Many schools refer to being at the 'heart of the community'. However, leaders in highly effective community schools have a vision that places families and their community at the centre of everything the school does to fulfil its mission and aims.

23 These leaders have an overriding belief in the power of community schools to transform the lives of pupils and their families. They understand that their school cannot do this alone and has to work with families, the community and a range of partners to provide the education and support needed to ensure that every child thrives and succeeds. These leaders acknowledge that children and young people only spend a relatively small proportion of their time in school. For the majority of their time they are influenced by their families and their community. Successful community schools are proactive about equipping families with the capacity to support their children. In doing this, community schools reach out to the wider community to help them.

24 The exceptionally strong relationship between the school, community and families is a common feature of effective community schools. In nearly all instances, this is the result of a clear vision that is well-understood and embraced by all staff. The delivery of this vision is carried out with drive, tenacity and determination. Leaders of highly effective community schools are intently focused on overcoming challenges and barriers. They seek solutions so that their pupils, families and community can be the best they can. This is a significant factor in the success of these schools as community schools.

25 During our visits to schools, we met many school governors who demonstrated a passion and commitment for their school and for its community. Governors play an important role in supporting schools to establish and embed community strategies. For instance, in a few schools we visited, governors provide robust challenge to proposals to fund family engagement officers and go on to support the development of the initiative once established. In other cases, as in Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm, the governors play an important role in working in partnership with the then Communities

First initiative to establish a community school. In Graig Y Rhacca Nursery and Primary School, governors help to organise community events such as the reinstatement of a local bus stop, litter picking and fundraising for a community fridge. In addition they provide support for families in the school by organising food banks, domestic abuse support groups and by acting as advocates for vulnerable families in crisis.

### Effective self-evaluation and strategic planning

- 26 Highly effective community schools ensure that they include family and community engagement in their strategic planning and self-evaluation and improvement processes. These schools place thoughtful strategic planning and robust self-evaluation at the forefront of effective family and community engagement. This is a key part of their school improvement strategy. Their planning includes targets related to, for instance, the number of families accessing family learning, reduction in safeguarding referrals or broader outcomes such as improvements in parents' knowledge and skills.
- 27 These schools take bold decisions to discontinue particular strategies if they believe that the demands and needs of their pupils, families and communities require a fresh approach. They know, through engagement with the community, parent groups and wider partners when new issues arise that require a change in strategy. These schools then amend their approaches in response to this intelligence. Millbrook Primary School has a well-established approach to working with families and the community of Bettws in Newport. The approach has been driven by ambitious leadership and a deep understanding of the potential of community schools. Through an exceptional insight into the local community and effective self-evaluation, the school has moved away from having a family engagement officer to establishing a culture that expects every member of staff to have a role in family and community engagement to help widen the approach to engagement with families. This is supported by the appointment of an experienced practitioner with a background in mental health to support the increasing number of pupils and parents with mental health issues and anxiety. The case study on Millbrook Primary School on **page 64** provides further information about how the school tailors its family engagement to meet the needs of the community.

### Developing positive relationships with families and the community

- 28 In schools that place engagement with families at the heart of their school priorities, nearly all staff establish strong and trusting relationships with families. In highly effective community primary schools, this starts at the earliest stage in a child's education. Staff in these schools have a sense of shared corporate responsibility to work in partnership with families and the community.
- 29 A common feature of highly effective community schools is the way in which they value parents and see them as partners in learning. In primary schools, parents are encouraged to use the school building as much as possible. This begins at the start of the day when parents bring their children to school. For example, in Golwg Y Cwm Primary School in Powys, the headteacher and staff welcome pupils and members of their family into the school building every morning. This enables the

headteacher to speak to parents if she has concerns about a child. As a result, parents are confident to approach senior leaders and teachers to share news about their children that might influence their behaviour or approach to work on that day. This approach has helped parents feel welcome and comfortable in the school building. On **page 42** you can find out more about approaches to family and community engagement taken by Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm.

- 30 In a similar way, the headteacher at Ysgol Rhosymedre in Wrexham takes a highly visible approach at the start and end of the school day. Historically, parents did not have positive attitudes towards the school and preferred not to engage. The headteacher knows the families well and makes a concerted effort to engage in general conversation with parents at every opportunity. In order to gain parents' trust she is always direct, open and honest. Slowly, through word of mouth, the headteacher and school staff gained the trust of parents and a reputation for being firm but fair. The headteacher will often invite parents in for coffee and a chat when she feels that a family may be experiencing some issues. This has led to a true 'open door' policy where parents do not have to wait to speak to the headteacher.
- 31 In highly effective community schools, parents and other family members are valued and respected by senior leaders and school staff. In many of these schools, parents are often dealing with difficult financial, health, wellbeing or domestic situations that have an impact on their children. Due to the trust they have in the staff of these schools, they do not feel that they are in danger of being judged negatively about the situations they find themselves in. Parents know that they can get help and advice from the school and it is often the first place they will go to seek help. Staff in Ysgol Brynsierfyl in Carmarthenshire ensure that pupils realise they are part of a strong and caring school community. The school responds well to the needs of others, especially in times of crisis. When parents are extremely ill, or when there is bereavement, the school ensures they are available to support the child and the family as much as possible. Charity fund-raising events are organised by, and for, parents in need. The school, with the help of parents and the local community, have set up a garden of peace where pupils and families can plant trees and find a quiet space for reflection. This has helped pupils to see how they need to sympathise and empathise with others and has brought different families together as they support each other within the community. The school also links with organisations such as the Samaritans to help at such times. Staff have been trained to support pupils and families in crisis. Through this work, the school has helped to remove the negative stigma that can often be associated with families asking for help.
- 32 In schools that engage with families successfully, parents comment on the way in which they are supported by the school, often through exceptionally difficult times including bereavement, domestic violence and risk of homelessness. They view the school as a supportive place that helps them overcome challenges they are facing with their child or home situation. Schools that have highly effective family and community engagement strive to treat every parent fairly and with dignity by establishing strong relationships based on trust and mutual respect. They understand that child and family issues do not sit in isolation and strive to help families for the benefit of the child.

## The role of family and community engagement staff

- 33 Most of the schools that participated in this survey have a member of staff whose role it is to engage with parents, the community and a range of agencies and organisations able to provide support for children and their families.
- 34 The appointment of a family or community engagement officer, or a person who undertakes a similar role, is often considered by senior leadership to be the most important action taken by a school to improve their work with families and the community. These schools use grant funding effectively to facilitate the appointment of key staff. However, often community schools have to rely too heavily on grant funding to support their community strategies. One of the consequences of this is that staff who support valuable community focused strategies are in temporary roles.
- 35 In nearly all cases, parents view the family or community engagement officer as the reason why the school is so effective in involving them in their child's learning, providing parenting support and generally helping them deal with challenges they face.
- 36 Leaders of effective community schools understand the importance of appointing or identifying the 'right' person to undertake this crucial role of working outwardly from the school with families and the community. In many ways, the quality of the relationship between the family engagement officer and families has the greatest impact on the effectiveness of the engagement. In nearly all examples of family and engagement officer roles in the schools, the person appointed to undertake the role was someone who had the following qualities:
- a commitment to the community and to supporting families
  - understanding of the needs of the community served by the school
  - recognition of the importance and value of collaboration and partnership
  - experience of working in a community-focused role or with families, possibly in a non-school context
  - strong inter-personal skills and an ability to establish strong working relationships with a range of people, irrespective of their background or situation
  - an ability to place the child and family at the heart of what they do and to be an advocate for them, particularly when families do not know how or where to seek support for the significant challenges they face
  - possession of professional and personal values, beliefs and attitudes that help them establish trusting relationships with families
- 37 Primarily, family and community engagement staff working in the schools involved in this survey are individuals who are driven by a desire to improve the life chances of children and their families. They understand the importance of developing strong partnerships with families and, with community organisations and other agencies, they are best placed to support families. For example, the highly successful approach to effective parental and community engagement in Glenboi Primary School in Rhondda Cynon Taf is driven by the Family Engagement Officer (FEO). She works in close partnership with the headteacher and has developed a relationship with parents that is pivotal to the position of the school as one that has the community at its heart. The mantra of the parents is 'every school needs a family

engagement officer, but they can't have our family engagement officer'. Due to the success of this approach, the local authority has agreed to extend the initiative to other schools in the authority. You can read more about the role of the Family Engagement Officer in Glenboi Primary School in the case study on **page 57**.

- 38 Although many primary schools have well-established family or community engagement staff, this is not always the case in secondary schools. However, highly effective secondary community schools appoint staff to work directly with families and the community. As with primary schools, these secondary schools tailor the role to meet the needs of their pupils and families. For example, Pen-y-Dre High School in Merthyr Tydfil has established a 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) team comprised of a team around the family officer and two members of staff to support pupil and family wellbeing. These staff undertake a range of roles, working out of the school and including home visits, to nurture relationships with parents and families. The impact has been very positive, particularly in relation to improving attitudes to learning. As the benefits of this approach are central to the school improvement strategy, the school no longer uses grant funding but its core budget to fund this initiative. The case study on **page 54** on family and community engagement in Pen-y-Dre High School provides more information on their approaches.
- 39 Effective community schools often provide flexible working arrangements for staff who work with families and the community. This enables these staff to provide support and activities for families outside of normal school hours or during weekends and holidays.

### The role of research and professional learning in supporting the development of community schools

- 40 The approach to family and community engagement taken by many effective community schools is informed by effective national and international practice, research and Welsh Government policy.
- 41 Many schools commented on the value of *FaCE the challenge together: family and community engagement toolkit for schools in Wales* (Welsh Government, 2015). They say that it provides them with valuable advice on how to engage with families and the community, strategies to develop a whole school approach and practical resources to help them establish and sustain family and community engagement. The headteacher at Ysgol Heulfan in Wrexham was inspired to use publication of the FaCE Toolkit as a catalyst for change. Using the guidance as a starting point, she developed an open honest culture in the school that values parents' views. The appointment of staff committed to the principles of a community school and a whole school culture to reflect a 'can do' attitude are at the heart of family and community engagement in the school.
- 42 Effective community schools value initiatives such as the Family Learning Signature and Families and Schools Together (FAST) to help them initiate family and community engagement. However, effective community schools do not see these as the only approach to take to establish family and community engagement. Instead, they form part of a suite of approaches that are used to enrich and support their engagement approach. For example, Ysgol Gynradd Talysarn in Gwynedd

uses the Family Learning Signature in combination with a research programme, local authority support and nearby cultural organisations to foster aspiration and enjoyment in learning with targeted families.

- 43 Many leaders of effective community schools ensure that all staff have access to professional learning about family and community engagement. This might involve visits to observe effective practice of engagement in professional learning programmes offered by regional consortia or higher education institutions. A core value in these schools is that effective family and community engagement is the responsibility of all staff and not the sole responsibility of a family or community engagement officer or headteacher. There is an expectation that all staff develop their professional skills, knowledge and understanding of their professional role in a community school, particularly in the way they work with partners and agencies that provide support. Ysgol Rhosymedre provides a range of in-house professional learning linked to the wellbeing agenda. The school also supports staff with bespoke development so that they are well prepared to address specific any specific needs with individual children and their families. Examples of this include training for Makaton and Elklan. This is also offered to parents. Leaders work closely with other local schools to combine funding in order to maximise professional learning opportunities. They tailor the professional learning to meet particular family and community needs, such as helping children and their families through transition from primary to secondary school.
- 44 Headteachers in effective community schools recognise the importance of having highly skilled staff to work with families, particularly those who are vulnerable and need additional support. For example, the Family and Community Engagement Officer in Ysgol Gogarth, a special school in Conwy local authority, is a trained counsellor and offers bereavement support for families. This is invaluable to support the emotional wellbeing of parents given the life limiting conditions that pupils with complex needs have. Parents value the chance to talk openly and honestly within the safe and familiar environment established by the school. To find out more about approaches taken in Ysgol Gogarth you can find the case study on **page 46**.
- 45 Over the last five years an increasing number of schools from Wales have taken part in an international learning visit in partnership with the British Council. These visits, usually to the USA, have provided valuable opportunities for school leaders, and in a very few instances teachers and learning support staff, to engage with the powerful approaches to community schooling by 'full service' schools in cities such as New York and Chicago. In a similar way, a few schools have engaged with local authorities in England to find out about successful initiatives that support family and community engagement.
- 46 In the best instances, school leaders have used professional learning gleaned from national and international visits to create an approach that suits the needs of their school. This approach requires a strong understanding of not just the strategy observed but the research that sits behind it. For example, in Pencoed Primary School in Bridgend local authority, staff have considered the work of Charles Desforges on the value of parental involvement. As the result of observing practice in a local authority in England that had located family engagement officers in every school, the headteacher developed an approach for Pencoed Primary School. The

professional learning gained during a visit to schools in New York with the British Council helped the school consolidate its approach to family and community engagement. Further information about the approach in Pencoed Primary School can be found in the case study on **page 60**.

### Family learning

- 47 Leaders and staff in effective community schools recognise that parents and families are the first educators in a child's life. Through the provision of family learning programmes that meet the needs of parents, effective community schools have a positive impact on the wellbeing, confidence and opportunities for training and employment for the whole family. These schools have a strong understanding of the nature of their community and the particular challenges faced by families.
- 48 Effective community schools are committed to providing useful and varied family learning programmes to engage and develop parents. Family learning is just one of the ways in which these schools establish positive and powerful relationships with parents. Ultimately, this has a positive impact on the wellbeing of pupils and the families involved in family learning.
- 49 Schools that demonstrate the characteristics of an effective community school provide successful family learning programmes that are responsive to identified need. These schools have a strong insight into the nature of the community and the particular challenges faced by parents. For example, Maindee Primary School in Newport works with the local community hub to run courses that enable parents to achieve qualifications. School staff and members of the community hub jointly organise courses on information communication technology, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), paediatric first aid and a course that leads to a teaching assistant qualification. Parents have benefited greatly from these opportunities to develop new skills and qualifications. Through the partnership with the hub, the school offers opportunities for parents to engage in work experience days and the chance to volunteer in the community. Other activities, organised by the school and the hub, often take parents outside of their comfort zone and give them the chance to develop new skills. This has been proved to give them confidence in accessing training opportunities or in seeking employment.
- 50 Family and community learning is often approached differently by secondary than primary schools. In the best examples, secondary schools use community learning opportunities as a tool to engage families and the members of the community. They use the expertise of teachers and facilities of the school to offer courses that might stimulate interest in learning, such as to develop a new skill. For example, Cefn Hengoed Community School in Swansea offers, on a monthly basis, a range of learning sessions targeted to interest parents and members of the community. These include sessions on basic ICT and internet safety, financial maths, thirty minute meals, careers for life and bilingualism. You can read more about the way in which Cefn Hengoed Community School works with parents and the community in the case study on **page 50**.
- 51 In many cases, schools develop family learning programmes that encourage pupils and parents to learn together. This approach is most widespread in primary schools

where parents regularly have opportunities to engage in sessions to find out how aspects of the curriculum, particularly literacy and numeracy, are taught and what is expected of their children. Effective community secondary schools provide useful opportunities for parents to learn about examination expectations, study skills and specific teaching and learning approaches.

