

# After PISA: A way forward for education in Wales?

David Egan | January 2017





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## Executive Summary

1. The first period of education policy-making in Wales under devolution was heavily influenced by the principles set out in *The Learning Country* of 2001. Following the PISA results of 2009/10 the Welsh Government undertook a 'policy turn' under the influence of what is known as the Global Education Reform Movement (the GERM).
2. This has led to an accountability-driven form of school improvement which, whilst it has contributed to ongoing progress in educational achievement in Wales, has significant perverse consequences which make it unsuitable for creating the education system envisioned in *The Learning Country*.
3. The major challenge faced by the Welsh education system is the impact which poverty has on educational achievement and the slow progress we are making in overcoming this situation.
4. We should, therefore, return to the principles and policy approaches of *The Learning Country* with a renewed emphasis on a made-in-Wales approach to school improvement, a new approach to ensuring education works in partnership with communities and a relentless focus on improving equity.
5. The new approach to education and community partnership should draw upon the increasing knowledge we have about the importance of families and communities in influencing educational achievement and be influenced by emerging practice and models from Wales, the UK and internationally.
6. If Wales is to save the devolution project in education in the face of current uncertainties and political posturing, it is essential that we forge a new strategy for the future based on these principles.

# 1. Introduction: Education in Wales since Devolution

## 1.1. From 'The Learning Country' to 'the GERM'

In 2001 the Welsh Assembly Government published '*The Learning Country: A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales*'. This was the first major articulation of a vision for the new education system in Wales made possible by the devolution of power in 1999. More than that, *The Learning Country* believed it was providing the 'first comprehensive strategic statement on education and lifelong learning' ever produced for Wales.<sup>1</sup> The seminal nature of the document and the international attention and recognition that it attracted, has been supported by Wales' leading historians of education who welcomed it as 'a radical departure... providing Wales with an education system based on different social principles which amounts to a statement about the nature of Welsh society.'<sup>2</sup>

The policy developments which flowed from *The Learning Country* programme created the essential features of the education system we have in Wales today including our own schools' inspectorate, qualifications body, a largely state-provided school system and the continuing role of local education authorities. It is also reflected through the values inherent in a predominantly state-provided, bilingual and comprehensive school system.

The extent to which this has led to distinctive education policies is, however, more mixed. Much of the first decade of devolution was focused on developing a distinctive school curriculum, including the Foundation Phase for 3-7 year olds and the Welsh Baccalaureate for secondary-age students. This was accompanied by policies designed to improve the status and quality of the teaching profession, particularly through support for the General Teaching Council for Wales.<sup>3</sup>

From 2006, the publication of evidence suggesting that the standards being achieved by students in Wales were lower than other parts of the UK resulted in much more attention being given to policies that drew upon the work of the international movement on school improvement and effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Initially this focused on the development of what became the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF). This synthesised international evidence to produce a balanced approach between the need to **support** schools and teachers so that they could better raise the standards of their pupils, and **pressure** so that head-teachers, school governing bodies and local authorities could be held more accountable for their work. The SEF recognised both the importance of children achieving their potential and maximizing their personal wellbeing and the

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<sup>1</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2001), *The Learning Country*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Jones, G.E and Roderick, G.W. (2003), *A History of Education in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, p.225

<sup>3</sup> Egan, D. and James. R. (2003), 'Education' in Osmond, J and Jones, J.B., *Birth of Welsh Democracy: the First Term of the National Assembly for Wales*. Cardiff: Institute of Welsh Affairs

<sup>4</sup> Egan, D. (2010), 'School Effectiveness in the Learning Country' in Chapman, C. et al. *School Effectiveness and Improvement Research, Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge

need to involve families and communities, as well as schools and teachers, if progress was to be achieved.<sup>5</sup>

As has been too often the case in the history of devolved education in Wales, whilst the SEF was met with broad consensus and support from the education community, its development and implementation proved more problematic.<sup>6</sup> After a disappointing set of results for Wales in the 2010 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the then Education Minister strengthened the focus on standards through an Action Plan designed to address the weaknesses that he believed had led to the PISA results.<sup>7</sup>

This resulted in much greater emphasis on accountability within the education system - exercised through the work of the schools' inspection body Estyn and the newly created Regional Education Consortia, a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy within the curriculum, an increased use of data including more national testing and the introduction of what in effect are school league tables via the 'school categorisation system'.

In essence, this led to Wales becoming part of what Pasi Sahlberg has called 'the GERM': the Global Education Reform Movement, with its emphasis on performativity and accountability.<sup>8</sup> PISA, with its focus on standardised tests and national performance tables, is a fundamental part of the GERM.

Wales has not adopted the structural reforms implemented by successive governments in England that has led to the growth of independent academies and free schools, and the emasculating of local authorities. But in most other respects there has been increasing congruence between the education policies adopted by the UK and Welsh governments in relation to school standards, including the emphasis on standardised testing such as PISA. This has led to Wales mimicking England in its ambition to create a 'self-improving' school system, a concept that has arisen from the neo-liberal and market-driven values that Wales still formally rejects.<sup>9</sup>

It can be argued therefore, that whilst Wales has maintained the distinct structures and values of its education system as envisaged in *The Learning Country*, its education policies have moved away from 'made in Wales' approaches to those adopted by the Global Education Reform Movement including England. The

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<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government (2008), *School Effectiveness Framework: Building Effective Learning Communities Together*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

<sup>6</sup> OECD (2014), *Improving Schools in Wales: an OECD Perspective*. Paris: OECD

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, L. (2011), *Teaching Makes A Difference*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

<sup>8</sup> Sahlberg, P. (2010), *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* New York: Teachers College Press

<sup>9</sup> Hargreaves, D.H. (2010), *Creating a self-improving school system*. National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services; Welsh Government (2014), *Qualified for Life: An education improvement plan for 3 to 19 year olds in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government,

consequences of this ‘policy turn’ are at best mixed and have produced some serious down sides.

## 1.2. Progress and consequences

Although the discussion provoked by Wales' performance in PISA might suggest otherwise, the evidence is that educational standards in Wales have improved steadily since devolution. The table below shows the percentage of young people in Wales who at the ages of 11 and 15 achieved the levels of proficiency that should be expected of them in English (or Welsh) and Mathematics and Science (what is known as the Core Subject Indicator) in 2005, 2010 and 2015.

	<b>At Age 11</b>	<b>At Age 15</b>
<b>2005</b>	74.3%	38.4%
<b>2010</b>	78.2%	48%
<b>2015</b>	87.7%	54.8%

On face value this represents real progress and they are a credit to our young people, their schools, teachers and families. In relation to the impact of Welsh Government policies, it is interesting to note that progress, particularly in results at the age of 15, was being made up to 2010 under the umbrella of *The Learning Country* as well as since the ‘policy turn’ of 2010.

