

Regenerating communities: The role of extended schools

By Claire Millett

Introduction

Education is right at the top of the Government's agenda. While improvements in attainment levels are beginning to show, the level of educational *underachievement* in the UK is still higher than most other country's in the industrial world. An abundance of research and literature demonstrates that poor schooling has a negative effect on society in social and economic terms and also that poorer areas have poorer educational results.

The Social Exclusion Unit's Schools Plus Policy Action Team 11 has summarised much of this research in their 1999 publication "*Building Learning Communities*". The report states that in 1999 the Department of Social Security found clear evidence of a chain of events linking child poverty to teenage parenthood, reduced rates of staying on at school after 16 years old, increased chances of contact with the police and higher risks of low wages and unemployment. Further, in the late 1970s, people who stayed on at school beyond 16 years old had earnings on average 40% higher than those who had left school at 16. By 1990 this had increased to 60%. Additionally many studies have found a link between under achievement in schools and crime:

- truants are more than three times more likely to commit crime than non-truants;
- 42% of young offenders sentenced in courts had been excluded from school and a further 23% were frequent truants;

■ a 1994 study found that one in two prison inmates had serious literacy and numeracy difficulties compared with one in six in the general population.

In terms of how area disadvantage affects educational attainment, the Social Exclusion Unit found that students in disadvantaged areas attain less than their peers in more affluent areas.

The above issues are now being seen as a community wide problem, and as a result the Government has developed a community focussed solution via 'full service' or 'extended' schools. This *Local Work* will firstly explain what is meant by these concepts, before going on to investigate how, and the extent to which, they can contribute to the wider regeneration of an area.

What is a 'full service' or 'extended' school?

The term 'full service schools' originated in the USA and was developed during the 1980s. The Scottish Executive adopted the model in 1999 and has since converted many of their traditional schools into 'Community Schools'. Essentially, it means housing a range of services, previously provided in different locations, on the school site. Some of these services are targeted at pupils, such as homework clubs; others are aimed at families, such as parenting classes and baby clinics and others are available for the wider community, including GP surgeries and adult literacy schemes. In the

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USA the additional services are primarily interventions which focus on a problem. Thus it is common for schools to house projects concerned with family therapy and drug counselling whereas extended schools in the UK are more likely to house projects related to educational development and skills to gain employment. (Wilkin et al 2003: 2).

Following the success of the Scottish model, the Social Exclusion Unit commissioned research into the benefits and cost effectiveness of using schools to provide other community servicesⁱ. Following the positive findings of the PAT 11 report, in March 2003 Baroness Ashton, Minister for Sure Start, announced that the DfES will provide funding so that at least one school in every Local Education Authority (LEA) will provide a full range of community services by 2006. The 240 extended schools will receive £52.2 million over a period of three years. Initially the money will be strategically targeted at the most disadvantaged areas and then rolled out progressively to other areas. In November 2002 the DfES granted pathfinder status to 25 LEAs and most have already begun to provide extra services.

Legislation has moved in favour of the initiative too. The Education Act 2000 gives governing bodies the power to directly provide community services such as health and social care and childcare as well as community facilities such as a youth club. Prior to this, if schools wanted to provide community facilities the governors had to agree and then set up a voluntary management committee. Further, the Government has issued *Extended Schools Guidance*, which provides practical advice for schools considering providing extra services.ⁱⁱ The guidance encourages schools to tailor programmes to reflect the needs of their own local community. This is because areas in different parts of the country face different problems. Therefore, a service that may be beneficial on one school site may be redundant on another.

According to Baroness Ashton, the central aim of extended schools is to "remove the barriers to teaching and learning and help teachers focus on their core job of teaching." ([www.teacher-](http://www.teacher-net.gov.uk)

[net.gov.uk](http://www.teacher-net.gov.uk)). However, can extended schools affect other Government priorities, such as social inclusion, intergenerational poverty and community cohesion? In short, what can this new initiative contribute to the wider regeneration of an area?

A catalyst for positive change

Extended schools can act as a catalyst for the regeneration of an area as well as with the promotion of other Government priorities. The benefits of extended schools are well documented, they include:

Pupils

- improved attainment;
- improved attendance, for example, children in need of services like speech therapy do not miss half the school day travelling to an appointment if the service can be provided on site;
- improved behaviour as additional activities and facilities can increase pupils' engagement and motivation;
- improved employment prospects;
- reduction in truancy and exclusions;
- less drug abuse;
- fewer teenage pregnancies.

Parents

- increased involvement with the school and their child's learning. This has the knock-on effect of contributing to greater levels of family stability and cohesion;
- help balance work and family life, for example, flexible school-based childcare can meet parents working needs and health care on the school site is easy for families to access.