- 52 Schools located in areas of high social disadvantage see family learning as a way of addressing low parental literacy and numeracy skills. This is particularly evident in primary schools where parents have opportunities to learn alongside their children. This helps to improve their basic skill level which, in turn, helps them develop confidence to support their children with learning. In addition, this approach to collaborative family learning enables parents to become effective role models for their children by demonstrating their own commitment to learning. A 'Learning Together' project helps parents of pupils in Ysgol Heulfan in Wrexham local authority to develop a better understanding of how to support their child's learning in a relaxed and enjoyable way. The case study on **page 67** provides information about other successful approaches the school has taken to engage families.
- 53 Severn Primary School in Cardiff provides a wide range of courses to meet the diverse language and social needs of parents. A teaching assistant runs a weekly language course over a two year period that covers topics linked to school life. The school also provides a gateway to further education by facilitating access to courses at a local college. The co-located adult and community learning centre provides valuable opportunities for parents to develop their skills and knowledge that helps them support their children in school. The community has a high mobility rate among families so the school understands the value of involving those new to the community in social activities to tackle isolation.
- 54 For many parents, engagement in a family learning programme helps them develop the skills, confidence and interests to engage in further adult learning or in a few instances, leads to employment. Following engagement with family learning in successful community schools, individual parents gain employment or go on to participate in further education. Examples include employment as learning support assistants in the school, childcare workers in provision linked to the school or progression to university courses. Family learning in many effective community schools also supports individual parents to take on voluntary community leadership roles. This enables them to play a valuable part in the wider community, often acting as support and inspiration for other parents and contributing to the vision of the school to have the wellbeing and success of families and the community at its heart.

### **Working with partners to support and strengthen diverse communities**

- 55 Many community schools serve increasingly diverse communities in terms of culture, faith, ethnicity and social background. These schools, located in areas with a rich cultural and ethnic community but often with a number of social challenges, make an important contribution to support and strengthen community cohesion. They recognise that one of their roles, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010, is to support equality, eliminate discrimination and foster good relationships between different groups (Great Britain, 2010). These schools work with parents, community groups and local authority services to help create a sense of belonging for all pupils and their

families. Often the impact of their work extends to the wider community and contributes to helping new families settle into their new home by making them feel welcome in the community through their engagement with school.

- 56 Community schools that are located in highly diverse communities ensure that their support for families responds to the changing nature of the local population. They take opportunities to introduce cultural opportunities into their schools to share experiences related to heritage and tradition. For example, in Maindee Primary School in Newport, a grandmother has set up a Roma dance group. The Roma community are proud of this initiative and it has helped broaden community understanding of Romani culture. The school has also gained acknowledgement of the strong work they are doing to promote peace within the local community. The Peace Mala project is supported by a wide range of local faith leaders and has been powerful in strengthening community cohesion in the east of Newport.
- 57 When community schools serving diverse communities work closely with local authority services and specialist external agencies, the benefits for pupils and their families are considerable. These schools develop comprehensive strategies to support families with mental health issues, finance and the impact of adverse childhood experiences as the result of significant change and churn in their lives. The support centred around the school helps remove the barriers that prevent children being successful in school. This is evident in Sandfields Primary School in Neath Port Talbot where strong partnerships with the local authority, police, and the Integrated Children's Centre help address issues such as poor attendance and weak literacy and numeracy skills of a number of pupils from Romanian families. Due to the success of this approach, the school now works with well-established Romanian families and older pupils to support the integration of pupils and parents who are newcomers to the school.

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## Extending the use of school assets by the community

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- 59 The concept of opening up schools for use by the community is not new. For instance, in 1925, Henry Morris developed the concept of schools as community hubs which would provide educational, leisure and social facilities for use by the families and wider communities in Cambridgeshire. Primarily, this development was to help tackle poverty as a result of rural decline by establishing the school as the social and educational hub of a sustainable village community (Public Policy Institute for Wales, 2016).
- 60 The Full service extended schools initiative in England, launched in 2003, enabled schools serving the most disadvantaged areas to offer a wide range of services or activities outside of the school day to help meet the learning and development needs of pupils, their families and local communities (Department for Education, 2006). The New Community Schools (NCS) project in Scotland was concentrated in disadvantaged areas where children faced significant risk of social exclusion and barriers to learning in their everyday environment (Sammons *et al.*, 2003).
- 61 Between 2005 and 2011, the Welsh Government Community-Focused Schools (CFS) grant funding enabled local authorities and schools to develop projects that could 'provide '...activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community' (National Assembly for Wales, 2003, p.3).
- 62 In 2008, Estyn (2008) reported that the Community-Focused Schools initiative improved access to school premises and resources, especially for physical exercise and information and communication technology. It also helped improve relationships between schools and their local communities, and effective partnership working was a good feature of some of the most successful of the Community-Focused Schools provision. Overall, the Community-Focused Schools funding did not achieve a wide scale development in community focused schooling. The success of the initiative tended to rely on approaches taken by individual schools and was too variable across Wales. As a result, the vision that every school in Wales should be a community-focused school was not fully realised. As the 2008 Estyn report on the Community Focused School initiative concluded, 'schools are a long way from becoming a 'one-stop shop' for community services in the way that the Welsh Assembly Government envisages' (2008, p.12). Since cessation of the funding in 2010, many schools have continued to open up their facilities for use out of core school hours to improve access to facilities and services by families and communities served by the school.
- 63 Research, undertaken by the Public Policy Institute for Wales (2016) on increasing the use of schools facilities for community use, provides a helpful interpretation of the different ways in which schools might extend the use their assets for wider community use. These are:
- **Direct provision.** The school is directly involved in providing activities such as

sports clubs or family learning. This can be free or funded by participants or organisations.

- **Hosting/dual use.** The school opens up its facilities to community groups and sports clubs, for example adult education providers, sporting activities in the gym or on the sports fields, use of the school hall. The school might charge a small fee but broadly the school sees this use of the school as part of its mission to be a community school.
- **Separate use of the same building but under indirect school control.** Where the school might relinquish space for use by another organisation, for example an adult education provider, but retains the right to use the space in agreement with the user. The school will usually charge for use of the space. The fee might vary depending on the type of organisation and how usage links to the strategic priorities of the school.
- **Separate use of the same building but under alternative user control.** Part of the school is placed under the direct control of another organisation and the school relinquishes control of the space. Examples include social services or health providers. Usually schools will charge a business rate for use of the facilities and users are expected to take on responsibility for associated costs.

64 Schools that utilise their physical assets, either within or outside of usual school hours, reap considerable benefits in terms of increased pupil engagement in activities that support their wellbeing, improved school and community pride, a reduction in anti-social behaviour in the community and greater community support.

65 The schools visited as part of the survey provide access to their assets and resources for a range of purposes. These include:

- Sporting activities or activities that support the health and wellbeing of pupils, families and the wider community, provided by the school or community organisations. In these instances, the school usually hosted the activities or worked with partners to provide the activities.
- Adult and community education, including family learning programmes. In these instances, the schools hosted the activities. In a few instances, the schools indirectly controlled the use of the space. In a very few cases, the schools relinquished control to another organisation.
- Access to the school library, during the school day and after school, for parents and children together. In these instances the schools almost always hosted and managed the activity.
- Provision of youth clubs in partnership with the local authority youth service. In these cases, the schools relinquished use of a school facility but retained overall responsibility for the building.

66 The schools that make the best use of their assets for the benefit of their pupils and the wider community do so with a strong understanding of the needs of their community. They have an awareness of how the school can, in many instances, fill a gap in services or make resources more accessible to community residents.

67 The provision of access to school facilities and resources is seen as part of a strategy to improve the lives of children and families in the local community. It is not an isolated activity that only brings financial benefits to the school but one that can

contribute to improving community relationships and wellbeing. In the best examples of asset use, leaders make the decision to open up their school based on a strong belief in the role of the school as a force to transform the community.

- 68 Effective community schools have a clear strategic approach to using their assets for the benefit of the community. The decision to extend the use of school assets to benefit the wider community is part of a wider strategic approach to address disadvantage or specific needs, by presenting opportunities that might not otherwise exist in the community. Ysgol Terrig in Flintshire works closely with the local parent and toddler group and the Cylch Meithrin to ensure that parents can access child care provision easily. As a result, Ti a Fi and the Cylch Meithrin are hosted in the school. The decision to forge a close relationship with these groups has resulted in a number of benefits for the school and parents. For example, the provision of Welsh medium childcare has had a positive impact on the number of parents choosing Welsh medium education. In addition, the school has been able to work in partnership with the Cylch Meithrin to develop provision in the community that supports the development of early language skills.
- 69 Leaders of effective community schools seek innovative ways of maximising the use of the school buildings and, in a few instances, adjacent community facilities. They see beyond the immediate benefits of bringing parents into the school. They recognise that the school is a valuable resource, particularly in communities where there is often limited access, for example to sport and leisure facilities, health services other public buildings. This is particularly evident in rural schools visited during the survey. For example, Ysgol Moelwyn in Gwynedd has adopted responsibility for the local leisure centre to ensure its survival for the benefit of the community. You can read more about this in the case study on **page 33**.
- 70 Governors are involved fully in decisions about the use of school assets and challenge leaders to justify the benefits and risks of using the school as a community resource. In nearly all instances of effective asset use, governors make an important contribution to the success of the strategy through their understanding of local need and their ability to make connections with other groups in the community.
- 71 In most cases, schools that open up their buildings for use by the wider community work closely with the local authority. In doing so they address health and safety, safeguarding, caretaking, security and financial arrangements robustly and secure helpful support for initiatives they want to take forward. School leaders in these community schools know that the local authority is a valuable source of advice and support that enables the school to extend the use of its assets and resources safely and successfully.
- 72 The importance of effective and efficient day to day management of school-community assets is crucial to the successful use of school assets by the wider community. This ensures that essential duties and tasks are carried out efficiently. These include ensuring that safeguarding and health and safety procedures are in place and adhered to, arranging a timetable that does not impact negatively on use of the facilities by pupils, and liaising with external groups and users. Schools often have their own solution to managing assets depending on the particular situation, type of facilities and community need. All schools that extend

assets for use by the community appoint a manager, such as in Ysgol Bae Baglan in Neath Port Talbot, or work in partnership with another organisation to manage and oversee use of the facility. An example of this approach is found in Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm where an innovative partnership between the school and the local football club has resulted in the development of a sports facility that is used by the school and the community. You can read more about approaches taken by these schools in their case studies on **page 35** and **page 42** respectively.

- 73 Many effective community schools provide clubs and activities after school hours or in holiday periods. These schools extend the school day to enable pupils to benefit from additional learning or enrichment activities. By opening up their facilities outside of usual school times, community schools contribute to the wellbeing of children and their families. For example, summer holiday programmes ensure that pupils eligible for free school meals continue to receive healthy lunches throughout the six week break.
- 74 In many of the schools visited as part of the survey, the summer holiday programme is well planned in partnership with a range of organisations and is responsive to the specific needs of the pupils and their community. In Cadoxton Primary School in the Vale of Glamorgan, the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) enables pupils to engage with a wide range of enrichment activities that help them stay involved in learning, social activities and healthy during the holiday period. The school works with local partners, such as the local cricket club and the Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), to provide stimulating activities. In addition, the school uses the enrichment programme as an opportunity to invite parents into the school during the holidays. At these times they can access the credit union and useful information about Flying Start and Families First.
- 75 A prominent feature of the successful use of school assets, particularly those located in older school buildings, is the way in which schools adapt their premises so that they become accessible to the community, parents and agencies. In these schools, a common approach is to develop a space near the school entrance, which can be used for parent group or community meetings and, in a few instances, places where parents and pupils can access support services. Usually, these services are available during normal school hours or at the end of the school day. In a few instances, schools use adjacent community facilities to meet with parents. In other cases, schools provide a designated entrance for parents away from the main entrance. These creative approaches to utilising school buildings help parents feel at ease and confident when visiting community schools.
- 76 A creative approach to utilising the school building has helped the headteacher and staff in Glenboi Primary School provide a space in the school for parents and the community. Parents have access to a community room, which is used for parent group meetings, one-to-one meetings with the Family Engagement Officer or support services. This is also a place where parents can meet informally. As a result, parents feel that they are welcome in the building and have a sense of ownership of the school. The case study on Glenboi Primary School on **page 57** contains more information of the work the school does to engage parents and the community.

- 77 Schools that open up their facilities to the community often do so in partnership with voluntary organisations or local authority services, such as the youth service. For example, Ferndale Community School in Rhondda Cynon Taf works with the youth service to provide a youth club on the site of the school. The local authority provides the youth workers and the school provides the building at a reduced cost. The school mini-bus is used to transport pupils from some of the more remote and disadvantaged communities. The impact of this provision is considerable, particularly as the provision encourages vulnerable pupils to attend. Through working in partnership and utilising the school assets, the youth club has extended the school hours, provided opportunities for young people to work with community services and improved the image of young people in the community of Ferndale. Significantly, the youth centre is a haven for young people at times of crisis or difficulty. Furthermore, the youth club facility is used by the local community in the evening and weekends as a base for clubs and societies. For example, the local motor motorbike club uses the youth club building for sessions on motor mechanics. You can read about the way in which Ferndale Community School has developed a community hub in the case study on **page 38**.
- 78 In a few cases, schools utilise their facilities to run projects in partnership with community organisations. For example, local housing associations work closely with schools to help them access funding for local cultural projects or inter-generational projects. This approach has benefits for both the school and the community organisation. Pupils have the opportunity to participate in activities that enrich and expand their experience while the housing association is able to raise its profile in the local community and make positive links with families through the school. In Ysgol Bae Baglan, a strong partnership with Tai Tarian, a housing association supported by Cynnydd Youth Engagement Officers, has resulted in a high profile project on local heroes of film and screen.

