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Research Associate Report

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Classrooms in the community

How can local clusters of schools work more effectively to achieve the community involvement targets in their development plans?

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Introduction

This research focuses on local clusters of schools working in partnership to achieve community involvement. Schools group together for a number of reasons and these groupings are given a variety of names, for example, cluster, family and federation. Whatever name is given to these collaborations, this research is intended to help those schools embarking on, or involved in, partnership arrangements to effectively engage the community.

In Somerset, where the research took place, local clusters of schools have been formed into Community Learning Partnerships (CLPs). These are partnerships between lifelong learning providers in a defined geographical area. They formally collaborate in the provision of early years education, statutory schools and adult education by planning together, agreeing priorities, jointly owning targets and pooling resources.

Since CLPs were established in the county in 2001, the government has signalled, through a number of initiatives, that community-based working is the way forward. This includes:

- the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and the development of full-service and extended schools
- the provision of personalised learning through extended opportunities beyond the school

The research focused on two CLPs, one covering a rural area (West Somerset) and the other covering an urban area (Taunton). Both CLPs feel strongly that increased community involvement strengthens strategies for school improvement. For example, they are both successfully developing work in raising pupils' achievement through parental involvement. They said they would welcome research into ways in which their community involvement work could be improved. For this reason, the question which the inquiry addressed was:

> How can local clusters of schools work more effectively to achieve the community involvement targets in their development plans?

It is hoped that this research will help school clusters throughout the country become more effective in realising the goal of improving the quality and delivery of education through community involvement.

Background

In June 2001, Somerset LEA invited schools to begin to form CLPs with other education providers and relevant agencies. Although the initial CLPs were to be clusters of schools, there was a recognition that a whole range of other partners would want to have a stake in the creation of learning communities. However, it was also acknowledged that a start had to be made somewhere and schools were well placed in their communities to get things moving.

The background to this invitation to schools was that a wide consultation exercise had taken place which explored what learning might look like in the early decades of the 21st century. The results of this process were published in 'Learning in Somerset – Looking Forward 2000 to 2020'.

In this publication, Michael Jennings, Corporate Director of Education for Somerset, wrote: "One of the core aims of Somerset Education is to develop effective Learning Communities! If this is to become a reality then collaboration to maximise capacity is the first step. In this way the other core aims of 'raising achievement' and 'promoting lifelong learning' can be realised. Equally importantly we should be thinking ahead as to how we can align our schools to be ready for future changes."

A number of these changes have now taken place. Community-based initiatives such as extended schools, specialist schools, family learning and out-of-school hours learning are just some of the examples of developments which have grown rapidly over the past four years. Take, for example, the development of extended schools. The government, through the Education Act 2002, required schools to consult widely before providing extended services. Guidance on consultation and planning for extended schools through the DfES TeacherNet includes the following:

"Local schools may be able to work together in clusters, with each school developing activities and services. This will enable pupils, families and communities to access a wider range of services across several locations. Working in clusters can be particularly helpful for schools that have limited extra space or resources to offer services."

More recently, the DfES published its Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (2004). This document states that:

"The department wants all schools to become extended schools. Many schools are already working in this way but, over time, the Department wants all primary and secondary schools to offer extended services. For primary schools this means that they will offer a wide range of study support activities, parenting support, including family learning and ensure swift referral from schools to a wider range of specialised support services for pupils, working through Children's Trusts. Secondary schools will be expected to provide a core of study support activities, widespread community use of schools' facilities and family learning activities."

One of the reasons for developing CLPs in Somerset in 2001 was that these partnerships would be well placed to respond effectively to future changes in education. The two preceding paragraphs give examples of changes in education which the DfES was later to further develop, namely, schools working together as clusters and extended schools. Somerset LEA, in establishing CLPs in 2001, has proved that it has been well placed to

respond to such initiatives. This is confirmed in this research, particularly with regard to schools working together as clusters.

When CLPs were first established, their work – not surprisingly – focused largely on traditional ways of achieving school targets. According to a number of heads, the community dimension was less formally articulated and a lower priority. Since then, CLPs have evolved and new development plans give greater priority to their community aspects. For example, there is some evidence of the recognition that skills and capacity exist, among a variety of individuals and organisations in the community, which can help realise the goal of improving the quality and delivery of education.

