

A briefing on community cohesion

Challenges and opportunities for Out-of-School-Hours Learning and Community Focused Schools

'Schools already play a major role in helping to support pupils' personal and social development by preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life. Guidelines on promoting and supporting pupils' personal and social development (ACCAC, 2000) recognise: "... the challenges schools face in a diverse developing society ... in empowering pupils to be active, informed and responsible citizens ... and the challenges of being a citizen in Wales and the world".' (Transforming schools, Estyn, 2007, Para 41)

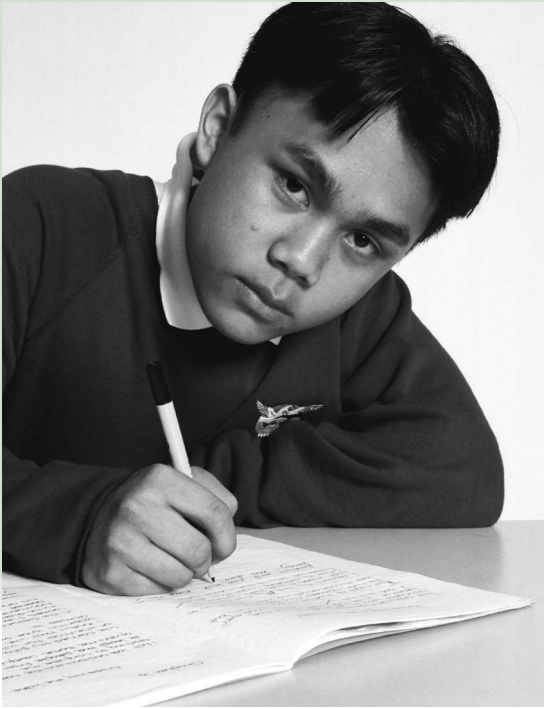


Contents

The purpose of this briefing	2
Introduction	3
Context – the population of Wales	3
What is community cohesion?	5
How community cohesion links with other developments	6
Why does it matter to me?	7
How can Community Focused Schools and Out-of- School-Hours Learning help to promote community cohesion?	7
Conclusion	8
Top tips	9
Case studies	10

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Building learning communities



The purpose of this briefing

This briefing paper has been prepared to give those involved in the development of Community Focused Schools (CFS) and Out-of-School-Hours Learning (OSHL) a quick overview of community cohesion. It includes some case studies showing how current activity can often make a real contribution to creating more cohesive communities. The paper aims to clarify what is meant by community cohesion and to show how, through developing Community Focused Schools and OSHL approaches, schools, and a wide range of their partners, can play a role in fostering cohesion. Community cohesion is not a new idea, but the recent debates about community cohesion and work on promoting it provide an opportunity for exploring ideas and looking at things slightly differently.

The key question addressed in this paper is: 'How can a school community help to foster cohesion?'

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ContinYou Cymru, Anchor Court,
First Floor, Keen Road, Cardiff CF24 5JW

Tel: 029 2047 8929 Fax: 029 2047 8930

Email: info.cardiff@continyou.org.uk

Website: www.continyou.org.uk

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Definitions

Community Focused Schools

'A community focused school is one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community. Across Wales many schools already provide some community services including adult education, study support, ICT facilities and community sports programmes.'

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

Out-of-School-Hours Learning (OSHL)

'[Out-of-School-Hours Learning] is learning activity outside normal lessons which young people take part in voluntarily. [It] is, accordingly, an inclusive term, embracing many activities – with many names and [taking place in a variety of locations]. Its purpose is to improve young people's motivation, build their self-esteem and help them become more effective learners [and citizens].'

Adapted from Study Support: a National Framework for Extending Learning Opportunities, DfES, 2006

Introduction

Within the UK, discussions about community cohesion came to the fore after the disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001. The Home Office led the initial policy response, which resulted in the Cantle report. However, recent debates suggest that this is not just an issue for northern cities in England. The report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion *Our Shared Future* (2007), chaired by a local government chief executive, has outlined some new possible directions of travel for all communities. (This Commission drew its evidence from, and makes recommendations for, England, but the analysis and suggestions are relevant to the whole of the UK, including Wales.) Cohesion is viewed by the Commission as the process that must happen in all communities to ensure that different groups of people get on well together. This is, therefore, not just about areas with high populations of people from minority ethnic groups. As the briefing for the *Schools ETC* Cohesion Awards made clear earlier in 2007: 'This Award is not only for schools in areas that have concentrations of mixed ethnic or religious groups. Schools in all areas that have done out-of-school-hours citizenship work relating to community cohesion are encouraged to apply.'