Since 2010, however, it can be argued that progress has increasingly come at a cost. The exponential growth of accountability in the education system in Wales has led to greater pressure being placed on teachers, schools and local authorities. As well as being inspected periodically by Estyn, schools are regularly monitored by their local authorities and the Regional Education Consortia through the work of School Challenge Advisers. If they are a part of other initiatives, such as Schools Challenge Cymru, they may also be exposed to yet another level of accountability. In addition, the annual publication of their ratings within the Welsh Government School Categorisation System exposes them to, league-table like, public scrutiny. It could be argued that this is accountability run wild. Aside from issues of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of so many layers of scrutiny, there is the danger that such a disproportionate use of accountability can be counter-productive, as Richard Elmore has argued.<sup>10</sup>

Much of this accountability process is data-driven and it can be suggested that the Welsh education system is becoming data-obsessed. Data is, of course, worthwhile evidence, but as the Alliance for Useful Evidence points out, it is only one form of evidence, and it may not always be the best.<sup>11</sup> As the historian EP Thompson once

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<sup>10</sup> Elmore, R. (2007), *School Reform from the Inside Out*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

<sup>11</sup> Alliance for Useful Evidence (2016), *Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide*. London: Alliance for Useful Evidence

memorably pointed out, it might be 'quite possible for statistical averages and human experience to run in opposite directions.'<sup>12</sup>

This focus on data can also produce perverse effects, such as 'teaching to the test' which is often thought to be a feature of English and Mathematics teaching in our schools since the re-introduction of national testing and the increased emphasis on achieving at least a Grade C at GCSE in these subjects.<sup>13</sup> It can also lead to what is known as 'gaming' in the system, whereby only certain pupils are entered for high-stakes testing and assessments, something that internationally is being used to call into question the reliability of the PISA tests in general and particularly the inappropriate comparisons that are made between countries. As has been suggested, statistics may not lie but liars do use statistics.<sup>14</sup>

The increased focus on English and Mathematics in primary and secondary education has led to accusations that the curriculum has been 'hollowed out' with the consequence that children and young people have been denied the opportunity for the broad and balanced approach to their education that was the intention of the National Curriculum introduced in 1988.<sup>15</sup> Graham Donaldson has recognised this in his work on the future of the curriculum in Wales and the reforms that are flowing from his report offer hope in this respect, although if they are to succeed they will need to confront the current data-driven, accountability orthodoxy in the Welsh education system.<sup>16</sup>

These problematic features of current school policies in Wales are also captured in the School Categorisation system. One of the consequences of this appears to be an increase in what is known as 'parent-flight' from what are perceived to be low performing to high performing schools. This is a known and largely intended effect of the neo-liberal marketisation of the education system in England - closely associated with 'academisation' - and it is being achieved to a significant extent in Wales without such structural changes. It is almost certainly a part of the reason for the growth in demand for Welsh-medium education in some parts of Wales and for changes in school populations in urban areas of Wales. Often it is schools in our most disadvantaged communities that suffer the most from this 'flight' of more aspirational parents. The impact of this on the success and future viability of our most disadvantaged schools is a particularly serious inverse effect of current schools' policy in Wales.

These developments have led to a perception, often articulated by teachers and head-teachers in Wales, that children and their wellbeing are increasingly being

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<sup>12</sup> Thompson, E.P. (1963), *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin

<sup>13</sup> Beckett, L. (2016), *Teachers and Academic Partners in Urban Schools: Threats to professional practice*. Abingdon: Routledge

<sup>14</sup> Cortes, E. (2011), 'Metis and the Metrics of Success' in Elmore, R. (Ed), *I Used to Think and Now I Think*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>15</sup> See for example the recent report of the Institute of Directors which argues that schools are becoming little more than 'exam factories'. Institute of Directors (2016), *Lifelong Learning: Reforming education for an age of technological and demographic change*. London: Institute of Directors

<sup>16</sup> Donaldson, G. (2015), *Successful Futures*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

marginalised. The growth of mental health problems being experienced by children and young people, worries about their general wellbeing and the extent to which the admirable commitment of the Welsh Government to ‘children’s voice’ is translated into practice, are all redolent of this concern.<sup>17</sup> The successful campaign led by the children’s charities in Wales, for there to be a designated Children’s Minister in the Welsh Government that came to power after the May 2016 elections, was also indicative of a growing belief that education policies had become too narrowly focused on the education system and with too little regard for children and their families.<sup>18</sup> All of this seems in stark contrast to the other major devolved area of government in Wales, the Health Service, where increasingly the patient (an adult or an adult on behalf of children) can be seen to have been moved to the centre of policy considerations rather than the periphery.<sup>19</sup>

These consequences of ‘the GERM’ in Wales can also be seen to be having a deleterious effect on teachers and schools. The teaching associations in Wales believe teacher morale to be at an all-time low.<sup>20</sup> Recruitment to secondary teacher-training courses in Wales has become increasingly challenging and this will inevitably impact on the ability of schools to appoint staff, particularly in our most disadvantaged communities. Teacher retention continues to be an issue particularly in ‘high pressure’ areas such as English and Mathematics.

### 1.3. The state of the nation

It would seem, therefore, that in the attempt to improve perceived weaknesses in the education system in Wales, we have borrowed policies from elsewhere (the GERM) and grafted them on to the distinct features of the Welsh education system. Whilst it is possible to point to these having led to progress being made in terms of hard outcomes, the ‘price paid’ for this seems to be considerable and suggests that it might be time to re-assess the future direction of education policy in Wales.

School improvement research has shown that whilst improving a single school is technically relatively simple (requiring skilled leadership which focuses on improvements in the quality of teaching), moving this to scale is technically very complex.<sup>21</sup> It can be argued that this is what we are witnessing in Wales: an over-

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<sup>17</sup> Banerjee, R. et al (2016), *Promoting Emotional Health, Well-being and Resilience in Primary Schools*. Cardiff: Public Policy Institute for Wales; Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2016), *Beth Nesa? What Next?: the Findings*. Swansea: Children’s Commissioner for Wales; World Health Organisation (2015), *The Health Behaviour in School Aged Children*. Cardiff: NHS Wales; UNICEF (2016), *Fairness for Children: A league table of inequality in child well-being in rich countries*. Florence: UNICEF; National Assembly for Wales (2014), *Inquiry Into Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services*. Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales. Hutchings, M. (2015), *Exam Factories? The impact of accountability measures on children and young people*. London: National Union of Teachers

<sup>18</sup> National Children’s Charities (2016), *Manifesto for the National Assembly for Wales Elections 2016*. Cardiff.

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Government (2012), *Patient’s Voice for Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

<sup>20</sup> NUT Cymru (2016), *Stand Up for Education: A Manifesto for Welsh children’s education*. Cardiff: NUT Cymru; ATL (2016), *Survey on Teacher Recruitment and Retention* [accessed via: <http://www.atl.org.uk>]; National Association of Headteachers (2016), *Address of NAHT President to National Conference, 2016*. London: NAHT

<sup>21</sup> Fullan, M. (1991), *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. New York: Teacher’s College Press

simplistic approach being applied to what is a highly complex situation which requires a far more sophisticated policy direction.

