



EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

***SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER WITH REGARD
TO QUESTIONS POSED BY COMMITTEE
MEMBERS ARISING FROM
GOVERNORS WALES' PRESENTATION***

– SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

**(PRESENTED TO THE MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY 23RD JANUARY 2003)**

19TH FEBRUARY 2003

**PRESENTATION TO THE
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY, 23RD JANUARY 2003**

Supplementary Paper

The under-mentioned observations arise from questions received from committee members during Governors Wales' presentation:

1. Question from the Minister

It was important that governing bodies took account of their new powers in the Education Act 2002 to provide community facilities. How would Governors Wales persuade governing bodies to use these permissive powers and to consult with their LEA on proposals for community use of their school?

Governors Wales' response

- 1.1 Governors Wales accepts that its role is not only to reflect the concerns of governors of schools in Wales but to support governor development and influence the thinking of individual governors.
- 1.2 As our presentation suggested, a succession of Governors Wales responses to various other consultations have stressed the importance of schools as focal points in the community and important facilities for community learning, leisure and recreation. Despite the existing responsibilities of governing bodies, we seek to encourage governors of schools to exercise the powers that the Education Act 2002 enables. Governors Wales hopes to:
 - i) focus one of its annual or proposed regional conferences upon the community school;
 - ii) explore the implications of the Education Act 2002 during the course of management committee meetings and subject seminars for management committee members;
 - iii) extensively revise its Governors Handbook with regard to the provisions of the new Education Act and secure funding for its distribution to governors;
 - iv) publish guidance to governors that explores the concept, principles and practice of community activities focused upon schools;
 - v) extend and develop the range of practical supports in the field discharged by Governors Wales' development staff.
 - vi) represent the views of governors with regard to practical challenges and implementational constraints, to the minister.

- 1.3 Governors Wales recognises that adequate responses to the developmental needs of governors with regard to new responsibilities for community activities will require the investment of appropriate resources for the purpose. Each new policy initiative launched by the Welsh Assembly Government with regard to schools, ultimately has implications for the nature and quality of the support services that are needed to ensure that governors may play an effective role in securing implementation.
- 1.4 Whereas Governors Wales is anxious to develop and deliver support services for governors, which compliment those provided by LEAs in Wales, we rely upon the grant aid provided by the Welsh Assembly Government. Although Governors Wales is a small organisation, we believe that we exercise a significant, and in relation to our size, disproportionate influence upon our constituency comprising some 26,000 governors of schools. We are grateful for the financial support of the Welsh Assembly Government and LEAs in Wales. As we enter a new three-year funding period on 1st April 2003, we trust that the funding that we receive will match Governors Wales' developmental aspirations and the needs of governors for information, advice, guidance and training.

2. Question from Cynog Dafis AM

It was interesting to hear your comments about the inspirational nature of some teaching, how do you see the role of teachers in the school of the future?

Governors Wales' response

- 2.1 Despite the development and application of new technologies in the classroom, Governors Wales regards these as aids to teaching and learning and not technological substitutes for the expert interventions of a qualified teacher. We sought during our presentation to highlight the importance of teaching as an art, suggesting that the education system should recreate the conditions where teachers can be creative and as innovative as necessary in order to engage the interests and abilities of pupils. We also argued that the curriculum, and the courses of study within it should be more flexible and capable of responding to the needs of individual pupils in order to motivate and encourage them to succeed. Whilst not suggesting that the generality of teachers in Wale employ a predominantly didactic approach, we do consider that teachers need to employ an increasingly sophisticated and varied range of teaching methods focused upon the active participation of learners. In this respect, Governors Wales suggests that some of the methods employed, albeit in less formal learning situations, by experienced youth workers are worthy of emulation in schools.
- 2.2 Although we recognise that current conditions in schools may be different, we make no apology for harking back to an era when many of the teaching staff of the community schools of the day were frequently engaged in work with adults and young people during the evenings and at weekends. Whereas this was an additional, optional, paid commitment to adult education or youth work, many believed that extending the focus of learning to the parents of pupils currently enrolled, the parents of children attending feeder schools and others, was invaluable in cementing the bond between school, parents and the community at large. Equally, those teachers comfortable with engaging with young people via activities sponsored by the youth

service, frequently on the school site, found that the dual role provided new insights into the needs and family circumstances of individual pupils, and helped develop a new dimension of their relationships with those they taught which brought benefits to their classroom relationships, practice and effectiveness.

