

Chris Jones

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS – A SUMMARY

1. Abstract

This article offers a summary of Community Schools. Describing the nine International Quality Standards from Community Schools, it focuses on key aspects of Community Schools and examines the implications for policy, strategy and in service senior management training. Finally, research topics are recommended.

2. International Centre of Excellence for Community Schools (ICECS)

In 2009 The Charles Stuart Mott Foundation kindly donated a significant amount of funding to establish this new non-government organisation (NGO) because its staff agreed with the call from several NGOs that supported Community Schools for a Centre which would network, inform, support, innovate, research and disseminate best practice amongst Community Schools establishing a much needed community of learning.

In the last two years it has reached out to find as many Community Schools, or NGOs that are supporting them as possible around the world. From this we know that there are active movements in many countries – some with government backing to help State funded schools to evolve, some that are established by local NGOs in the absence of State funding.

Community Schools can be found in Canada, South and Latin America. Mongolia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Australia, South America, USA, UK, Scandinavian countries, Hungary, Serbia, Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and many more. There are many throughout Africa and in South East Asia.

2a Names

There are many names which are used to describe Community Schools. In England they have been known as Community Schools since the 1930s but now that

they are part of national policy they are called Extended Schools whilst in Wales they are called Community-focused schools. In Russia they are known as Community Centre Schools and in Hungary and Serbia second chance schools.

The focus may be slightly different – a locus for adult learning, dual use of school premises, after school learning programmes, volunteerism, community owned and managed schools. Even so, those involved are most likely to share common characteristics.

3. Community Schools – a working definition

This is not easy because they have evolved in different countries for different purposes. For example, their development has been supported in the countries of the former Soviet Union, often with funding from Western foundations, in order to help instil democratic principles and as a means to build civil society. It is hardly surprising then that here we see an emphasis on volunteering and the growth of a social curriculum that encourages participation in the running of the school – school councils, community governance, child centred learning etc. In recent years, we have seen the move to encourage inclusivity, especially for children with disabilities becoming more widespread.

However, the motivation has been different in the West. Here, where the gap between rich and poor has been greater for longer we find that there is significant under achievement amongst some groups of young people. In most cities in the West, there are concentrations of young people experiencing multiple disadvantage. These are the areas where immigrant populations are most densely concentrated and also where there is a white, impoverished underclass. These young people have several obstacles to learning. Maybe the national language is not spoken at home, perhaps there are problems in the family that distract them from learning, some may be hungry, some have little aspiration and some come from a family culture that does not encourage learning. Outside the family they may experience discrimination because of their race or creed or because they have a disability. The result is a complex range of factors which militate against their learning and no matter how

skilled the teacher, the school alone cannot solve the problems. For this reason we see Community Schools evolved from normal state schools as staff reach out for help through partnership working with the families and the wider community. Here we see an emphasis on work with families, especially early years work, partnerships with other agencies and community groups to bring in a range of services for pupils and the wider family. Mentoring schemes abound so that pupils can have additional support with reading and studying, after school clubs give children an additional chance to experience a learning environment. In the UK a notorious child abuse case highlighted the failure of public services – education, health and social services as well as community groups such as a church – to work together to save a child's life. As a consequence there has been a concerted effort to ensure that closer relationships can help avoid such abuses in future.

In other countries, where there is no or inadequate State funding schools have been set up by local communities through NGOs. This is especially the case in those less developed countries such as those in south East Asia and Africa. Here the emphasis is on trying to ensure that children are able to attend at least long enough for them to receive a basic primary education in literacy and numeracy as a minimum. Often classes are large and teachers under qualified and poorly paid. Most of these schools do their best to provide a basic education but in some cases where they are funded by a particular organisation they are used to instil particular, creeds or ideologies and are not always inclusive.

In some countries parents have seen the benefits of Community Schools which offer a wider range of services, after school clubs, mentoring, special projects etc. and have pressed for them to become elite schools available for the middle class parents.