Ten years ago, the SEF probably offered the hope of a uniquely Welsh solution to what was required. Instead we have 'borrowed' policies from elsewhere and tried to make them work in Wales. Research on 'policy borrowing' suggests that it very rarely works as a strategy and that what is much more powerful is learning from elsewhere and adapting that learning to the context faced in one's own education system.<sup>22</sup>

SEF was, however, a decade ago and the world, including the world of school improvement, has moved on. The question now for Wales should be how, during the lifetime of the Fifth Assembly, can we develop a new and unique policy direction that enables Wales to create an education system where all its children and young people achieve their potential? If we are to do this, the greatest challenge of all is overcoming the current inequity of the Welsh education system.

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<sup>22</sup> Raffe, D. (2011), *Policy Borrowing or Policy Learning: how (not) to improve education systems*. Edinburgh: Centre for Educational Sociology

## 2. The Challenge

### 2.1. An inequitable education system

Over the last decade, it has become increasingly clear that the most significant weakness of the education system in Wales is its inequity. This has long been a problem for education in Wales, but the increased focus on system improvement has highlighted its seriousness.<sup>23</sup>

This inequity takes various forms. Generally, girls fare far better than boys at most points in the education process. There are also significant differences between ethnic groups in Wales. Indian and Chinese ethnic students are some of the highest achieving young people in education whilst other groups, particularly those of Gypsy/Romany background and black African descent, do relatively badly. The strongest association of all is between the 30 per cent of children in Wales who live in relative income poverty and their typically low educational achievement. There is also intersectionality within these general characteristics, with, for example, white working class boys living in poverty often being the lowest achievers. Overall, however, researchers estimate that poverty is the greatest form of vulnerability associated with low educational outcomes.<sup>24</sup>

The general trend for progress in educational achievement apparent in Wales is also reflected in statistics for our most disadvantaged young people. The table below shows improvements made at the age of 11 and 15 in the achievement of children on free school meals in Wales for 2005, 2010 and 2015 in relation to the Core Subject Indicator (achieving the expected level in English, or Welsh, and Mathematics and Science).

	<b>Age 11</b>	<b>Age 15</b>
2005	51%	16.0%
2010	60.2%	19.8%
2015	75.1%	29.3%

Encouraging as these developments are, they should not mask the following statistics:

- At the beginning of their journey through the education system, 28% of children aged seven, in receipt of free school meals, do not meet expected levels in literacy and numeracy.
- Nearly 70% of our young people in Wales living in poverty do not achieve five GCSEs at C or above, including English and Mathematics, by the age of 15.

<sup>23</sup> Egan, D. (2012). *Communities, Families and Schools Together: A Route to Reducing the Impact of Poverty on Educational Achievement in Wales*. Cardiff: Save the Children. Egan, D. (2016). 'Educational Equity in Wales', *Wales Journal of Education vol 18:1* Cardiff: University of Wales Press

<sup>24</sup> Strand, S. (2014). 'Ethnicity, gender, social class and achievement gaps at 16: intersectionality and 'getting it' for the white working class'. *Research Papers in Education*. 29(2)

Why these indicators are of concern is because:

- Whilst schools might not cause poverty, the levels of achievement of children living in poverty declines between the ages of 3 and 15 and thereby schools do contribute to ongoing, inter-generational poverty.
- Investment in early years' education (through childcare, the Flying Start programme and the Foundation Phase curriculum), is known to be one of the most important preventative measures to reduce future poverty but it is not able to fully eliminate the impact of poverty on children.
- Achieving five good GCSEs including English or Welsh and Mathematics is an important indicator of future employability, whether this be through proceeding to further education, into apprenticeships, higher education and ultimately the labour market. Given that good quality employment provides the best chance for young people in poverty moving out of poverty in future, this has great significance.

## 2.2. The ecology of poverty in Wales

The growing focus on poverty in Wales at cross-government level and within education has increased our understanding of both the complexity of poverty in Wales and its geographical location. Whilst poverty is still most readily associated with household income levels, it is also evident in deficits which disadvantaged people face in their health, housing, food, fuel and general quality of life. This reflects the analysis of British society developed by sociologists influenced by Bourdieu whereby social status, including living in poverty, can result from combinations of inequality in economic, social and cultural capital.<sup>25</sup>

Based on income poverty alone, approximately 20 per cent of the population of Wales live in permanent poverty and up to another 30 per cent, live close to the 'poverty line' moving above and below it over time. Whilst many of these people - particularly those in the post-industrial valleys and urban areas of South Wales - are in poverty because of a lack of employment, most people in poverty in Wales live in a household where at least one adult works.

We also know that poverty in Wales is widely dispersed, with pockets existing in all parts of Wales and greater concentrations in some areas. This means that policies designed to tackle the impact of poverty need to be both people-focused, as represented in the Families First programme which operates across Wales, and place-sensitive, as is the case with the pre-school Flying Start programme which is concentrated on the most disadvantaged areas in Wales, and the Communities First programme which serves the most deprived communities. The complicated demography of poverty in Wales, however, has led to perversities arising whereby

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<sup>25</sup> Savage, M. (2015), *Social Class in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Penguin Books

many children in poverty are not entitled to Flying Start-led interventions and more people in poverty live outside Communities First areas than within.

### 2.3. Welsh Government strategies for tackling the impact of poverty

During the period of the last Welsh Government (2010-2015) a holistic all-portfolio strategy was developed to tackling poverty led by a designated Minister and team of officials. The policy narrative moved increasingly away from mitigating the impact of poverty (important though that was in the face of the Westminster Government's continuing programme of austerity and 'welfare reform') to the prevention of poverty through a focus on early years, early intervention and improving the employability of the most disadvantaged.<sup>26</sup>

Education policy had an important place within this overall tackling poverty strategy, with reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement being one of the three stated top priorities (improving literacy and numeracy were the others) of the Education Minister and his department. Education policy in this area was set out in a strategy document entitled *Re-Writing the Future* with its focus on early years' education, improvements in learning and teaching, raising aspirations and family/community engagement.<sup>27</sup> The strategy has been supported by a range of interventions including the *Pupil Deprivation Grant* and the production of some very well regarded resources on family and community engagement<sup>28</sup>.

The formation of a new Welsh Government in 2016 and the arrival of a new Cabinet Secretary for Education, does not appear to have changed the overall direction of education policy. An increase in the Pupil Deprivation Grant, including a doubling of the amount attached to 3-5 year olds is a positive development. There has, however, been a major change of overall policy direction. The holistic tackling poverty strategy, led by a responsible Minister, has ended and been replaced with a greater focus on prosperity, underpinned by an emphasis on the importance of early intervention (particularly during the first 1,000 days of a child's life), a significant expansion in childcare opportunities for working parents and much greater focus on employability. The future of the pan-Wales lead tackling poverty programme *Communities First* is in doubt, but there is to be a new *Valleys Strategy* targeted at the post-industrial communities located there. Poverty is now to be the responsibility of all Welsh Government Ministers, with a lead Minister (the Economy Secretary) coordinating their work.

