

# Policy 5: Community Use of Schools

## Community Focused Schools

Over recent years, Denbighshire has demonstrated a commitment to making schools more firmly part of their community via the development of Community Focused Schools.

The Welsh Assembly Government issued guidance in 2003 to schools and local authorities to increase the community use of schools in Wales. This guidance was developed on the basis that schools are often physically at the centre of a community but their facilities are sometimes unused in the evenings, on weekends and in the holidays. The guidance defines Community Focused Schools as follows: -

“A community focused school is one that provides a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of its pupils, their families and the wider community.”

The benefits as defined by the Welsh Assembly Government of developing Community Focused Schools include: -

### For pupils and schools:

- higher levels of pupil achievement
- increased pupil motivation and self-esteem
- specialist support to meet pupils' wider needs
- additional facilities and equipment
- enhanced partnership working with the community
- enhanced status for learning in the local community
- reduced pupil disaffection.

### For families:

- improvements in child behaviour and social skills
- greater parental involvement in children's learning
- more opportunities for local adult education and family learning
- greater availability of specialist support for families.

### For communities:

- better access to essential services
- improved local availability of sports, arts and other facilities
- local career development opportunities
- better supervision of children outside school hours
- closer relationships with the school.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2008 – 2011, recently adopted by the Council and its partners, makes reference to the delivery of outcomes via the continued use of Community Focused

Schools funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. A clear strategy on how this will be delivered will be adopted in 2009.

The “Narrowing the Gap” project showed that a key factor in a successful school is a close relationship with the wider community, which the community focus school initiative aims to achieve. Involvement with the community improves the achievement and motivation of a school and benefits the pupils in that school.

The Welsh Assembly Government Circular 23/02 School Organisation outlines the key considerations for local authorities to consider when organising schools and in particular during the consideration of reviewing the overall number of schools. In particular the circular states that

“In the case of rural schools particular considerations include the overall effect on the community of closure and the extent to which the school is serving the whole community as a learning resource. This does not mean that rural schools should always remain open but the case for closure has to be robust and the proposals must be in the best interests of educational provision in the area.”

A draft revised version of the circular refers to the need to conduct a community impact assessment where alterations are made to school organisation. The authority would undertake this exercise through an area review.

The Council is committed to working with its partners to deliver Community Focused Schools.

## **Community Use**

Within Denbighshire there is a wide pattern of school sites serving the wider community. In particular six of the eight Secondary Schools at present have dual use leisure facilities whilst a range of adult education facilities are also delivered from school sites. Where considered appropriate the Council will continue to work with schools to ensure that schools can be used appropriately for such community uses, and that such uses should expand.

The Council will need to ensure that where wider community use is considered, that appropriate policies and guidance are in place with respect to health and safety, child protection procedures and any other common practices.

Any review of schools within an area will have to take into consideration the impact and benefit a school or its facilities has within the local community. The Community Impact Assessment will take into consideration both the community use of the school buildings and the wider impact the school has within the community. However the overriding factor in any such review would be the effect on the standard of education and lifelong learning to be provided in the area.