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Increasing the Use of School Facilities: Evidence from Wales

Case Studies

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Case Studies

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Introduction

In this annex to the main report, we present 15 case studies from across Wales that demonstrate how schools and their communities have benefitted from increased use of school facilities. These examples – based on interviews conducted in January and February 2016 and additional investigative work – take in rural and urban settings, and communities with different socio-economic profiles. For each case study, we draw out the main learning points.

Case Study from Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs¹

Following the closure of after school childcare provision within a local community centre, the local head teacher was keen to ensure that the service continued for families. With school support, a management committee was formed. To facilitate the running of the club, the head teacher made arrangements to relocate all school- run after school activity clubs from the main hall to other areas within the building. This ensured the after school club had a consistent base and enabled registration with CSSIW (Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales).

Other arrangements made to facilitate the club included the clearing of a storage room and allocation for use by the after school childcare club, amending cleaning rotas, clearing of an access route as a separate entrance and clearing of space within the staff room for storage and food preparation.

Main learning points:

- Strong local leadership is essential
- Recognising the wider benefits of a range of services and activities that can be provided from a school is crucial to securing local support
- Practical barriers can be overcome with determination

¹ Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs is an organisation that helps develop and support out of school childcare clubs.

Bryn Elian (Foundation) High School, Old Colwyn, Conwy

“If a school has the facilities, why would you not do it?” (Deputy Head)

This foundation school offers a wide range of school-run out-of-hours learning as well as family and community engagement activities. It has worked hard to develop its role in the local area. It has a range of facilities used by others including a floodlit AstroTurf area, a sports hall, a studio and classrooms. These activities are managed by the school Business Manager. It is on target to cover all associated costs, and possibly generate a surplus of £10,000 to £15,000 a year. Charges are reviewed annually, with varying rates for charities and commercial organisations. North Wales Police use the school facilities for holding exams, there is a Health Club for families on Saturdays and an award winning ‘Dog Therapy’ provision based in the school (with significant benefits for the children involved). This is also carried out as an outreach activity for another local secondary school.

An additional benefit of the school being available for outside use is that it is open for longer, allowing the school to provide its own activities at no additional cost. The school is very conscious of the need to ensure quality control so that activities at the school do not harm its image and believes that the marketing of the range of activities offered has brought in additional pupils. People get to know the school, like what they see and are thus comfortable with their children attending Bryn Elian. It also facilitates a smoother transition from primary to secondary phases, and has contributed to reduced vandalism possibly due to the wider community viewing it as their school and/or because it is supervised for longer periods of time.

The school governors are supportive and the school has clear terms and conditions, bespoke booking software and a businesslike operation. There are some challenges (for example, staff absence, replacing key personnel, and training education staff in business practices), but the will to make it work is paramount.

Main learning points:

- Clarity of process facilitates the use of school facilities
- Excellent facilities encourage the use of those facilities by outside bodies
- Use by others facilitates smooth transition and improves the image of the school
- Income generation provides the resource for activities for pupils that would not otherwise be available

Ysgol Maes Garmon, Mold, Flintshire

Ysgol Maes Garmon is an urban Welsh medium secondary school with around 600 pupils on roll serving Mold and surrounding communities. The school has a hiring policy for use of its facilities. However, some agencies feel they should be exempted from this (for example those who are promoting Welsh language and culture) which causes some issues as the school would then have to bear the direct costs. If such an activity benefits the current pupils of the school (or its cluster primary schools) then no charge is made. Guidance from the Welsh Government on charging policies would assist in legitimising the schools stance on this.

The school does have a long standing (and financially advantageous) relationship built on mutual trust with Theatre-train who have been using the school every Saturday for a number of years. The caretaker has to open and close the school (this has direct costs but in this case they are offset by Theatre-train paying). The school also hires facilities to a range of organisations on an ad hoc basis, with outside areas being used more regularly than internal areas.

As with many schools of a similar age, the site restricts what can be achieved in terms of use by others. There is a council policy that the kitchen may not be used by non-school users which causes some problems as those who wish to hire for functions often need catering facilities. Additionally, facilities which may have commercial potential are sited (unhelpfully) in the middle of the school – this would cause safeguarding issues during school hours as visitors would have to be accompanied while on site, which is not practical. Long-term arrangements are difficult to accommodate because the hall is heavily used by the school (for example, for assemblies and exams). Car parking and toilet facilities are a further challenge and the summer period is often the only time when maintenance and repairs can be carried out.

Despite these practical difficulties, the benefits of community use are well recognised by the school. They recognise however that new schools have the advantage of building in designs that keep ‘customers’ separate from pupils. Finally, the issue of trust is crucial – the school must be confident that users are responsible. Otherwise, concerns about health and safety, security and damage would limit use.

