



Relationships between school, family and the community

In addition to ensuring academic progress, effective schools develop partnerships with parents and others to support the learning process and to nurture self-esteem and confidence in young people. Mog Ball carried out an overview study of the relationships between schools and their communities, to clarify which agencies are involved with schools and families to advance these goals. She found that:

- f** Children's entry to school at an earlier age and the growing relationship between primary schools and pre-school provision are bringing schools into closer contact with social support agencies and voluntary organisations which work with families.
- f** Partnership with parents means that schools are beginning to take an interest in areas of family need previously seen as the responsibility of other agencies, where there is an impact on a child's progress - parental literacy, for example.
- f** Targeted and general support programmes which aim to empower parents in the primary years, and young people later, draw on expertise from local specialist agencies: health visitors, therapists, educational psychologists, social workers, the police, youth workers, voluntary organisations, businesses etc.
- f** The demands of the curriculum and the unfamiliarity of this way of working, which requires a multi-agency and facilitating approach new to teachers and school management, has resulted in the appointment of specialist staff in some schools to co-ordinate support services.
- f** The logical extension of these trends is the re-structuring of the school as a base for all the needs of families, especially in areas where there is a high demand for services. A few initiatives suggest some movement towards this 'full-service school' approach.
- f** There has been a growth in nationally developed programmes of intervention and activity for young people, particularly those deemed 'at risk', in which locally managed schools can participate. There is little research on the comparative effectiveness of such programmes.
- f** These developments suggest that the idea of the 'holistic school', offering educational resources to the whole community, remains pertinent, but will require investment in school premises and additional elements in teacher-training if it is to spread rapidly.

Different types of relationship

Links between school, family and community occur for the following reasons:

- Decision-making and management of the school
Parents and community representatives participate in school governing bodies, parent/teacher associations and advisory committees.
- Communication between home and school
There is a continual exchange of information between families and schools over individual children, through letters, reports, phone calls and meetings.
- School support for families
Schools may provide help for families on matters like health, development and creating home conditions that support school achievement and social behaviour.
- Family and community help for schools
Parents, community and employee volunteers may assist children, teachers or school management in the classroom or in other aspects of school activities.
- School support for learning at home
Schools may help families to develop learning at home to help in turn the child's learning at school.
- Collaborations with community agencies
Outside agencies, both local and national, provide the school with access to community and support services for children and families.
- Community education
Learning opportunities may be available for all age-groups, both within and outside the school and within and outside the conventional school hours.

Differing needs

The kinds of relationship change as children grow. In pre- and primary school, support for the child is directed through the family. In secondary school there is gradual need to view the child as an individual with needs for information, help and experiences which reinforce autonomy and independence.

The period of middle childhood is not well served by support programmes. There is little evidence of thinking about the changing support needs of children in transition to adulthood and from primary to secondary school. Pastoral care remains a concern for schools, with some in areas of social stress looking for funding to recruit specialist staff to work with children and liaise with agencies which provide help. Youth service involvement in secondary education has resulted in many programmes targeted on children 'at risk', of exclusion from school or of involvement in crime, and drawing on specialist agencies.

There are also many preventive programmes designed to inform young people about issues that concern them: health, drug and alcohol misuse, personal safety (including bullying), and sexuality. Action-based programmes involve young people in peer support, work experience and community service opportunities. The pressures of the curriculum have squeezed these activities. National agencies which promote them emphasise their potential links with the curriculum and the experiential learning opportunities which they offer. Although there has been research on the impact of the latter, it is specific to particular programmes and has not provided standard assessment measures. Young people's need for personal development support is varied and has to be tailored to the individual. For many the school may not be the right place to find it.

Extending schools

Schools are co-operating with families and community agencies to provide care before and after the school day, opportunities for children to study in homework and study support centres, and understanding and experience of the world of work. This has brought them into contact with community and neighbourhood organisations, who may manage after school clubs on school sites, and with local businesses.

Links with business occur through direct contact with individual companies, leading to visits, sponsorship and other contributions; through co-ordinated local partnerships between education and business, and through local and national link agencies. Employees may volunteer to work in classrooms, or act as mentors to young people, teachers or school managers. Businesses get involved in schools as a way of raising their profile in the community and being involved in the preparation of

young people for work. Placing young people, especially young men, in work situations as an alternative to school has been found to improve behaviour and aid personal development.

Community contact

Sports facilities are being opened for public use, and volunteers from local clubs invited to help with coaching. Sports personalities are contributing to preventive work on subjects like drug misuse. Arts projects also provide schools with opportunities to work with the wider community, though many are suffering from limited resources.

The number of opportunities for young people to provide community service outside the school has decreased: these activities continue, but are often conducted within the school, or by secondary pupils in primary schools. Outside the school, work still goes on in hospitals, day centres, playgroups, and environmental projects; and local people, especially elderly people, are offered hospitality and entertainment by schools. Projects like these offer empowering opportunities to pupils, who may design, manage and deliver programmes.

Concern about the environment has prompted local initiatives for sustainable development and regeneration. Schools are included in bids for the Single Regeneration Budget and European funding. Some have contributed to local planning exercises which have brought children into contact with the wider community.

Inclusive community schools, which offer community education to local people and facilities outside school hours, are well-placed to develop relationships with other agencies. There is some evidence that this approach has improved failing schools, and that the experience of learning alongside adults can improve motivation and behaviour in young people. Community education supports young people by:

- making the school a more convivial place;
- presenting learning as desirable at all ages;
- giving opportunities for social interaction;
- enabling parents to participate in meeting their own needs;
- offering learning situations to meet individual need;
- raising the reputation of the school in the local community.

An increase in the number of community schools will require investment in premises and staff training.

Constraints

The climate for school-community links is good. Government policy encourages them. Other services are being judged in terms of their contribution to schooling and the achievements of children in school. Many developments indicate that schools could become the base for other agencies.

This idea raises some questions, however. Do parents and young people find this an attractive idea? Will those who have a poor view of school want to gain access to services through it? Fully-fledged community schools have overcome prejudices by reconstructing the school as a centre of community activity. This approach needs to be analysed and presented in more detail to schools, so that they understand exactly what they need to convert to it - resources as well as philosophy.

Teacher-training is a limited preparation for the community approach. Many teachers find partnership with parents difficult, and feel that the curriculum demands all their time. Other agencies may not welcome collaboration, especially where they have lost territory to education. Schools have become extremely security conscious and cautious about outsiders, with good reason. Curriculum demands and security fears have also affected the activities which young people can follow independently, outside school.

There are many national organisations offering specialist programmes to schools. There is little systematic review of these programmes. Some work with local agencies, or multi-agency groups, but there is a danger that they are making relationships which schools should be making for themselves.

A filter is required to help schools select what is most appropriate to add on to the core programme, and to judge what is likely to work best. The local education authority is the obvious intermediary. In those with a coherent home-school strategy, with flexibility for individual schools within a general framework and with the provision of extra staff to carry it out, good practice is developing.

About the study

This research was based on an investigative trawl of literature and information systems and a series of interviews with key personnel at national government and national agency level.

How to get further information

A detailed report, *School inclusion: The school, the family and the community* by Mog Ball, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (price £11.95 plus £1.50 p&p, ISBN 1 85935 041 0). It is available from York Publishing Services Ltd., 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZX, Tel: 01904 430033, Fax: 01904 430868.

Further information may be obtained from Mog Ball, Tel: 01225 744006; e-mail MogBall@compuserve.com.

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