(*Schools ETC* is the quarterly magazine published by ContinYou on all issues relating to community education. The Awards are an annual occurrence, with the theme varying from year to year.)

There is an opportunity and a challenge for those involved in Community Focused Schools and OSHL in recognising the diversity of the people of Wales. Cities with large ethnic minority populations are likely to be the areas where issues of cohesion are most obviously in evidence. However, *Our Shared Future* shows that, when a significant (in local terms) number of migrants suddenly arrive in an area where most people come from similar backgrounds, this may give rise to severe difficulties (for both existing and new residents), as the support infrastructure is rarely present in these areas. Also, in some more 'homogeneous' areas (with a very high percentage of people from similar backgrounds), misunderstandings and 'a fear of the new' can raise important issues that need to be addressed. It is important to recognise that community cohesion relates not only to ethnicity, culture or religion, but also to age, lifestyle, disability and a range of other factors that divide people from each other. It can, therefore, be clearly seen that community cohesion is an issue for all communities and all schools in Wales to consider.

Schools can have a dramatic impact on the success (or otherwise) of community cohesion. In this short briefing, we will be looking at the roles of Out-of-School-Hours Learning (OSHL) and Community Focused Schools developments in contributing to, and supporting, the creation of cohesive communities throughout Wales.

In its annual survey, *Living in Wales 2006*, the Local Government Data Unit – Wales reported that:

- 11% of respondents stated that, in the last five years, they had suffered some form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- the second most common reason given by respondents who suffered discrimination, harassment or victimisation in the last five years, after 'other', was race/nationality.

Context – the population of Wales

In 2001, the census showed Wales had a population of 2.96 million. At that time, 75% of the total population of Wales had been born in Wales; 20% had been born in England; 3% elsewhere in the European Community; and 2% outside the countries of the European Community. Anecdotal evidence suggests the percentage from Eastern Europe may well have increased significantly since 2001, following the accession of further countries to the European Community.

Like the other three countries in the United Kingdom, Wales is geographically very diverse. The people of Wales are equally diverse, with people from very differing cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds all

living here. As the figures above show, about one quarter of the people of Wales were not born here, and of course many who were born in Wales have family links to many other countries elsewhere in the UK, as well as in Europe and further afield. These people, or their parents or grandparents, moved to Wales for a wide range of reasons – mainly, but not solely, economic. The Welsh Assembly Government estimates that this pattern of internal migration will continue, with the population of Wales increasing to 3.16 million by 2021, with about 90% of that increase being accounted for by net internal migration from elsewhere in the UK or from other countries.

There are differences in the make-up of the population between regions, within regions and even within towns and villages. The 2001 census noted people's ethnic group, religion (where stated) and country of origin for each Welsh county. The range at that level is quite marked. For example, the highest percentages of non-white residents in 2001 were in Cardiff (8.4%), Newport (4.8%) and Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan (2.2% each). The lowest percentages were in Ynys Môn (0.7%), and in Flintshire and Blaenau Gwent (0.8% each). When looking at country of birth outside the UK, the same pattern is repeated for high percentages (Cardiff 6.9%, Newport 3.8% and the Vale of Glamorgan 3.3%), but it is some of the Valleys' communities that have the lowest percentages (Blaenau Gwent 1.0%, Merthyr Tydfil 1.2% and Neath Port Talbot 1.5%).

As one of the case studies on the website demonstrates (see www.continyou.org.uk/cohesioncasestudies), another challenge to community cohesion is temporary housing and the short length of time that some families spend in areas before being moved on by the authorities.

So what effect does this have? Do such families get a chance to become part of a community? Does the community have a chance to get to know them? What impact does this have on the children attending schools – their participation, friendship groups and attainment? Such situations can be very challenging for the children and their families, and for schools and the community.