Main learning points:

- Charging policies need to be clear and applied equitably
- Practical challenges of many school sites make additional use difficult due to issues such as safeguarding, use (non-use) of catering facilities, parking and access
- The prime purpose of the school is education – taking risks with the site could impact negatively on that purpose

John Bright (PFI) High School, Llandudno, Conwy

The modern campus of John Bright comprises the school and leisure centre. The school best describes this as ‘a triangle of responsibility regarding the facilities and day-to-day management’. The leisure centre is the responsibility of Conwy County Borough Council and Sodexo is the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) organisation that manages the campus and school facilities. The contract with Sodexo covers school use of facilities for 195 days, 8.00 am – 6.00 pm. All policies and procedures were in place from the start as part of the PFI contract. This results in the school being restricted in relation to use of the building outside the contract times.

However, relationships are carefully managed, trust has been developed and the contract does not cause problems on a day-to-day basis. If the school wished to develop services and activities beyond the contract hours, then costs would be incurred, or Sodexo would undertake the management of such services, resulting in any funding going to them. The school doesn’t have use of the leisure centre during holidays and if that were to occur it would entail additional costs for the school.

The school provides a wide range of out-of-hours activities. Most are delivered by the school but some are bought in from other organisations (for example, fitness activities and the Urdd.. There are also additional ad hoc activities. For example, North Wales Police use the school for recruitment, and the NHS run family cookery lessons and drop-in school nurse sessions.

The benefits of the PFI arrangements for the school include the excellent school building and facilities for pupils and staff, all maintenance being covered (and therefore no unforeseen outlay for the school budget) and enhanced educational and leisure facilities for the wider community.

Main learning points:

- PFI contracts need to consider the wider needs of the school and its wider community engagement from the outset
- PFI arrangements have allowed for the building of excellent learning and recreation facilities for the community that would not otherwise have been possible
- Existing PFI contracts are unlikely to allow for increased use of facilities without significant costs
- PFI can put schools in a challenging position – changing the contract arrangements are costly, lengthy and on an individual basis

Lewis School, Pengam, Caerphilly

This school has been a Community Focused School (CFS) since 2006. Through CFS they were able to work with the community focus officer employed by the local authority and, through her, gain access to funding from Welsh Government and other sources. They were then able to begin using the school premises extensively – for example for educational and recreational activities involving the pupils, parents and the local community. ‘Community dance’ (an intergenerational activity with Lewis pupils providing refreshments and support) was the first event that was organised and is totally self-sufficient.

Following this (and building on links with Porth School in Rhondda Cynon Taf), the school began a full programme of after school and evening activities in collaboration with Coleg Gwent, University of South Wales, Ystrad Mynach College, Caerphilly County Borough Council and a number of private organisations. A range of courses and taster sessions were offered, including Spanish, textiles, computing, photography, yoga, bowls, dry stone walling, gardening, ceramics, radio station, sign language, roller-skating and fly fishing.

Building on these foundations with a Community Safety Reassurance for Older People grant, the school started its award winning Intergenerational Lunch Club (described by Estyn as ‘exemplary’). The club offers older people lunch, with Lewis school pupils assisting, and then an option of either bowls, bingo or scrabble. Spin offs have included trips to London and historical sites. The school uses these opportunities as a vehicle for numeracy and literacy projects for the pupils.

The position of the school within its catchment area (which has high levels of socio-economic deprivation) has an effect on all the activities offered in the school because transport is a problem for many.

The benefits of becoming more community focused, according to the Deputy Head:

“...have been huge. Our standing within the community has increased considerably due mainly to the intergenerational work but also to the work done by bringing the rest of the community into school. Without doubt perceptions between the elderly and our pupils have changed with a new respect formed on both sides. One of our pupils, who had never been abroad, had a passport paid for by one of our lunch club. Special bonds have been built because of this. We have definite evidence of improvement with individual pupils and can prove improvement in attendance and behaviour, though most of the improvement has been in their general wellbeing. Through CFS [Community Focused Schools] we have been able to give pupils from deprived backgrounds an opportunity to try skills and activities they would not have had the chance to do”.

When community focus officers were in place it took a lot of pressure off school staff. Having a budget also meant the school were able to try more things but, again according to the Deputy Head:

“...it's not all about money. We have been running activities like the sequence dancing for 10 years and have made it sustainable. However, a lot of what we do is dependent on parents' and community members' generosity, no bad thing but not sustainable. Making this work, in most schools, is down to the member or members of staff who care about enrichment. More and more however, with pressure put on staff for academic results there is less time to push this agenda through. If the local authority or better still the Welsh Government really wanted to get the maximum use of schools then designated staff need to be employed for each borough or possibly in the schools themselves. There is massive potential and the benefits to all would be huge”.

