

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Paper presented by Governors Wales – Policy Review: School of the Future

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Governors of schools in Wales welcome the initiative of the Welsh Assembly Government in considering the nature of schools in Wales in the second decade of the 21st Century.
- 1.2 In responding to the challenge of contributing to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's discussions, Governors Wales' observations will return to themes reflected consistently within the confederation's responses to a variety of consultative papers issued not only by the Welsh Assembly Government but by other bodies.
- 1.3 Governors Wales' response to consultations regarding 'Policy Review: School of the Future', upon which this discussion paper is based, focusses upon the under mentioned strands:
- * The fundamental purpose of schools and their value as a resource for community building and learning;
 - * the primacy of the needs of individual pupils as the driving force in curriculum design and its delivery;
 - * the dynamic between curriculum design and its appropriateness, community endorsement, the values of the school, curriculum delivery and standards of achievement;
 - * funding issues relating to the capacity of schools to make adequate provision for teaching and learning with regard to;
 - the national curriculum;
 - the school as a community learning resource and the paradigm of the learning country;
 - * testing, assessment, evaluation and the means of acknowledging the capacity of schools to deliver 'added value' as a result of the both formal and informal learning opportunities provided;
 - * equality of opportunity, social inclusion and widening participation;
 - * the potential for better exploitation of information technology.

2. SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY FOUNDED LEARNING RESOURCES AND SYSTEMS

- 2.1 "All schools are privileged places, where young people gradually learn to open themselves to life as it is ... and then create in themselves an attitude to life as it should be". ⁽¹⁾

The quotation above relates to what the authors considered to be common characteristics shared by all schools, irrespective of their secular or religious nature.

The same document describes all schools as "... communities where values and attitudes are communicated via the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members".

Governors Wales subscribes to these broad statements of the over-arching purpose of education. We do not regard these statements as merely a remote ideal but believe that these fundamental purposes should find concrete expression in the objectives, planning, implementation and the assessment of the performance of schools.

(1) extracted from 'Towards a vision statement, for catholic schools in Wales'

2.2 Governors in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom have, nevertheless, supported the programmes of reform designed to raise standards of achievement to levels necessary to enable the economy to grow and for British business and industry to be internationally competitive.

2.3 In supporting these goals and the educational reforms necessary for their achievement, long-serving governors may recall ministerial statements in the 1980's and early 1990's that spoke of the consumers of education as "... small businesses, industry, the national economy and ... parents". Whereas governors, we believe, may derive some satisfaction from contributing to the needs of "consumers" so defined, many will question the absence in such statements to pupils as the primary consumers of the services that schools provide, albeit with the desirable support of interested parents.

"We are not engaged surely in producing just good performers in the market place, or able technocrats".⁽²⁾

2.4 We are mindful of the opportunities and constraints that a formally structured, universal, national curriculum provides. Governors Wales is also conscious of recent political observations relating to the system of "one-size fits all" comprehensive, secondary education. Earlier political arguments stressed "standards and not structures". Governors Wales, whilst appreciating the argument for diversity in schools, cannot reconcile specialism and diversity with the "one size fits all" curriculum that is nationally prescribed for maintained schools and their pupils.

2.5 Indeed, as recent research apparently suggests, the disinterest of many pupils is a reflection of their disengagement with a curriculum that is perceived to fail to respond to individual needs and, therefore, fails to motivate and interest pupils equally.

2.6 Governors Wales contends that the importance of motivational links between individual pupil needs and the delivered curriculum extends to the match between the curriculum, parental values and perceptions and, indeed, the need for wider community endorsement of the goals of the school and the curriculum.

2.7 This is not to say that governors of schools deny or ignore the interests of local businesses, manufacturing industries or employers in the service sector. On the contrary, we believe that there is a strong motivational imperative provided by job opportunities and long-term career aspirations. Where this link is broken in areas where long-term unemployment is a common experience and job opportunities few it is, perhaps, unsurprising if many young people and their parents perceive education and its nationally imposed curriculum as an irrelevance. The result is, we argue,

disinterest, disruptive behaviour, disengagement and truancy, often parentally endorsed.

2.8 Governors Wales welcomes, therefore, Welsh Assembly Government economic and employment policies that have significantly reduced the number of the unemployed in Wales and have improved employment prospects for our young people.

2.9 Nevertheless, the arguments for schools, pupils, parents and the local community to share perceptions of the value of education, and the nature of schools and their goals remain.