A growing body of evidence suggests that if these are to be the foundations on which a more equitable education system is constructed, families and communities (as well as schools) need to be more strongly involved. There is the potential, therefore, of

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<sup>26</sup> Welsh Government (2013). *Building Resilient Communities: Taking Forward the Tackling Poverty Action Plan*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<sup>27</sup> Welsh Government (2014). *Rewriting the Future* Cardiff: Welsh Government

<sup>28</sup> Welsh Government (2015). *Family and Community Engagement Toolkit for Schools*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

moving the education system in Wales away from what has been depicted above as an unsustainable, accountability-driven school improvement focus, to one that is constructed to overcome inequity, placing children and young people at the centre of policy and strongly involving families, communities and all parts of the education system, not just schools.

### 3. Back to the Learning Country

The analysis offered above suggests that the 'policy turn' in education in Wales that has gathered pace since 2010 based on approaches common in the Global Education Reform Movement has not succeeded overall. Instead we should return to the values and policy approaches of a revised 'Learning Country' approach. At the core of this should be:

1. A more sophisticated approach to school improvement which removes the deleterious effects of current policies and which values and raises the esteem of the teaching profession in particular.
2. An enhanced focus on reducing the impact that poverty has on educational achievement concentrated on three areas of policy intervention.
3. Much greater emphasis on the role of families and communities including all parts of the education sector, in bringing about educational progress.

#### 3.1. A new model of school improvement

It is a truism that schools make a difference, and also that they make the greatest difference of all for their most disadvantaged students. Whilst other factors, including school leadership, are important, the area that makes by far the biggest difference to what young people achieve when they are in school is the quality of the teaching they receive.<sup>29</sup> It should therefore be at the heart of a new approach to school improvement in Wales.

What should be removed from our current approach to school improvement in Wales is the negative consequences of current policies. This should include:

- The reduction of accountability to proportionate and cost-effective levels based on Estyn inspections and rigorous processes of self-evaluation.
- The end of the current obsession with quantitative data to be replaced by a broader range of quantitative and qualitative evidence as a means of assessing school performance.
- Much greater focus on the voice and the wellbeing of children and young people.
- Significantly increased support for teachers and their professional development.

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<sup>29</sup> Barber, M. and Mourshed, M. (2007), *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top*. London: McKinsey and Company

- The end of the school categorisation system with its perverse effects on the reputation and standing of schools, particularly in our most disadvantaged areas.
- Consideration of how school catchment areas can be better managed to prevent 'parent flight'.
- An end to the 'hollowing out' of the school curriculum through the development of the new curriculum.

These policies might be constructed through a new School Effectiveness Framework, based on a balance between appropriate levels of challenge and considerably expanded support for schools and a recognition that out-of-school as well as within-school factors are important in developing school and system improvement.

### 3.2. Reducing the impact of poverty

Integral to this new approach to school improvement should be the overarching importance of creating an equitable and excellent education system through reducing the impact that poverty has on educational achievement.

As has been suggested above, interventions in this area should focus on the educational aspects of three areas of cross-cutting Welsh Government policy:

1. ***The importance of early years' education:*** A greater quantum of resource should be allocated to improving the availability of high quality childcare and to extending the reach and the depth of Flying Start. In the Foundation Phase, increased emphasis should be placed on evidence-based approaches that can ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds progress at the same rate as their more privileged peers. In each of these areas of early years' provision the importance of the quality of the workforce and their professional development is critical.
2. ***Early Intervention at all stages of a child's journey through the education system to ensure that they do not fall behind in their learning:*** These interventions should draw on the robust evidence base of what is likely to succeed in achieving this and on the support which can be offered at family and community level.
3. ***Far greater concentration on employability as a key outcome of the education process:*** This should be embedded appropriately within the new curriculum and should lead to a range of high-quality traditional and vocational routes and qualifications that support progression into further and higher education and the labour market. This would require significant improvement in the independent careers advice offered to all young people throughout their secondary education, but particularly those most disadvantaged and liable to become disengaged. It should also involve re-consideration of the different

routes available to young people post-16 and post-18, particularly prioritising progression to apprenticeships.

### 3.3. The Role of Families

The significant influence that parents and families have on the education of children and young people is supported by a large body of evidence. The home learning environment in the early years of a child's life is known to be particularly important in relation to future success in education.<sup>30</sup> As they pass through the education system, parental influence continues to be the single strongest factor affecting young people. For example, a study in 2007 identified family involvement in schooling between the ages of 7 and 16 as being a more powerful factor than family background, the size of family and the level of parental education.<sup>31</sup>

It can be taken for granted that through the economic, cultural and social capital that they can provide, parents and families from our most affluent communities support their children and the school they attend to ensure that the child's potential is reached and their future progression is secure. A child born into an affluent area of Wales is much more likely to have parents who have done well in the education system, to be surrounded by other young people with similar backgrounds and to live in a community where success in education is taken for granted and celebrated.

There is also a good chance that they will attend local primary and secondary schools where high levels of success are usually achieved. There is a very high likelihood that when additional support is required, such as in the build up to GCSE and post-16 examinations, their parents will be able to purchase additional one-to-one tuition for them. They are also much more likely to be able to access rich informal education opportunities such as out-of-school activities, trips to museums, arts events and holidays than their less advantaged peers. Given such advantages it is very difficult for children **not** to achieve and even exceed their potential and to be rewarded by educational success.

In some areas of Wales, however, which may be a matter of miles away from the more affluent areas, very different circumstances can prevail. In some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities in the UK, children may face family situations where aspirations for them are high, but parents may not have the levels of education required to support their children nor the social capital or income necessary to access additional support. Children in poverty are much more likely to be growing up in chaotic family situations where there is poor family health and wellbeing.

The communities they grow up in, often ravaged by the impact of the loss of previous employment and the lack of high-quality alternatives and negative peer group

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<sup>30</sup> Siraj, I and Mayo, A. (2014), *Social Class and Educational Inequality: the Impact of Parents and Schools*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>31</sup> Peters, M. et al (2007), *Parental Involvement in Children's Education*. London: DFES

influences, are much more likely to depress and sometimes eradicate the high aspirations they once held. There is a far lower likelihood that they will attend primary and especially secondary schools where high levels of achievement are the norm and which are skilled at supporting children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in realising their potential and achieving success.

It is sometimes assumed that parents from more disadvantaged backgrounds will not have high aspirations for their children and that they will transfer low expectations to them. In contradiction to this, research studies have revealed a more complex situation. The aspirations of children from disadvantaged backgrounds are generally as high as children from more privileged backgrounds throughout most of their primary education, but then begin to fall away during the secondary years.<sup>32</sup>

A recent study has concluded that when parents from high poverty communities with low levels of qualifications are given appropriate support, the exclusion and truancy of their children is much less likely and their success in learning much more achievable.<sup>33</sup> For children living in poverty, keeping their aspirations high also requires high quality careers advice, meaningful work experience and skilled mentoring.<sup>34</sup>

The growing body of evidence we have on family involvement in education suggests that there are three interrelated domains where this can be effective, particularly for more disadvantaged parents and families:

1. Involvement in children's learning through home/school links, for example to develop early literacy.
2. Engagement of parents in the life of the school and its activities.
3. Involvement of families in parenting and parental education programmes.<sup>35</sup>

What this suggests, therefore, is that family involvement in education, particularly in our most disadvantaged communities, is one of the greatest untapped resources in our education system.