To this diverse and varied picture an extra richness is added by the differential use of Welsh as a first or dual first language. Welsh speaking is on the increase, fostered by excellent cultural organisations such as Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Mentrau Iaith and the Welsh Language Board (Bwrdd Yr Iaith Gymraeg), and by the growth and development of Welsh-medium schools and of the teaching of Welsh in English medium schools. Welsh speaking is especially strong in the north and parts of the west (Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Gwynedd, and Ynys Môn all have over 50% of the population able to speak Welsh). It is growing most quickly in some parts of the south and east (Torfaen's percentage increased from 2.5% in 1991 to 11.1% in 2001; similarly Blaenau Gwent increased from 2.2% to 9.5%, Monmouthshire from 2.1% to 9.3% and Newport from 2.3% to 10.0%).

Typically, new migrant groups from outside the UK (the Indian sub-continent, Africa, the Caribbean and latterly Eastern Europe) tend to settle in larger towns and cities. However, the people who move to Wales from other UK countries do not follow this pattern, often choosing to live in more suburban, rural or semi-rural areas.

Schools and community organisations need to be aware of the implications of these patterns of migration as they develop their OSHL and Community Focused Schools provision. This is at the heart of community cohesion – recognising and celebrating cultural diversity, while not threatening in any way the cultural roots and heritage of the indigenous population.

20.8% of the population of Wales said they were able to speak Welsh in 2001. This compares with 18.7% in 1991. The highest percentage of Welsh speakers was found among children – for example, it was 40.8% in children aged 5 to 15 years. 24.7% of people (aged 3 and over) born in Wales could speak Welsh in 2001 and 9.0% of people born outside Wales could speak Welsh.



What is community cohesion?

Our Shared Future, the report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), defines integration and cohesion as follows:

'An integrated and cohesive community is one where:

- *There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or country*
- *There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in turn*
- *Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment*
- *There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny*
- *There is a strong recognition of the contributions of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common*
- *There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods.'*

Studies show that cohesion is at risk in areas where there is a lack of community leadership. It is here particularly that Community Focused Schools and Out-of-School-Hours Learning can play a vital role – through exploring opportunities, opening the doors to new experiences and sharing resources, for example.

Our Shared Future and recent work from the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) have shown that evidence of what drives integration and cohesion is very patchy. However, it is clear that the factors affecting cohesion are complex and vary from place to place. No single factor determines cohesion – rather, communities with low cohesion will generally have experienced a series of challenging factors simultaneously (for example, perhaps a

combination of poverty, lack of access to jobs, an influx of new workers, high crime rates and a fast pace of change). However, many areas in the UK with high levels of deprivation are nevertheless able to achieve high levels of cohesion because local action, often by schools and their partners, has helped to build resilience to counter the effects of deprivation.

An important factor in perceptions of 'settled communities' is that in them people recognise that there is a fair and equitable allocation of public services. There also appears to be an important correlation between the availability of community facilities, such as community centres, and cohesion. Again, schools can make a very significant contribution to providing these facilities with their partners.

Promoting interaction – four key spheres

The Commission on Integration and Cohesion identifies four spheres for possible action:

- schools;
- the workplace;
- sports, culture and leisure facilities;
- shared public spaces and residential areas.

It emphasises the need to promote meaningful interaction in all these spheres. We believe that many schools will readily recognise the potential role of Community Focused Schools and OSHL in providing that interaction and integration.

Community cohesion poses real challenges for schools and their partners in terms of:

- **securing commitment and ownership** – it is essential that the local approach to community cohesion is developed and owned by local agencies, organisations and communities;
- **understanding the dynamics** – schools (working with their partners) have a key role to play in building cohesive communities at neighbourhood level. Schools will need to work through the relevant governance structures, such as community councils and school governing bodies to promote community cohesion and tackle any potential tension or conflict;

- **demonstrating leadership** – strong leadership involves countering individuals or groups that aim to exploit or create tensions between communities. Good leaders will find imaginative ways of engaging with communities and creating a sense of belonging within an area. Strong leadership does not mean forcing things through – it does mean having a clear vision of what it is that the group

or community wants to achieve and understanding how to get things done without creating difficulties further down the line.

What is clear is that schools need to develop strong links with their communities, engage with parents and carers from different backgrounds, and involve local people in their school.

How community cohesion links with other developments

The Welsh Assembly Government has adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis of its work for children and young people. This is expressed in the seven core aims of *Rights to Action* – to ensure that all children:

- 1 have a flying start in life;
- 2 have a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities;
- 3 enjoy the best possible health, and are free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation;
- 4 have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities;
- 5 are listened to and treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised;
- 6 have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional well-being;
- 7 are not disadvantaged by poverty.