(2) Attributed to Cardinal Basil Hume: 'The Common Good in Education', 1997

2.10 Governors are disappointed that opportunities to prepare for vocational qualifications remain too frequently a second best, low status alternative. Too frequently still, is the success and the standards achieved by schools judged by academic success. Too frequently, are pupil needs potentially jeopardised by government imposed academic targets at 14+.

2.11 Governors Wales argues, therefore, that an examination of standards in schools in Wales should not omit research into the effects of the national curriculum itself as a part determinant of pupil achievement. Many governors may argue for greater flexibility to accommodate a more needs-based approach to teaching and learning in which goals and methods of delivery are negotiated between pupils, parents and teachers.

2.12 Governors Wales notes the references in 'The Learning Country' to developing a range of opportunities designed to encourage participation by pupils. We consider that these aspirations should be extended to negotiations designed to lead to the articulation of community interests in schools and efforts to foster shared perceptions and local endorsement of the curriculum.

2.13 These suggestions are based upon a firm conviction that in the 21st Century that schools need to relate to, communicate with and serve the needs of those of all ages that comprise the community served by the school.

2.14 Perhaps most importantly, the consultations regarding schools of the future present an opportunity to redefine the fundamental purpose of schooling in the context of economic, social, cultural and linguistic factors in Wales. In doing so, Governors Wales hopes that all the major stake holders with an interest in the future of schooling in Wales will have been encouraged to consider current structures, systems and practice afresh.

3. DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

3.1 In its responses to other consultations, Governors Wales has acknowledged the potential for schools to act as a focal point not only for learning but also as a focus for the expression of community interests and concerns. Members of the Assembly will not need reminding that arguments for the retention of small schools, particularly in isolated, rural settings, often emphasise these wider dimensions supporting

community focus and community identity as vital additional purposes for schools over and above their responsibilities for children's learning.

- 3.2 Governors Wales has also sought to encourage governors and professional colleagues in schools to maximise opportunities to utilise the school as a community resource. The rationale for this position can be summarised as follows:-
- (i) Education plant, having been provided from the public purse should be fully utilised and freely available for public use.
 - (ii) The processes of education and its impact upon individual and community life is too precious for its accessibility to be limited to children and young people or for its image and presentation to be confined by the formal, nationally prescribed curriculum.
 - (iii) Other agencies in the community including voluntary organisations and a wealth of other independent groups, societies and clubs active in the life and culture of the community surrounding the school can and do make a contribution to learning. The participation of these informal agents of community learning and development should

be recognised, represented and valued as contributors to educational opportunity, harnessed by schools.
 - (iv) Paternalism and direction are, in the 21st Century, becoming less and less acceptable in society at large. Institutions, and perhaps especially schools, need to relate to, and communicate with the people they serve.
- 3.3 We are, however, conscious that the definition of these wider responsibilities for schools can be traced back to Henry Morris and his village colleges of the 20's and 30's. Later developments in Leicestershire, Sheffield, Devon, Nottinghamshire, Monmouthshire and elsewhere reflected Morris' concerns and perspectives. Although the status, profile and opportunity for adult education, the youth service and leisure and recreation was increased, there was too infrequently any synergy between these extra-school functions and the core activities of teaching and learning focused upon pupils.
- 3.4 Governors Wales looks forward to schools of the future that will develop models of operation based on wider collaboration, consultation and partnership designed to make schools comprehensive of a range of educational, cultural, social and recreational needs of the community.
- 3.5 This requires more than extending the school day and "bolting on" additional services out of normal school hours and at weekends and during holidays.
- 3.6 Governors Wales advocates schools of the future that recognise the need to locate education within a local context in which dialogue, response to identified need and local accountability are regarded as paramount. In such schools, the curriculum would begin where the learners found themselves – acknowledging existing skills, experience and attainment. There would be no attempt to transplant upon learners or an expectation of community endorsement of a curriculum which was "external" to the learner.

