



Advice on School Partnerships

A report on good practice in primary schools



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate
For Education and Training in Wales

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BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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1. Introduction

- Introduction to the report** 1.1 This paper identifies good practice in the development of partnerships formed by primary schools. It focuses on the partnerships with parents, communities, other schools, institutions and industry. It highlights the positive impact these partnerships have on pupils' and teachers' development. Increasingly, schools are developing a wider variety of partnerships and a small selection is included in this paper. Schools can use the case studies¹ included to inform the planning and development of their own partnerships.
- Background to the report** 1.2 This paper draws on:
- inspection reports;
 - published documents;
 - discussions with headteachers and members of staff; and
 - visits made by Her Majesty's Inspectors to a small number of primary schools.
- Aim of the National Assembly for Wales** 1.3 Ensuring better learning opportunities for children and adults is one of The National Assembly for Wales' highest priorities. Its aim is for the people of Wales to have access to an effective lifelong learning system, that will ensure equal opportunities for all, and the development of an inclusive society. Schools play an important role in bringing this aim to fruition by operating flexibly and finding innovative ways to raise standards of achievement while being more responsive to the needs of their pupils and their communities. Working in partnership with others is one way of achieving this aim.

¹ The sections in the boxes that are shaded are examples of good practice

Quality of the partnerships

1.4 Primary schools are developing excellent partnerships with a wide range of individuals, groups and institutions. Increasingly, they are finding new ways of extending the experiences to pupils that have a positive impact on their motivation and support the achievement of high standards. Partnerships with parents, communities, schools and other institutions have improved again this year to a point where they are good or very good in about three quarters of schools.

2. Main findings

The main findings of the report

- In 72% of the schools inspected in 2000-2001 there are good or very good partnerships with parents, the community, other schools and institutions;
- there are good or very good links with parents in four out of five schools inspected. Seventy-five percent of schools have good or very good partnerships with other schools;
- partnerships between schools and industry have improved a little this year to around 33% where they are good or very good;
- in schools with the most successful partnerships, there are clear policies and strategies for developing and maintaining them;
- increasingly, schools are developing innovative partnerships that provide pupils with real-life situations to develop their skills and knowledge;
- partnerships that are well planned and coordinated are effective in promoting school improvement and raising standards;
- partnerships enhance and enrich the curriculum for pupils and provide teachers with excellent professional development opportunities;
- the development of effective partnerships requires strong leadership and vision from headteachers, senior managers and governors;
- creating and maintaining partnerships requires the commitment of staff, parents, pupils, governors and external agencies; and
- on occasion, the process of applying for funding to develop partnerships is complicated and bureaucratic.

3. Partnerships with parents

Parents' involvement in their children's education has a positive impact

3.1 The positive impact of parental interest and involvement in their children's learning is well documented. Over the years, good primary schools have encouraged parents to become increasingly involved in their children's education. As a result, schools have developed varied and interesting ways of involving parents usefully in the life and work of schools.

Links with parents have improved

3.2 Over the last four years, there has been a year-on-year improvement in the links formed between schools and parents. This year, four out of five schools inspected have good or very good links with parents.

Parents provide support for schools

3.3 In general, parents support schools well in their fundraising activities and many act as volunteer support workers within classrooms and during school visits. In some schools, parents with particular skills contribute to curriculum activities, for example, art, games and information and communications technology. Their contributions effectively extend the range of opportunities provided for pupils.

Schools arrange meetings for parents

3.4 Almost all schools hold meetings for parents of new pupils, and for those whose children are to move from one phase to the next. Most parents welcome opportunities to discuss their children's progress during open evenings. However, persuading parents to attend curriculum sessions, where they are given details about subjects and the way they are taught, is more of a challenge. Schools use different approaches to overcome this. For example, some combine curriculum sessions with social evenings, involving parents in the presentations, inviting them to observe their children working, and producing informative booklets about curriculum activities.

Parents' support for a school

In one school of approximately 150 pupils, two parents support the school by typing curriculum documents, letters to parents and the annual school newspaper. They also listen to pupils read during two half-day sessions every week. Three other parents help with classroom activities on one day a week. Parents manage the school library and the extra curricular football, folk dancing and Urdd clubs. These activities are well supported by pupils and have resulted in many successes for the school at local and national level. One parent who is an accomplished weaver, teaches pupils in Year 4 to weave during the spring term every year.