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<sup>32</sup> Goodman, A. and Gregg, P. et al (2010), *Poorer children's educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>33</sup> Harris, A. and Goodall, J. (2013), *Helping Families Support Children's Success at School*. London: Save the Children

<sup>34</sup> Menzies, L. (2013), *How English Schools Can Work With Parents to Keep Them on Track*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>35</sup> Dickson, M., Gregg, P. and Robinson, H. (2013), *Early, late or never? When does parental education impact child outcomes?* Bristol: CMPO; Grayson, H. (2013), *Rapid Review of Parental Engagement and Narrowing the Gap in Attainment for Disadvantaged Children*. Slough: NFER; Goodall, J. et al (2011), *Review of Best Practice in Parental Engagement*. London: DFES. Egan, D. (2012), *Poverty and Low Educational Attainment in Wales: Student, Family and Community Interventions*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Putnam, R. (2015), *Our Kids: the American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon and Schuster

### 3.4. The importance of communities

Communities matter in relation to educational achievement - particularly in our most disadvantaged communities. A Cabinet Office report in 2008 captured this very well:

“Young people in certain types of neighbourhoods are less likely to develop ambitious, achievable, aspirations. Certain community characteristics are associated with low aspirations such as close knit social networks, a sense of isolation from broader opportunities and a history of economic decline. High levels of bonding social capital and low levels of bridging social capital can restrict young people’s horizons and access to opportunities.”<sup>36</sup>

Research on community contexts in London, Glasgow and Nottingham support this analysis. It found that in disadvantaged areas of these cities people had high aspirations for both education and opportunities for employment. However, achieving these desired outcomes was influenced strongly by the places themselves. Advice was not readily available on how these ambitions could be achieved and what possibilities existed in the local labour market. The study concluded that schools, families and the community itself were all important in making progress, with families having the biggest influence.<sup>37</sup>

An earlier study on education in disadvantaged areas suggested that because of the significant differences existing between these areas, no single approach to developing improved outcomes would suit each of the contexts. It also recognised that community partnerships, such as Community Based Schools, could make a significant difference.<sup>38</sup>

Community Based Schools and Extended Schools have been developed in many countries including England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Evaluations of these programmes have shown that they impact positively on pupils, schools (through improvements in attendance and achievement and reductions in exclusions), families (allowing, for example, opportunities for parental education and improving the perception of the school) and communities (through developing greater community cohesion).<sup>39</sup>

A USA study in 2002 of community schooling concluded that ‘when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better at school, stay in school longer and like school more.’<sup>40</sup> In his highly influential recent study of education in the USA, Robert Putnam has also made a strong case for the

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<sup>36</sup> Cabinet Office (2008). *Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities*. London: Cabinet Office

<sup>37</sup> St Clair, R., Kintrea, K. and Houston, M. (2011). *The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspirations*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>38</sup> Wilkin, A. et al (2007). *Schools as community-based organisations*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Nicholls, B. and Stickland, N.(2015), *Schools plus: education at the heart of communities*. London: Centre Forum; Cummings, C. et al (2007), *Evaluation of the Full Service Extended Schools Initiative: Final Report*. London: DfES; Kerr, K., Dyson, A. and Raffo, C. (2014), *Education, disadvantage and place*. Bristol: Policy Press

<sup>40</sup> Henderson, A. and Mapp, K. (2002), *A New Wave of Evidence: the Impact of School, Family and Community on Student Achievement*. Austin: National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.

importance of the community context in education, pointing to the potential they offer for creating social capital and networks that disadvantaged children often do not enjoy, the key role of informal mentoring that can be offered by community members, and the assets that can be provided through the support of religious bodies and the business community.<sup>41</sup>

Wales prides itself on being a nation of communities where people identify strongly with their own patch as well as with their national identity. The appendix to this report provides some examples of where innovative community-based approaches to education are underway. Yet, this community aspect of education is currently hugely under-developed and in many cases where it does exist, it is fragile, relying on insecure funding streams and inspirational local leadership. It is probably here that the greatest potential of all resides for developing the distinctive and progressive education system that, it can be argued, has not yet been fully realised through the opportunity provided by devolution.

The whole of the education sector has a role to play in supporting families, communities and of course young people and should become involved in these developments. One of the unique features of *The Learning Country* was its holistic vision for education as lifelong learning, with all sectors from pre-school through to adult and community learning having a valuable role to play. That has been lost through the increasing focus on school performance in isolation and needs to be regained within a new strategy.

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<sup>41</sup> Putnam, R. (2015), *Our Kids: the American Dream in Crisis*. New York: Simon and Schuster

## 4. Education and Community Partnerships

Alongside a new model of school improvement, a return to *Learning Country* policies based on the social principles which Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Roderick celebrated might see a new approach to schools working much more closely with their communities. Almost certainly reflecting consensus opinion in Wales, we have eschewed new school governance models such as academies and free schools, but we have done little to develop stronger links between our schools, parents and families, and the wider community.

We might therefore look to develop much stronger education and community partnerships in Wales based on the following principles:

- Recognition that parents and families have a critically important part to play in education.
- Realising all the assets that the community possesses to support education.
- An acceptance that relationships and processes are as important as hard outcomes such as test and examination results.
- That education is not the only public service that can contribute to educational progress.
- The importance of all education sectors (pre-school, school, further education, adult and community-based learning, work-based learning and higher education) working together collaboratively within the community.
- The important role of shared and distributed leadership.

Based upon these principles, education and community partnerships could ensure that education provides all community members with:

- **Inspiration:** new experiences and broadening horizons.
- **Information:** which is timely and supportive and ensures that early intervention is in place.
- **Self-esteem:** developing confidence and resilience in learners.
- **Self-efficacy:** a belief that individual and collaborative goals can be achieved.<sup>42</sup>

The practical expression of these principles should take the form of a **Learning Offer** which would include:

- High quality pre-school education.

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<sup>42</sup> Cuthbert, C. and Hatch, R. (2009). *Educational aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities*. London: Social Policy Association.

- Excellent learning and teaching within schools.
- Family engagement opportunities.
- Extensive out-of-hours learning opportunities.
- A strong focus on wellbeing.
- Opportunities for early intervention when anyone falls behind in their learning.
- A variety of routes to employability.