I became interested in the Somerset CLPs because of work I carried out in the county in 2004 for ContinYou, a leading community learning charity. During this time, some of the headteachers I met said they would welcome research into the ways in which their community involvement work could be improved. This led me to apply to become an NCSL research associate and to engage in the inquiry covered in this report.

Brief details of the CLPs involved in the research

West Somerset CLP includes 17 schools, comprising 13 primary schools, 3 middle schools and 1 community secondary school, which is also a technology college. Its catchment area covers a rural district of 600 square miles.

Taunton CLP includes 27 schools, comprising 22 primary schools and 5 secondary schools (all of which are specialist schools). Its catchment area covers the county town of Taunton, together with villages in the immediate vicinity.

Each CLP has a chair elected at headteacher or deputy headteacher level from one of the schools in the partnership. West Somerset CLP also has a full time co-ordinator.

Methodology

The research began with a local literature search which included a consideration of the development plans (2004–2005) for each CLP. This was followed by meetings with the chair of the Taunton CLP and the co-ordinator for the West Somerset CLP. In consultation with these two representatives, it was decided that the research should focus on the Taunton Market Project for the former CLP and the Rural Opportunities in Lifelong Learning (ROLL) project for the latter. These projects were seen as good examples of community involvement case studies.

Preliminary findings showed that each CLP development plan was unique. It was dependent on the individual skills, interests, resources and circumstances of the CLPs and the areas they served. However, the research aimed to seek out common strands as well as those that were distinctive to each CLP. Both CLPs are in the process of sharing leadership across their organisational structures and, therefore, the research also questioned whether this distributed leadership style provided an effective approach to their community involvement role.

After this preliminary work had taken place, the methodology for the research comprised:

1. an exploration of related literature, for example, community involvement targets in each CLP's development plans
2. semi-structured interviews with:
   - a sample of headteachers involved in the projects
   - other key staff involved
3. a self-evaluation exercise, which each project conducted on its completion:
   - one held a focus group which I attended (Taunton Market Project)
   - the other asked headteachers to complete and return a questionnaire which I accessed (ROLL project)

   Data from these self-evaluation procedures was analysed.

4. lessons, activities and displays within a sample of the schools involved were observed or scrutinised and schools' documentation was examined.

The research was conducted in 2005 over a period of four months.

Case studies

Introduction

This chapter gives details of each case study – Taunton CLP's Market Project and West Somerset CLP's ROLL project – under the following headings:

- project description
- the project in the context of the CLP's development plan
- the project's community involvement activities

This provides readers with an insight into what the projects comprised, so as to:

- exemplify the range of involvement that schools have embarked on and the learning opportunities for children that arise from these
- contextualise the findings relating to leadership that follow these descriptions

Case study 1: Taunton Market Project

Project description

Taunton CLP had designated the academic year 2004–2005 as one in which primary schools would focus on "enriching the curriculum through history and in particular their local historic environment". The Taunton Market Project was seen as an ideal vehicle for this. After 1,100 years, the market was to be relocated outside the town. The project involved Somerset Heritage Services and local schools working in partnership to create a record of the market, its buildings, users, tradition and history before it left the town.

When Taunton CLP approached Somerset Heritage Services to discuss the Market Project, the latter enthusiastically agreed to provide resources and expert support throughout the project. Somerset Heritage Services are responsible for the provision of archive, museum and archaeological services for the county.

The project was co-ordinated by a sub-group of the Taunton CLP, which included representatives from Somerset Heritage Services. This sub-group was supported by a heritage education specialist who had been appointed as consultant for the project. The consultant and sub-group co-ordinated provision for schools participating in the project. This provision included training, resource packs, school visits to the market and specialist tutors who visited schools to run classroom sessions for pupils.

At the end of the project, participating schools were asked to submit information on anything which gave a representative picture of what had been achieved during the academic year. This included:

- copies or originals of artwork
- samples of children's work
- teaching plans and evaluations
- short accounts of what the school had done
- photographs of children working
- newspaper cuttings

The purpose of this exercise was to enable the heritage services to create a permanent archive of material from the Taunton Market Project.

The setting-up and delivery of this ambitious project, using the combined forces of Somerset Heritage Services and Taunton CLP, created much outside interest. This included regional media coverage and a successful exhibition of children's art from the project at Taunton's theatre. There was also interest at national level from the heritage sector, which sees the project as an example of innovative co-operation.