Parents raise funds for the school

Through the 'Friends of the School' parents raise substantial sums of money. This is effectively used to buy new resources and to cover the cost of educational visits.

Homework policy

The homework policy is well structured and is consistently implemented across all classes. Pupils keep homework files and they and their parents are invited to write comments about the work they are given. Teachers monitor the written comments regularly and these are considered when setting future work.

Support for young children and their families

3.5

Many schools are extending the links they already have with parents by providing good quality care as well as education for young children. This integrated, wrap-around care² enhances the experiences provided for children and is sufficiently flexible to meet the differing needs of parents. There are many sources of funding available for such projects but on occasion the process of applying for financial support is complicated and bureaucratic.

² Wrap-around care: a range of childcare services based around part-time education that enhance the learning and play opportunities for children and their families

Affordable, good quality,
wrap-around care

In one nursery school, where excellent relationships exist between the school and parents, the requirement for affordable childcare was seen as a need by both parents and members of staff. In response to this, members of staff, with the help of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership's (EYDCP) co-ordinator, used spare accommodation available within the school to provide wrap-around care. The Partnership coordinator supported the school in accessing funds under the Sure Start programme to set up the care facility. Two qualified assistants manage the 18 place playgroup created. The service is available to parents from 8:30am to 5:30pm during the week. Children attend the nursery for a half-day session and parents select the times their children attend the playgroup. A charge is made for the service and the facility is now self-financing.

A drop-in centre

Due to the success of this project the school created a drop-in centre for parents and others from the local community. With the aid of a further Sure Start grant and support from the local education authority, the Basic Skills Agency and the National Training Organisation a range of training and support sessions are held at the centre. These include a twins' club, meetings with health visitors, a 'Parents' Partnership' group, a session with the school psychologist to help parents manage their children at home and a 'Family Learning' group. Introductory courses are organised for parents who wish to enter employment or to attend courses. Books, magazines and young children's storybooks³ can also be borrowed from the centre.

³ A storybook is a cloth bag that contains a good quality picture story book with a related nonfiction book and appropriate characters, tapes and games based on a theme

Benefits of partnerships with parents

3.6 The benefits of partnerships with parents

- pupils benefit from the interest and involvement of parents in their learning. They are more motivated and standards of achievement are raised;
- schools gain from having more informed and supportive families;
- teachers and pupils benefit from having additional support in classrooms;
- pupils experience a broader range of activities;
- parents develop their own skills alongside that of their children;
- affordable, good quality wrap-around care gives parents the flexibility to undertake courses or to take up employment;
- parents have access to advice and support about their children's health and education;
- by using spare classrooms for playgroups and drop-in centres, schools make efficient and effective use of the available accommodation; and
- schools become catalysts and centres for lifelong learning.

4. Partnerships with communities

Use of the community to support work across the curriculum

- 4.1 Many schools throughout Wales make good use of community resources to support work across the curriculum. Regular visits are made to places of interest for example, activity centres, churches, mosques, galleries and museums and individuals from the community visit schools to talk about their work and their experiences. Altogether, these provide a context for pupils' learning and contribute to their understanding of their community and Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig. Some schools take advantage of community groups to support reading activities in classes. Adults are paired with pupils and act as reading partners over a set period of time.

Community support for schools

With the support of a local development group, teachers in one school invited famous writers and poets to share their work with pupils. The teachers also organised workshops where pupils worked alongside experts and produced their own stories and poems.

Partnerships with environmental groups

- 4.2 Increasingly, schools are collaborating with local and national environmental organisations on projects to develop their communities. Through developing partnerships with organisations like The Prince's Trust, Groundwork Wales, Keep Wales Tidy and The National Trust, schools gain advice and support about school and community based projects.