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## Co-location of services in community schools

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- 79 In 2003, the National Assembly for Wales School of the Future project report identified eight defining characteristics of a community school. Two of these reflected the concept of the co-location of services. These are:
- engagement with families, often including the development of family support services in school
  - integrated provision of school education, informal as well as formal education, social work and health education and promotion services
- 80 A review of the Full service extended schools initiative in England (Cummings *et al.*, 2007a) identifies that participating schools are characterised by considerable diversity but demonstrate common features, often also evident in the schools involved in this survey. These features are:
- a focus on overcoming pupils' barriers to learning and recognition that these were related to what were seen as family and community problems
  - the development of additional provision to overcome these barriers
  - the deployment of additional staff and formation of partnerships to deliver this provision
  - the manipulation of funding streams to support provision and a tendency for schools to go their own way in pursuing their aims
- 81 Full service schools in the USA also bring together a range of services, including health and dental services, family support and learning, care for new mothers and extended curriculum opportunities to address specific challenges in the community. The schools are led in partnership. The principal (headteacher) has oversight of teaching and learning and a community director, with significant strategic leadership responsibility, leads the community aspect of the school.
- 82 Schools with co-located services normally provide support and services for pupils, their families and the community throughout the school day and outside of the regular school day and term time. They differ from the approach taken by schools that only extend their assets for community use, as this is normally related to the provision of leisure, sporting, cultural or educational activities. The term 'co-located services' describes an approach where services that support the wellbeing, health and care of pupils, families and the community are located in the school either on a permanent basis or at regular times during the week.
- 83 Schools that act as community hubs with co-located services work in partnership with range of services within and beyond education that benefit the pupils of the school, their families and local residents. There is no one fixed model or blueprint for co-locating services. Instead, schools have developed individual approaches that meet the specific needs of the community they serve and that can be developed, maintained and sustained by each individual school.

- 84 The services that are co-located in schools vary, but usually involve services such as childcare, health, police and a range of local authority services. Typically, the following services are co-located in schools or in community buildings belonging to a school:
- early years childcare provision and Flying Start
  - local authority services including Families First, educational welfare, family information service, early year's teams, play development teams
  - Police Community Support Officers (PCSO)
  - community library services
  - housing advice and support, usually provided by a local housing association
  - domestic abuse teams and third-sector organisations providing support for those at risk from domestic violence
  - local start-up businesses that provide employment for local people
  - health services including health visitors
  - third-sector organisations able to provide support and advice to families and the community, such as Action for Children, Save the Children and Barnardo's
- 85 In nearly all of the schools we visited with co-located services, most of the services are located in the school on a part-time basis. In most instances, partners use 'hot-desking' spaces or community rooms located in schools.
- 86 In the schools visited, co-location helps provide swift advice and guidance to families in need. They are able to signpost parents promptly to the most appropriate support, as this is often on site. When services are co-located it also enables efficient communication between service providers and the school.
- 87 At Ysgol Gogarth, the vision of co-located services became a reality as the result of a new purpose built school. The headteacher recognised that there was a need for close working relationships with a range of agencies to support pupils with a range of special educational needs. It was often disruptive and unsettling for pupils and parents to attend frequent appointments off site. Now, an integrated services approach enables parents to attend appointments for health-related matters on site. There is little disruption for the child and the model enables health and school staff to easily discuss the best way to support individual pupils. The case study on **page 46** provides more information about the way in which Ysgol Gogarth has co-located a range of services on the school site.
- 88 Schools that host Flying Start benefit considerably from the co-location of this provision. In these schools, staff from both settings work closely together as one team. As a result, they are able to share information and professional learning, regularly sharing practice and insight into how best to deal with particular challenges. They collaborate effectively and swiftly communicate concerns they may have about a child or family in need. They have a consistent approach to working with children and their families in the early years. This aids the transition from Flying Start to the foundation phase for both parents and children. These strong relationships, forged as parents first become familiar with the school, provide a solid foundation for further growth as children progress through primary school.

- 89 When schools have co-located services, this helps them fulfil their vision and purpose as a community school. A few schools have dedicated community areas that house a wide range of local authority and third-sector services. These strategic partners work with the headteacher and staff to help families and communities deal with challenging circumstances, including housing issues and advice on welfare benefits, health and parenting. Most of these schools broker support and advice for families and are able to quickly signpost a family in need to the most appropriate support.
- 90 At times, lack of space in schools and the need of partners to provide services in other localities does not allow services to be co-located in the school on a permanent basis. However, effective community schools are flexible in their approaches to the provision of co-located services. For example, most schools with co-located services provide 'hot-desk' space in a community hub so that partners can be on site when required.
- 91 In many ways, schools with co-located services provide a 'one-stop-shop' for parents and families who might not have the financial means or know-how to access support otherwise. The co-location of services in schools visited enables access to the support they need in a place and at a time when they need them.
- 92 A common positive feature of co-location, irrespective of working arrangements, is the way in which partners value the opportunity to work collaboratively. This helps them share information and responsibility to address common challenges. Together, they deliver prompt, collaborative solutions to challenges faced by vulnerable pupils and their families.
- 93 In both Millbrook Primary School and in Golwg Y Cwm Primary School, the schools work seamlessly with co-located partners to tackle significant challenges faced by their pupils and parents. Families access support for their children or for wider issues, such as access to food bank vouchers or support for domestic violence. This support is available in a place where they have established trusting relationships with a range of professionals and where they feel welcome and safe. The case studies on Golwg Y Cwm Primary School and Millbrook Primary School on **page 42** and **page 64** respectively provide more information on their approach to co-locating services.
- 94 The schools visited comment positively on the benefits of having co-located services. They value the way that co-location of services help families see their school as more than a place that educates children. Instead, parents see the school as a place that provides care and advice to help them support their children and give them the best chances in life. With this in mind, parents are willing, confident and committed to work in partnership with the school.
- 95 The co-location of services is particularly important in schools that serve rural areas or have families who are reluctant or unable to travel outside of their immediate locale to access services. The provision of services in these schools helps families to have a better understanding of the work of the school. In many instances, this changes parental perceptions of school and improves family and community engagement, and this has a positive impact on the wellbeing and attitudes to learning of pupils.

- 96 When schools work with partners to provide co-located services, families and the community see the school as a supportive organisation that contributes to their wellbeing and quality of life. The services may not be permanently located at the school but, to families who need them, this is not an issue. Staff at these schools access advice from services that help them carry out their roles in educating pupils effectively as the demands of dealing with health and social issues are reduced.
- 97 In Rhosymedre Primary School, the co-location of services helps the school support families to 'live the best life they can'. For example, the school works closely with the health visitor to provide advice on toilet training and tooth brushing. In addition, there is a health day for parents when they can get their blood pressure taken and engage in workshops on healthy eating.
- 98 Ysgol Heulfan takes a similar approach. The headteacher invites a range of agencies to use the school as a base for appointments to save parents and pupils the inconvenience of travelling for appointments. Vision care, specialists from Gobowen and Alder Hey hospitals, and the physiotherapist team conduct appointments on site whenever possible. This approach minimises the stress of appointments and helps community schools to become a key player in supporting and signposting parents to additional support. You can find further information about the approach taken in Ysgol Heulfan in the case study on **page 67**.
- 99 In a very few instances, schools take the initiative to develop extensive community hubs that address gaps in existing services. In these instances, the provision is sometimes located away from the main school building in order to be at the centre of the local community. The Ferndale Community Hub in Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority was established by the school in partnership with the local authority and is now run by the Fern Partnership, a charity which has its origins and management in Ferndale Community School. The initiative is underpinned by a clear business model, and ensures that the people of Ferndale can access high-quality childcare, the local police and health advice, library services and a community facility that provides a range of advice and learning opportunities. The case study on Ferndale Community School on **page 38** outlines the development and operation of the Community Hub.

## Appendix 1: Case studies

### **Case study 1: Providing access to facilities for pupils and the community at Ysgol Moelwyn**

#### **Information about the school**

Ysgol y Moelwyn is a bilingual secondary school for pupils between 11 and 16 years old, which is maintained by Gwynedd local authority. It is situated in Blaenau Ffestiniog and serves a wide, mainly rural area. Historically, the town has depended on the slate industry and then more recently on the nuclear power plant in Trawsfynydd. More recently, its economy has been in decline. There are 325 pupils on roll.

The three year average for pupils that are eligible for free school meals is just over 12%, which is lower than the sector national average of 16%. The school has recognised nearly 30% of its pupils as having special educational needs. Around 4% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is higher than the national percentage. Around 82% of pupils speak Welsh at home.

#### **Context and background to the practice**

Ysgol y Moelwyn serves a wide, mainly rural area. However, despite the large catchment area, the school considers itself to be at the heart of its community for the benefit of children, young people and adults in the area. The vision of the headteacher and senior leadership team is one that is ambitious for the school and the community of Blaenau Ffestiniog. They recognise the challenges that pupils and their families face with regard to access to services, housing and future employment and actively support the community to address these challenges. The school promotes both the value of learning and the importance of community wellbeing successfully through its vision and strategies. The senior leadership team, pupils, parents, staff and governors share a strong vision and sense of pride in their wider community.

#### **Description of activity/strategy**

The school has adopted responsibility for the local leisure centre to ensure its survival for the benefit of the community. During the day Ysgol Y Moelwyn pupils, and pupils from cluster primary schools use the facilities for physical education lessons and sports activities. In the evenings, facilities such as the all-weather pitch and school playing fields are used by local sports and community groups to host activities that benefit the health and wellbeing of families. The school ensures that, when the pitch is not in use, it remains unlocked so that local children have a safe place to play.

The school hall is used regularly by the local male voice choir for rehearsals and concerts, providing opportunities for local people to meet and socialise.

The local youth service works in close partnership with the school to provide valuable support for pupils. For example, the youth worker responds to requests from pupils to offer fitness classes in the leisure centre to improve health, wellbeing and self-esteem.

The school has a well-established after school homework club to help pupils take advantage of its learning resources. To ensure equality of access to this activity, the school provides transport home to allow all pupils to benefit from the sessions. In addition, the school provides an after school club for primary aged children during term time. During the summer break, the school runs a well-supported holiday club at the leisure centre. To ensure that the needs of all pupils are met by the extensive out of hours provision, the school's learning support team also holds a two-week programme for vulnerable pupils, 'Clwb Stalan' at the school during the summer holidays.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- Pupils access facilities, equipment and expertise to support them in after-school learning.
- Attendance has remained high.
- No pupil is prevented from benefitting from extended learning hours due to effective transport arrangements.
- The local sports facility remains open for community and school use.
- Local children have a safe place to play.
- Parents of pupils know that their children are occupied positively and well looked after, for example by having access to food during the summer holidays.
- The school is viewed as a place to learn and socialise by the local community.
- Parents see the school as an open and welcome place for their children and themselves.

## **Case study 2: Expanding the use of school assets in Ysgol Bae Baglan to engage the community**

### **Information about the school**

Ysgol Bae Baglan is a 3-16 all-age school, in Neath Port Talbot local authority. Currently, there are 1,513 pupils on roll. The school was formed following the amalgamation of four schools in 2016.

The school is in one of the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 30%. The school identifies around 27% of pupils as having special educational needs.

### **Context and background to the practice**

Since opening in 2016, the school has worked successfully to create a strong community ethos. Through effective partnerships with a variety of organisations it has developed as a hub of community activity. This positive community interaction has shaped the school's identity whilst enriching experiences for pupils and people within the locality.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

The school places great importance on positive relationships between the school, families and the community. The offer of a wide array of cultural activities, sporting programmes and the extension of the school day helps the school to develop a relationship with the community and allows local people to benefit from the school facilities. As a result of this, the community has a sense of ownership and pride in the school.

The school's strategy involves using its excellent new facilities thoughtfully to:

- improve access to sport in the community
- build a new school community ethos that involves the local area
- raise aspiration in pupils
- instil in pupils, parents and the community a shared pride in the school

Forty-five clubs and organisations use the school's facilities. This means that, on average, around 350 members of the community regularly participate in activities on the school site. Through this work, the school is supporting the local authority's aspiration of 'better health through active living'.

School leaders made important appointments to ensure the effective management of this extensive community use of the school's resources. They appointed a community manager, a small team of dedicated sports officers and a caretaker. The community manager also has a role in promoting the use of the school's facilities through liaison with local organisations.

The school does not profit financially from allowing the community to use its resources. Instead, it ensures affordable access to facilities. The school's facilities are available to the community at evenings and weekends.

The community manager allows the school to raise its profile in the wider community. The school makes highly effective use of social media to promote its sporting and cultural events. This approach has engaged parents and encouraged them to find out what is happening at Ysgol Bae Baglan. The school has capitalised on this interest to ensure that social media channels also provide information and advice about other services and events in the community. For example, a very well-attended community fun day at the school, held in conjunction with the emergency services, provided a useful opportunity for local businesses and service providers to promote their work within the community. This well-attended event brought the community together, something that had been difficult to do prior to the new school being built as there were few community facilities with the capacity to achieve this.

Following a successful campaign by pupils, the local authority based a youth club at the school. This has improved accessibility to the service for young people from the locality. The youth club is managed by two youth workers as part of the local authority's 'Cynnydd' project. They know the school and pupils well and are able to support pupils outside of school hours. The provision of the youth club enables a close link with an in-school mental health pupil forum led by one of the Cynnydd workers, who has a background in supporting mental health issues. The forum meets regularly to discuss the types of provision that can be put in place in the school or community to support young people facing difficulties in their lives.

A dedicated nurture area at the school enables a variety of external agencies to provide support and advice in response to the needs of pupils and parents. For example, specialist agencies use this space to provide advice, counselling and nurture for new parents and support for adoptive parents.