- 2.3 In the most well developed community schools of the 1970s, some teaching staff were flexibly deployed over the extended school day and at weekends. It was not unusual that some members of staff might begin the day at 2.00pm, teaching examination classes until 4.00pm; engage in a programme of home visits to discuss pupils progress with parents from 4.00pm until 6.30pm; and work with an adult education class or youth group from 7.00pm until 9.30pm.
- 2.4 Governors Wales acknowledges that not all teaching staff would favour such deployment or necessarily be comfortable and capable of performing both teaching and youth worker roles in and beyond the classroom. Equally, however, we recognise that flexible timetabling and deployment of staff would be worth considering if the schools of the future are to exert a direct influence upon community development and lifelong learning. It is also clear that the resourcing of schools would need to reflect the cost of providing for community access and activity; the youth service would need to be re-directed and re-vivified; and the adult education service would require better resourcing and its curriculum freed from goals, standards, and forms of accreditation focused upon employment prospects as opposed to learning goals reflective of individual needs, personal development, confidence and self esteem.
- 2.5 Our belief in the community schools described in our original paper suggests a wider role for some teachers than is currently the norm. We reaffirm, however, our belief in teachers as role models and the source of activity and experience. For children and young people, whether within the framework of the curriculum or through the medium of extra-curricular activity, what teachers inspire can be genuinely life changing and life enhancing. We trust that the schools of the future in Wales will provide opportunities and experiences that are both rewarding, enjoyable and an inspiration for pupils, parents, the wider community and staff alike.

3. Question from Cynog Dafis AM

How can governors be encouraged to embrace federation as an alternative to the closure of small schools?

Governors Wales' response

- 3.1 Governors Wales believes that governors of schools in Wales should and do place the best interests of pupils to the fore in their decision-making. We do not doubt, therefore, that governors will, however reluctantly, consider federation to be preferable to closure. Undeniably, however, governors will need to be convinced that local arrangements will satisfy:-
- i) the need for the effective leadership of the schools comprising the federation minimising the potential "flit-factor" of the federation head teacher whose knowledge of each school is limited but whose time devoted to travel between each school is extensive;

- ii) the need for the federated governing body to be neither too large to be effective nor too small to be considered to be genuinely accountable to parents and the wider communities.
- iii) the need that the agenda for meetings is sensitively and carefully constructed to ensure that interests across the federation are given equal weight, and equal opportunity for consideration and debate.

4. Question by Helen Mary Jones AM

To what extent do governors on the ground follow and endorse the argument for the community responsibilities of schools that the Governors Wales paper suggests?

Governors Wales' response

- 4.1 We cannot suggest that governance of schools in Wales is 'state of the art' or that many governors have sought or created opportunities to reflect upon big picture issues such as schools of the future. This is not to say that the increasingly wide range of responsibilities discharged by governors precludes such consideration, nor that governors are, as a rule, preoccupied by the minutiae of school management. It does suggest, in our opinion, that governors need support, and encouragement in making the space necessary in the agendas of governing body meetings to consider very fundamental aspects of education philosophy, policy and practice. It seemed to Governors Wales, for example, that the invitation to exercise blue-skies thinking with regard to schools in Wales in 2015 and beyond, suggested reflection upon the purpose of schools and schooling as a starting point. We hope that the influence and encouragement of Governors Wales field development staff will increasingly focus governing body debate on major issues concerning the development of education policy, the curriculum and good practice in schools in Wales. We cannot claim, therefore, that all governors will have sufficient knowledge of the community school model to appreciate its advantages and benefits.
- 4.2 We believe, nevertheless, that the majority of governors are protective of schools as unifying agents in community life and development. It would not be unsurprising, therefore, if the majority of governors could not be persuaded as to the qualities, values and benefits of the community school.