Partnership with the Prince's Trust

A grant from the Prince's Trust enabled one school to work with a local conservation group to improve the school grounds. Members of staff, pupils and parents prepared an outline plan of their garden. Members of a local conservation group then made detailed drawings and provided the trees and bulbs for planting and joined staff, pupils and parents in creating the garden. The garden has become a focal point for many school and community-based activities, such as, fun-days and picnics. Community involvement in the project has created interest in the garden and has reduced the amount of vandalism experienced by the school.

Schools sharing resources with the community

4.3 Schools have potentially valuable facilities, resources and expensive equipment which should be made available to the communities they serve. As well as being centres of learning for pupils, schools also have important roles to play in promoting lifelong learning for all.

School partnerships supporting lifelong learning

In one partnership, two primary schools that share facilities with a new comprehensive school have joined with providers of further education courses to run a 'Learning and Leisure' programme. Parents and their children use the sporting facilities of the leisure centre and have access to a broad range of courses provided by the local Further Education College, the Continuing Education Department of the local university and the Local Education Authority. Courses are held at the comprehensive school on a range of subjects, including numeracy, Welsh and English literature, art, history and computer studies. Activities are planned at different levels of difficulty in response to the needs of parents. Some courses are structured so that parents can learn alongside their children. All parents who are involved in the project can use the crèche facilities of two private childcare providers.

Benefits of community partnerships

4.4 **The benefits of partnerships with communities**

- partnerships with the community give schools access to a wide range of activities and resources;
- pupils benefit from working with specialists and experts in their field, which can in turn have a positive impact on standards;
- pupils learn about sustainability, conservation and other environmental issues in a meaningful way;
- pupils learn about their community and their role within it as future citizens;
- parents have easy access to leisure and study facilities;
- partnerships between schools and groups within their area support the development of learning communities; and
- through working in partnership effective and efficient use is made of resources.

5. Partnerships with other schools

Partnerships between schools

5.1 Over the last four years, there has been an improvement in the liaison arrangements between schools. This year over 75% of the schools inspected have good or very good links with other schools.

Establishing good links between schools and their partner primary schools and nursery settings is essential if the transfer of pupils from one phase to the next is to be managed smoothly and high standards are to be maintained. Many schools have established a good range of strategies that enhance collaboration and help continuity and progression.

Comprehensive schools and their partner primary schools in particular have developed strategies that include a combination of pastoral and curricular links and involve both formal and informal visits by staff and pupils. In some instances, key stage 2 and key stage 3 teachers plan lessons together to ensure continuity of experiences for pupils.

Good links between a comprehensive school and its partner primary schools

In one comprehensive school, members of staff meet regularly with teachers from their partner primary schools to discuss the transition of pupils. Liaison activities are well planned and adequate time is allocated for discussion and visits. Primary pupils visit the comprehensive school often during their final year to watch gymnastic displays and to attend concerts. They become familiar with the layout of the school and the activities undertaken by the older pupils. Senior comprehensive school teachers visit the primary schools and talk to Year 6 pupils about their work and their concerns about the transition. During the summer term, primary pupils spend a day at the comprehensive school and take part in a 'carousel' of curriculum activities. On arrival, pupils are given name badges, entertained to lunch and are accompanied throughout the day by senior comprehensive school pupils.

In order to promote continuity and progression between key stage 2 and key stage 3, members of staff from the science department in the comprehensive school meet regularly with the primary teachers to discuss approaches to the science curriculum. They share expensive equipment and undertake some teaching in each other's classrooms.

During the autumn term, members of staff and pupils evaluate the transition programme. Their observations are fed back to senior staff and changes are made to the programme if required. Recently, a joint action plan was written that extends the current level of collaboration between the schools. Pupils in all the partner primary schools work on the same project and make joint visits. They prepare an exhibition of their work, which transfers with them to the comprehensive school.

Schools working
as clusters

5.2 Many schools, particularly small primary schools, have developed informal links with other schools in their area. They share staff expertise and teachers work together to prepare curriculum documents, which reduce the burden on individuals. The creation of clusters in some areas has developed more formal links. Schools in the cluster work closely together. The headteachers meet regularly to discuss management issues and often produce combined development plans. Subject co-ordinators take responsibility for curriculum areas including the monitoring of standards across the different schools. Members of staff also share resources and training sessions.