In addition to being a focal point for the community, the school strives to reach out and seek opportunities to link with community groups to enhance and enrich pupils' experiences. A close partnership with the local housing association has enabled the school to access funding to support a project based on local heritage and culture. The housing association has nine thousand properties in the area and, as such, is likely to provide housing for a considerable number of pupils and their families. The project, along with other initiatives, is a way of connecting local residents, the housing association and the school to raise pride and aspiration in the community. The grant funds a project based on local heroes of film and screen and was initiated by pupils following a visit to the school by Michael Sheen.

The school reaches out to successful alumni from the local area who wish to contribute to the community that nurtured and inspired them. These links help the school secure funding for programmes that focus on developing

resilience and aspiration in pupils and the wider community. For example, the 'Compass for Life' programme involves all pupils in Years 5 and 6 to set high aspirations for the direction of their lives. Through links with inspirational and successful people who have roots in Port Talbot, the school hopes to raise the aspirations of pupils, their families and the wider community.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- Improved community relationships and greater mutual respect between citizens within the locality.
- Improved access to resources that support pupils' education and wellbeing out of school hours.
- Improved awareness of and access to support for parents and families.
- Greater sense of belonging, ownership and pride amongst pupils in relation to their school community.
- Raised aspirations for pupils and members of the community.
- Improved attendance in the secondary phase.

### **Case study 3: Ferndale Community School: working in partnership to develop a community hub with co-located services**

#### **Information about the school**

Ferndale Community School is a mixed English-medium 11-16 school maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. There are currently 589 pupils on roll. Most pupils come from the Rhondda Fach valley. The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 32%, which is considerably higher than the sector national average of 16%. The school reports that over 60% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

The school identifies that around 21% of pupils have special educational needs. The school hosts a special needs unit which supports key stage 3 and key stage 4 pupils from across the local authority with complex needs.

#### **Context and background to the practice**

Starting as a parent-teacher association (PTA) for Ferndale Community School, the Fern Partnership is now the driving force behind a thriving community hub located in the centre of Ferndale.

In 2008, the Friends of Ferndale, a successful parent-teacher organisation, was registered as a charity with the following objectives linked to their charitable status:

- To advance the education of pupils by raising funds for items and activities over and above those which the local authority provide for
- In partnership with community organisations and businesses, assist in developing the lives and wellbeing of the community

The rationale for the establishment of the charity was to support improved outcomes at Ferndale Community School, particularly the outcomes of pupils disadvantaged by poverty, by working with families and the wider community. As a charity, the PTA was able to exceed the capacity of traditional fundraising activities of a PTA by applying for grant funding.

The strategy of the charity was to:

- build positive relationships with the community
- access grant funding for the school and community benefit
- create a brand that supports the success of Ferndale Community School
- reinvest a proportion of the profit of the organisation into the school and other relevant projects
- work in unity as a true partnership to secure quality outcomes

In 2014, the Friends of Ferndale established a management committee and appointed trustees. These were the headteacher of Ferndale Community School, the school Business Manager, the Chair of Governors and two

community members. In the same year the organisation tendered to become a Flying Start provider. This was successful and the early years provision opened in 2015. In 2015-2016, the charity accessed grant funding to broaden their services to support community learning, specifically family learning which was located in a community building near to the school.

In 2016, the organisation became a company limited by guarantee with charitable status operating as 'The Fern Partnership'. The Fern Partnership and Ferndale Community School work in partnership as a school, a business employing local people and a community organisation with a common vision to enhance the lives and experience of the community they serve. The governance arrangements mean that the strong link with Ferndale Community School has been maintained.

### **Description of strategy**

Following the closure of Ferndale Infant School in the summer of 2016, the Fern Partnership developed provision in the community hub with the support of the local authority. The strategic role of the local authority was crucial in developing the hub. For example, the authority supported the partnership with accessing funding and completing grant applications.

The facility is at the heart of Ferndale and delivers a range of services for the community to address gaps in existing services available to the community of Ferndale. The partnership is no longer located in the school but in a community hub approximately one mile away from the school, but the link between the two facilities remains strong. The community hub provides a single point of contact for residents of Ferndale but does not necessarily provide all of the services they might need. Staff in the hub provide advice and are able to signpost residents to the most appropriate service.

The proposal to establish a community hub was developed in response to the identified needs of the community and addressed gaps in existing services available to the community of Ferndale. The partnership works collaboratively to minimise duplication of services and aims to provide communities with quality, purposeful opportunities that will ultimately help address tackle issues related to disadvantage and poverty.

The Fern Partnership is now one of the biggest employers in the area currently employing 68 people from the community. The partnership has recently been able to offer apprenticeships in childcare and business to former pupils of Ferndale Community School. The work of the hub is managed by the Director of Early Years and Community and supported by a Community Manager who works with a range of partners and stakeholders to provide a wide and relevant range of activities and support for members of the local community.

The partnership routinely consults with the community to find out what type

of services and support they require to improve their wellbeing, job opportunities, skills and capacity to contribute to building the community themselves. For example, following feedback from local people in 2016, the partnership established affordable and flexible pre-school provision to help families access further education and employment. Little Ferns, catering for children and babies from 0-5 years of age, is a registered childcare provider and offers 15 hours of childcare for children of school age.

The community hub houses an inviting and extensive library for the community. This is very well supported and has increased its number of visitors and member's year on year. The library also provides other services for residents, such as renewal of bus passes and the provision of information. Local groups use the facilities for meetings and the IT suite is used for work club and digital support sessions.

The community hub signposts local people to a range of agencies able to provide support and advice. A recent initiative involved the creation of Wellbeing Bags containing information about the library and over 20 other support organisations that can help residents with mental health, debt, support for families, ageing well, employability and training. Similarly, a series of community events provide useful activities and advice for local people. For example, the local authority Family Information Service hosts informative drop-in sessions for families to access information on childcare, parent and baby groups and other local services. Advice on reducing heating costs and eligibility for boilers and home insulation has proved to be effective in securing support for energy bills and improving home heating.

The location of specific advice and support at the hub enables the school to help pupils and parents access this swiftly. In addition, the co-location of agencies at the hub enables close partnership working to overcome common community challenges that have an impact on pupils at the school. For example, the school and the police, working with the PCSO located in the hub, established 'Operation Bang' aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour around Bonfire Night. This resulted in a highly successful community firework display held at the school and reduced the number of incidents and bonfires.

A hot-desking facility provides a valuable base for local start-up businesses. This enables local people to work in the local community, address childcare needs and support local economy.

Effective partnerships with providers of adult education mean that the residents of Ferndale have access to relevant courses delivered at the community hub or in other venues in the Rhondda Fach. These include courses on first aid, safeguarding, food hygiene and autism awareness and a range of opportunities to develop skills in digital technology.

All people who are involved in providing services in the hub or wider

network meet together for one day each week to engage in a development programme. This is to establish a 'one public service' approach and support the vision is that it is everyone's responsibility to make every contact count. For instance, all people working in the hub are given Alzheimer's awareness training and autism awareness training to ensure that they know how to help everyone who uses the hub. This approach is supported by the local authority and the shared belief in the importance of creating a common culture that staff identify with.

Establishing the Fern Partnership has provided valuable learning for the school and for other schools looking to develop a similar partnership. The following points are important to consider.

- Establish clear systems for the management of community funding that are separate from school funding.
- Establish clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for staff working across the school and the partnership. The time allocation for each responsibility should be transparent.
- Appoint a person, at an appropriate senior level, to manage the partnership including the financial aspects of the partnership. It is not the responsibility of the headteacher to undertake this role.
- Agree clear lines of accountability between the Management Board and local authority.
- Work closely with the local authority and use their services and systems to support the development of hub provision. For example, the local authority can support the school with risk assessment, risk management and due diligence processes.
- Appoint a person with the relevant experience and background to take on a community leadership role and manage provision on a day-to-day basis.

### **Impact on pupils, parents and the community**

- Although the direct impact on pupils in Ferndale Community School is difficult to evaluate, the school sees the investment in early years' provision as one which will reap benefits for the secondary school in the future.
- Similarly, the expansion of community provision and establishment of the Community Hub has an impact on the wellbeing of families, children and young people in Ferndale.
- The school has identified that it is easier to get parents to engage with activities held in the hub than it is with activities held in school.
- Establishing the Fern Partnership has contributed to job creation in an area where jobs are scarce. In 2014-2015, five people were employed by the partnership. This had risen to over 60 employees in 2019-2020.
- The reach of the partnership has expanded to include seven childcare settings located in the Rhondda Fach, Rhondda Fawr and Cynon Valley.

#### **Case study 4: Effective leadership of family and community engagement in partnership with co-located agencies and services in Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm**

##### **Information about the school**

Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm is an English-medium primary school, which serves the area of Penrhos and Ystradgynlais in Powys local authority. Currently, there are 216 pupils on roll, including those who attend provision for three-year-olds. The school hosts a Flying Start setting and three specialist teaching facilities for 30 pupils with special educational needs drawn from other schools within the cluster. Flying Start provides access to enhanced health visitor support on the school site along with a wide range of in-school support for parenting and speech and language development.

Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity and speak English as their home language. The three year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 30%. This is well above the sector national average of 18%. The school identifies 31% of pupils as having special educational needs, which is above the sector national average of 21%.

##### **Context and background to the practice**

Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm opened in 2012 following school reorganisation in the Ystradgynlais area. It serves the communities of Ystradgynlais and Penrhos. Since her appointment to the school in 2012, the headteacher has developed and modelled a strong vision for the school based on a deep understanding of the community it serves and a recognition that the school alone could not achieve the high expectations and aspirations it had for its pupils. By now, the school is a vibrant learning community with a warm, caring and inclusive ethos. Staff, pupils, parents and the wider community work together exceptionally well demonstrating mutual respect for the roles they all have in ensuring the very best education for children.

A considerable proportion of pupils live with social and emotional disadvantage and are vulnerable to the effects that such disadvantage might have on their educational progress and wellbeing. The headteacher and all staff believe that it is essential that the school provides support and intervention for these pupils and their families through working in partnership with a range of agencies. The headteacher has been very successful in communicating her inspiring vision to staff, parents and the wider community. As a result, families have access to a very wide range of services provided by the school and its many partners.

The aim of Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm is to create a happy, secure environment which will help all children reach their full potential. Leaders, school staff and the many partners that work with the school believe that children gain the most from their education when families, staff and children work together as partners in learning.

## Description of strategy

The school has established a very strong and trusting partnership with families in the community. This is evident from the moment the doors of the school open in the morning when parents enter the school building to take their children to classrooms. This enables the headteacher to greet each one and, when needed, speak to individual parents about concerns or respond to their questions. Parents are also able to speak to each class teacher as they leave their children at the classroom door. This open access approach breaks down barriers by helping parents feel welcome in the school and able to share news about their children or address any worries.

Golwg Y Cwm is more than a place where children learn. It is also a facility that benefits the families and community of Penrhos and Ystradgynlais. These communities are geographically isolated. The school serves the most deprived ward in the local authority, which is in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in Wales. Many families cannot afford to travel to larger towns nearby so the school has become the place where they can access friendship, support and advice to help them raise their children.

In addition to providing a range of support and activities for parents, the school houses specialist provision in the co-located services hub. This includes:

- a domestic violence support service provided by Calan, a third sector organisation
- a health visitor
- the Flying Start Community Advisory teacher and the Strategic Commissioning and Programme Manager
- the social services Early Years Help team
- a support worker from the charity Action for Children

These providers work together seamlessly with the school staff to provide holistic support for the children and families of Golwg Y Cwm.

The community manager plays an essential role in coordinating valuable family learning activities, out of hours events and the extensive range of services provided by partner agencies. The role of the community manager is an important factor in securing the strong family-centred approach to learning that characterises Golwg Y Cwm. For example, the Family and Community Together (FACT) learning programme includes various activities to encourage families to learn together. This includes informal drop in events, such as the well-supported community coffee morning or support for mothers with babies. Other family support activities include support for job searches, CV writing, welfare advice and interview skills.

The school makes very good use of the easily accessed family room. Parents know that they are welcome here at any time during the school

day, finding a warm welcome, support and plenty of advice from the school and other parents. In a few cases, this interaction has helped parents improve their skills in speaking English and to develop their confidence to attend college courses, some of which are held at school and run by partner further education establishments. Through this welcoming and open approach, the school has built trust with the parents that has a positive impact on the wellbeing of their children. The design of the school building is a significant factor in helping parents feel welcome in the school as the family room is located near the entrance to the school and close to the headteacher's room and community services area. This enables parents to drop into the school for informal conversations, family learning or, in some cases, advice from any of the services located in the building.

Through its strong relationship with families, the school provides exceptional support for parents in difficult circumstances. Because of the open and trusting relationship formed between the school and the parents, the school is often the first port of call when a parent needs help. Together the school and the co-located service hub provide swift, targeted support to families. In each case, when there is a family in need, school leaders and the community manager in partnership, facilitate access to a substantial range of services. These services include housing advice, support to address domestic violence concerns, access to health professionals, parent support groups, local foodbanks, school-based interventions and other support or advice that might open up new opportunities for learning, socialising or care.

The school has fostered highly effective relationships with local authority children's services to support vulnerable families. Many of these families have complex needs which have a significant impact on the wellbeing, behaviour and health of their children. The school plays an important role in liaising with the local authority Child in Need team and the Team Around the Family to support nearly all of these families to make positive changes to their lives.

The school helps parents to support their children at home through initiatives such as the Big Book Library. This was introduced following a nurture session where children were asked to bring in their favourite book. This revealed that a few children had very limited access to books at home so the school secured funding to develop access to the school library for families and story sacks for families to use at home.

In partnership with the local credit union the school runs a savings club for pupils, their families, including grandparents. This helps instil important habits about how to manage money in pupils and their families. Children learn about finance and are given rewards for being good savers. Pupils help with counting the deposits and parents are committed to supporting the savings club. This initiative is highly successful in Golwg Y Cwm, being the most successful school savings club in the local authority. The initiative has influenced the establishment of other school based schemes in the area.

Flying Start provision is completely integrated into the day-to-day life of the school. The organisation of classrooms means that Flying Start groups learn side by side with Foundation Phase pupils. This means that transition for the pupils and their parents into the primary school provision is seamless. It also means that the school builds relationships with parents at an early stage.