From September 2008, all local authorities are required to publish a Children and Young People's Plan, setting out how the services and activities they provide for children and young people will help to fulfil each of the core aims. Schools need to be aware of the plan for their local authority area, as the work they do in fostering community cohesion should support these core aims.

The core aims of *Rights to Action* are very relevant to the work of fostering cohesion. Helping to develop the conditions where cohesive communities flourish will contribute both directly and indirectly to all of these core aims, but perhaps most obviously to core aims 3, 4, 5 and 6. Equally, making progress on the core aims can make a major contribution to achieving a cohesive society.

In its 2007 document *A Wales Fit for Children and Young People*, Children in Wales recommends sixteen areas for immediate

action. Two of these are of relevance here:

- promote children and young people as citizens in their communities;
- improve the lives of children and young people seeking asylum.

In *Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales*, the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship policy for youth support services (for 11 to 25 year olds) in Wales, there are ten 'entitlements for young people' (things that the Assembly believes that every young person in Wales deserves in order to be able to take advantage of the opportunities and choices that they will be presented with). These include:

- **feeling good:** young people are entitled to feel confident and good about themselves;
- **being individual:** young people are entitled: to be treated with respect; to be treated as an equal by everyone; to be recognised for what they have to contribute; to be recognised for their achievements and celebrate what they achieve;
- **safety and security:** young people are entitled to live in a safe, secure home and community. In order to make the most of all the opportunities that life presents, young people need to feel safe, secure and free from threats and bullying. The people who are there to help them, including their local community, school and the police, should help to make them feel safe.

These three entitlements relate particularly to the agenda of community cohesion – it's about being confident, individual and being safe being a confident individual. It's almost a definition of what OSHL is about and part of what Community Focused Schools are about.

Why does it matter to me?

So, what are the implications for schools, their partners and local authorities? Previous sections of this briefing have identified that:

- cohesion is a multi-faceted phenomena and not solely about ethnicity and related factors;
- the population of Wales is extremely varied and is changing dynamically;
- schools and their partners have a role to play in tackling issues relating to the cohesion agenda;
- OSHL and Community Focused Schools can contribute to achieving targets and goals identified by a range of reports from the Welsh Assembly, Estyn and others.

Essentially, this is why it matters. Although issues of cohesion may not currently be 'high profile' in most areas of Wales, the dynamic nature of population change suggests that, unless positive action is taken, such issues may well arise in the future and perhaps in unexpected ways and places. Given that prevention is better than cure, it makes a lot of sense for schools and their partners (including importantly their colleagues in the local authority) to address these issues now.

In the following section we will look at how this might best be achieved.

How can Community Focused Schools and Out-of-School-Hours Learning help to promote community cohesion?

Our Shared Future makes clear that the impact of growing diversity is specific to each area. Therefore what is needed is to find local solutions that are relevant to everyone in a particular community, regardless of their background. This is where schools and their partners can make a real impact – acting locally on a national/global issue (following the dictum of René Dubos to 'think globally, act locally'). For that reason, as was made clear in ContinYou's *Community Focused Schools* toolkit, published in 2006 (see page 8), what works in one area with one set of circumstances may not work nearly so well, if at all, in another area and a different context. There are, therefore, no 'prescriptions' – just useful pointers and ideas.

Community Focused Schools and OSHL offer opportunities that may not be so easily

gained in mainstream timetabled sessions or during the school day – there is much more freedom to do what works for you. The approach should, of course, reflect the nature of the school's population and the community it serves. It might be that this would involve work within the school day (within the curriculum) with other schools, either locally or globally, and/or with partners, young people, families and the wider community.

The first requirement is, of course, to know the community. This varies enormously, as described in the 'Context' section of this paper, but it also varies from school to school in other ways – from the small, compact catchment area of a suburban primary school to the huge, and certainly not compact, catchment areas of many rural secondary, Welsh-medium or special schools. Often these schools will have two catchment areas – the one the children come from (often very large) and the local community near the school (much smaller). Both are relevant in this context.

There are many ways of getting to know a community. This briefing paper isn't the place to delve into that area of activity. However, ContinYou and other agencies (for example, local community groups and community development sections of local authorities) can offer help here if required, particularly on activities such as carrying out community audits.