Federations of
schools

5.3 In some areas, local education authorities have formed federations of schools. This involves joining two or more schools under one headteacher and one governing body. Each school continues to function on its original site and the headteacher moves from one to the other.

A federation of schools

In one area, a federation has been formed by joining a small rural school with a large urban school. The federation of schools also has a cluster arrangement with two other small schools in the area. Currently, the three schools are in the process of producing a shared scheme of work for science. This scheme of work will be used by all schools to guide their curriculum planning and the courses will be taught by a specialist teacher based at one school. Eventually these arrangements will be extended to cover all curriculum areas. Through the use of video conferencing, small groups of pupils based at one school will be able to link with their peers at another school for shared lessons. Eventually it will be possible to link all schools at the same time.

Over time, the headteacher of the federation of schools will use video conferencing to access staff and parents on the other two sites. The system will also give parents access to the headteacher when required.

Partnerships with schools in Europe

5.4 In 'The Learning Country', the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning states that schools in Wales must make the most of all available opportunities to achieve excellent results whether they arise locally or internationally. One local authority has taken this concept on board and is using the Comenius - 'Roots and Wings' project to enhance links between its schools and those in Europe. Comenius school projects support and facilitate direct contact between pupils and staff across Europe in exciting crosscurricular initiatives.

Teacher exchange visits

5.5 Members of staff also benefit from exchange visits with teachers from other countries. They spend time shadowing their colleagues in classrooms and on training courses. They observe different types of classroom organisation and teaching strategies and have time to reflect on their own practice.

Partnership with
schools in Europe

In a small rural school, members of staff and pupils are preparing for their international project by making arrangements for the initial planning meeting. The school is co-ordinating this year's project and is responsible for making all the arrangements for the meeting. Two teachers and, for the first time, two pupils are to attend the four day planning meeting which is to be held in Florence during November. The pupils are chosen by members of the school's Children's Council, which was set up following a visit by the headteacher to a school in Denmark.

The school is working with five other schools, one from each of the countries of Denmark, Norway and Ireland and two from Italy. During the planning meeting, agreement will be reached as to the nature of the project and the timetable for exchanging completed work. One such project was based on the weather. Pupils in each of the schools prepared materials about the climate in their own countries that included work in language, geography, mathematics, art and craft. Pupils exchanged emails and videos of their work and these were used as resource materials to extend the projects in the other schools. This gave each school an international dimension to their studies.

This work extends pupils' understanding of other countries and has also influenced the way the school is organised and managed. The school has its own flag, an influential Children's Council and a parent runs an after-school French club. Currently, members of staff are in the process of including international links in their schemes of work to ensure that it forms a regular part of their planned activities. As a result of their work with schools abroad, the school has won the prestigious award of 'International School Award'. It has also undertaken work on the rights of children for UNICEF.

The benefits of working with other schools

5.6 The benefits of partnerships with other schools

- continuity and progression in pupils' work are improved when schools in different phases work closely together;
- when curriculum responsibilities are shared between schools, the bureaucratic burden on individual teachers is reduced;
- through the input of specialist teachers the quality of teaching and learning is improved;
- pupils, especially those in small schools, benefit educationally and socially from contact with a larger group of peers;
- links with schools in other countries extend pupils' experience and increase their understanding of other cultures and traditions; and
- teachers gain excellent professional development by working in partnership with other schools.

6. Partnerships with local education authorities, other agencies and institutions

Partnership with Local Education Authorities

6.1 Most schools have good working relationships with their local education authorities and value the guidance they provide across a diverse range of issues. Schools look to their authorities for high quality advice on school improvement issues and support in raising standards of achievement across the curriculum. Many schools are involved in schemes aimed at raising standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy, that are promoted by their local authorities. Others are actively involved with projects designed to raise pupils' awareness of social issues such as drug abuse, violence, bullying and racial equality.

The Quality Mark

In one authority 90% of schools have achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark. The scheme was well publicised within the county and schools were given detailed advice and guidance about its management and organisation. Advisory staff visited schools to offer advice and to monitor progress and opportunities were provided for teachers to share good practice. Schools focused their attention on raising standards of achievement in literacy and numeracy and challenging targets were included in their school development plans. A high profile was given to schools when they achieved the Quality Mark status and award ceremonies were arranged as an acknowledgement of their success.