The domestic violence service located at the school supports over 30 families in a range of ways. For example, the service helps families access private rented accommodation following a relationship breakdown, supports families experiencing child protection or child in need situations and provides specialist support for children who are exposed to domestic violence.

The children's charity based in the school provides behavioural support to children and their families who are experiencing difficulties. The support involves the whole family to improve outcomes for their children. It is tailored to meet the needs and challenges of individual families and draws on the expertise of a range of agencies. Families can self-refer to access support or receive referrals from the school.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- Improved literacy and numeracy skills for pupils
- Improved wellbeing, attitudes to learning and decreased anxiety in pupils
- Increased participation in physical activity in school for pupils and members of the wider community, through the strong link with the local football club which shares facilities with the school
- Improved rates of satisfaction amongst parents in relation to the school's provision
- Improved independence, motivation and confidence in learning of parents of vulnerable pupils
- Improved confidence of parents to access employment and training resulting in improved self-esteem
- Increased number of families supporting pupils with their learning
- Improved access to specialist facilities for parents during times of emergency or heightened vulnerability

## Case study 5: Co-located services at Ysgol Gogarth

### Information about the school

Ysgol Gogarth is a day and residential special school situated in the coastal town of Llandudno. It is the only special school maintained by Conwy local authority. Currently there are 234 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 19. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for moderate and severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Most pupils come from the Conwy local authority area and a very few come from neighbouring local authorities. The three year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 42%. A few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

The school manages a residential facility that offers short-term placements for pupils who attend the school. The school also provides a base for a number of other key services, including the children with disabilities social work team, the ASD outreach team, the sensory support service and child development centre for Conwy. Since the last inspection, the school's site and buildings have been significantly redeveloped as part of the Welsh Government's 21st Century Schools and Colleges programme.

### Context and background to the practice

Following his appointment the headteacher recognised that there was a real need for closer working relationships with other agencies to help and support pupils with a range of special educational needs. Around six years ago the school moved to a new purpose built school site. During the design process, the headteacher insisted on additional spaces to enable agencies, such as physiotherapists to support pupils at the school. Arrangements were put in place for the school to be open all year round to provide access to this provision. To support this further, the school ensured that the IT systems had the capacity to enable health and other agencies to work effectively. The school negotiated joint funding arrangements with agencies to finance resources.

As many of the pupils attending Ysgol Gogarth have specific and often complex needs, the headteacher worked closely with social services and the local authority to look at how they could improve the residential provision as part of the new build works. A ten-bedroom bespoke children's home that offers respite care was built. It offers residential respite for families and a safety net for the local authority when a child needs care. The facility also provides an extension to the school day and develops older pupils' self-help and independence skills.

The issue of who would take overall managerial and financial responsibility also needed to be agreed. The headteacher takes overall responsibility for the school and the residential care facility. Due to the complex nature of

the residential care facility and the involvement of staffing and funding from multiple agencies, a bespoke governance group was established. This includes the head of integrated disability services, the Director of Education for Conwy, the lead elected member for children's services, three school governors, a staff member, and an audit member from social services.

### **Description of the strategy**

Leaders recognised that for co-location and a widening of community and family engagement to be successful they needed:

- strong leadership and a clear allocation of responsibility for key areas
- a clear understanding of families and their needs
- clearly designated and suitably equipped areas for different groups to work
- commitment and enthusiasm from everyone involved
- like-minded people with a 'can do' attitude
- flexible school working hours
- a willingness to adapt as the journey progressed
- a desire from all to promote parents' and pupils' independence, resilience, health and wellbeing

The establishment of a strong management structure with clearly defined areas of responsibilities was one of the first things that happened. These include senior leadership responsibility for managing the site. The headteacher and deputy headteacher chair a multi-agency forum group comprising of speech and language, health and social services staff. This group meets regularly to discuss individual pupils' progress and needs. There are three assistant headteachers. One is responsible for 14-19 vocational links and careers, one for key stage 2 and one for key stage 3 provision and pedagogy. In addition, a family and community engagement officer leads on family and community engagement. The headteacher makes sure that the school gives time to other services. For example, he releases staff to attend meetings on supporting a summer play scheme provided by local authority social services. This approach helps to develop effective working relationships with a range of partners.

Currently several key agencies share the school site. These include the integrated disabilities social work team, the child development centre, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, continuing care nurses, behavioural support, paediatric clinics and the child and adult learning disability services (CALDS) who work at home with parents. The headteacher also wanted to work with other agencies to support parents' and pupils' health and wellbeing in a broader sense and so developed close links with the Conwy sports development team.

This integrated services approach enables parents to attend appointments for any health-related matters on site. There is little disruption for the child and school staff who work with the pupils and attend meetings to share their expertise when appropriate. This team approach supports accurate

and purposeful reviews to take place. It also cuts down on the need to send multiple emails and reports beforehand as staff can easily speak face-to-face.

When the school holds its parents' evenings, it invites other organisations to set up stalls in the school hall. Whilst parents are waiting, they naturally wander around and chat. This helps to break down misconceptions about what different organisations actually do or provide. In addition, parents do not feel overwhelmed by meeting new people as many of these professionals already share school reception spaces and are very visible around school, and readily accessible for an informal chat. The school employs its own speech and language therapy assistants who provide beneficial digital workshops for parents on how to use their child's communication tools and systems. This practical approach supports parents in the wider community when they take their child out. Indeed many local cafes and supermarkets have learnt basic Makaton signs to help staff better communicate with pupils.

In addition, the on-site behavioural support team help teach pupils the skills they need to participate fully at school, home and in the community. They help pupils with specific communication difficulties to identify and communicate their needs. This is particularly effective in supporting pupils with ASD. The close collaboration between teachers, parents, and speech and language therapists develops pupils' literacy and numeracy, self-management, functional living and community skills exceptionally well. Their work on desensitisation enables pupils with specific ASD-related issues to wear seatbelts or glasses and ear defenders without getting agitated. Speech and language therapists invite parents in to watch their child's sessions and provide valuable resources. Interaction therapy staff work with parents on a weekly basis and share footage of learners' sessions to compare practice and to come up with joint targets. Parents particularly appreciate the opportunity to meet weekly over a cake and coffee. This enables them to problem solve, review progress and access resources or advice. It also removes the fear factor of talking to health or social services staff in an unfamiliar environment.

The school knows the importance of developing strong relationships with parents and their children. To help foster these links, staff consult parents regularly to find out what they actually want in addition to the bespoke work with other agencies. Leaders analyse responses and look at ways to cater for parents' health and wellbeing needs and offering practical support with any other issues. For example, staff work closely with the Conwy sports development team who run health and fitness related activities in Ysgol Gogarth on a weekly basis. The sports development team works closely with the family and community engagement officer to run e-bike excursions for parents around the Great Orme and to host fun fit activities such as Zumba and weighted hoola hoops.

The headteacher recognises the importance of having highly trained staff in order for them to provide bespoke support to parents and pupils. The

family and community engagement officer is a trained counsellor and offers bereavement support. This has been invaluable for supporting the emotional wellbeing of all given the often life limiting conditions that pupils with complex needs have. Parents value the chance to talk openly and honestly within a safe and familiar environment.

The school also works regularly with business and providers within the community to provide additional information and support to parents. For example, CALDS had open and honest dialogue with parents about what it was like to care for a child with a disability. They used the findings to learn how best to tailor their service to support parents in what they actually needed help with, rather than assuming they knew what was needed. This created a more bespoke service that caters better for individual needs. The Conwy play development team undertook a similar approach and works with parents of young children to promote the importance of play and to provide useful ideas and resources to use at home. St. John's Ambulance works with the school to train parents in basic first aid. Many state that they feel more confident in dealing with issues that may arise as a result of their child's medical condition. A local law firm also run a wills and trusts seminar at the school. This helps parents to deal with practical matters around what will happen to their child after they are gone.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- Pupils have the skills and confidence to independently access sports facilities and work placements. Older pupils have clear aspirations for future job prospects.
- Co-located services provide highly effective support for independent living skills.
- Staff from the school work strategically with partners to make the best use of skills to benefit the pupils.
- Families have access to valuable support that contributes positively to their wellbeing and confidence to support their children.
- Organisations located in the school work flexibly with one another with a shared understanding of the benefits, limitations and pressures of services.
- Staff from the school and partner organisations value the benefits of working in partnership. They share a vision and have a solutions focused approach to supporting the needs of pupils and their families.
- The school has a strong position in the community and is well respected by local businesses. This has led to the involvement of pupils in community and vocational training.
- The school raises community awareness of disability and what pupils with special education can achieve. As a result, pupils are valued in the local community.

### **Case study 6: 'If you believe it, you can achieve it' – establishing positive relationships with families and the community to instil ambition and resilience in pupils in Cefn Hengoed Community School**

#### **Information about the school**

Cefn Hengoed Community School is a 11-16 comprehensive school situated in the Bonymaen / Winch Wen area of Swansea. The school has six cluster schools that are all situated in the east of Swansea. The school currently has 790 pupils on roll. The school reports that 55% of the pupils live in the most deprived areas of Wales, and the three year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is just under 34%, which is above the national average of 16%. Nearly 42% of the pupils have special educational needs.

#### **Context and background to the practice**

Cefn Hengoed Community School (CHCS) is a thriving community school that works in close partnership with the community and families to ensure that pupils flourish and succeed in school. The headteacher and staff of the school have a strong understanding of the needs of the community and families in the area served by the school. This has informed the strategic approach the school has taken to family and community engagement. Its commitment to build resilience and ambition in pupils and the wider community is best captured by the school ethos, 'if you can believe it, you can achieve it'. A particularly notable feature is that the school has sustained its successful approaches to family and community engagement over the years.

The school aims to be as open and accessible as possible to families and the community. It reaches out to build strong relationships with families knowing that engagement often precedes and supports achievement. The strategy for family and community engagement has four aims:

- to engage stakeholders
- to celebrate success
- to raise aspirations
- to provide inclusive support

#### **Description of strategy**

Cefn Hengoed Community School has developed a model of practice that involves families as soon as their child enters the school. The school establishes effective relationships with families through a number of whole school initiatives, strong cluster working and regular events that bring families into the school. These include support evenings for parents with pupils with ASD, information events to help parents with ensure that their children are safe from harm and practical sessions such as those to help pupils prepare for examinations. For example, a recent event involving the wider community and cluster schools aimed to educate the whole community about safeguarding issues. This event provided information about, for instance, modern slavery, extremism and community cohesion,

support for domestic abuse and advice about trading standards. Events that help the school promote its culture of success and community image are held regularly.

The school makes highly effective use of social media to promote the success of pupils and activities that are of interest to parents and the wider community. It has developed a school app for pupils and parents and liaises closely with primary cluster schools to use a digital application to highlight concerns during and following transition to the secondary school. This relentless focus on engaging parents has resulted in over 70% of parents attending parents' evenings and engagement events for the last five years. In addition, parents who are traditionally hard to reach are encouraged and supported to engage with the school through the work of the extensive and experienced team of pastoral staff.

The school has committed considerably to developing a team of staff who provide support not just to pupils but also to their families. This team includes a Wellbeing Manager and Autistic Spectrum Disorder Support Officer, who support pupils and families facing difficulties that are having a negative impact on the wellbeing and learning of pupils.

The support provided by the Wellbeing Manager is tailored to meet the circumstances of individual pupils and their families and is not solely provided in school or by the school. However, the school plays a pivotal role in identifying and brokering effective support. For instance, if a pupil starts to miss school, prior to the involvement of the Educational Welfare Officer, the Wellbeing Manager will try to identify the particular issue. If the issue is related to a housing problem such as cleanliness or lack of facilities, the Wellbeing Officer will liaise with the local housing association or support the parent to make contact. In this way long-term attendance issues can be prevented and the pupil is able to continue to engage with learning. The Wellbeing Manager also supports families who have suffered bereavements and helps them access counselling and wider support.

The ASD Support Officer works specifically with pupils with ASD and their families and is an important and highly valued point of contact for parents. She speaks to parents on a daily basis to update them on the progress of their child and is vigilant to changes in a pupil's behaviour. This enables her to address concerns swiftly in partnership with parents. Her approach to working with parents is supportive and positive so that parents do not feel that they are at fault or presenting the school with a problem. As a result, parents feel confident to contact the school with the knowledge that their concerns will be listened to and dealt with, no matter how minor they may be. They recognise that the school is working with them in a true and equal partnership, regularly reviewing and refining home and school approaches together.

The roles of the Wellbeing Manager and the ASD Support Officer are carried out in a supportive, non-judgmental yet authoritative way. Families trust the staff and know that they are helping them address difficulties for the benefit of their children. Both the Wellbeing Manager and the ASD Support Officer

work closely with families to build resilience in pupils facing difficulties. They communicate regularly with parents and are often welcomed into homes. For parents, these members of staff provide hope, confidence and belief that their children will be happy in school and succeed, even though at times this might seem like a considerable challenge. This reduces anxiety for parents and, in turn, has a positive impact on the wellbeing and success of their children.

The school has established a wellbeing fund to support families in need. Pupils and staff raise money through fundraising activities and a weekly staff bulletin requests items for the local foodbank. Using this fund and vouchers from the foodbank, the school is able to support families at times of need. For example, in December 2019, the Christmas Crisis Fund was used to provide food vouchers and presents for seven families experiencing difficulties.

The Cefn Hengoed and Cluster Engagement Sessions offer valuable opportunities for parents and members of the community to benefit from the physical and human resources of the school. Staff offer, on a monthly basis, a range of useful learning sessions that are targeted to interest parents and the community. These include sessions on basic ICT and internet safety, financial maths, 30 minute meals, careers for life and bilingualism. The Cluster Engagement Sessions are testament to the strength of the cluster working between CHCS and the local primary schools. The schools work together exceptionally effectively, recognising that the most effective way to overcome common socio-economic challenges is to share expertise and, when possible, resources. For instance, they pool their funding for looked after children to appoint a wellbeing officer to work across the cluster.