- 3.7 Professor Tim Brighouse has described the national curriculum as “Stalinist”. Governors of schools in Wales may not agree with this description but many will have perceived from the privileged position of responsibility, discharged with the advantage of a little distance, the attempts of schools to create every opportunity to bring the individual and his or her experience, the community and its life and landscape, into the curriculum. In its vision of schools of the future, Governors Wales sees Community Schools that take their locality and its activity, people and everyday life as a laboratory of learning for pupils and others; where the need to harness the processes of informal learning which operate beyond the institution are recognised; where local people, when it is relevant and profitable, contribute to classroom activity; and where other adults are extended opportunities to learn alongside children and young people, and contribute their maturity and experience in a process of shared learning.
- 3.8 Governors understand the need to engage parents as partners in the processes of educating children. Parents need to be helped to realise the nature of the responsibility they bear in supporting their children and, perhaps equally significantly, the opportunities they can take as a means of promoting their own learning and personal development through both formal and informal means. The Community School, its ethos and practices, takes as a priority the task of developing the means to reach out to parents as well as welcoming parents into the school. Crucially, home school liaison can be employed to ensure that parents are helped to understand education development; be kept informed about their children’s progress; engage with the curriculum and their children’s learning by participating with them and so on.
- 3.9 It is, Governors Wales argues, therefore difficult to perceive schools as anything other than essential resources supporting the life and development of local communities. Schools can provide facilities, but also a wide spectrum of services and support, enhancing community life and promoting community development.
- 3.10 We accept, however, that governing bodies, the management teams of schools and, indeed, the resources available to schools will need to encompass a community dimension if wider community responsibilities are to become part of the core business of schools and not a supplementary agenda. There is, we believe, a community ethos that deserves to be the focus of training and development. There are messages to be conveyed within the school and from the school to its community. These are that:
- (i) Education relates to the individual living in the community – local, national and global. It is, therefore, a community priority and should be taken seriously.
 - (ii) Learning should be continuous, lifelong and can be shared and enjoyed by adults and children together.
 - (iii) The education of the rising generation is the responsibility of everyone in the community in partnership with professional educators – “the overriding concern of the adult community, for its own health, must be the education and nurture of its young”; *
 - (iv) Parents and the community at large have a vested interest in the academic and other dimensions of a school’s performance;

- (v) The school's buildings and equipment, where provided from public funds, belong to the community which has an interest in their general standard, adequacy, maintenance and care.
- (vi) The whole community is a stakeholder exercising an interest in the operations of the school and have a part to play by influencing its methods, organisation and management.
- (vii) The school is a focus for learning conduct in both formal and informal contexts.
- (viii) The school may serve social, cultural and recreational purposes as well as educational ones.
- (ix) The school identifies with and responds to, needs peculiar to the locality.
- (x) The school is a focus for agencies active in the community.
- (xi) The school reaches out in its effort to serve community needs and interests in addition to welcoming the community into the school.
- (xii) The school serves the needs of all ages and whilst appreciating that children, adolescents and adults may have distinct needs and characteristics, they share many similarities and should enjoy equal status.
- (xiii) The school is a precious community resource whose use must be maximised.
- (xiv) The differing needs of individuals can be accommodated in harmony and equality of

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opportunity and social inclusion should be hallmarks of provision.

- (xv) Those with special needs are given an appropriate priority in the allocation of resources.
- (xvi) Education is both lifelong and continuous and its processes should not be confined by conventional notions of "school", "school day", "formal" and "informal", "education", "leisure", "pupil" and so on.
- (xvii) The curriculum is shaped by the community and implemented with its consent, approval and support.
- (xviii) The Community School efficiently harnesses resources derived from a range of agencies and providers in order that needs can be met rather than ideals frustrated.

4. THE CURRICULUM

4.1 We believe that the vision of Community Schools described earlier, requires as a prerequisite, a more responsive, flexible curriculum. Governors Wales appreciates, however, the role of a nationally prescribed curriculum both in providing a means of establishing comparators for standards of achievement but also as a means of

focusing upon the improvement in the performance of schools. Nevertheless, a “long tail of under-achievement” stubbornly persists.