Partnerships with artists

6.2 Many schools are taking advantage of grants such as those provided through the Arts Council to extend the expertise they have available and to enhance learning through increasing opportunities for cultural, literary, musical and aesthetic experiences. Painters, sculptors, weavers, potters, poets and story-tellers work with pupils to plan and create murals, wall hangings, ceramics, stories and poems using a variety of media and tools. In some schools pupils benefit from working with members of the National Opera of Wales through the 'Opera Box' initiative. Pupils write their own stories and design their own sets and costumes. With the help of professionals, their written work is set to music and they perform the opera created.

Pupils working with artists

In one school, three artists in residence worked with junior pupils during an 'arts week'. They used 'The Hobbit' as a stimulus for the work and designed and built a set based on the novel. The work included aspects of history, geography, art, mathematics and design technology. Pupils wrote poems and reviews of the author's work and drew maps based on his description.

Developing sporting links

6.3 In some schools facilities for developing physical education are limited. Where possible, these schools develop links with other schools, sports centres and sports clubs to give pupils access to good quality resources and expertise. Partnerships with national initiatives such as 'Dragon Sport' and 'Sports Marc Cymru' provide support for schools in aspiring to the very best standards in physical education and sports in schools.

An effective link, that extends a school's sporting facilities

In one school, a strong link has been forged with the local rugby club. The school uses the excellent indoor facilities of the club for physical education lessons and athletics. Games such as netball, cricket and football are played throughout the year, regardless of the weather and members of the rugby team provide some coaching for pupils during lessons and outside school hours. Well-known sporting personalities also visit the school to promote reading. They read to pupils and talk about their favourite books and provide excellent role models, especially for boys who may lack interest in reading.

Investor in People

6.4 As a result of initiatives for school improvement, an increasing number of schools are applying for, or have received, 'Investors in People' status. This award recognises the commitment made by schools to the continued training and development of their staff.

A partnership with Investor in People

As part of an Investor in People initiative, one school has set up a partnership with a local industry. Having identified the training and development needs of ancillary and teaching staff, the school approached the industry for help in planning a series of training and development inputs. Staff appraisal and the study of management structures were features of the programme. As a result of this collaboration the school adopted a tiered management structure for meetings and re-introduced a staff appraisal system.

Partnership with
Initial Teacher
Training
organisations

6.5 Increasingly, schools are playing a greater role in the initial training of teachers and learning support staff and work in collaboration with Initial Teacher Education and Training Providers. Teachers act as mentors for the trainees and provide additional courses and documentation that extend their experiences. Trainees gain from working alongside professional teachers in classrooms, and schools benefit from the fresh ideas and approaches introduced by the trainees.

A school's link with
Initial Teacher
Training
institutions

In one school, the senior mentor with responsibility for trainees has developed a school-based training programme which complements that offered by the provider. Trainees improve their teaching abilities and increase their understanding of the teachers' role by working alongside experienced teachers. They are set additional tasks with a particular focus on curriculum planning, marking pupils' work and developing behaviour management strategies. Teachers gain professional development by acting as mentors and the school's curriculum is enhanced by trainees providing workshops on aspects such as the implementation of Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig.

Benefits of
partnerships with
institutions

6.6 **The benefits of partnerships with other institutions**

- schools that work in partnership with institutions receive good quality support and guidance on a range of issues;
- pupils extend their educational, personal and social experiences through working with specialists and experts in their field;
- teachers improve their own skills by observing and working with specialists; and
- schools and trainees benefit from exchanging ideas about teaching and learning.

7. Partnerships with industry

The quality of partnerships with industry

7.1 Partnerships between schools and industry have improved slightly this year. They are good or very good in 33% of the schools inspected. However, the rate of improvement is slower in this area than in others.

Links with local businesses

7.2 Many schools have good links with local shops and business and pupils visit them regularly as part of their work. In some areas, local businesses fund environmental projects in schools and provide pupils with new sports equipment. Some schools have started their own mini-enterprise schemes; for example running tuck shops and selling items made by pupils at fund-raising events. These activities enable pupils to learn about the world of work and provide a context for pupils' learning in language, mathematics, science, geography and information technology.