The project in the context of the CLP's development plan

The purpose of this section is to outline the project's aims and objectives and highlight how these relate to the CLP's plan. Evidence of how effectively each of the development plan's objectives was achieved will be given in the chapter entitled Achieving community involvement.

Taunton CLP's development plan (2003–2005) states that its central purpose is "to improve, enrich and broaden children's learning and achievement". It further states that to achieve this central purpose it will:

- increase the quality and range of children's learning opportunities
- provide enhanced targeted staff development matched to individual and shared objectives
- continue to develop leadership working collaboratively
- involve the wider community
- encourage schools to work together
- enable all children to recognise and develop a sense of community in Taunton and beyond

With regard to the second point, the project began in the autumn term of 2004 with an INSET day for key staff that were to be involved in its development. At this event, teachers were given an introductory resource pack with photographs charting Taunton's recent history, along with facsimile materials and documents from the Somerset Record Office on Victorian Taunton. Teachers were also asked to provide ideas on how they might wish to use the Taunton Market Project in their teaching programme for 2004–2005. Their ideas were used to assist the record office in compiling a comprehensive project resource pack. This resource pack – to contain documents on Taunton in the 19th century and a CD-ROM entitled 'Taunton Market through Time' – was to be produced for the beginning of the spring term.

A history working group had also been established and it was given the task of translating the ideas and information generated at this INSET day into a training and activities programme for the academic year. This group provided fertile ground for the issue mentioned in the third point, developing leadership working collaboratively. It built on the INSET day to develop a training and activities programme for all participating schools. A wide range of activities was organised for the academic year, aimed at involving five schools in each activity. This was to enable all aspects of the project to be covered and to ensure that no one section was overlooked. Individual schools were encouraged to develop their activities in a variety of ways to fit their specific curriculum needs.

The fourth point, regarding the involvement of the wider community, relates to the following extract from the project's newsletter, written by the headteacher of one of the primary schools involved in the initiative.

Market research at Churchstanton Primary School

"All classes have been looking at the history of farming in the area, using old maps to trace farm names and relate them to present farms. Many of the children live in cottages that were once home to agricultural workers. All classes have been on, or are going on visits to local farms owned by parents."

In addition, the children:

- visited the town's museum to learn from volunteers about artefacts and life in the almshouses, as well as a town trail to inform their understanding of a medieval market scene
- analysed and described scenes and pictures from a disk compiled by the record office
- subsequently became involved in an oral history project with an old people's home

The project's community involvement activities

Pupils in some of the other primary schools:

- carried out art work at the market, led by a well known community artist
- measured and recorded the site at Taunton Market

To enable the activities to be carried out successfully, the following sessions were arranged for teachers:

- conducting oral history interviews
- planning Taunton Market-related activities suitable for Key Stage One
- discovering Taunton's past through its built environment

Case study 2: ROLL project

Project description

The ROLL project aimed to work with children, their parents or carers, and other interested adults to promote ICT skills. This two-term project, with a distinctive rural nature, had grown out of a former Learning Bus project, which provided learning opportunities for people in the remote rural areas of West Somerset. It involved a partnership between the West Somerset Community and Technology College and 13 first schools.

The project's objectives were to:

1. support learning through ICT in West Somerset first Schools
2. recruit new adult learners to ICT from across West Somerset

With regard to the first objective, each school identified a staff member to be the school's link with the ROLL project co-ordinator.

The link teacher was encouraged to recruit volunteers to assist in the work. Training for these volunteers, parents and the link teachers themselves was provided by West Somerset Community College.

The project co-ordinator was responsible for:

- transporting computer equipment to the first schools to teach pupils ICT, assisted by a technician
- helping embed ICT into the work of the schools, including integrating it into the school curriculum, to raise standards
- supporting this process to a point where it could be sustained with the support of a technician alone

The approach adopted to achieve the second objective was to provide free taster sessions for interested adults and free introductory sessions for parents and carers who wished to help with their children's education.

The ROLL project was generated and managed through West Somerset CLP. West Somerset Community College, with its commitment to technology, provided a large proportion of the funds. The co-ordinator also worked in partnership with the adult and further education services where appropriate.