With such an array of motivations it is hardly surprising that a definition has to accompany the title Community Schools. ICECS itself is clear about its value base and is pleased to learn that most professionals in the field agree that all the Community Schools share or aspire to practice certain characteristics. The International Centre of Excellence for Community Schools will recognise a

Community School as any school which does most or all of the following to the best of their ability:

- acknowledge parents as partners and engage them in decision making;
- work in partnership with other agencies to deliver additional services into the local community;
- encourage volunteering by the children and use issues in the local community as a resource for learning;
- be open and pluralistic, rather than closed with a narrow curriculum focus;
- make every effort to be inclusive regardless of children's class, religion, ethnicity or sexuality, demonstrating a belief all children, including those with disabilities have a right to access a good quality education.

4. International Quality Standards for Community Schools

During the past few years several NGOs have worked together to set these common characteristics into a framework which will help community Schools improve their practice. The NGOs come from Ukraine, Moldova, UK, Russia, Czech Republic, Bosnia Herzegovina, Armenia and Kazakhstan.

Together we have devised a set of Standards which we believe will be acknowledged by any Community School in the world and indeed these have now been taken and used in South Africa, Canada and the United States of America. They will be used as the structure for a web based international "encyclopaedia" which will be produced in the coming few years. Senior Editors from ICECS and the Coalition of Community Schools in the USA will set the scene and individual case studies will be sought from all around the world.

The Standards are offered to the field as a self-assessment tool for Community Schools to measure their own progress. There are nine Standards in all:

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| ➤ Leadership | ➤ Volunteering |
| ➤ Partnership | ➤ Lifelong learning |
| ➤ Social inclusion | ➤ Community development |
| ➤ Services | ➤ Parent engagement |

➤ School culture

Each Standard has a set of indicators and each indicator a set of descriptors but there are key messages embedded in each of these Standards:

4a. Leadership

This should be collaborative and distributive. This is essential if the school is to embody all the characteristics expressed by the Standards.

4b. Partnership

There should be equal partnerships with a wide range of agencies, including community groups.

4c. Social inclusion

Every effort should be made to remove barriers to learning and this should include equality for all in the school regardless of their ability, creed, religion, ethnicity, class or sexuality.

4d. Services

The school premises should be used for the benefit of the wider community and a range of services, based on researched need should be available.

4e. Volunteering

This should be encouraged amongst pupils but also amongst parents and the wider community to make their contribution to the curriculum and the wellbeing of pupils.

4f. Lifelong Learning

Opportunities, based on needs analysis, for parents and the wider community to return to learning should be available in the school – provided by either the teachers or by other agencies working in partnership.

4g. Community development

The school is a valuable asset, and in some communities the only public asset. It can play its part in building the capacity of local communities.

4h. Parent engagement

Parents should be encouraged to participate in the life of the school and their value as co-educators acknowledged.

4i. School culture

The hidden curriculum, the teaching methodology and the quality of pastoral care should help provide the best learning environment for children and adults to learn.

These Standards have been recognised and welcomed in all countries where they have been introduced. Most Community Schools have reported that they are delighted to have a means by which they can articulate their aspirations and describe their achievements to parents and the wider community.

5. Implications for Policy

In those countries with a fully funded State system of education Community Schools have evolved from State schools which acknowledge that schools need to be more pluralistic if they are to have accessible provision for all children and of those children are going to be ready to learn or where they recognise the important role which schools can play in the building of democratic civil society. Often it is a name which they will adopt but does not necessarily have any formal structure within the administration of Community Schools. This has often proved a useful way to innovate, but where a government can see the benefits that accrue then there is much that can be done to establish a sympathetic policy framework.

Details will vary from country to country but as a minimum such a framework should include:

➤ Flexibility in the delivery of the curriculum so that learning can be relevant to local conditions and the local community can make a contribution to the practical application of the theoretical base.

➤ Freedom to align planning cycles, prioritising and budget setting, and priorities at local level so that main public agencies such as health, social services and economic development can achieve synergy of purpose and action.

- The freedom of the governing body or senior staff to manage school premises outside of school hours so that it can be used as a community asset.
- The freedom of staff to welcome volunteers into the school and to allow pupils to go outside (with proper safeguarding measures in place).

Ideally school architecture will evolve to accommodate schools “without walls”.