Main learning points:

- Learning from others and networking is beneficial
- Transport issues do not only relate to rural areas
- Intergenerational work has the potential for positive impacts, especially in disadvantaged communities
- Enthusiasm and commitment from staff is an essential requirement of successful community involvement and use of school premises and facilities

- There is a need to resource the capacity to enable this level of work to be developed and managed, whether from within the school or via other arrangements that the school is a part of (for example, 'locality management')

Eastern High School, Cardiff

This is a new build Community Secondary School, co-located with Cardiff and the Vale College, expected to open in 2017. Throughout the design phase, the need to include facilities for community and dual use was 'built in'. As a result core/teaching sections of the school will be able to be 'locked off' to prevent any safeguarding issues while the public and the school are both using the facilities. The dual use facilities include the hall, sports hall, gymnasium, training kitchen and restaurant, music, IT and media studios, a bistro and a shop. Additionally, extensive outdoor sports facilities will be available for community use outside of school-use hours and separate secure access to changing rooms and showers has been provided. The Cardiff and the Vale College will be providing post 16 education on the site and there are a number of potential opportunities for sharing facilities and expertise. Management arrangements are still being discussed and all potential users (existing and new) are involved in those discussions.

Main learning points:

- Early involvement of expected providers and end-users in the design of new builds is essential
- Safeguarding issues can most easily be addressed if 'built in' rather than 'bolted on'

The next two case studies, Yr Eos and Maesincla, demonstrate how different facilities and opportunities in what are very similar schools and communities can impact on what the school and partners are able to offer.

Yr Eos Integrated Children's Campus, Ceredigion

The campus is located in the Penparcau area of Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. It consists of Ysgol Llwyn yr Eos, the Penparcau Family Centre, the Penparcau Community Education Centre, Flying Start and the Ffrindiau Bach yr Eos Nursery. The school itself is a primary for 4-11 year olds but also has four 'resource bases' for children with additional learning needs on the campus school (Infant language/Junior language/Autistic/PMLD and a PRU).



There are 250 pupils on site, with half (50 per cent) on the Additional Needs register and between 31 per cent and 50 per cent receiving free school meals. A quarter of the children (25 per cent) attending the play facilities for children aged from 3-14 years are referrals from social services. The Head teacher spends a significant proportion of time focusing on safeguarding issues, and issues associated with looked after children.

The co-location of a wide range of related services on one site is seen as a major positive factor in accessing families, particularly those who might in other circumstances be difficult for schools and other agencies to reach. Importantly, interviews with parents reveal that they are in most cases unaware of the boundaries between services – they access what they need, when they need it, and make use of well-structured internal signposting. The system is user friendly and is built on many years of developing trust between the community, the school and other service providers. In a sense it makes no difference at Penparcau which service is accessed first, parents go where they feel most comfortable and are treated holistically, not in separate packages. This process is facilitated by an effective Flying Start led information sharing protocol.

Governance challenges are not significant because and there is a management committee for the Integrated Children's Centre (ICC). As the experienced Head teacher said "it's all down to attitude. We could get bogged down in bureaucracy but we don't because we just help each other out" – which includes the school 'lending' the other services its caretaker as the need arises.

The main focus, and the most significant impact, has been around early intervention. For example, speech and language support was previously accessed at ages 5-7 years. However, now that the service is on site with the pre-school group, it can also be accessed at age 0-4 years resulting in better outcomes for the children involved. Families are offered earlier, more intensive and more integrated support. This not only helps them but also the other children in the school, and smooths transition from pre-school to school.

Additionally, because the services are integrated they have a much stronger collective voice in seeking support from the Welsh Government and other agencies. This has resulted in a recognition of the need for porous boundaries in such a semi-rural area (for example, baby massage can take place if at least half of those involved are 'Flying Start' babies). This has the positive impact of ensuring the services keep running, reducing stigmatisation and providing positive role models.

The school has to deal with additional needs in house as there are no Additional Needs schools in the county. Therefore, the benefits of integrated, supportive, early intervention are

clear to see. This is an important point for development elsewhere – if staff are to be enthusiastic about change they need to see the benefits clearly and those changes need time to establish themselves. As the Head teacher said "We know each other well, we have built up trust, we just talk to the person we need to talk to which would be much more difficult if we were not all here together".