Having developed a clear appreciation of the nature of your community (or communities), it will be clear where there are potential issues that might lead to difficulties with cohesion. The key question then is: 'How can a school community help to foster cohesion?' Only you can answer that, based on your own context. The 'Top tips' (page 9) and the two case studies (pages 10 to 11) should give you some ideas for things you could try. The two case studies, together with five further ones (some from Wales, some from England) on ContinYou's website (www.continyou.org.uk/cohesioncasestudies),

illustrate what can be achieved, often in very challenging circumstances.

However, it is important to recognise that what these schools are doing may not be relevant and/or a practical proposition in your school, in your community or in your circumstances. As always with Community Focused Schools and Out-of-School-Hours Learning, do what works for you in your context. Each journey starts with just a single step!

Conclusion

This isn't in any way an exhaustive review of community cohesion. It does, however, give some indication of its scope and potential.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself.

Does your school/organisation:

- take positive steps to promote good community relations?
- facilitate and encourage the development of strong and positive relationships between people from different religious, cultural and racial backgrounds, and of different ages?

- ensure that resources and activities offered for children, young people (pupils), families and the community are fully inclusive?
- know which organisations are in your area or what support the local authority can offer to help you to do this?

Schools and their partners can make a very real difference to the well-being of the communities they serve – by addressing issues of cohesion, that difference can be made even more profound.

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ContinYou Cymru *Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen – a Toolkit*, 2006 – available via www.continyou.org.uk/walesresources

ContinYou Cymru *Out-of-School-Hours Learning: a Code of Practice*, 2006 – available via www.continyou.org.uk/walesresources

The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) is based at Coventry University and headed by Ted Cattle (the Chair is Oona King).

Institute of Community Cohesion, Futures Institute, 10 Innovation Village, Coventry University Technology Park, Cheetah Way, Coventry CV1 2TL
Tel: 024 7679 5757
Email: cohesion@coventry.ac.uk

Community Focused Schools: Making it Happen – a Toolkit was published in November 2006 by ContinYou Cymru, with support from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales. Each school in Wales should have received a copy via its local education authority. The toolkit helps schools and others to develop a Community Focused Schools approach.

Top tips

- Use community resources (voluntary groups, faith groups and so on) in OSHL activities (for example, through mentoring schemes) in order to help pupils to understand others, through promoting discussion and debate about common values and diversity, and to challenge prejudice and stereotyping. This might be supported by and enriched through fieldwork, visits and meetings with members of different communities.
- Welcome a diverse array of groups to use the resources of the school for their own activities (with appropriate safeguards, as described in ContinYou Cymru's *Community Focused Schools* toolkit and its *Code of Practice* for Out-of-School-Hours Learning).
- Remove, as far as resources allow, barriers to access and participation by people with disabilities (whether these are physical or learning disabilities).
- Provide opportunities for children, young people and their families to interact with others from different backgrounds – the Pentrehafod case study gives some good examples of this in practice. Interestingly, Darra Singh (the Chair of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion) has said: 'We saw some good examples of school twinning, but it is quite patchy at the moment, so we asked for much more drive to move that forward in terms of a national school twinning programme. Particularly where you've got schools which don't have a varied school profile in terms of people's backgrounds.' (*Local Government Chronicle*, August 2007).
- Develop, or re-invigorate, the 'penpal' system, perhaps updated for the modern age into an 'email-pal' system – this could be a really helpful step towards cultural understanding (with appropriate safeguards, of course).
- Offer support through OSHL (or through supplementary schools) for pupils for whom English is an additional language, to enable them to achieve at the highest possible level in English (supplementary schools, set up on a voluntary basis by local community groups, offer out-of-school-hours educational opportunities to children and young people, many of whom come from minority ethnic communities).
- Extend engagement activities with parents and others in the community through coffee mornings, cooking or arts-based activities, parent and child courses or other activities.
- Provide extended services, including things such as adult and family learning, information and communications technology, or English classes for speakers of other languages.
- Provide or participate in community sporting events.
- Organise or participate in regular inter-cultural events aimed at promoting good community relations.
- Develop activities aimed specifically at pupils with particular needs (such as refugees, travellers, looked-after children or under-achieving groups) – see the case study from Pentrehafod.
- Link with schools with different racial/religious mixes for activities/events.
- Provide extra pastoral/family/mentoring/buddying support for children/families of refugees or asylum seekers.
- Offer citizenship activities as part of OSHL provision.
- Build partnerships between faith schools and secular schools.
- Undertake outreach work with families in different communities.
- Link with supplementary schools, in communities where these exist.
- Run women-only keep-fit classes to promote healthy lifestyles for women unable to attend public classes on religious grounds. For example, the keep-fit classes at Camp Primary School in St Albans, which have been running for two years, have been one of their most successful initiatives for promoting positive cross-community relations. They are very popular with both Muslim and non-Muslim women.
- Provide 'reading buddies' and 'numeracy buddies'. As well as offering friendship and one-to-one support for children, buddies have had a notable impact on children's attainment. At Hannah More Primary School, for example, there are weekly visits from local businesses to support children with literacy and maths.
- Set up intergenerational projects to encourage participation by parents and the community in the school – for example, Cathays High School in Cardiff runs 'Meet the Mouse', a computer-based series of workshops which encourages adults to improve their basic IT skills, with guidance and support being provided by pupils.
- Establish a partnership group in order to promote joint working and sharing of information, avoid duplication and address community needs – the partnership group at Betws Primary School in Bridgend includes representatives from local community groups and agencies, Communities First, school governors, teachers, parents and the wider community.
- Use intergenerational learning to bring younger and older members of a community together (see the Rhondda Cynon Taff case study).