The school values and respects the skills, talent and resource the community can offer to the school. The governing body is heavily involved in all aspects of school life and ensures that community issues are at the forefront of discussion and decision-making. Members regularly evaluate the progress the school is making as a key community partner and provider of community resources. Two local councillors are members of the governing body, one being the chair, and community, local authority and parent governors provide challenge and support for the school to expand as a community school.

Recently, the school has been awarded funding to develop a hub for the provision of leisure and community services at the school. The Cefn Hengoed Community Hub Project has involved the school, local authority and third sector organisations working together to secure funding from the Welsh Government to build sports and community facilities that will benefit the school and the community. Building on Cefn Hengoed's existing exceptionally strong community engagement, the vision is that the new facilities will provide a valuable opportunity to co-locate services at the school, thereby bringing the school, families and community even closer together.

### **Impact on pupils, parents and the community**

- Overall, the wellbeing and engagement of pupils are outstanding.
- Pupils achieve well above expectation, particularly those who are vulnerable and face challenges in their lives.
- Pupils understand that they have an important role in making their community a place that respects and supports individuals. They contribute thoughtfully to community projects and initiatives to help those in need.
- Parents are confident in the support and advice they receive from the school.
- Families are empowered to support their children at times of difficulty.
- The community has pride in the achievement of pupils and contributes to raising their aspirations and self-esteem.
- By working in partnership with parents and the community, the school has contributed to a significant reduction in the percentage of young people not in education, employment or training.
- Crime and anti-social behaviour in the community have reduced.

## **Case study 7: The role of the Team Around the Family at Pen-y-Dre High School**

### **Information about the school**

Pen-Y-Dre is an English-medium 11-16 community school maintained by Merthyr Tydfil local authority. There are 591 pupils on roll. This figure has risen for the last three years. The three year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is over 30%, which is above the national average of 16%.

The school serves a catchment area consisting of the large Gurnos estate, as well as a number of valley communities on the edge of the Brecon Beacons. Pupils come mainly from six partner primary schools. The school reports that 70% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Nearly all pupils speak English as their first language and come from a white British background.

The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 45%, which is considerably higher than the sector national average of 23%.

### **Context and background to the practice**

Since 2012, the school has worked successfully to ensure that parents are meaningfully included and involved in many aspects of school life and that they have confidence in the school to achieve the very best for their children and the community it serves. The school has an open door policy and has worked successfully to improve communication and strengthen relationships with parents. The school was the first school in Wales to win in the Professional Teaching Awards for their work with parents and the community.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

Effective family engagement is a priority in Pen-Y-Dre High School. Many parents have had negative experiences of education and were reluctant to engage with the secondary school. To address this, the school has established highly effective strategies to open up the school to parents and remove any negative pre-conceptions they may have of schooling. This work begins in partnership with cluster primary schools. The high school makes links with parents whilst their children are still in primary school through a range of interesting and vibrant cluster projects. Pupil Development Grant funding is used to employ two learning support assistants who are based at the high school but work across the cluster primary schools to support vulnerable pupils.

Following transition to the high school, pupils and their families are well supported by a team of staff who have a specific role to help improve wellbeing, particularly of vulnerable pupils and their families. This team, led by a Team Around the Family (TAF) officer, play an important part in establishing positive relationships with families, particularly those who might be experiencing challenges in their lives. They make home visits to

build trust and nurture relationships with parents. For example, if a pupil is absent, a member of the team will visit following the first day of absence. In the case of more vulnerable pupils, the team will visit as soon as the school is aware of absence.

The TAF play an important role in helping families understand why they might need specific support via referrals to external agencies, such as social services or third sector organisations. Often parents are concerned that this might present problems for them but, with the support of the TAF, they are helped to understand why additional support will benefit their lives and help their child with education. This can only be achieved because of the way in which the team has established very strong and trusting relationships with families.

As the school is very aware of the difference effective family engagement can make to the success of a child, they are willing to explore different approaches to improving family engagement. For instance, in order to make links with families who are reluctant to visit the school or local authority offices, the TAF organised parent meetings in local community centres. In a similar way, the school trialled parent 'surgeries' at the local shopping centre and post office. Parents were able to drop in to speak with TAF staff to discuss the progress of their children. Although these initiatives were initially successful, the school found that they were not financially sustainable and not as successful as home visits. Through evaluation, the school found that home visits enabled more effective bespoke intervention and advice for families experiencing difficulties. For example, home visits provide valuable opportunities for staff to help parents complete applications to access local authority support, benefits and housing. This ensures that home circumstances for pupils and their families are stable and able to have a positive impact on wellbeing, progress and achievement in school.

The school has recently explored ways of further developing bespoke support to meet the very specific needs of pupils in the school. For example, in collaboration with an assistant headteacher the TAF have organised a parent evening at Park Prison. This enabled a pupil to share successes with a parent who was in prison. The impact of this on the pupil was considerable as it raised his self-esteem and aspirations, and helped him consider pathways for his future career. It also helped maintain important family contacts at a time of significant stress for the family. The school is currently planning to build on the success of this practice by securing a support plan for pupils in similar situations.

### **Impact of provision on pupils, families and the community**

- The school is confident that improved family engagement has contributed to an improvement in standards of individual pupils.
- There have been improvements in attendance and attitudes to learning of some of the most vulnerable pupils.
- Increased parental involvement has led to improved behaviour, attitudes

to learning and resilience.

- An increasing number of parents visit the school with confidence, knowing that they will receive non-judgemental and beneficial support from staff in the school.
- The improved interaction between staff and parents has had a positive impact on the reputation of the school in the community.
- The work of the TAF has contributed to reducing pupil absenteeism.
- Through collaborative work with a range of agencies, parents have a better understanding of what support is available for them from the school and wider services.

## **Case study 8: Engaging and supporting families through the work of the Family Engagement Officer at Glenboi Primary School**

### **Information about the school**

Glenboi Community Primary School is located in Mountain Ash in the Cynon Valley, Rhondda Cynon Taf. The area served by the school is one of the most disadvantaged in the authority. The school has 133 pupils on roll. The three year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is nearly 58% and 48% of pupils have special educational needs. The school hosts a specialist class for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

### **Context and background to the practice**

The appointment of a highly skilled and effective Family Engagement Officer (FEO) in 2015 was an important step in helping the school fulfil its vision as a community school. This decision was informed by the publication of an Estyn report on effective practice in tackling poverty and disadvantage (2012). The headteacher and governing body recognised that Glenboi Primary School would benefit from a number of the strategies identified in the report, particularly those that focused on the benefits of engaging parents and carers. Since then, the school has taken a number of important steps to develop and embed highly effective family and community engagement to strengthen the relationship between families and the school.

The school believes that the appointment of the FEO has been pivotal in improving relationships with parents. This strategy has been so successful the school is at a point where parents are an integral part of the school community. Since 2015, parental engagement has been a priority in the school improvement plan and seen, by all staff as vital to the success of pupils. All staff, in particular the FEO, endeavour to build strong relationships between home and school. This brings considerable benefits to pupils and their families.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

The appointment of the FEO was a strategic decision involving the governing body. The governors and headteacher considered carefully the funding for the role and the potential benefits for the school. The governing body had a deep understanding of the challenges of the community and recognised the potential of appointing a person who could work to engage and support families.

The Welsh Government Family and Community Engagement Toolkit (2015) provided valuable guidance that helped the school shape the role of the FEO. In particular, the school recognised that it was important to appoint a person with the right skills, values and a commitment to improving the life chances of children and families served by the school.

As a result of thoughtful planning, the role of the FEO is tailored to the meet needs of Glenboi Primary School and the community. This includes having

a strong understanding of the community, families and the challenges they face. The FEO has a high profile in the school and community and is a respected member of the governing body,

The FEO works very closely with the headteacher to ensure that important information about pupils and families is promptly communicated to staff and solutions are swiftly put into place. The strong working partnership with the FEO enables the headteacher to focus on leading teaching, learning and the strategic leadership and management of the school. The FEO focuses on supporting vulnerable pupils and their families through partnerships with community organisations and relevant local authority services such as the Resilient Families initiative.

The FEO is highly visible and accessible to parents at the start and end of the school day. In this way, parents can raise issues or let her know of any challenges a child might be facing. As a result, the school is swift and proactive in responding to difficulties. For instance, the FEO is able to contact relevant agencies quickly or let teachers know that a child might not be in the right mindset for learning.

The role of the FEO is threefold. Firstly, she works with a range of external agencies to provide services and support that can be accessed by all pupils and their families. Examples of this work include:

- successful engagement with the Families and Schools Together (FAST) Programme in partnership with Save the Children
- liaison with initiatives run by the local housing association and Valleys Kids to provide enrichment activities for pupils, their families and the community
- provision of effective family learning programmes and parenting courses to support parents to engage with their children's learning
- organising family literacy programmes or classes for parents and children to learn to cook healthy and economical meals
- the provision of specific interventions to improve pupil wellbeing
- creating a space in the school for families and the community to use

Secondly, the FEO works in a targeted way to meet the needs of specific families to help them overcome significant challenges. This work involves activities such as the following.

- She liaises with third sector organisations to provide essential home appliances and furniture to help parents to care for their children. The FEO also distributes emergency food vouchers to families in need.
- As deputy safeguarding officer, the FEO works with the local authority integrated families support team and social workers attached to specific families to address concerns about safeguarding and other family issues. The FEO regularly attends case conferences, core group meetings and 'Resilient Families' review meetings.
- The FEO provides additional support for families at difficult times including supporting families at risk of moving into a women's refuge,

helping families new to the area settle in to the community and supporting families with bereavement including arranging counselling.

Finally, the FEO works with groups of parents to help them establish parent groups such as the Parent Council and the Friends of Glenboi. This has helped develop leadership capacity amongst parents and community members. Parents who have been involved in these groups have developed confidence, self-esteem and valuable organisational skills, which they use in other community roles.

### **Impact on pupils, parents and the community**

- Pupil wellbeing has improved since 2016 and pupils engaged in interventions make good progress with their social and emotional development.
- Pupil attendance has improved since the introduction of strategies to engage with families and the community.
- Families engage exceptionally well with the school and are actively involved in their children's learning.
- Family engagement is identified as a very strong aspect of the work of the school.

The school has broken the cycle of poor parental engagement and has changed the perceptions of parents towards the importance of education.

## **Case study 9: An evidence informed approach to developing family engagement in Pencoed Primary School**

### **Information about the school**

Pencoed Primary School is in the village of Pencoed, in Bridgend local authority. There are around 597 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11 years old. The school has 25 classes, including four learning resource units for pupils with a range of learning difficulties. The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 15%, which is just below the sector national average of 18%. The school identifies around 29% of pupils as having special educational needs, which is above the sector national average of 21%. Few pupils come from an ethnic minority background and few speak Welsh at home.

### **Context and background to the practice**

The school's headteacher has undertaken extensive research into the benefits of family engagement. She discovered that benefits for a school included increased pupil attainment, higher attendance, better relationships with parents, wider school improvement and wide ranging advantages for the local community. To help establish effective practices, the school staff have looked closely at the work of Charles Desforges (2003), who cites that parental involvement is the biggest single factor in children's attainment.

In 2010, the headteacher visited Bradford local authority as they had outstanding practice in family engagement work. She saw that all schools within the local authority employed a family engagement officer (FEO) to lead the school in this aspect of their work. In addition, the local authority led staff training on engagement activities and organised family learning sessions for parents. Following this valuable research, the school appointed their own FEO and leaders set about improving their own practice.

In 2018, the headteacher and FEO visited New York as part of a British Council funded group to look at a variety of community schools and how they engaged with their families. They brought back useful ideas to help further strengthen their provision at Pencoed. This included recognising that schools are at the hub of the local community and how services work closely together to ensure that children are ready to learn when they first enter school. They saw that, in full service schools in New York, families are heavily involved in a child's education and that family engagement is at the heart of the community school model.

### **Description of activity/strategy**

Leaders and other staff members used the information gained from their extensive research to begin to improve provision for family engagement at the school. Leaders recognised that for their work to be successful at Pencoed they needed:

- a whole school approach

- strong leadership
- an understanding of families and their needs
- time to focus on support
- commitment and enthusiasm from everyone involved
- a shift in mind set
- flexible school working hours

These priorities have informed a comprehensive family and community engagement strategy, which has informed the work of the school for the past nine years.

An important part of this is the parental engagement work that goes on before the pupils enter the school. To help foster this early engagement with parents, the school's FEO, helped by parent volunteers, runs a well-attended weekly baby and toddler group. The school works closely with local health visitors who refer local parents who would benefit from this provision. Parents who attend value the opportunity to make early relationships with the school and make friends with other parents. The school benefits by getting to know the needs of children and their families before they start in the nursery. Staff also have the opportunity to signpost parents to additional support when this is required. In addition, to strengthen these early relationships with families, the FEO accompanies staff when they make home visits to the homes of all pupils before they join the school. This is mainly for nursery-aged pupils but also applies to all pupils who join the school at any point. These visits help promote the school's strong family programme and also enable the FEO to outline the school's expectations of how they expect parents to engage with the school and their child's learning.

The Parent Forum is a well-established group that meets every half term and includes family representation from every year group in the school. The FEO attends every meeting with the headteacher often invited as well. Parents set the agenda and discuss a wide range of school related matters. School leaders often have to answer questions and queries with their responses discussed by the group at subsequent meetings. The school also uses the group as a 'sounding board' when they want to consult with parents on school decisions, for example on how to improve communication with parents. This body gives parents a strong and valued voice in the school with members able to discuss school issues in an open and honest forum.

The headteacher organises monthly coffee mornings for any family member to attend. These are informal gatherings that give parents the opportunity to drop in to discuss any concerns or ideas with her and the FEO over a drink and snack. Parents value this opportunity to engage with staff at this level. School staff report that they are able to address concerns at an early stage in a relaxed environment. It also helps to break down barriers between school staff and parents. Around 15 family members usually attend each session.

The FEO runs a wide range of events and programmes, which enable

parents and family members to be fully involved in the education of their child. She targets many of the family learning programmes to ensure that parents are able to engage with their children's learning and therefore focus on understanding and developing specific skills. For example, 'Beyond the Book Bag' looks to support parents with their understanding of early reading skills, whilst 'Funky Phonics' and 'Impact in writing' focus on developing pupils' writing skills. She also organises a 'Family Forest School' programme on Saturday mornings as this is often the most convenient time for families to attend. These sessions give opportunities for parents to complete outdoor learning activities developing collaboration, resilience and communication skills with their children. In addition to weekends, family learning programmes at the school are also available during the summer holidays to continue to support families.