Main learning points:

- Co-location is a positive benefit to children, families, the school and other services
- Early intervention yields positive results
- A supportive attitude and flexibility bring significant benefits
- A shared vision and ethos is reinforced in practical ways by agencies sharing a particular approach (for example, the Incredible Years principles)
- The opportunity to meet to share vision, training and practical approaches is critical. Minutes and action plans help to keep everyone on track

Maesincla Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Caernarfon, Gwynedd

This school, housed in 1940s buildings, serves an area of deprivation (Communities First Area, with 40 per cent of pupils receiving free school meals) in Caernarfon. It is a Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled School with 315 pupils and acts as the local primary school for the area. It is quite close to two other primary schools, one of which (Yr Hendre) is a new build. The design of the building and the lack of any dedicated community facilities (or other spare space) restricts the use of the site by others despite the welcoming and enthusiastic ethos of the school management. Around one third (35 per cent) of the children on roll are on the Additional Needs register and despite their obvious needs there are no other services on site. This contrasts greatly with the otherwise similar situation at Penparcau Children's Campus in Aberystwyth where dedicated on-site access to other professionals is fundamental to the ethos of the Integrated Children's Centre (ICC).

The school runs a number of innovative programmes to support the children (including music and pre-school groups), and is working closely with the families to improve the learning outcomes for the pupils with the support of Communities First.

Main learning points:

- Restricted sites reduce the ability of schools to work in multi-agency ways despite the desire to do so by school management
- Similar schools in terms of catchment have markedly different access to services

Yr Hendre County Primary School, Caernarfon, Gwynedd

This new build primary school with 411 pupils serves an area of disadvantage (Communities First area) in Caernarfon with 24 per cent of the children eligible for free school meals. It has dedicated facilities for the community, for health professionals and is the base for a social services intervention programme which contributes to the income of the school. This external funding (not just from social services but also from other site users) supports the work of a member of ancillary staff who manages the community use of the school using well-designed booking procedures. This takes the pressure off the Head Teacher who is thus more able to concentrate on direct learning issues.

Although safeguarding issues prevent the main school being used by community groups during the day, there are parts of the school with their own toilet facilities that can be used. (including a secure interview room which has attracted the interest of the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner). Enthusiastic school management and governors, the excellent facilities (including a custom designed sports hall with an extra-high ceiling) and good access have enabled a range of outside bodies to use the school outside school hours.

Leisure services and social services were both involved in the design of the school, with strategic and supportive involvement of senior officers from the local authority also playing a key role.

Main learning points:

- The effective use of ancillary and other staff (for example, as in 'locality management') to drive development and manage the use of the school site takes some of the pressure off the Head Teacher
- The need to be realistic about what can be achieved with the 'people resources' available and at what stage a tipping point may be reached that needs additional capacity
- Well designed and clear booking processes ensure clear understanding and expectations

- Effective early involvement of other agencies in the design of the school facilitates more extensive use of its facilities
- High level and supportive strategic involvement can be very important in driving change

Ysgol Terrig Primary School, Treuddyn, Flintshire

Ysgol Terrig is a Welsh medium primary school in Flintshire with around 70 pupils on roll. It serves a very rural area with a dispersed population. Currently they offer a limited range of opportunities including a breakfast club, an after-school childcare club, a Cylch (Welsh medium nursery) run by Ysgolion Mudiad Meithrin, a breakfast club (shared with neighbouring English medium primary) and they also host some Urdd activities. Although the school does have a hiring policy they do not publicise it widely for two main reasons. Firstly there is a village hall nearby which serves as a community hub. The school is unable to compete with it for space (it is an old, restricted, structure), on price (caretaking and cleaning costs have to be included in any hiring which make it relatively expensive to be used at weekends or during holidays) and for reasons of community relationships – the village hall is well established. Secondly, safeguarding is a major concern for the school. There is only one toilet area which is within the classroom area so non-school adults cannot use the building at the same time as the school is open. There are not enough toilets in the school if the hall was used at capacity unless they also use the attached youth wing but that would incur additional costs to the hirer as it is owned by the youth centre.