The project in the context of the CLP's development plan

West Somerset CLP's Development Plan (2004–2005) states that its aim is "to give impetus to our learning community and to provide the best possible learning opportunities for pupils in order to raise levels of achievement and attainment at all key stages".

The plan's strategic objectives are to:

- increase the use of ICT as a learning tool
- ensure that staff can develop their skills and experience to their maximum potential
- ensure that collaboration between schools is effective and efficient
- widen the commitment and involvement of parents and carers in their children's education

The first objective on the use of ICT as a learning tool is at the heart of the full range of activities provided by the project. The second objective was met through the provision – by West Somerset Community College – of initial training for link teachers involved in the initiative. Its purpose was to help these link teachers, drawn from West Somerset first schools, to use the project as a support for increasing ICT learning within their schools. It also provided them with the opportunity to learn alongside other link teachers across the network of schools in the area. This helped them to overcome feelings of isolation and to encourage wider collaboration.

This encouragement of wider collaboration relates to the third objective in the development plan. All those interviewed felt that the CLP provided the right structure for ensuring effective and efficient collaboration between schools. Examples given to support this statement were:

- economies of scale in development of initiatives such as the ROLL project
- a broader context for staff development
- opportunities for sharing leadership across organisational structures

The ROLL project's free introductory sessions for parents and carers who wished to help with their children's education is linked to the last objective. Of the 13 first schools involved in the project, three were selected to host the provision for parents and carers.

The project's community involvement activities

There were three elements to the project's community involvement activities.

The main element was the support for ICT learning in West Somerset's 13 first schools. This involved West Somerset Community College, with its commitment to technology, reaching out to the first schools, which were mainly located in rural communities. The co-ordinator worked pro-actively with the schools to develop tailor-made packages of ICT support based on the individual curriculum needs of each school.

Secondly, the provision for parents and carers in three of the 13 schools. Activities included ICT and the National Curriculum, the help which computers can provide for children's learning and opportunities for adults to improve computer skills. A creche was also available for those who needed this support.

Lastly, the provision for interested adults. Activities included tips on everything from using the internet and digital cameras, to understanding computer file names and shopping online.

Achieving community involvement

Introduction

The visits to the projects, interviews, observations of key activities and self-evaluation procedures provided evidence of the extent to which community involvement was being achieved. In this section, the evidence has been themed under the relevant objectives in each CLP's development plan to assess how effectively the case studies had achieved each of the objectives.

Case study 1: Taunton Market Project

My research of this case study included interviews and attendance at a focus group. I conducted individual interviews with three headteachers and the project consultant. The focus group was convened by the chair of the history group. Its purpose was to evaluate the project, consider how documentation could be made available for ongoing use across the town and to explore ways of extending support for history beyond this first year. The focus group involved members of the history group, the heritage services team and school-based project co-ordinators.

What now follows are the development plan's objectives together with evidence of the extent to which they have been achieved.

1. Has there been an increase in the quality and range of children's learning opportunities?

I asked interviewees to give a percentage figure to indicate to what extent the project had been successful. The average figure proved to be a success factor of 82.5 per cent, which those involved regarded as a good result. One of the respondents thought that "the range of opportunities for learning and the take-up at schools was very good, but because the project was still in process, it was very difficult to judge its overall impact".

One headteacher summed up the views of his colleagues when he said that "the increased interest in history had led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning". This improvement was not only confined to history. For example, "the work of the community artist had helped to improve the quality of children's art and children's writing had also improved". Another headteacher emphasised this last point at the focus group, stating that "the pictures in the resource pack inspired one of the best and most powerful pieces of children's writing I have ever seen".

Yet another headteacher explained that the project had "changed the way we do history at school". For example, the school had filmed children involved in project activities and was using this film as a resource for learning. Approaches such as this brought the community into the classroom and took the classroom out into the community.

It was clear that pupils found this local study of history was helping them to see it "as part of real life" and not just a subject on the timetable. Teachers found that this local perspective helped pupils to have a better understanding of history in the national context. "History was brought to life by local people coming into schools to relate their experiences of the past to the pupils." For example, an auctioneer taught pupils about how his work at the cattle

market had changed over the years. Also, a church school was in the process of involving the congregation of the local church in sharing recollections of the past with pupils.