- 4.2 The work of Abraham Maslow and others draws attention to the significance of human need as a prime source of behavioural motivation. Many governors consider that, for a sizeable minority of pupils, the national curriculum as currently defined, is alien to their backgrounds, experience, needs and expectations. In some schools, this may be compounded by an over reliance upon a framework of rules and procedures reflecting institutional needs rather than the realities and characteristics of the lives of many pupils. Although this may be a description of “worst case scenario” where there is perceived irrelevance or unnecessary restriction, it is not surprising if pupil reactions are negative, or an expression of alienation. The result is frequently truancy, often condoned by parents or aggression and disruption whilst in school.
- 4.3 Too frequently, many governors believe, the under achievement of pupils reflects the negative attitudes of their parents often conditioned by their own failure whilst in school. There is, therefore, a need to convince parents and children of the relevance of education and for the design of the curriculum to be appreciated as a primary agent in promoting supportive parental and pupil perceptions. Equally important is the setting of realistic, achievable and relevant goals for pupils, designed to give pupils experience of success and contributing to the progressive development of confidence and self-esteem.
- 4.4 Governors Wales recognises the significance of the Welsh Assembly Government’s desire to implement policies for education that are distinctly Welsh and that the 2002 Education Act enables potential divergence from policies applying elsewhere. We trust that this will result in the development of a curriculum that is flexible, responsive and attuned to the cultures and language of Wales.
- 4.5 Governors Wales appreciates that individual schools may already exercise a degree of flexibility as regards the national curriculum or offer some pupils the opportunity to follow an “alternative curriculum”, or have introduced other innovative approaches to curriculum design and delivery. We trust, however, that in its deliberations concerning the schools of the future, the Welsh Assembly Government will commission a thorough review of the curriculum with a view to its redefinition for the second decade of the 21st Century. We believe that the conditions should be created for innovation to be unfettered and valued.
- 4.6 Some aspects of the curriculum that are a current concern to governors are:-
- An under emphasis upon vocational education.
 - A decline in foreign language provision and take-up.
 - General concern about the provision for 14 to 19 year olds.
 - A need for the curriculum to provide for transferable skills that will prepare students for adapting to different occupation or developing roles within a single occupation arising from economic, social and technological change.
 - A greater emphasis upon IT skills and better exploitation of IT as a learning tool.
- 4.7 It is difficult to consider the curriculum without also considering the current arrangements for national testing and public examinations. Governors of secondary schools in Wales will be relieved that this summer’s crisis regarding grades at Advanced Level does not extend to students studying with the Welsh Joint Education

Committee's examinations. Nevertheless, some students in some schools in Wales follow the syllabus and take examinations offered by Boards in England. We trust that Ministers will ensure that, in future, students may have confidence in the systems of assessment and grading employed, whether criterion or norm referenced, irrespective of the Examination Board concerned.

4.8 Governors Wales believes that attention must be paid to the effects of the current testing and examination regime upon pupil stress. We are concerned that recent surveys of young people suggest that many experience significant stress as a result of coursework, curriculum tests, public examinations and both parental and teacher pressure.

4.9 Surprisingly, the presence of qualified youth workers, providing informal learning activities, information, advice, guidance and counselling on school premises is, in 2002, a rarity. Indeed, such arrangements where they exist are considered to be innovative. Governors Wales commends such arrangements as a means of not only enhancing the level of personal and peer support to pupils but also as a means of providing an informal, but complementary liberal dimension to the curriculum and to pupils' experience of school.

5. TEACHERS AND TEACHING

5.1 Governors Wales, whilst acknowledging the increasing influence upon Information Technology and other technological developments in our day to day lives finds it difficult to subscribe to the view that the ultimate result of the application of new technologies will be the need for fewer teachers in schools. This is not to deny the potential for independent, self directed or even incidental, informal learning as a result of accessing the internet, television or other media. Nor does our view assume that "teaching" is more important than learning. Nevertheless, Governors Wales believes that the best, most significant, permanent life-changing experiences for pupils are those that arise from the inspirational practice of the best teachers. Nor should governors, parents or teachers underestimate the degree to which teachers act as role models for their pupils. The success of the school of the future rests, therefore, upon the skills, qualities and commitment of the teachers of the future; teachers who are appropriately qualified, motivated and rewarded for the responsibilities that they discharge.

5.2 Governors Wales is encouraged by recent statements that imply that new education legislation suggests a shift in emphasis to "culture, creativity and community" as a new mantra for education. Governors Wales has regarded with concern measures that have suggested that successful teaching can be defined as a craft – that is, the careful application of a number of prescribed processes that will achieve the desired result. It is hoped that a new emphasis upon creativity will include an acknowledgement that the art of teaching requires that teachers creatively engage with pupils, meeting their needs and providing motivation by their capacity to revise new, interesting and challenging means of promoting learning. Equally, we trust that learning will not be restricted to experiences that can be provided solely in the classroom but in the community and beyond. Despite the need to ensure, above all, the safety of pupils both in and whilst engaged in learning activities outside the school, governors hope the schools of the future will not be deterred from providing extra-school educational visits, outdoor activities, residential experiences and visits to other countries for fear that harm to pupils will result in action in the courts.