6. Implications for strategic development

If the capacity of existing community Schools is to grow and if more are to be generated then strategic planning is essential. The details of the plans and the subsequent actions will be determined by local conditions but in general terms the strategic plans should:

- Include a range of stakeholders including those agencies which may become active partners e.g. government departments, local administrations, NGOs.
- Be realistic and achievable.
- Be followed through with details action plans.

The strategic plans should include:

- the role which other agencies can play in partnership;
- arranging appropriate funding mechanisms;
- a commitment to continuous professional development of all staff – teaching and support staff engaged in Community Schools;
- a policy commitment to on-going and rigorous research to evaluate the contribution, if any, that Community Schools make to pupil attainments and to other social agendas such as improved health, economic development, social capital etc.;
- plans to include those frequently excluded, making available time and resources for the additional effort this may take.

The action plans should include:

- precise details showing how the strategic plans will be achieved;

- deadlines, milestones, funding required, named personnel with specific responsibilities;
- specific commitments to the inclusion of those normally excluded such as those with poor education, low incomes, belonging to a minority group, homosexual or transgender groups, people with disabilities.

7. Implications for training

All staff engaged in Community Schools should receive continuous professional development but it is vital that head-teachers and senior staff have the opportunity to work through the implications of running a community school on their own current management practices.

7a Head-teachers and senior management staff

Whilst all schools require good sound management practices, community schools, because they are pluralistic in nature require not just management but strong, inspiring leadership.

The International Quality Standard refers to leadership and not management. The Community School headteacher and senior staff should be leaders with vision and have higher levels skills to realise that vision. This table summarises the differences:

Management role	Leadership role – management responsibilities +
Assume responsibility for pupils' academic attainment	Assume responsibility for pupils' academic attainment and recognising that this aided by a culture of learning in the wider community which is supportive to pupils and assuming additional responsibility for contributing to the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of the wider community
Accounting for the decisions made	Inspiring others to share a vision and realise this through action

Deploying the school's resources Sharing resources with others – the school's resources for the benefit of the wider community and the community's resources for the benefit of learners in the school

Ensuring staff perform to a high standard of competence Enthuse and empower staff so that they identify innovation and take the initiative

Manage resources efficiently and effectively Leverage in additional resources from others e.g. linking budgets, business sponsorship, volunteers from the community

Monitor work Monitor and evaluate work
Report to the authorities and parents on achievements Share goals with others and celebrate successes and learn from failures

Leadership assumes a complex set of values, skills and knowledge set of skills, attitudes, concepts and knowledge (S.A.C.K). They can be summarised:

- the ability to adopt a vision with the full co-operation of staff, pupils and the wider community;
- a thorough understanding of social inclusion, the will and the skills to take the lead on values, culture and practices which might in some quarters be seen as controversial;
- a good understanding of the skills of partnership building, networking and collaborative ventures;
- understanding and knowledge of other agency priorities and practices;
- a knowledge of the community being served;
- a knowledge of funding sources and strategies and accounting procedures;
- inclusive strategic planning and needs analysis which take into account the needs aspirations, customs and cultures of the community being served by the school and which will lead to the realisation of the vision;

- inclusive evaluation and monitoring to check progress against the plans and a commitment to on-going improvement;
- the ability to collaborate with partners in other agencies as an equal partner, taking shared responsibility for successes and failures and a willingness to build trust;
- a readiness to devolve decision making down through the school to teachers, support staff and to pupils within the constraints of their abilities;
- a willingness to join learning communities both within their own country and with other countries to share best practice.

7b Classroom teachers

Teachers in a Community Schools should have a similar set of skills, attitudes, concepts and knowledge in addition to their normal teaching skills:

- a knowledge of the community being served – their values, customs, shared ideas and tensions between groups;
- a commitment to social inclusion and an understanding of how language, the visual representations of people in materials and a range of practices can help or hinder equality of access to learning provision;
- an understanding of how the hidden curriculum and teaching methods can contribute to a positive and supportive learning environment;
- a knowledge of how to conduct needs analysis and evaluation;
- an understanding of project design;
- an understanding of partnership working to build curriculum links which brings theory to life for pupils e.g. with local businesses, community interest groups etc.;
- a willingness and an ability to work positively with parents, encouraging their active involvement as co-educators;
- a willingness and confidence to take the initiative.