Case studies

Pentrehafod School, Swansea

This case study is the result of a discussion with Jill Ahern, Community Education Development Officer at Pentrehafod School.

Pentrehafod School in Swansea is an 11 to 16 school, with approximately 1,000 pupils on roll. Since it opened in 1976, the school has worked tirelessly to promote inclusion and an appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity within its community. This ethos is embedded in the culture of the school, which is home to one of Swansea's EMLA (Ethnic Minority Language and Achievement) units. The children at the school have 25 different languages as their mother tongues.

As in many schools across Wales, curricular activities celebrate a range of faiths and cultural diversity, but Pentrehafod is just as concerned with its role as a Community Focused School and in the contribution that Out-of-School-Hours Learning can make to creating cohesive communities.

Jill Ahern has taken a leading role in this work at Pentrehafod. The fair trade shop, set up in 2006 as a social enterprise, is run by young people from the school. Pupils have access to a DVD produced by the school explaining the importance of fair trade. The extra cost of fair trade products did not prevent the shop from selling out at a recent football tournament at the school. This is typical of the embedded Pentrehafod approach. Community cohesion is not a fad – it is part of the life-blood of the school. It's not seen as relating only to issues of ethnicity and faith. The school is regularly asked to participate in intergenerational events in the city, most recently as part of the Community Regeneration Strategy. Jill said: 'Quite often the under 25s and over 50s find a remarkable amount of common ground.'

The school has strong links with India (supported by the British Council), with China (potentially involving youngsters from Pentrehafod visiting Nantong) and with Africa. A young orphan boy from Swaziland is currently attending Pentrehafod while undergoing medical treatment, supported by voluntary contributions from the school and community. Pupils at the school were carefully prepared for his arrival (his condition makes him quite obvious) through a range of activities. He has quickly become part of the school community, learning important skills in recycling that he can take back to his home community in Africa. This African link started with a pen pals scheme and with clothes collections organised by Jill.

In common with many schools, there are a number of children at Pentrehafod who are also 'carers' for other members of their family. There is a Young Carers' Club, supported by a project worker, and there is soon to be a young carers' event supporting Carers' Rights Day. In this work, as in all other aspects of the school's Community Focused Schools and Out-of-School-Hours

Learning provision, care is taken to avoid attaching labels to children. All events are 'open', just more targeted at certain individuals, depending on circumstances and the nature of the event.

Pentrehafod School wants to be seen as a vital part of its community, not just existing in the community. Jill is a member of the city-wide strategy group on Community Focused Schools and the school has strong links with Communities First, various disability groups, the African Community Centre and Hafod Youth Action. The Youth Offending Team works closely with the school, as does the Youth Service and Swansea University School of Medicine. The Reaching Higher Reaching Wider project at Swansea University has recently had work going on with pupils in Years 9 to 11. An alternative curriculum provided by a community church is on offer to some Year 11 pupils who might be on the edge of school refusal. Pentrehafod School was part of ContinYou's pilot project on Children's Voice.