- 5.3 These and other considerations require not only the best in terms of the commitment and skills of teachers but that the investment in inspection as an agent of quality assurance is balanced by an appropriate investment in teacher support and training. We trust that schools of the future will pay appropriate attention to the support and development of their most valuable, and hopefully valued resource, their staff. However, greater commitment by schools to community responsibilities will present new challenges for teachers and other staff; require additional skills and training; may suggest more flexible patterns of teacher deployment; need better provision of teacher support and technical support staff; require the application of additional resources; and place additional demands upon governing bodies.
- 5.4 Admirable though it may be for the 2002 Education Act to give governing bodies the option of assuming responsibility for encouraging and developing greater community use of schools, we note the restrictions that will apply to financial management. We appreciate the argument for prohibiting cross-subsidy, but governors will be concerned to press the case for an adequate, equitable, base level of funding that also reflects relevant factors with regard to local needs and circumstances. This base-level funding must be appropriate for sustaining the core activity of the school – the provision of teaching and learning for pupils.
- 5.5 Nevertheless, despite the potential of schools to draw upon the voluntary sector, charitable organisations and other bodies in order to help develop the function of schools as community resources, we believe that additional direct funding will be required for the co-ordination and management of wider community responsibilities.

6. A STEP BACKWARDS INTO THE FUTURE

- 6.1 Governors Wales has, in response to other consultations, referred to many of the previously mentioned issues in the context of the standards agenda. Whereas we support the community school model as an exciting way forward, Governors Wales is conscious that these ideas are neither new, nor untested.
- 6.2 In 1977 during “Youth Charter 2000”, a conference for young people looking forward to the millennium, the then Secretary of State for Education, Mrs Shirley Williams described community schools as “ ... the bright stars in a dark education sky”.
- 6.3 We are aware that many community school “innovations” may be new to some, but were in evidence in the mid 1960’s and 1970’s. Community colleges with after school provision for adults and provision for young people and with youth workers deployed as members of the staff of the school could be found, for example, in Monmouthshire and Glamorgan. Impressive jointly provided leisure facilities available to both school pupils and the wider community were developed in Gwent. Further afield, the Stantonbury Campus not only provided a theatre, art gallery and library in addition to leisure facilities; deployed every member of the teaching staff in the role of family liaison with a systematic programme of home visiting also developed its “Day 10” Curriculum feature, where, on alternate Fridays, the formal curriculum was suspended and pupils were engaged in community service, educational visits, creative activities and so on. The Sutton Centre provided shopping centre access to school and community facilities and highly developed opportunities for cross age learning. Jointly provided leisure facilities enjoyed seven-day usage and included ... an ice rink! The Abraham Moss Centre overcame barriers to access to further education by not only working actively with the local community but also by combining a school and a college of further education.

- 6.4 We note, however, that the community school is an expression not of improved investment in facilities, but of an ethos that binds school and community together. Education is a process, which is about change – change in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of those who learn. In community schools, however, we believe that the process does not confine itself to the rising generation of young people but is inclusive of those with whom young people will be in immediate contact in the world outside school. The overriding goal is to change community perceptions about the value of learning and education; about the purpose, motives and methods of the institutions which promote learning; about the community; and about self.
- 6.5 Lavish facilities are, therefore, not essential prerequisites of community schools or of the school of the future. Indeed, unless carefully managed, the presentation to the public of prestige facilities can thwart the educational purpose that they were intended to support.
- 6.6 Governors Wales reiterates its argument that schools provide a potential focus for community life and their pupils a common denominator in an increasingly fragmented society. Governors may provide evidence of large numbers of parents and others in our communities whose common experience is:
- Failure in education, work or personal relationships;
 - Exploitation and manipulation by forces which they can neither understand or control;
 - Confusion arising from rapid and accelerating social, economic and technological changes;
 - Feelings of marginalisation and low self esteem.
- 6.7 Strikingly, schools that serve a purely utilitarian purpose will, Governors Wales contends, never impact upon such experiences; never provide the supports or the life changing opportunities or moments when perceptions of unimagined and unachieved potential are glimpsed. We believe that schools of the future need to offer more than “learning for earning” but that the successful community school will be able to demonstrate its contribution to local and national social and economic interests.
- 6.8 Governors Wales believes that some lessons for the school of the future can be learned from an era when “community school” meant something other than its meaning in current legislation.
- 6.9 We urge members of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee to consider some of the above-mentioned observations for ideals and practices which may inspire the schools of the future in Wales.

“We celebrate the past to awaken the future”
J.F.Kennedy, 14th August 1960