While this evidence indicates that there had been considerable success in achieving the development plan's objectives, it was felt that there was still room for improvement. The majority of people involved felt the main concern was that the project needed a longer lead-in time than was given, with at least six months for pre-planning. Because of this, "communication was a problem, especially early on in the project". One interviewee felt that the project would have benefited by being piloted first. There was also a strong feeling that the consultant should have been appointed before the project was up and running. In the event, she was appointed four weeks into the project. Because of all these factors, it was felt that "early opportunities for embedding the project into the wider curriculum were missed".

"A longer lead-in time would have allowed for greater research of the community in and around the market." For example, farmers coming down from the hill farms were a rich source of local history and this was not fully tapped.

Longer planning time would have provided more opportunities for greater involvement of farmers, auctioneers, trading standards officers and others who fulfil various roles at the cattle market. They particularly provide a rich source for the development of oral history. "Oral history immediately involves the community," said one headteacher.

2. Did the project provide enhanced targeted staff development matched to individual and shared objectives?

The majority of people felt that the project had given schools across the partnership a common focus. This enabled them to develop a broad interrelated programme of activities, which still managed to be flexible enough to be shaped to the needs of individual schools. Teachers who had an interest in history could also work together across the whole partnership of schools. They found this wider contact with like-minded colleagues "inspired them in their work, increased their enthusiasm and enlarged their knowledge of history".

Every school was represented at the initial INSET day and their level of involvement grew significantly as the project evolved. The day was seen by participants as very supportive and informative. "It effectively set the climate for schools and the heritage services to work together and share resources."

Once again, however, the point was made that a longer lead-in time should be given to future projects. More time would have allowed for programmes of work, relating to specific curriculum subjects, to be fully explored. For example, the community artist could only work with six schools though many more wished to participate. Advance planning, to involve the community artist in staff development, would have widened the opportunities for more schools to be included in community art activities.

3. Did leadership develop as a result of schools working collaboratively on this project?

The general feeling was that the CLP had provided a framework which enabled effective networking and the sharing of leadership to take place. The CLP gave delegated powers to the history group to develop the project and the group was seen to be "effective not only in carrying out its brief, but also exceeding it where necessary". However, some people felt

that the partnership needs to explore ways in which staff leading on projects can be released, to a degree, from the pressures of some school responsibilities.

The history group acted as the project's management committee. Its membership included a number of headteachers, a history lecturer from the local college and the consultant (who represented the heritage team). With hindsight, it was felt that "it would have been helpful to have had a representative from the market".

The general feeling was that as the CLP evolved it became more effective at networking and developing a collaborative approach to leadership. Some people felt that "internal and external networking would have been assisted by the establishment of a website at the early stages of the project".

Despite this omission, however, everyone felt that the inter-agency co-operation between the CLP and the heritage services had been a great success. All of the headteachers wished the CLP had developed this working relationship years ago. They felt that the heritage services team had provided an excellent service. As well as compiling the resource pack, of which every school had a copy, they had been making weekly visits to schools and these had been very successful. The experience had helped headteachers to more fully appreciate that "inter-agency collaboration could be a particularly effective form of community involvement". In this instance, "it had led to a considerable increase in the quality and range of children's learning opportunities".

Clearly, this project provided some good examples of schools sharing leadership across their organisational structures. The research confirmed that the majority of people questioned felt that this distributed leadership style provided an effective approach to the community involvement role of the CLP. However, it was felt that whilst leadership had been developed through schools working collaboratively on this project, there was room for improvement. What was needed "were more thorough procedures for the evaluation of the project. This would enable issues such as leadership development to be more effectively built in to future planning".

For example, participants in the project acknowledged that "communication was a problem" (see page 13). The reasons for this should be evaluated and steps need to be taken to improve communication in future project work. This has particular relevance to the development of distributed leadership, because this form of leadership involves many leaders. Having many leaders means that the CLP must ensure that it works towards shared goals and follows the same pathways. Distributed leadership needs to be co-ordinated, with good communication, so that there is a shared sense of purpose.

4. Did the project effectively involve the wider community?

Answers to this question ranged from very effectively to not very effectively. It was effective in terms of inter-agency involvement. "Children visited the cattle market and the farmers market and engaged well with the community in each of these settings." Adults came into schools to share their experience of the market over the years. Specialists, such as Rural Life Museum archivists, visited schools. "Children's displays of work on the project were displayed at various venues in Taunton and captured the interest of the public."