7c Support staff and volunteers

Since Community Schools are open and pluralistic there will be many people, other than the school staff coming into school. They may be volunteers, cleaners, learning mentors, youth organisers. It is important that they also understand the

mission of the Community School and understand how best to fit into its ethos, values and standards. At the very least their induction should include:

- The vision for the Community Schools.
- The standards of behaviour expected of all those on the premises.
- The whole staff commitment to social inclusion.
- Discipline processes.
- Their own contribution and value to the school's community.

8. The need for research

In describing Community Schools most agree that they have much to offer. It makes sense that such schools will widen access to learning, that they will maximise a supportive learning environment for their pupils, that they will become a vital asset particularly for stressed local communities and that they can make a valuable contribution to community cohesion especially where there are tensions between local groups competing for scarce resources and influence.

It is easy to assume that public policy will continue to move in favour. Not so. There are those who do not see inclusive education as a necessary goal but prefer the notion of elite schools claiming that this will inspire others to do well (despite the evidence to the contrary). There are those who believe that strict imposed discipline from an authoritarian staff and rote learning of the basics is likely to provide a better educated working class, capable of carrying out routine tasks required by business.

Much of what has been described in this paper is an ideal and much of it has been public policy in the UK. Since the Obama presidency in the USA some of this is gaining ground in public policy. The US is learning a great deal from the UK experience. A new right wing government is now in power in the UK and the Secretary of State for Education is on record as saying that there should be a return to traditional teaching methods. Whilst it has made savage cuts in building new schools, it has made public funds available to parents wanting to set up schools run by them and their family and friends, incorporating middle class tribalism into the system.

Those who support the idea of Community Schools as described here – pluralistic, committed to ensuring full access to learning which is relevant and learner centred and an asset available for the benefit for the wider community – would do well to consider how best to protect them when the prevailing political tide ebbs away from the values underpinning Community Schools, putting their sustainability in jeopardy.

Despite the current enthusiasm for Community Schools, and most would acknowledge that Community Schools are likely to be effective, there is very little research available to provide enough clear evidence for a powerful shield against hostile political argument. Of course, there is a wealth of research about the various elements of Community Schools – the benefits of a relevant curriculum, the link between parental involvement and pupil attainment, the improved and broadened range of skills for pupils learning through child centred methodologies. When Community Schools integrates all these positive elements then many claim that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, but there is precious little to prove this point. There is an urgent need for research into Community Schools and their impact on pupil skills development and academic attainment.

Community Schools have the power to make a significant contribution to a range of social agendas: enterprise skill development, citizenship and social capital, community cohesions, sustainability, healthy families amongst others. This would be a very rich seam showing the value of Community Schools and building alliances with other agencies with linked priorities. A battery of action research programmes in which Community Schools across the globe try out new activities with local partners is well overdue. Such action research projects generate innovation and a wealth of practical guides for others to follow.

9. ICECS next steps

ICECS and those supporting it are working tirelessly to build an international community of learning to optimise the current worldwide growth in Community Schools. Networks, partnerships, projects, newsletters, webinars, web publications,

International Quality Standards are all on the agenda in an effort to shine a light on excellent practice. All those committed to these ideals are welcomed.

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Кріс Джонс

Громадсько-активні школи

Стаття пропонує огляд громадсько-активних шкіл. Описуючи 9 міжнародних стандартів якості громадсько-активних шкіл, автор статті фокусує увагу на ключових аспектах громадсько-активних шкіл, досліджує наслідки їх діяльності для політики, стратегії та підготовки менеджерів вищої ланки. Наприкінці статті запропоновано теми для подальшого дослідження.

Крис Джонс

Общественно-активные школы

В статье предложен вниманию обзор общественно-активных школ. Описывая 9 международных стандартов качества общественно-активных школ, автор акцентирует внимание на ключевых аспектах таких школ, исследует результаты их деятельности для политики, стратегии и подготовки менеджеров высшего звена. В заключение предложено темы для дальнейшего исследования.