Much of the recent work of the FEO has focused on further developing the links between the school, pupils and families and the wider community through the school's 'The Generation Games' programme. This is a programme that successfully promotes inter-generational learning and is based in the local residential care home. Younger pupils, along with their parents or other family members, visit the home weekly. They are then "buddied up" with one of the residents at the care home and they complete different activities each week, closely matched to the needs of both the pupils and the residents. The school's FEO works closely with the events manager at the care home to devise the six-week programme and to ensure that they plan stimulating and fulfilling activities. The activities allow opportunities for both the pupils and the residents to communicate and to share information about their lives and memories, along with developing other skills including physical, creative, personal and social skills. Tease, the school's Pets as Therapy dog, is also included in the programme and enhances the wellbeing of both pupils and residents. The programme has strengthened reciprocal learning relationships between different generations and has helped to develop social cohesion within the local community.

The pupils involved have a far greater understanding of the needs of others and have developed greater confidence in communicating with different generational groups. The feedback from the parents and family members involved has been positive with some expressing an interest in continuing their support for the elderly following the completion of the programme. The residents involved have benefited greatly, showing higher levels of wellbeing and stimulation. This is a very good example of community working where the benefits have been numerous.

The school has a pupil family engagement team who meet monthly with staff to discuss ideas on how to engage with the community. Pupils take their roles very seriously and have recently been involved in organising a charity coffee and games morning and a Saturday morning Christmas lunch for local residents. The pupils hand-delivered the invitations within the community. This work has helped many of the pupils to overcome shyness when engaging with older people and has helped them develop a strong sense of community awareness.

The school regularly evaluates the impact of family and community engagement work. It offers parents a wide range of ways to feed back their views after events and training. This includes traditional written evaluations and also opportunities to record their feelings by using symbols and plotting their feedback on a bullseye target. Staff also ask parents to complete parent questionnaires at parents' evenings. Leaders focus the questions on specific topics on which the school seeks feedback.

### **Impact on pupils, parents and families**

- Pupils eligible for free school meals achieve as well as their peers.
- Pupils behave well in school and the school has very few exclusions.
- Attendance has steadily improved since the introduction of strategies to engage with families and the community.
- The family engagement programme has a measurable and substantial impact on pupil attainment. For example, the Impact in Writing programme has resulted in more than half of the children making more than expected levels of progress in their writing skills.
- Relationships between the school and most parents is strong. Parents trust staff and feel that they have a strong voice that leaders listen to.

Local residents feel valued by the school and included in the school's activities.

## **Case study 10: Meeting the needs of the families and the community of Millbrook Primary School through effective strategic planning and self-evaluation**

### **Information about the school**

Millbrook Primary School is a 3-11 English-medium community primary school maintained by Newport City Council. It serves the Bettws community of Newport, which is an area of economic disadvantage.

The three year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 27%, which is well above the national average for primary schools of 18%. The school reports that around 72% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 18%. This is below the sector national figure of 21%. Most pupils speak English as a first language and many come from a white, British background. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

### **Context and background to the practice**

Millbrook Primary School has a well-established approach to working with families and the wider community. This approach has been driven by ambitious leadership, which recognises the important and pivotal role the school can play in supporting families and influencing change in the community. From the earliest stage in its development as a community school, the approach to family and community engagement was based on evidence and research about effective national and international practice. The appointment of a Family Engagement Officer in 2009 was an important step in helping the school build valuable relationships with families, particularly those who were hard to reach or in difficult circumstances.

Over time the school has developed an exceptionally strong understanding of the community. In the last two to three years the school recognised that the nature and specific challenges of the community were changing. More children were displaying anxiety, some of which was linked to parental mental health issues. Internally, staffing in the school had changed and new opportunities and strategies that could help the school achieve its vision were available. For example, the school was an early adopter of the Family Engagement Officer role. This helped the school develop strong relationships with families through family learning programmes. It also built knowledge and capacity for family and community engagement to become the responsibility of all staff. The school re-evaluated its approach to family and community engagement. As a result, it took the following steps:

- extended its multi-agency approach to family and community engagement in partnership with the local authority, health, the police and third sector organisations such as Save the Children and Barnardo's
- appointed a Wellbeing Officer to focus on working with vulnerable families experiencing emotional and mental health challenges
- ensured that all teachers and learning support staff took on the responsibility for engaging with families of pupils in their classes alongside the intensive support provided by the Wellbeing Officer

## Description of strategy

The school has developed a Community Partnership Framework that supports the headteacher, staff and community partners to strategically plan its approach to community and family involvement. The framework identifies key principles that underpin the work of Millbrook Primary School. These are:

- a shared vision and goals across all partners
- the value of partnerships, integration and collaboration
- establishing a community learning organisation with learning opportunities for all, including pupils, staff, parents and partners
- empowering parents and children to take action
- an ethos that promotes positive relationships

These principles mean that the school and its partners have a common reference point from which to evaluate their work. This in turn, informs the strategic planning for family and community engagement.

The headteacher has established a strong ethos and understanding amongst staff of what it means to be a community school. One of the key values is for all staff to be positive, look at solutions rather than challenges and to put into practice the motto of the school, which is 'everyone should have yes in their heart'. This means that every member of staff has a responsibility for family and community engagement. It is truly a whole school approach that is facilitated through very close working relationships between class teachers, learning support assistants, families and services that are co-located at the school.

A dedicated community block houses a team of local authority agencies that support Millbrook to be school that is responsive to the needs and ambitions of the community. They work closely with the headteacher and staff to make a difference to the life chances of children and families from the community. Some agencies are permanently based at Millbrook, such as Flying Start, the Play Development team and Language and Play team, Families First and 'Stay and Play' at Millbrook. Other services share office space and visit the school on a regular basis. These include Gwent Police, the school nurse, the educational welfare officer and two national children's charities, Save the Children and Barnardo's. The school and partners acknowledge the way in which the co-location of services helps them work collaboratively to share information and provide prompt support and intervention to address challenges. For example, the school, in partnership with Families First, supports a relative who is caring for a pupil in the school and awaiting a referral from Social Services.

A highly experienced practitioner with a background in mental health supports the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils and parents. She helps parents of pupils with anxiety to develop strategies they can use at home. A former classroom has become an accessible, welcoming and private family room that provides a place for parents to seek advice, support

and friendship. Initiatives such as the popular weekly Reading Café are a time when parents can read with their children and socialise with other parents. Having this base for parents has made a difference to individual families, particularly those who face challenging personal circumstances that might have an impact on the wellbeing and achievement of their children.

Well-established family learning programmes have, over time, helped parents gain employment. In turn, this has contributed to the economic wellbeing of families. Similarly, the family learning programme has supported parents to take on leadership roles in the community. For example, they have achieved food hygiene qualifications and knowledge of safeguarding to ensure that children, engaging in community activities organised by parents, are protected. The parent group, Friends of Millbrook, have established a number of initiatives that have been very well received by families and children in Bettws. These include setting up a credit union and organising community wide Christmas events independent of the school.

The headteacher has a strong understanding of the needs of the community served by the school. She knows that engagement strategies need to be regularly reviewed and revised to meet the changing challenges of a community experiencing significant socio-economic hardship. The school has become a strong hub in the community, providing education, parental support and a range of family support services. The Community Partnership Framework, coupled with rigorous self-evaluation, ensures that Millbrook Primary School continues to place the needs of its families and communities at the centre of its school priorities.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- Decrease in the number of exclusions
- Notable reduction in number of safeguarding referrals
- Improvement in attendance since the introduction of family and community engagement strategies
- Improved skills, confidence and self-esteem of parents engaged in family learning programmes
- Increased capacity of parents able to take on leadership and organisational roles in the community
- Increased amount of community-led social activity that engages pupils and their families
- Establishment of initiatives that have a positive impact on the lives of children and families in the community of Bettws, such as the provision of a community-led credit union

## Case study 11: Family and community engagement at Ysgol Heulfan

### Information about the school

Ysgol Heulfan is in Gwersyllt, in Wrexham local authority. There are 378 pupils on roll, aged between 3 and 11 years, including 44 nursery children who attend on a part-time basis. There are 12 mixed-age classes in the school. The school also has a resourced provision called Y Canol, comprising three classes for 23 pupils aged between 3 and 16 years with a wide range of complex learning needs. There is an additional provision for foundation phase aged pupils, most of whom have non-verbal autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Many of these pupils travel from outside the school's traditional catchment area.

The rolling average for the past three years means that about 30% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the sector national average (18%).

Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and speak English. Around 7% of pupils speak English as a second language and are developing competence in English. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school identifies around 21% of pupils as having special educational needs. This is similar to the national average.

### Context and background to the practice

The school serves an area of social and economic deprivation in Wrexham. In 2006, when the school appointed the current headteacher, leaders realised there was a real need to improve the school's parental engagement and community involvement.

Following amalgamation of the infant and junior schools, leaders and governors recognised the important role that the school could play in bridging the gap between home and school to ensure that pupils, families and community groups could work together more productively. It was apparent that parents did not feel comfortable in attending traditional learning based workshops and formal parents' evenings. There appeared to be a culture of mistrust, as historically many parents had not had the best experience of school and in many cases had felt let down by the education system.

### Description of strategy

Following the attendance of staff at a professional learning event focusing on family and community engagement, the school decided to use the Welsh Government Family and Community Engagement (FaCE) toolkit as a catalyst for change. In addition, the headteacher worked hard to create an open and honest culture that genuinely values parents' views. The appointment of forward thinking staff to key positions and the creation of a

whole school culture to reflect a 'can do' attitude were essential. Three assistant headteachers have community engagement activities clearly defined as part of their role, and the headteacher provides all staff with appropriate support and training to bring about this change. Senior leaders have specific roles that support a whole school approach and to ensure that school communication and engagement activities meet the needs of parents successfully. The school takes a strategic approach to community partnerships and pools resources successfully. Leaders evaluate the impact of initiatives and use community partners effectively to support their family engagement work. Leaders understand that the school needs to participate in community events and establish strong relationships with the other groups in the area, including faith groups. For example, reception pupils attended the Remembrance service at the Cenotaph.

The 'buy in' and involvement of governors were essential to future success. The chair of governors is a high profile figure locally and parents are comfortable to approach him. All governors see the importance of the school being at the heart of its community and see academic data as one small part of school success. They look at how well the school supports the progress pupils make from their differing starting points, and how well the school supports their wellbeing. Governors are highly visible around school and take part in regular learning walks, including those with parents. They regularly have discussions with pupils to find out what they think is working well and what they think could be improved.

The school supports pupils, their families and members of the wider community successfully in numerous ways.

### **Opening the doors to local community groups**

The headteacher realised that the school needed to be seen as the 'go to place' within the community. She was keen to work more closely with other agencies and local community groups. To this end, Flying Start uses the school premises and shares school resources. This helps young children to settle into school life quickly as they are familiar with the staff and routines. The school offers its premises free of charge to other groups. For example, the church group 'Pebbles' uses the school once a week for storytelling and craft-based activities. The vicar regularly visits the school and, as a result, pupils enjoy taking part in activities such as the nativity walk at the local church. The girl guides also use the school hall and the after school club 'tea time club', uses the premises and school resources to provide care for pupils from 3.00 to 5.30.

### **Working with other agencies**

The school invited relevant agencies to use the school as a base for appointments to save parents and pupils from Y Canol the inconvenience of travelling for appointments. As a result, vision care, specialists from Gobowen and Alder Hey hospitals, and the physiotherapist team conduct appointments wherever possible on site. The school has built a

hydrotherapy pool and parents actively fund raise to help equip the school with specialist equipment. There is a school nurse based at Ysgol Heulfan four days a week and staff who work with individual pupils attend all meetings with the parents. This sharing of knowledge and expertise is of enormous benefit to the health and wellbeing of both pupils and parents. This system minimises the stress of removing pupils for appointments and enables the school to quickly become a key player in supporting and signposting parents to gain additional support. By opening its doors, the school has quickly placed itself at the heart of its community and has won the trust of parents. Many parents now believe that if the school promises something then it will deliver, and they no longer live in fear of being let down by the system.

The headteacher and staff strongly believe that their role in working with children and their families is something that goes on beyond the school day. This willingness to go above and beyond is key to the school's success in working with its community. There is no longer a sense of stigma and parents will readily approach the school for support for a wide range of matters. For example, the headteacher can now sign for vouchers for access to the local foodbank. The school works closely with a local respite care facility, and helps parents access a range of services to support their health and mental wellbeing.

### **Learning together projects**

Staff invite parents in to work alongside their child to see what they have been learning. For example, improving pupils' mental mathematics skills was identified as a priority in the school improvement plan. The school runs a series of workshops to show parents how they are tackling this. Each class splits in half so that there is a manageable group of around 12 to 14 pupils and their parents or grandparents. Reception class pupils are currently working alongside their parents to show them how they are learning to add, subtract and total numbers. This is very practical and fun and involves playing games and number bingo. Parents thoroughly enjoy these sessions and comment slips indicate that they better understand how to support their child's learning and enjoy the fun and relaxed way in which the sessions are delivered. Junior-aged pupils recently held a fashion day and asked parents with sewing or craft skills to help. Parents and grandparents talked about and shared pictures of how fashion had changed over time and a 'passion for fashion' day allowed pupils to design and make garments by altering old clothes. Again, feedback from all involved was positive and, although the day was fun, pupils and parents learnt useful mathematical and problem solving skills involving measuring and drawing accurate patterns.

The school places equal value on developing pupils' academic and social skills and their sense of wellbeing. Nursery pupils are currently involved in weekly visits to a local residential home for the elderly. The idea came after watching a television programme showing a similar enterprise. Each child takes with them a bag containing a storybook, games and craft materials.

They enjoy reading with a resident, play animal bingo, drawing, and making things related to the story. This project is developing the confidence of young children and breaking down perceived age-related barriers.