The point was made that the financial budget for the project was not huge, but it generated great enthusiasm, which led to a considerable amount of in-kind support. This support came

not only from the CLP and the heritage services, but also from the wider community – "particularly those involved in the market". Examples would be acting as hosts to schools visiting the market and arranging for market staff, such as auctioneers, to visit schools to talk about their work.

However, there was also a feeling from the schools that "greater priority needed to be given to programmes of work involving the community". They felt that the community dimension of the project had a much lower profile than the school work. Consequently, the community dimension often seemed to be separate from the school work and appeared to be bolted on to the projects as an afterthought. The CLP would therefore "benefit from further developing an integrated policy to school and community". This would help them to realise the goal of improving the quality and delivery of education through community involvement.

5. Did the project encourage schools to work together?

There is evidence of the achievement of each of the objectives so far, which shows that the project was effective in encouraging schools to work together. One of the reasons for this effectiveness was that "the project gave schools a common focus which stimulated the sharing of ideas, networking and working in partnership". It was important to choose an issue which would achieve widespread interest. "The fact that Taunton Market was to close down in the town, for the first time in over 1,000 years, made it a winning theme for a locally-based history project."

Bearing this in mind, it will be interesting to see how the next stage of the project progresses. Somerset Heritage Services submitted an application for funds to the South West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, based on the success of the Taunton Market Project. Funding is being requested for an extended learning package. This learning package would create the means to extend resources about markets to schools in other areas of Somerset. The aim is to ensure that the impetus and close working that has been developed between schools and Somerset Heritage Services during the past year will not be lost.

This new project, called the Somerset Markets Project, would include:

- a markets resource pack with teachers' notes
- a markets loan box
- training events
- advice to teachers
- outreach visits to schools

The major outcomes would be:

- an emphasis on working with teachers to show how archive and museum items can be used for a wide range of curricular activity
- the creation of ongoing resources, building on what has been achieved and learned through the Taunton Market Project
- feedback from teachers which will inform future learning resources for schools

If this new project is successful, then the original project's achievement in "encouraging schools to work together" will spread across the county.

Finally, it was felt by the majority of people that the project was cost effective, precisely because schools worked together. It was seen as a very good example of the way in which a CLP could exercise economies of scale, which were beyond the scope of an individual school. Each school contributed to the budget for the project. Somerset Heritage Services also contributed resources and the South West Museums, Libraries and Archives Council provided additional funding.

6. Did the project enable all children to recognise and develop a sense of community in Taunton and beyond?

The project involved the community of Taunton and neighbourhoods which were local to each school. "Parents and the wider community were enabled to share their memories of changes in the town with the children. This involvement encouraged a deeper sense of community identity."

Also, as mentioned earlier, teachers found that this local perspective helped pupils to have a better understanding of history within the national context.

Case study 2: ROLL project

My research on this case study involved interviews and the analysis of questionnaires which were completed by the headteachers involved in the project and returned by post. Individual interviews took place with a first school headteacher, an adult student, the project co-ordinator, the CLP co-ordinator and a deputy principal of West Somerset Community College. A total of eight of the 13 headteachers of the first schools involved in the project returned completed questionnaires.

The following are the development plan's objectives, together with evidence which indicates to what extent they have been achieved.

1. Did the project increase the use of ICT as a learning tool?

As with the other case study, I asked interviewees to give a percentage figure to indicate to what extent the project had been successful. The average figure proved to be a success factor of 70 per cent, which those involved regarded as a good result.

The consensus was that the project did increase the use of ICT as a learning tool. It had successfully provided access to ICT for children and adults living in rural areas because it used a mobile facility. It also "gave ICT provision of a high standard across the curriculum". The whole-class teaching approach adopted by the co-ordinator provided hands-on experience to the optimum number of pupils.

Overall, the ICT skills of pupils, staff and parents had improved. The vast majority of schools were particularly impressed by the ways in which their pupils' ICT skills had been enhanced. They also felt that the potential for networking in the field of ICT was being well developed, with the assistance of West Somerset Community College through its technology college status. "This networking not only provides access to information and improves communication, but it also helps schools and their communities to overcome some of the problems of rural isolation."