Staff/schools

- greater career development opportunities for staff;
- easier staff recruitment and increased retention;
- essential services more accessible to

staff.

LEA

- improved service management and coordination;
- improved standards in school;
- more effective service delivery;
- increased school autonomy. (Wilkin et al: 3).

Additionally, extended schools are a great asset to the local community. They can provide a site on which public and community services can cluster together, leading to greater accessibility of essential services for the entire community. This buzz of activity could lead to interest and investment from the private sector, which in turn could result in improved sports and other cultural and leisure facilities. All these developments bring with them local job and career progression opportunities and better supervision of children outside school hours.

A vehicle for regeneration?

Extended schools are well placed to assist in the regeneration of an area as they have to work with a range of partners in order to provide appropriate facilities and deliver effective services. In areas already in receipt of regeneration funds, such as SRB, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), New Deal for Communities (NDfC) etc, a partnership is normally set up to manage and distribute these monies. Membership of these partnerships is usually drawn from the public, private and community and voluntary sectors. These are the key players that should also be 'round the table' when discussing extended schools. Therefore, instead of creating a new partnership with the same faces, it would make sense for extended school partnerships to 'hook up' with an existing partnership. As well as saving individual's time, another advantage to this is that extended schools are directly involved and linked with other regeneration projects going on. This will help ensure that services are not duplicated. Further, communities in these areas are usually extensively

consulted in order to find out the main issues affecting them and what improvements they would like to see. The extended school partnership could use this research to reduce consultation fatigue and decide which facilities and services to provide on the school site.

Partnership working: The Newcastle upon Tyne model

Newcastle upon Tyne is one area where regeneration monies have helped develop extended schools as it is considered that they will have a positive effect on the local area. The city has a long history of receiving Government monies and delivering regeneration programmes. Currently various parts of it receive funding from SRB, NRF, NDfC and Sure Start. In terms of wider regeneration strategies in the city, the extended schools project is part of both the Community Strategy (developed by Newcastle Local Strategic Partnership) and Going for Growth (the city's 20-year regeneration plan). Consequently, the project has received funding from various bodies, including the North West Partnership (who administers SRB funds), Sure Start and the local authority. In addition to this, Newcastle upon Tyne is one of the DfES' Extended Schools pathfinder areas so it has also received funds from them to pilot the initiative.

In total four primary schools and one secondary school have been chosen to provide community facilities and a pilot project is being developed at Montagu Primary School situated on the Cowgate Estate in the North West of the city. This pilot project is an example of good partnership working. The LEA has worked with the North West Partnership, the DfES and the local Community Forum to build a new community facility adjacent to the school. This will be home to an impressive range of services for young people and the rest of the community, including a Family Health and Community Project that will provide community-based health services for the whole family as well as a crèche and a Workfinder Project that will support local people to get back in to employment and training. The Neighbourhood Housing Team

and Primary Care Trust (PCT) Health Team will have a permanent base at the school, while some other agencies will hold weekly surgeries, including Victim Support, Citizen's Advice Bureau, Northumbria Police and Family Mediation Services. For young people there will be a Play and Youth Service that will provide services to children and young people up to 25 years old.

The school will be fully operational in May 2004 and already there is excitement at the opportunities that it will bring. Vince Howe, Regeneration Manager of the North West Partnership says, "*The extended school model fits in with our regeneration plans. The school will make a big contribution to improving educational attainment and at the same time contribute towards the sustainable regeneration of the Cowgate Estate.*" Therefore, the Newcastle upon Tyne model demonstrates how linkages with other regeneration schemes and existing partnerships can be more time and cost effective.

Focussing on local need: The Hastings model

Moving south, Hastings in East Sussex is also working in partnership to drive forward extended schools in their area. Their extended school project is overseen by a management group which comprises the following partners: head teachers, the Director of the Education Action Zone (EAZ), a representative from the LEA, PCT, Social Services and the Neighbourhood Manager. What makes the project at Hastings stand out from many others is its focus on the particular problems affecting the local area. Central to extended schools having a positive impact on the local area is not the number of services or facilities it provides, but rather that the school's 'extras' reflect the needs and wants of the local community. Hastings' management group found that in one of its wards (Greater Hollington), more young children have tooth decay than in many other deprived inner city areas. In order to address this an oral health hygiene team visits five schools in the area to check teeth and provide advice to children and parents about how to better look after teeth and gums. This move is in response to a very local

problem as parents have voiced their concerns about the problems of accessing dentists, who tend to be in the town centre and transport links are poor.