Main learning points:

- Restricted sites are unable to offer a wide range of community opportunities for safeguarding reasons
- On-costs in small schools with restricted budgets are prohibitive
- Competing with well-regarded alternative venues could cause difficulties in dispersed rural communities
- Relationship development and maintenance with other local building/facility providers can be challenging and take time

Esgob Morgan Junior School, St Asaph, Denbighshire

This school with a mixed catchment has an innovative head teacher. The school provides a broad range of out-of-hours learning opportunities, while other services not provided directly by the school include out-of-school childcare and uniform groups run by voluntary organisations. The school is working to engage families and the community even more in the life of the school. Therefore, the school does not charge other organisations for using its premises as it is part of its community engagement strategy. For example, the WEA (Workers' Educational Association) Cymru provided signing-up sessions for eLearning courses with the school providing weekly drop-in sessions for those signed up to meet, use computers and get support. The WEA made no charge to the school or those signing up and the school made no charge to the WEA. The local WEA Cymru development officer is keen to share what they can offer with schools and through schools. However, not all schools are open to developing programmes, or enabling WEA to deliver from school. The WEA want to be able to provide more opportunities within communities and for that to occur school facilities will be vital.

Main learning points:

- Not charging encourages more use of school facilities
- Other organisations being involved enhances the educational experience for the children
- Providing services for the wider community helps engage families in their children's learning
- Some organisations want to use school facilities but it isn't always an easy path to tread

Pontpennau Primary School, Cardiff

This new build primary incorporates a community hall and other facilities that can be used by the community while ensuring appropriate separation from the children during school hours (safeguarding). Some activities that previously took place in a separate community hall have transferred to the new school, including a crèche and pre- and post- school wrap around child care. There are separate showers and changing facilities available for community users. Governance arrangements are at an early stage of development and a sub-committee of the Governing Body meet with other users on a regular basis to discuss any site issues that arise.

Main learning points:

- Taking on delivery from other deliverers needs careful handling by schools
- Governors need to be involved with other providers and end-users to ensure clarity about expectations

Cae Top Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Bangor, Gwynedd

This relatively new school (built 2009) in Bangor is close to the university and the 242 pupils speak 21 different languages. Between 15 and 20 per cent are in receipt of free school meals. The county's EAL (English as an Additional Language) centre is located in the school which has excellent facilities, including a sprung-floor hall.

However, despite the best efforts of an enthusiastic school leadership, the school has a limited range of community uses because of its location next to a slightly older new build secondary (which has much more extensive facilities) and the university (which has a wider range of opportunities).

There is no dedicated community room in the school but other services (physiotherapy, for example) do use the school. Despite the nearby competition, there are also a limited number of outside users. There is no community use during the day (due to safeguarding concerns issues) and the caretaker is flexible in allowing evening and weekend use where there is no direct cost to the school.

Main learning points:

- Excellent facilities and enthusiasm are no guarantee of extensive community use if local 'competitors' can offer better and more extensive opportunities. This would suggest the need for different potential service deliverers and venue providers to work together to create a holistic pattern of provision for community/area involved.
- A flexible and enthusiastic approach by caretaking and school management are essential to attracting outside use of school facilities

Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services

The council is the independent representative body for the youth work sector in Wales. Some youth organisations have a good track record of working in and with schools, however this is patchy across the country. Many schools have a long standing relationship with one or more youth organisations including, for example, the Urdd. However, for many organisations it is very challenging to make links, develop and maintain relationships. CWVYS has done a great deal to encourage and support the development of youth work and youth workers in school. Between 2009 and 2011 they produced a range of youth work methodology handbooks, including 'A Class of their Own' for youth workers in schools. There is great potential for further development of youth work and provision within the Donaldson (2015) recommendations for the informal curriculum and Personal, Social and Health Education delivery. However, for many young people the school is not the place they would choose to take part in activities. This is still sometimes the case because of negative experiences of school.

Main learning points:

- Existing good practice can be built on
- Effective youth work provision must be offered from the right location, which may or may not be a school building
- Education providers and youth work providers have much to learn from and about each other that could benefit young people's experiences
- Resources and capacity are often a challenge

The Learning and Work Institute

The Institute is a new independent research, development and campaigning organisation promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. It brings together 90 years of combined history and heritage from the 'National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education' and the 'Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion'.

This is a link to a short video they have filmed on family learning at Monkton Priory school in Pembrokeshire (a Communities First area), where around two thirds of the pupils (65 per cent) receive free school meals. The learning points relate to the featured school.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lwVDmnZVSM>



Main learning points:

- Originally part of SpringBoard and now supported by Communities First
- Providing a range of courses based on what the community want, up to degree level in conjunction with Trinity St David's
- Linking courses to local employment opportunities
- Providing additional support to adults who would not feel able to go to college or university
- Raising family aspiration and empowering parents and children

The Public Policy Institute for Wales

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- Works directly with Welsh Ministers, helping them to identify the evidence they need and commissioning policy experts to undertake work on their behalf
- Is part of the What Works network and provides a strong link between the What Works Centres in England and policy makers in Wales
- Is leading a major programme of research on What Works in Tackling Poverty.

For further information please visit our website: ppiw.org.uk

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