While headteachers thought that the tuition provided by the co-ordinator had always been of a good quality, there were other aspects of the project which needed improvement. The most important improvement, according to respondents, was for "a consistency in technician support throughout the period of the project". The community college had to withdraw this support part of the way through the project, because it needed to retain technical resources closer to home.

Some respondents felt that the project suffered from the "consequences of short-term funding". This meant that the lead-in time was too short and not enough attention was given to pre-planning. Examples of this which were cited were "inadequate induction for the project co-ordinator" and "not enough time for the selection and training of link teachers". It also meant that funding for the project was inadequate and this caused problems, for example, "equipment not fully functional" and "technical support dried up part way through the project". The feeling, in general terms, was that it was difficult to "build capacity without these essential foundations."

2. Did the project help ensure that staff could develop their ICT skills and experience to their maximum potential?

The vast majority of respondents felt that the CLP was an example of good practice in the field of partnership work. The project had successfully built on this partnership approach "to provide a broader context for staff development which complemented the training provision at the individual school level". The training within the project, provided by the co-ordinator to support the work of the link teachers, was very much appreciated. The majority of schools felt that this training successfully equipped staff to continue the project's work when the first phase, in which a co-ordinator provided assistance, came to an end.

Some schools thought that, in the absence of support from a co-ordinator, a continuation of the work would be very time consuming. This relates to the fact that link teacher support varied across the project. Some schools had a designated link teacher who gave continuous support throughout the project. In other schools, the role was taken on by a number of different teachers and this lack of continuity caused communication problems. In the remaining schools, no one has been identified to take on this role. Training and liaison problems inevitably occurred with schools which had intermittent or no link teacher provision.

Whilst the majority of schools felt that the training had successfully equipped staff to continue the project work at a teaching level, the point was made strongly that ongoing technical support would still be needed.

Schools welcomed the fact that the training provided them with the opportunity for staff to learn alongside other colleagues across the network of first schools in West Somerset. This helped them to overcome feelings of isolation and encouraged wider collaboration. Some respondents felt that the training element of future projects would be improved if a teacher's representative was involved in the planning stage of the training provision.

3. Did the project help to ensure that collaboration between schools is effective and efficient?

The general feeling was that the CLP was "an example of good practice in the field of partnership", while "the development of this project across the CLP provided economies of

scale which could only be achieved by schools collaborating together". This collaboration was seen to be effective and efficient. Collaboration between schools had also provided opportunities for the sharing of leadership across traditional organisational structures and this needed to be developed further.

It was generally agreed that for a project such as this, "mobile facilities provided the most economic and effective way of opening up learning opportunities across the CLP's rural catchment area". However, it was also recognised that the delivery of services such as this was more expensive in rural areas than in urban areas. Because of the mobile nature of the ROLL project, its budget had to give greater attention to staffing, equipment and, in particular, transport costs. There was a strong feeling that this issue of the additional cost of providing services in rural areas needed to be more fully acknowledged at both county and national level.

4. Did the project widen the commitment and involvement of parents and carers in their children's education?

The consensus on this issue was summed up by one headteacher who said that "this provision had successfully involved parents and carers". She added that she wanted to "encourage more opportunities for parents and children to work together". The project also had the effect of encouraging headteachers to consider the needs of the wider community. For example, one of the church schools was planning to provide ICT learning opportunities to members of the local church congregation.

The involvement of parents and carers in their children's education was seen by a number of respondents to be one of the keys to the raising of standards in the education of pupils. For this reason, they felt strongly that schools needed to give greater priority to this parental involvement approach.

Most respondents felt that the work with pupils had been more successful than the community involvement work. The view was that, because of the resource problems, priority focused firstly on the pupils' needs, then on the needs of parents and carers, and lastly on the needs of the wider community. A number of people felt that "the next phase in the project, if there is to be one, should give increased attention to parents and carers and the wider community".

Feedback from parents and carers themselves showed that they "very much appreciated the learning opportunities provided for them". They also praised the co-ordinator's skill, enthusiasm and hard work. These views were gathered from headteachers involved in the project, together with the direct contact that the researcher had with parents and carers.