The Education Business Division of Careers Wales

7.3 An increasing number of schools are developing links with industry and larger businesses through the Education Business Division of Careers Wales. The management courses they offer focus on, for example, appraisal, the writing of job descriptions and ensuring value for money in schools. The courses give teachers an opportunity to spend time in industry, to develop their management skills and to see how the subjects they teach are applied in the workplace. It also enables teachers to see where links can be made between industry and the primary curriculum. Partnerships are developed with industries in Wales, England, Europe and America. Through the Primary Enterprise Programmes schools have worked on diverse projects, from the creation of a Mars space station to the production of a book of famous people's favourite recipes. With the help of modern technology, some schools have developed links with NASA and schools in America.

Links between a school and the Education Business Partnership

In one school, all members of staff have followed a course organised by the Education Business Division of Careers Wales as part of their ongoing professional development. As a result, teachers have developed a wide range of industrial links that form a normal part of the curriculum experienced by pupils.

This year the headteacher joined a professional development course organised by Corus, which was aimed at leaders and managers in education. During the four days of the course, he attended workshops and listened to inputs about management issues presented by guest speakers recognised as excellent managers in the business world. During the course, he set himself targets to be achieved back at his school. His aim was to involve his staff more fully in the management of the school. This involved a great deal of discussion with members of staff, which led to changes in the way senior managers and subject co-ordinators perform their roles. In November he will attend a two-day review meeting when progress in achieving the targets will be evaluated.

Benefits of links with industry

7.4 **The benefits of partnerships with industry**

- through links with industry schools provide an element of reality and excitement to the work undertaken by pupils;
- schools gain the support of local businesses and others from within the community through links with industry;
- schools may benefit financially from sponsorship;
- pupils' understanding of local businesses and the world of work are increased through their links with industry; and
- teachers gain excellent professional development through their links with industry.

8. The management of partnerships

Forming productive partnerships that contribute to high standards and school improvement require vision and a willingness to change. Effective partnerships are not achieved easily; they require commitment from all those involved if schools are to benefit from them.

Best practice in the management of partnerships

8.1 In the best practice

- schools develop partnerships that support the needs of their pupils, staff, governors and the community;
- effective partnerships extend the experiences provided for pupils and members of staff and contribute positively to school improvement and high standards;
- partnerships have strong leadership from organisations, groups and individuals with a clear vision about what they aim to achieve;
- schools have clear policies for developing and maintaining partnerships;
- there is good communication between all partners, often with the support of a facilitator;
- once effective links are made they are included in staff development policies and schemes of work;
- management responsibilities are delegated to members of staff and form part of their professional development;
- a link governor is nominated by governing bodies to support and extend the development of school partnerships; and
- all members of staff are committed to the development of partnerships and are proactive in forming and maintaining effective links with their partners.

9. The way forward

Preparation for developing partnerships

9.1 Schools in Wales need to be in a position to respond to the challenges and demanding targets set by the National Assembly Government. To achieve this, they must be open to new and innovative ways of working which will improve provision and raise standards. Developing and maintaining purposeful partnerships with a range of partners will help schools to achieve this.

Questions for schools to consider

9.2 Before schools commit themselves to forming partnerships they need to:

- consider which partnerships would enable them to achieve their aims;
- secure ways of facilitating the development of the partnerships; and
- enlist the support and commitment of all staff, pupils, parents, and governors in developing and maintaining the partnerships.

Important questions for schools to consider when evaluating current partnerships and planning new ones.

- Through our partnerships are we involving parents and the community purposefully in the life and work of the school?
- Are we responding to the needs of our pupils, parents and the community?
- Are we finding innovative ways to motivate pupils and to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding through meaningful real-life contexts?
- Are we making the most of opportunities for pupils to learn about other countries and to develop an understanding of other cultures and traditions?

- Are we promoting racial harmony and diversity within our own society?
- Are we committed to encouraging and supporting staff in their professional development?
- Are we committed to developing partnerships with institutions and organisations that can help develop our pupils as responsible citizens now and in the communities of the future?