#### 4.1. Emerging examples and models

We already have emerging examples and models of such education and community partnerships from Wales, elsewhere in the UK and abroad. Save the Children in England are involved in developing **Children's Communities** in Wallsend in North Tyneside, Collyhurst in Manchester and Pembury in Hackney, London. These bring together parents, head-teachers, GPs, Sure Start centre managers, health visiting leads, senior youth workers, housing managers, family support workers and parent employment advisers, in a partnership designed to improve current service delivery through collaboration and to develop effective, long-term strategies to improve children's lives. The intention over time is to establish a network of activities in each community focused on early intervention.<sup>43</sup>

The Wallsend Children's Community is based around Churchill Community College, situated within a former coalmining and shipbuilding area which has experienced very similar post-industrial challenges to those faced by communities in Wales. Through a partnership approach which involves the whole community and with a strong focus on developing the employability skills of young people, they have transformed educational achievement in the area to a level that is way above the typical outcomes of similar schools in Wales.

The Children's Communities approach has been influenced by the **Harlem Children's Zone** (HCZ) model in New York. This was initiated in the 1990s in one of the highest poverty areas of the USA. Its focus is on disadvantaged children 0-18 with the aim of providing them with educational and economic opportunities that will enable them to have a successful transition to an independent, healthy adulthood. The core principles it adopts are:

- It is hard to raise healthy children in a deprived community.
- Local institutions can reverse the impact of deprivation by drawing community members together around common interest and activities.

Their approach is a doubly holistic one in that it supports children through their lives from cradle to employment (with a strategically planned pipeline of services) and

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<sup>43</sup> Save the Children (2015), Children's Communities [accessed via: <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk>]

supports the whole child, addressing a wide range of family and community factors that may prevent them doing well. HCZ raises its own funds and operates independently. Schools are an integral part of HCZ but are not the drivers of it. Evaluations are demonstrating significant success as the programme gains momentum.<sup>44</sup>

More broadly in the USA there has been the development of **Community Schools**. These have a long history dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. From the late 1980s new models of community schooling developed, all of which were designed to address the situation of children living in poverty. In New York, for example, the Children's Aid Society has developed 21 Community Schools with a full-service model which provides education, out-of-hours learning, health and social services in an integrated way and through intense relationships with the parents and communities they serve. There are many other models, all of which are part of the Coalition of Community Schools across the USA. They share a common mission 'to change the role of education in the lives of students, families and communities, so that under-served youth may be empowered to overcome obstacles and become happy, healthy and productive adults.'<sup>45</sup>

In Australia, a different model exists in the community of Logan, an area of Brisbane, Queensland. Leaders and community organisations in this seriously deprived community found that despite numerous funded programmes which had been introduced in the area, that poverty and deprivation were getting worse. They determined, therefore, to work together to create a partnership **Logan Together**, which shares a vision for the community and a commitment to cross-sector engagement.

The Logan Together partnership commits to collaborative action based on evidence-based decision making through joint investment and sustainable interventions. Their initial focus is on the early years of children's lives with programmes targeted at reducing smoking during pregnancy, improving children's birth weight, developing home-based literacy, high quality pre-school and early intervention throughout the primary years with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. Using a collective impact framework, they describe themselves as 'developing a whole community and comprehensive roadmap to plan for our success and guide our community partnerships over the next 10 years.'<sup>46</sup>

In Belfast, Northern Ireland, **Full Service Community Network Schools** have been developed in areas of the city as part of its re-development following The Troubles. They aim to consolidate existing strategies and improve integrated working across

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<sup>44</sup> Dyson, A. et al (2012). *Developing Children's Zones for England*. London: Save the Children; Tough, P. (2009), *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*. New York: Mariner Books

<sup>45</sup> National Centre for Community Schools (2014), *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*. New York: National Centre for Community Schools.

<sup>46</sup> Logan Together (2015), *Prospectus*. Logan City: Logan Together.

statutory, community and voluntary organisations so that sustainable improvement is achieved in education, health and employment. Their education work includes pre-school and nursery initiatives, family learning, early intervention support in primary schools and inter-agency working across all children's services. They can demonstrate impressive progress in cognitive outcomes, particularly for the most disadvantaged schools and children within the target communities. It believes that it is 'on the cusp of transforming our education system through joint partnership working, embedding the education zone culture, meaningful integrated working across government departments and consolidation of the full-service approach.'<sup>47</sup>

Closer to home is the work undertaken by Dave Adamson and Mark Lang as part of the 'deep place' approach to creating equitable and sustainable places that they undertook in the town of Tredegar in Blaenau Gwent in 2014. Faced by the evidence of seriously low levels of educational achievement in the town, they were persuaded that a Co-operative Educational Trust should be established to bring all schools together with employers, parents, community organisations and other educational institutions. They see potential in a co-operative model of a type that has developed in some parts of England.<sup>48</sup>

Examples of education and community partnerships in Wales in the Betws area of Newport, Maes-y-Morfa in Llanelli, Glyncoch in Pontypridd, Ferndale in the Rhondda Fach and Blaen-y-Maes in Swansea are set out in the appendix to this report.

These various models have some common features, which are that they:

- Are strongly focused on the child, both in relation to wellbeing and educational progress.
- All have strong early years' programmes.
- Develop collaborative leadership.
- Have a strong focus on the involvement of families, communities and community partners.
- Involve some model of shared services or integrated working.
- See employability as being a key goal to remove children from future poverty.
- All use forms of early intervention.

The recent announcement by the Welsh Government of the commissioning of 'Children's Zones' in Wales represents an encouraging development in this regard.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Presentation given to BERA Research Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy at Queen's University, Belfast, March, 2016 [accessed via: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/project/bera-research-commissions-poverty-and-policy-advocacy>]

<sup>48</sup> Adamson, D. and Lang, M. (2014), *Towards a New Settlement: A deep place approach to equitable and sustainable places*. Merthyr Tydfil: Centre for Regeneration Excellence Wales

<sup>49</sup> Welsh Government (11 October 2016), "New approach needed to build resilient communities" – Carl Sargeant', [accessed via: [Gov.wales/newsroom/people-and-communities/2016/new-approach-needed-to-build-resilient-communities/?lang=en](http://Gov.wales/newsroom/people-and-communities/2016/new-approach-needed-to-build-resilient-communities/?lang=en)]

## 5. The Future

In the political debate that followed the announcement of the 2015 PISA results in December 2016, the Conservative MP for Brecon and Radnor, Chris Davies, suggested that the performance of Wales in these tests might suggest that education was in such a dreadful state that a case might be made for it being brought back under Westminster control.<sup>50</sup> As with so much of the political posturing that now attaches itself to education in Wales, as elsewhere, this ringing condemnation of the young people, families and teachers of Wales was neither evidence-based or constructive.

More significantly perhaps the UKIP vote in the May 2016 Assembly Elections and the pro-Brexit vote in many of the Labour 'heartland' seats of the South Wales Valleys - areas with some of the lowest skills and qualifications profiles in their populations in the UK and highest levels of economic inactivity - can be interpreted as a clear message to the political establishment of which Chris Davies is a part.

We need education to succeed in Wales, because whilst silver-bullets do not and will not exist in creating a prosperous and equitable Wales, all the evidence suggests that employment is the best route out of poverty and that the most secure and well-paid employment comes to those with the best skills and qualifications.