Arts play a vital role in the life of the school and in its cohesion work. A black and minority ethnic play worker runs a play scheme in the school. Half-term activities were organised in the school by South Wales Inter-Cultural Arts to celebrate the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

Jo Martin runs the EMLA unit, the main purpose of which is to raise the attainment levels of children from minority ethnic groups. Children are supported in lessons by Jo and her colleagues, and their parents are involved as far as is possible. The unit is supported by separate youth support agencies for boys and for girls, targeting the Bangladeshi community. As Jo puts it, this forms: '... part of a pattern of specialist services meeting the specific needs of different communities within the school'.

Pentrehafod is far from unique in offering a range of activities and services reflecting the diverse community it serves. What is perhaps more unusual is the recognition that this is vital in building trust with all communities and all age groups – a crucial cornerstone of a cohesive society.



Intergenerational working in Rhondda Cynon Taff

Within Rhondda Cynon Taff the increasing ageing population is leading to a greater need for health and social care support to enable people to be independent in the community. Because young people are leaving the valleys, it is becoming hard to recruit to the health and social care sector. This is one of the main reasons for developing intergenerational work in Rhondda Cynon Taff.

An example of this work is the Cwmaman Past and Present intergenerational project which involves the residents of Cwrt Alun Lewis, a sheltered housing complex, and the pupils of Glynhafod Junior School. This entailed the school working in partnership with its Community Focused Schools cluster co-ordinator, Rhondda Cynon Taff Local Health Board, Rhondda Cynon Taff LEA, Age Concern Morgannwg and Cynon Taff Housing Association.

The children, all Year 6 pupils, visited residents of Cwrt Alun Lewis who were identified as being at risk of social isolation and/or mental ill health, one afternoon a week for a term. The aim of the project was to build bonds between the older and the younger members of the community. Their starting point for doing this was to look at the modern history curriculum (1930 to 1970).

The older people brought photos and objects from their past as a starting point for talking about specific topics. The children recorded these conversations in their history books. Where events were discussed that the older people did not have records of, the children searched the internet for photographs or information to discuss and write about at the next visit.

They did work on themes such as Valentine's Day. They compared present-day weddings in Cwmaman with those in the past, looking at the dresses, photographs and celebrations involved.

One of the challenges the school needed to deal with before the project started was to counter the stereotyped views that the children and the older people had about each other. The children heard a presentation about mental health and ageing, and the school consulted the older people and their carers to find out whether they wanted to take part in the project, and to discuss how it would work in practice. Another challenge was the concern of parents about their children interacting with older people with mental ill health. A meeting was arranged with parents in order to allay their concerns and break down any prejudices. One of the school's partners, Age Concern Morgannwg, also used the meeting to recruit volunteers to supervise the interactions between the younger and older people during the project.

The project has had a number of positive outcomes. Cynon Taff Housing Association, which runs Cwrt Alun Lewis, won the Chartered Institute of Housing Community Award 2007 because of this work. Cwrt Alun Lewis has also filled all its long-standing vacancies, making the sheltered housing and the project more sustainable.

The older people have enjoyed the opportunities to engage with younger people, to reminisce and to take part in a wide range of activities. The Year 6 pupils have developed an understanding of older people and of the needs of people with dementia, and have been introduced to the range of career opportunities within the health and social care sector. They have also learnt more about local history and about their communities. As one pupil said: 'I was nervous at first, as I didn't know the person and if they'd like to meet me. Now we are like friends and I'm confident and brave.'

What's next?

Other primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff are now taking part in similar projects. The Community Focused Schools cluster co-ordinators for the schools have a key role in working with the other partners in the project.

At local authority level, work has started on evaluating the short-term, and the potential long-term, impact of intergenerational working, in order to establish a permanent post to increase and co-ordinate intergenerational work throughout the area. Funding issues are being explored, including ways of 'mainstreaming' projects by bringing them within existing budgets. As intergenerational projects involve partnerships between staff in health, social care, regeneration and education, they have the potential to meet a wide range of strategic priorities, from discrimination against older people to increasing numbers in the health and social care workforce in order to meet demographic changes.

Lessons learnt

In order to be successful and sustainable, intergenerational projects need to be beneficial to all participants.

All stakeholders need to be able to see the benefits before embarking on the project, so that they can commit themselves to it.

A lot can be achieved with very little money and through partners pooling resources. The cost of the project should be negligible, if it is integrated into the partners' work plans.

It's important to take the time to make sure that everyone understands how the project could work in their area, and that they are truly committed to making it work.