Whilst attracting parents and carers to the provision had been successful, this could not be said for attempts to involve volunteers in the delivery of the project. The aim, from the outset, had been to involve at least one volunteer per school, but only two schools confirmed that they had been successful in achieving this aim. This problem will clearly need to be addressed in any future plans for the continuation of the project.

Main findings

The main issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the community involvement work of the two CLPs have been detailed under the following four generic headings:

1. Involving the wider community
- An integrated policy for school and community work needs to be developed, thus avoiding the tendency for the community dimension to appear to be bolted on.
- This policy will help schools achieve the goal of improving the quality and delivery of education through community involvement.
- Partnerships, which go beyond links with other schools, should be further developed to widen opportunities for learning in and with the community.
- Monitoring and evaluation of community involvement work needs to be more robust.

2. Encouraging schools to work together
- The CLPs provided the general framework for schools to work together and partnership was further encouraged by the specific nature and common focus of the two projects.
- If schools are given clear and specific examples of the cost effectiveness of them working together, it will increase their commitment to collaboration.
- Partnership work will be strengthened if schools are given a clearer picture of the progress they are making in achieving shared objectives.

3. Developing staff
- Projects need a longer lead-in time than was allocated to ensure good communication and staff development opportunities at the crucial, early stage.
- CLPs can ease the pressure on time by clarifying which staff development issues are project specific and which are best dealt with by individual schools through their ongoing staff development provision.

4. Developing leadership by working collaboratively
- Distributed leadership is appropriate for the community involvement role of CLPs because it enables leadership to be shared with organisations and individuals beyond schools.
- CLPs need to ensure, through their development plans, that the sharing of leadership across their organisation is co-ordinated and working to shared goals.

Recommendations

The two CLPs involved in this research have sought to improve the quality and delivery of education through community involvement and build on its success in searching for further improvements. The following recommendations, based on this report's main findings, will help them and, it is hoped, other school clusters in their efforts to improve quality through collaboration and community involvement to:

- ensure that the community dimension in any development is maximised and clearly articulated to all involved
- ensure that stakeholders have some representation in the planning and evaluation processes
- consider, at the planning stage, the monitoring and evaluation strategies to be used, how these will be rigorously applied, and how these will inform ongoing progress towards set objectives
- clearly define the economies of scale to be gained through collaboration
- consider how professional development will contribute to the achievement of objectives and how this will be provided most effectively and efficiently
- clearly establish the leadership structures that will support the achievement of objectives and how leaders will ensure that clear communication strategies are employed

Conclusion

Why should schools involve the wider community in the first place and, if they do, what are the key features of leadership for learning in the community?

Increased community involvement can enhance a school's strategies for school improvement and raising achievement. This accords with the DfES's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners (2004), which encompasses a move towards greater personalisation and choice, greater diversity of provision and providers, the development of effective partnerships and an extended role for schools. This means that schools must consider learning experiences and choices available to young people in both the formal and informal curriculum, in school and in other contexts, facilitated by teachers, support staff and a broader range of educators beyond the school sector.

A form of distributed leadership that supports community involvement needs to be established. This will necessarily mean extending leadership to include partners beyond the school. Support for distributed leadership can be found in relevant government legislation. Alongside the Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners, the Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004) programme for reform has engaged professionals who work with children in a rich and significant debate on the better delivery of services to children.

"Taken together, these reform initiatives provide opportunities for networks to support and promote a personalised approach to learning, explore multi-agency collaboration, work with a range of partners and promote a broader, more distributed view of leadership across schools and communities. This broader view of leadership will be different from that exercised in organisations and in networks made up exclusively of school members." (Extract from Community Leadership in Networks, NCSL, 2005)

This broader role for education, characterised by a growing partnership with other sectors and communities, has also been given further impetus through the new National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004). For example, the standard entitled 'Strengthening Community' includes the following statement:

"Headteachers should be aware that school improvement and community development are interdependent and that they share responsibility for leadership of the wider educational system."

This form of leadership displays a number of features which are clearly outlined in the report entitled 'Transforming Schools Through Community Education' (ContinYou, 2000). These features, which were also confirmed by my research, include:

- working collaboratively with individuals, organisations and agencies to ensure coherence in leadership
- recognising that skills and capacity exist amongst a variety of individuals and organisations in the community, which can help to realise the goal of improving the quality and delivery of education

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