Whilst education has succeeded and progressed under devolution it has not achieved the outcomes hoped for in *The Learning Country* of 2001. The predominant reason for this, as became increasingly clear from about 2006 onwards, was that devolved education policies were not leading to improvements in the historically low levels of educational achievement in Wales' most disadvantaged communities and were not resulting in the progress rate being made in other post-industrial communities in the UK with similar parts of their population.

The policy-turn occasioned by PISA in 2009/2010, and the political consequences of this, interrupted *The Learning Country* approach and replaced it with 'the GERM' with its relentless focus on consumer-driven performativity and accountability and its negativity to the perceived 'producer' (teacher) focused policies that had gone before.

The consequences of this policy-turn can be seen to have been largely negative, such that they may indeed now call into question the devolution project. For if we are to have England-like market-driven and consumer-led policies then, despite our different structures, why not return to England and Wales administration of them?

As Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Roderick perceptively identified, *The Learning Country* was much more than a 'programme for government', for it attempted to capture and espouse the social values and equitable aspirations that it believed were

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<sup>50</sup> BBC News (12 December 2016), 'Welsh Government 'special measures' call over education' [accessed via: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/38296010](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/38296010)]

the collective will of the Welsh people. Those have been lost in the transition to the GERM.

This report has argued that we need to return to those guiding principles, to replace the GERM with a more appropriate made-in-Wales approach to school improvement accompanied by a new approach to developing education and community partnerships and a relentless focus on improving equity of achievement. Thus, it is argued, can devolution lead to the creation of an education system that can help to transform Wales and its future.

## Appendix: Case Studies of Emerging Practice in Wales

### Case study 1: Blaen-y-Maes, Swansea

Blaen-y-Maes Primary school is located in Penderry Ward, Swansea. The area has:

- A much higher proportion of under four year olds than the city average.
- A high proportion of lone parent households compared to the Swansea average.
- A high percentage (26.9%) of people with long term health problems and disabilities.
- A very high percentage (41.5%) of the population who are economically inactive.

The school has 221 pupils on roll with 62.1% of these being eligible for free school meals compared to a city average of 20.8%. The percentage of pupils reaching the expected levels of achievement by the age of eleven has risen from 61.9% in 2009 to 70.8% in 2015. The most up-to-date data available on the attainment gap between free school meals and non-free school meals pupils shows a significant closing of the gap from 50% in 2009 to 7.5% in 2013.

Many of the pupils present with social and emotional wellbeing difficulties which impact on their ability to learn and result in them having high level of additional learning needs.

The community itself is mixed, with a section of generational residents, and a high proportion of transient residents including emergency housing and asylum seekers. There is also a growing Polish community within the area.

The school is very committed to the principles of restorative practice, and supporting children and their families is viewed as being part of the responsibility of everyone in the school. The senior leadership team ensure that staff share information, discuss pressing issues and are aware of incidents within the school, home and the community that could affect the children in their care, through weekly whole staff meetings. The whole staff team has undertaken training in supporting children with trauma and attachment issues, being one of the few schools in the city to have done this.

The Flying Start setting based within the school is managed by the Head Teacher and is regarded as *'the youngest class in the school'*. Through these links the school engages with families from an early stage and has strong working links with the resident Flying Start Health Visitors and Parenting team.

Effective information sharing protocols and transition procedures through entry into Flying Start and into mainstream school ensures that individual needs, issues, and

background of the child and family are shared. Flying Start holds joint events with the school, such as concerts, celebrations, sports days and school trips.

Two staff members are employed specifically to focus on family and wellbeing issues, namely the Family Inclusion Officer (FIO) and the Emotional Wellbeing Officer (EWBO). Each role has a different focus but both work together to provide holistic support for families.

The EWBO has responsibility for supporting children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. These are identified through observing children's behaviour and through daily circle time which provides children with the opportunity to talk about any problems they are facing. Outside of the classroom, children are identified through the needs of the family via referrals, families seeking support and from the FIO.

The FIO targets support at the parents and the family. Embedding the FIO into the school means that many of the families in the community will approach the FIO directly for advice and support which ranges from long term interventions to issues which are rapidly dealt with.

A large proportion of time and resources are dedicated to the children's emotional development and both the children's and the families' wellbeing. High importance is placed on working together to holistically support children and families.

### Case study 2: Ferndale, Rhondda Fach

Ferndale Community School is an 11-18 comprehensive in the upper Rhondda Fach. Its pupils come from the former coalmining communities of Maerdy, Ferndale and Tylorstown and from Penrhys. 35 per cent of children in the school are eligible for free school meals and the number of children with special educational needs is also high.

Over the last five years the school has made consistent progress in improving the achievement of all its students including its eFSM students, to the point where it now experiences levels of success above similar schools in Wales. This has enabled it to move out of ongoing monitoring by Estyn and to significantly improve its outcomes in Welsh Government quality assessments.

Over this period the relationship between the school and its wider community has come to the fore. Supported by a local councillor, and an active governing body, the school has begun to explore and develop a more active role. Recognising the limits of its capacity and potential reach, it has helped to reinvigorate a dormant charity associated with the school. The charity, supported by the school, is leading the development of a range of initiatives providing direct services to pupils of the school, their parents and the wider community.

The Welsh Government pre-school programme Flying Start, which is usually linked to primary schools, has become part of this development. Through an open tender process, the school and the charity won the contract to deliver a Flying Start service in the Maerdy area, with a group being co-located on the Community School site. Morning and afternoon sessions are provided for eligible children for up to five days a week and the provision is also available on a commercial basis for parents wishing to pay for child care, providing both a local service to working parents and an income source for the charity.

The Community School is optimistic that this involvement in Flying Start will provide a new and critical link with its feeder primary schools, opening-up new channels of communication about issues of transition, educational priorities and parental support. Based on the experience to date, the charity also intends to bid for the contracts to deliver Flying Start services in neighbouring communities, from which their high school pupils are drawn.

The charity has also recently taken ownership of the local public library, through a process of 'asset transfer' from the local authority. It has renamed it 'The Hub,' and with grant aid from Trust Funds and redirected Communities First monies, they have employed community development staff to work with local people to develop an evolving programme of education classes for adults, and social and cultural groups. The charity believes there are considerable potential benefits of linking community development work with the school. They are currently exploring the potential of raising funds for a new building within the school grounds which could be used as the base for a more accessible and extended community development programme.

Through these various initiatives the charity and the Community School is taking on the role of being a major player in the community development and regeneration of the area. It is in the process of changing its constitutional status to one of a limited company with charitable status, to better enable it to undertake this work. It will retain however, its core charitable purpose of supporting the school, and a governance structure that ensures a place on the board for the head teacher and school governors. The charity is therefore taking on a wide range of roles. It supports the school financially by, for example, employing school-based non-teaching staff to release the school budget for core educational purposes. It works with the wider community, as seen through various community projects and also targets specific groups as seen in Flying Start.