### **Parent learning walks**

Following on from the success of these events, the school now conducts learning walks for parents. The success of the school's endeavours to engage with parents can be measured in the high attendance rates for these walks. On average between 50 and 80 regularly turn up. The walks involve not only showcasing what their child is learning about, but take parents to all areas of the school to look at displays and to discuss what each class has been doing and how this links to school improvement. Feedback indicates that this helps parents to develop a better understanding of what the school's priorities look like in practice. They also have a clearer understanding of the teaching and provision methods used in both mainstream and the resource centre classes. Parents appreciate and value the staff and their dedication and commitment to pupils' academic progress and sense of wellbeing.

### **Impact on pupils, families and the community**

- The academic progress, confidence and sense of self-worth in pupils are strong.
- Pupils and parents have high aspirations for children to be successful in school, go to university or have a job that is fulfilling and enables them to thrive.
- Pupils improve their resilience, confidence and independence.
- Pupils enjoy taking on the responsibility for learning alongside each other and value the opinions of others.
- Parents and pupils have a real sense of ownership and pride in their school.
- Parents trust and engage with the school more.
- Community projects help pupils understand the needs of others.
- Parents and teachers have a strong sense of being partners in learning.
- The school is a strong hub in the community, providing valuable services and support.
- Staff and key partners act as a cohesive team to support community engagement and parent and pupil wellbeing.
- The community has a sense of pride in the school and incidents of vandalism are virtually non-existent.
- Parents feel valued by the school and confident to approach the headteacher and staff about a range of issues, not just those relating to education.

## Case study 12: Cadoxton Primary School

### Information about the school

Cadoxton Primary School is in Barry in the Vale of Glamorgan. There are 499 pupils on roll aged 3 to 11 years including 88 part-time nursery pupils. Over the last three years, the rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 34%. This is above the national average of 18% for primary schools. The school identifies that 33% of pupils have special educational needs. This is also well above the national average of 21% for primary schools.

### Context and background to the practice

The school serves an area of economic deprivation in Barry. The area has the highest youth offending rate in the local authority. In 2011, when the school appointed the current headteacher, leaders realised the need to strengthen the school's parental engagement and community involvement. They established a new school vision and mission that included family and community engagement as a cornerstone. Staff and governors recognised the important role that the school could play in bridging the gap between home and school to ensure that pupils, families and community groups can thrive. Their mission was to provide a safe, exciting and happy haven within the heart of the Cadoxton community. To succeed with their aim, staff have developed a whole school approach to relationships and interventions where family and community involvement is not a bolt on to their work but a key driver for all that they do. Staff pride themselves on listening to ensure that they provide everyone within the school community the support, respect and opportunities that they need to learn, grow, and to be their best. Leaders have appointed a full-time Family Engagement Officer (FEO) and have established a team of staff to support her with this work, including a member of the senior leadership team. In addition, leaders allocate time and resources to support and continually grow the school's family and community work.

### Description of strategy

There are numerous ways in which the school supports pupils, their families and members of the wider community successfully.

### Community centre / Caradog's Corner

The school is fortunate to share a site with a local community centre. Leaders realised the potential of this additional resource. They worked with a group of parents to establish 'Caradog's Corner'. This is a charitable group who serve families at the school along with other members of the wider Cadoxton community. Their initial aim was to gain funding to extend the community centre's facilities so that the school could use the centre as a base for many family engagement activities, including establishing a community café. The group are responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre and manage bookings for wider community groups who use the

facility to provide community activities such as a dance group. During the school day, the centre is a focus for the school's community activities. Staff use the space for a wide range of purposes including their breakfast club for younger pupils, family learning activities, drop in coffee sessions for parents and inter-generational projects.

The school has a strong focus on reducing the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) by working proactively with families and the wider community to improving wellbeing and having a strong focus on nutrition. The school is part of a 'Food for Fuel' pilot project where they recycle out-of-date supermarket produce for use in the school's café and sell food at a market place for families to buy. The school's family engagement team lead a project to help sell the food in both the café and shop on a 'pay as you feel' basis to encourage all parents, particularly those on low incomes to access. Year 6 pupils run the café, using the donated produce, to cook nutritious meals for parents and other members of the local community. Parents have a safe place to come where they know that they can get food and support. Year 6 pupils also make 'grow bags' in which they place recipes and ingredients for healthy meals. They sell these bags to parents. Pupils use the money that they raise to pay for their annual end of year 'prom' party.

### **School Holiday Enrichment Programme**

During the summer holidays, when the school cannot offer pupils a free breakfast and lunch, families can often struggle to afford and access food to provide children with a healthy diet. In addition, pupils can experience social isolation and a lack of intellectual stimulation, normally provided by school or family enrichment activities. This can contribute to a widening attainment gap amongst pupils. To help address this issue, the school provides a School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) to ensure that vulnerable families can access support during the six week break. The school uses a Welsh Government grant to cover all costs. Support staff from the school run the programme for the first three weeks of the summer break. These adults already work at the school so know the pupils and their particular needs well. In addition, local catering staff provide each pupil who attends with a nutritious breakfast and lunch. Staff organise a wide of educational, fun activities and promote pupils and their families to be more active and to eat healthily. The school used local organisations to help with activities. These include local cricket clubs and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). During the programme, the school also invited parents to attend. The school used this opportunity to provide them with access to important services such as the local credit union, Families First, family information services and Flying Start. In the summer of 2019, 92 pupils accessed the programme.

### **Families and Schools Together**

One of the school's most successful initiatives has been their Families and Schools Together (FAST) projects. This is a Save the Children project, aimed at improving learning and relationships by bringing parents, children,

teachers and the wider community together. It brings families together in a positive, supportive, non-judgemental way. Leaders created a FAST team that included staff, parents and members of the local community and staff received training on the approach. Initially, the school identified a groups of vulnerable pupils and families to target. These families then take part in an eight-week after-school programme to build on their family's and the community's strengths. The project aims to empower parents rather than using a prescriptive approach. Activities include giving parents valuable one-to-one time with individual children, eating meals together, discussing family issues, talking about wider problems and taking part in fun family activities. A local church official and the school's PCSO play a major role in this work. This helps strengthen relationships with key members of the community. The team accesses funding for parents to help them develop skills such as driving and counselling. The school has many success stories of improved family relationships, greater self-esteem in parents and pupils and parents accessing employment.

### **Family learning**

A majority of parents at the school are unemployed and unable to find work. They can have low self-esteem and often lack confidence to support their own children with their education. The school recognised the important role that they can play in engaging with parents, families and the wider community to improve their wellbeing and to provide them with opportunities to learn new skills. Staff have designed and sought bespoke courses to meet parental needs. Courses have included English and mathematics courses, computer learning, sewing, cooking, Welsh, food hygiene, first aid and financial planning. The school either holds training at the on-site community centre or signposts parents to other local educational centres.

### **The Garden**

The school, although on a large spacious site, does not include any green spaces. To help address this, leaders have secured ownership of a piece of land adjacent to the school to develop as a school garden and outdoor classroom. The proposed benefits of this project have been not only to provide green space for pupils and their families, but also to involve members of the local community in developing gardening and construction skills. The school worked with a local community group, the Barry Family Foundation, to engage parents and other local community volunteers to make the vision a reality. Many of these volunteers were victims of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The organisation also provided training for the volunteers in health and safety and also to help them develop the skills needed to create the space and make resources such as benches, an outdoor shelter and a pond. The team turned a piece of unused, overgrown land into a space that promotes the mental and physical wellbeing of pupils, staff and families alike. To finance the initiative, the school secured funding from the National Lottery and local business Dow Silicones Limited.

### **Impact on provision and standards**

- The school noted a reduction in the number of home incidents reported during the summer break following the provision of SHEP.
- Nearly all parents surveyed reported improved engagement with the school and a positive financial impact that helped them meet the costs associated with school holidays.
- Parents who engaged with the FAST programme have been able to communicate more effectively with their children and with increased confidence.
- Aspirations of parents and pupils have improved.
- Relationships between the school and hard to reach parents have improved.
- Strong and trusting relationships have developed between community groups, including the local police, and local families.
- Long term unemployed parents have been successful in gaining employment following engagement with family learning.
- The awareness and skills of parents about issues such as healthy eating and how to support their children at home have increased.
- The wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem of parents who engaged in family learning have improved.
- Community pride and ownership have developed following the creation of the Garden.
- Volunteers from the community who worked on the Garden have developed key skills and improved their wellbeing and confidence.
- Participants gained valuable work experience to help them return to work after long term unemployment.

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## Appendix 2: Evidence base

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### The findings of this survey are based on an analysis of evidence from:

- Scrutiny of inspection reports
- Visits to 20 schools that were identified, using inspection evidence, as being successful community schools / demonstrating the characteristics of a community school
- Interviews with 14 primary headteachers, five secondary headteachers and one headteacher of a special school
- Focus groups with parents and pupils
- Interviews with family and community engagement staff
- Interviews with local authority officers working with community schools
- Interviews with partners from third sector organisations working with community schools
- A range of national and international research on community schools
- Scrutiny of Welsh Government policy from 2001 to 2020

### The following schools were visited as part of this survey:

Cadoxton Community Primary School, Vale of Glamorgan  
Cefn Hengoed Community School, Swansea  
Ferndale Community School and the Fern Partnership, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
Glenboi Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf  
Graig Y Rhacca Primary and Nursery Community School, Caerphilly  
Maindee Primary School, Newport  
Millbrook Primary School, Newport  
Pencoed Primary School, Bridgend  
Penydre High School, Merthyr Tydfil  
Rhosymedre Community Primary School, Wrexham  
Sandfields Primary School, Neath Port Talbot  
Severn Primary School, Cardiff  
Ysgol Bae Baglan, Neath Port Talbot  
Ysgol Gymraeg Brynsierfyl, Carmarthenshire  
Ysgol Gogarth, Conwy  
Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm, Powys  
Ysgol Heulfan, Wrexham  
Ysgol Y Moelwyn, Gwynedd  
Ysgol Gynradd Talysarn, Gwynedd  
Ysgol Terrig, Flintshire

## A note on the context of the sample of schools that were visited as part of this survey

The schools that were visited as part of this survey are distributed across **free school meal groups** in the following proportions.

Band 1	0%
Band 2	16%
Band 3	21%
Band 4	21%
Band 5	42%

These schools are distributed in the following way in relation to the **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation** (WIMD). However, it is important to remember that WIMD is a relative measure for all Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Wales. The measures for schools are only for the LSOA **in which the school resides**. In nearly all cases the school catchment area is much larger than the LSOA the school is within. Therefore, in most instances, these figures do not necessarily take into account the deprivation of the wider catchment area.

WIMD category	Proportion of schools
10% most deprived	30%
10-20% most deprived	20%
20-30% most deprived	15%
30-50% most deprived	15%
50% least deprived	20%

Half of the schools visited are located in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. These schools are:

Ysgol Heulfan  
 Ysgol Brynsierfyl  
 Graig Y Rhacca Primary School  
 Sandfields Primary School  
 Glenboi Primary School  
 Maindee Primary School  
 Ysgol Bae Baglan  
 Cefn Hengoed Community School  
 Pen-y-Dre High School  
 Ferndale Community School

A few schools are located in 20%-30% of the most deprived areas in Wales. These schools are:

Cadoxton Primary School  
 Ysgol Rhosymedre  
 Ysgol Talysarn

A few schools are located in the 30-50% most deprived areas in Wales. These are:

Ysgol Golwg Y Cwm  
Ysgol Y Moelwyn  
Millbrook Primary School

A few schools are located in the 50% least deprived areas. These are:

Pencoed Primary School  
Severn Primary School  
Ysgol Gogarth  
Ysgol Terrig

### Contextual data in case studies

As the new census data will not be released until July 2020, the contextual data found in the case studies comes from the January 2019 PLASC, unless otherwise stated. For instance, information provided by the school is identified as such.

### Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## Appendix 3



## Glossary

<b>Communities First</b>	A community focused programme that supported the Welsh Government tackling poverty agenda to 2018
<b>Cynydd Project</b>	An initiative delivered in partnership with local authorities, further education colleges and Careers Wales that works with young people aged 11-24 who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training)
<b>Elklan</b>	A training programme to help education staff be more effective in working with children with speech, language and communication needs
<b>Families First</b>	A Welsh Government initiative, administered by local authorities that provides access to support for families
<b>Families and Schools Together (FAST)</b>	A Save the Children programme that helps schools build bonds between parents, schools and communities to make sure that children get the support they need to do their best at school <a href="https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/uk-work/in-schools/fast">https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/what-we-do/uk-work/in-schools/fast</a>
<b>Family Learning Signature</b>	A programme to help schools develop a picture of family learning capacity and needs. <a href="https://www.signature-academy.com/family">https://www.signature-academy.com/family</a>
<b>Flying Start</b>	Flying Start is the Welsh Government early years programme for families with children under four years of age. It is targeted in some of the most deprived areas in Wales. The scheme aims to provide intensive support services including for parenting, health and speech, language and communication.
<b>Full service schools (USA)</b>	The full service community schools programme provides comprehensive academic, social and health services for students, students' family members and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children <a href="https://www2.ed.gov/programs/communityschools/index.html">https://www2.ed.gov/programs/communityschools/index.html</a>
<b>Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA)</b>	Geographical units used in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)
<b>Maintained schools</b>	A category of schools wholly or substantially maintained by the local authority

<b>Makaton</b>	A unique language programme that uses symbols, signs and speech to enable people to communicate <a href="https://www.makaton.org/aboutMakaton/">https://www.makaton.org/aboutMakaton/</a>
<b>Pupil Development Grant (PDG)</b>	Funding to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and looked after children (LAC). It is intended to overcome the additional barriers that prevent pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential.
<b>Voluntary controlled schools</b>	Schools run by voluntary organisations (typically the Roman Catholic Church or the Church in Wales) and yet closely controlled by the local authority. The local authority employs the staff but the school and buildings are owned by the church, which appoints some members of the governing body.
<b>Voluntary aided schools</b>	These enjoy greater policy and financial independence than voluntary controlled schools. They tend to be religious or faith schools. The governing body employs the staff and sets the entrance criteria and the school buildings and land are usually owned by a voluntary organisation (usually the church).
<b>Welsh Government 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools and Colleges Programme</b>	A long term investment for schools and colleges to develop them as hubs for learning and reduce buildings in poor condition

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