Barriers to impact

These examples demonstrate that extended schools are certainly well placed and have the potential to help improve the quality of life for people living and working in an area. However, extended schools are facing barriers to their development, which may hamper their progress.

Funding

While it appears that the services and facilities they offer can make a difference, they cost money. As the example from Newcastle upon Tyne demonstrates, many schools began providing community facilities with funds from area-based initiatives. Now that the money is starting to run out, some schools are finding it increasingly difficult to raise funds in order to continue running their services.

This problem is particularly acute in the rural more affluent parts of the country. Flegg's extended school, just outside of Great Yarmouth, has provided a visiting doctor, nurse and youth worker, a weekly cinema night, a healthy eating club, a homework club, more than 20 evening classes for adults and a Citizen's Advice Bureau for the last two years. This impressive range of services has had numerous advantages for the local community yet it is struggling to raise cash to continue. The deprivation that Flegg faces is masked by the relative affluence of its surrounding areas and therefore does not attract money from initiatives designed for regeneration and tackling social exclusion. This is compounded as its rural location means that there are no major businesses in its locality that could sponsor a project. The school is in desperate need of extra funds but it will be another two years before Norfolk LEA can access some of its budget allocated by government to provide community services. Sarah Mintey, Director of business and community initiatives says, "*Extended schools are an inspiring government*

initiative that has helped raise the aspirations of our young people and the community. But many of the programmes will soon have to come to an end. It's deeply disappointing but if we don't have the funding, we can't deliver." (Roberts 2003).

Lack of 'joined up' policy

While preliminary research suggests that extended schools can have a positive impact on local communities, their progress and impact is also hampered by the feeling from some quarters that they contradict another Government initiative, namely the national policy for raising standards of attainment in schools. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundationⁱⁱⁱ found that schools' attempts to raise achievement levels and comply with Government policy on standards might make their development of providing wider services to the community difficult. The report calls for the standards agenda to be reviewed and to take into account schools' new roles in order to ease the contradictions. In particular, it asks that amendments be made in order to give schools greater choice and flexibility over ways to augment children's learning and also the removal of some unhelpful targets.

However, the argument that providing community services may be a barrier to schools fulfilling their primary aim of providing children with a sound education appears to be short sighted as extended schools can also contribute to other Government priorities. For example, in Gloucester the Local Strategic Partnership is taking a lead role to drive forward extended schools in order to promote community cohesion in the area. This is well placed as a recent investigation into the major cohesion issues for the area found that young people are one of the groups most affected by cohesion issues and as the views they form in their developmental years are likely to remain with them into their adult lives, schools are in an excellent position to break down stereotypes and ensure that different communities interact in a positive manner. Further, opening up the school gates to the wider community provides the opportunity for the public to come together and meet and mix with people that they may not have otherwise done.

Conclusion

It is still too early to say what the exact impact of extended schools will be on other Government priorities besides improving pupil's attainment levels. The DfES is currently evaluating its pilot scheme and initial findings suggest that extended schools have a great role to play in improving the quality of life for whole communities, not just pupils as traditionally was the case. By providing additional facilities and delivering extra services, extended schools open up opportunities for community involvement into what has traditionally been a closed environment to the community. These new opportunities and increased access have a knock-on effect that further boosts improvements to areas.

However, in order to ensure that schemes have a fair chance of success and do not end up as another good idea that failed due to lack of support, certain measures must be put in place. Firstly, schools' extra services must be properly funded, both in terms of enough funding to start with and long-term funding so that projects do not compromise service delivery because they are too busy applying for additional funds to sustain themselves. Of course the obvious solution to this would be to mainstream services. In many cases this is entirely appropriate, for example, the PCT could fund doctors, nurses and dentists; the JobCentre could provide a caseworker etc. However, for many other facilities where there is no obvious link to mainstream services funding needs to be guaranteed at least until they become self-sustainable, although many will never be, e.g. after school homework clubs.

Christine Davies, the Corporate Director of Education and Culture at Telford and Wrekin Council is a firm believer that schools need more financial security. "Unless schools get some certainty about funding they might be tempted to walk away from the extended schools agenda." (www.community-care.co.uk) Whilst walking away will not be possible as one school in every LEA must provide a range of community services by 2006, it is apparent that without dedicated funding for projects the initiative will not have the impact that the Government is hoping for and that extended schools have the potential to

provide.

Secondly, there needs to be safeguards implemented to ensure that schools do not have to expend too much time and effort into measuring performance indicators and meeting targets, particularly when this may prevent them from extending their range of services to include community facilities. Extended schools have the potential to impact many Government priorities including raising attainment levels. Therefore performance indicators and targets that could be deemed to inhibit progress should not be permitted to stand in their way.

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