### Case study 3: Maes-Y-Morfa, Llanelli

Maes- y- Morfa Community Primary School was formed following the amalgamation of Morfa Nursery and Infant School and Morfa Junior School. It currently has 220 pupils on roll, 37.2% of whom are eligible for free school meals. The school also has a high percentage of pupils who have additional learning needs and English is an additional language for 6.2% of pupils.

The area in which the school is located is severely disadvantaged. It is a Communities First area and is ranked 10th in the all-Wales Index of Deprivation. The school states that learners represent the full range of ability but that the majority are much lower on entry than would be expected in relation to language and basic skills.

The Head-teacher was appointed on the formation of the school. He has overseen and managed the significant movement of resources and staff from one site to another, resolved difficult budget issues, staff redundancies, the establishment of a new governing body, and promoting and raising the profile of the new school.

The achievement of pupils at the school is on an improving trend. For example, at the age of 7, eFSM pupils succeed at levels higher than similar schools in Wales and above local authority and Wales averages.

The school has purchased a house just outside the school for use as a family engagement centre. It provides a range of support services for parents and families including contributions from the local secondary school and further education college. This provision includes a reading programme to encourage reading at home, play-worker training, financial literacy training, advice on digital learning coaching, induction programmes for the growing Polish community and first-aid courses.

The school has a good relationship with Communities First and joint interventions are developed. It employs a Family Engagement teacher who is directly line managed by the Head-teacher. This enables regular communication, in a variety of forms, to be maintained with the most difficult to reach families.

#### Case study 4: Bettws, Newport

Millbrook Primary is located on the Bettws estate in Newport. It is an area of multiple, complex and persistent deprivation, with some of its wards being consistently in the bottom 10% of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation. The school was formed through the merger of two existing schools in 2007, at which time it was on a downward trajectory with falling pupil numbers, significant issues with pupil behaviour and wellbeing, and low staff morale. 27.9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The school has made consistent progress over time and now, for example, at the age of 7, all pupils - including those who are eFSM - achieve outcomes above similar schools, local authority and Wales averages.

Under the leadership of the Head-teacher, Millbrook has embraced the idea of school community partnerships. Starting from a low base of what staff described as poor and sometimes hostile relationships with parents, the school has developed an innovative approach to the challenge of family and community engagement.

Instrumental to the development of this work has been the head teachers' contact with the work of the Children's Aid Society and the wider community school movement in

the USA. She has undertaken study trips to explore their work in different settings and has also ensured that members of her staff team and community partners have had opportunities to learn through international links, further study visits and by welcoming delegations into the school.

Accepting that children's outcomes are intimately related to family circumstances, the USA Community Schools model is built on a recognition that while schools can and do support families, their primary purpose is the education of pupils. To meet these different but highly interlinked sets of needs, Community-School Partnerships of the type developed in the USA, have seen the appointment of a 'Community Director', ascribed equal status with the head-teacher, who attends to the wider needs of families in their communities.

Using this core principle and without any prospect of major charitable or government funding, Millbrook has reworked the model for a Welsh context. They have grasped opportunities as and when they have arisen and built alliances and partnerships with key individuals and organisations.

The role of 'Community Director' is undertaken by a school governor, who has also led a local voluntary organisation. Taking on a brokerage-type role, underpinned by a Service Level Agreement with the voluntary organisation, he and the Head-teacher have harnessed community resources, and negotiated the involvement of both statutory and voluntary partnerships.

For example, one of the main assets held by the school are its large and underutilised premises. Family- and child-focused services have been encouraged to become located within the school. This has led to the development of a Flying Start facility, the re-location of a Pupil Referral Unit on-site and to Families First using the building. Health visitors were also based there for a time. This co-location of services has generated a range of benefits including the greater proximity of services for users and the building of trust-based relationships. Through a partnership between the voluntary organisation, the school and the local authority, two Nurture Officers have been employed by Communities First, and are based within the school to work with specific groups of pupils and families.

Alongside these initiatives, the school has worked concertedly to develop effective relationships with parents. From making teachers and school leadership staff visible and available at the start and end of the day, to family learning, running Save the Children's FAST programme, coffee mornings, reading groups, and film nights, the school continually reinforces the message that parents are welcome. While this work falls into the remit of all staff, it is led by a Pupil and Family Engagement Officer, a title purposely designed to signal the relationship and build on the links between children, families and the school.

In small but incremental ways, parents have increasingly been included in the work of the school. One example of this was a leaflet drawn up by parents, for parents, about the effects on children of them missing school. The initiative emerged from a Parents Forum discussion about school banding, in which the head teacher outlined to aggrieved parents the basis on which they had been classified a 'Yellow' and not 'Green' school, in the recent banding exercise undertaken by the Welsh Government. Understanding the significance of attendance, parents decided that they were best placed to communicate key messages to other parents. For the school, this was a significant moment in their push to increase pupil attendance.

Funding this work, is a challenge for Millbrook, but has been achieved through the creative use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant, Communities First match funding, the re-investment from rents received, small grants, and local fundraising. It therefore remains vulnerable and fragile, meaning that the long-term sustainability of the work can never be guaranteed.

### Case study 5: Glyncoch, Pontypridd

Glyncoch is a small community of about 3,000 people based around a former council-house estate that was built in the 1950s, located three miles north of Pontypridd. The village has two primary schools (recently federated under one head-teacher) and most of the children proceed from them to Pontypridd High School. It has been a Communities First area since the programmes' inception.

People and Work (P&W) is a charity that has been involved in social and educational research for over 25 years. For more than a decade they have worked with the community of Glyncoch, Communities First and a range of other partners on projects addressing education, community safety, health, wellbeing, environmental improvement and civic engagement. A key feature of this work has been the way in which it is often difficult to distinguish the work as being that of any individual organisation at the community level. The services, programmes and facilities that arise from this activity are purposefully designed to overlap and integrate.

The low educational attainment of pupils from Glyncoch provided a key starting point for the work undertaken on the estate. P&W's initial programme, the *Build It* project, supported young people to develop the skills and confidence needed to take up apprenticeships and employment in the construction trades.

They then became involved in a project tracking the experience of children who had achieved well in education at primary school level but who had not maintained their success at secondary school. This led to the School Focused Communities programme, an action research project that followed and supported two cohorts of pupils from the primary schools and their families through their time in secondary education. The project contributed to a 25% decrease in school exclusions, significant improvements in educational attainment by the age of 15 and 70% of the cohort

proceeding on to some form of post-16 education or training compared to none previously.

Other activities have included an extensive programme of adult learning, which assisted in developing a much stronger learning culture amongst families in the community.

## About the author

Professor David Egan is Emeritus Professor of Education at Cardiff Metropolitan University and an Associate of the Bevan Foundation. He has had over 40 years of experience as a practitioner, researcher and policy-maker within the Welsh education system.

Whilst he remains fully committed to Wales having its own education system, he recognises that there is much to do to make it the high quality and high equity system we should want it to be. He is also joint editor of Wales' only scholarly education journal, the Wales Journal of Education.

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## About the Bevan Foundation

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## *Ideas That Change Wales*