



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
MÄNNYSTRIE O LEAR



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# RESEARCH BRIEFING

ISSN 1366-803X

RB 1/2003

July 2003

## COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS – AN INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE REVIEW

### Key Findings

- ◆ The evidence presented confirms that school buildings can be utilised to facilitate a broad range of activities that can improve the well-being of the community.
- ◆ Evidence suggests that the nature of community use differs between primary and secondary schools.
- ◆ The socio-economic condition of the area in which the school is located will also influence the nature and extent of the community use of its facilities. In areas of high disadvantage the school is often one of the main public resources available for use by the community.
- ◆ Essentially, the literature suggests that, in relation to broader benefits, school investment is likely to be characterised by relatively low levels of deadweight, displacement, substitution and inequity<sup>1</sup>.

---

1. *For definitions see footnotes on page 5.*

- ◆ Maximising the use of schools involves many stakeholders in addition to those traditionally tasked with the delivery and management of education.
- ◆ Considerable attention is paid in the literature to ways of using IT to maximise the community use of schools.
- ◆ There are a number of common barriers that must be overcome when school facilities are used for activities other than the primary purpose of educating pupils.
- ◆ Evidence suggests that schools' facilities in Northern Ireland are indeed utilised by the local community - the most common uses include adult learning, youth activities, and leisure and recreation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been considerable interest by policy makers in the UK and elsewhere in the activities for which school buildings can be used, which go beyond the education of school pupils. For example, it is thought by some that the school has a key part to play in terms of reducing social exclusion through, say, the provision of childcare facilities, and courses for adults in basic skills.

The overall aims of this study were:

- ◆ to establish a picture of the uses, other than education of children, to which school buildings and facilities are put in a range of countries; and
- ◆ to provide an assessment of the potential contribution community use of schools could make to Government policy objectives in Northern Ireland, and a consideration of how community use in Northern Ireland could be developed.

## 2. MAIN FINDINGS

### 2.1 Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this study highlighted a large number of instances where communities and schools in Great Britain, the United States and Japan have worked successfully together to increase the use of school resources outside of traditional school hours. It suggested that school buildings can be utilised to facilitate a broad range of activities that can improve the well-being of the community. The research indicates that there are six basic categories of activities, namely:

- ◆ **Adult learning:** school buildings are used, often in conjunction with Further Education Colleges, to provide a wide range of courses/learning opportunities for adults living in the community;
- ◆ **Youth activities:** in many instances school buildings provide accommodation for after-school programmes for school-aged children;
- ◆ **Leisure and recreation:** in many cases, school sports facilities, such as sports halls, swimming pools and gymnasias are open to use by the public,

both individuals and clubs, in the evenings, at weekends and at the school holidays;

- ◆ **Resource use and information dissemination:** there is evidence that some communities have implemented schemes whereby schools' and public library resources are housed in the school buildings, and services are provided by the same staff to the whole community;
- ◆ **Social services and health care provision:** school buildings have also been used to link children and parents alike to comprehensive social services and health care provision including immunisation programmes, dental services, post-natal services and mental health counselling; and
- ◆ **Cultural and social activities:** many schools, particularly those serving an ethnic community, act as the cultural centre for that community. In many instances, the school facilities (eg the sports hall) are used to host cultural festivals and religious ceremonies and provide a place where children could learn about their heritage.

The evidence also suggests that the nature of community use differs in particular types of schools. Typically, secondary schools have more extensive facilities that enable a wider range of community uses to be undertaken. An example would be the use of technology suites for adult learning courses. Alternatively primary schools, given their smaller size and greater numbers, tend to be more accessible than their secondary counterparts.

The socio-economic condition of the area in which the school is located also influences the nature and extent of the community use of its facilities. In areas of high disadvantage the school is often one of the main public resources available for use by the community. This may also be the case in more rural areas. In addition, school facilities are often available free of charge or at a very economical rates compared to alternative facilities that may be outside the means of many disadvantaged households.

Furthermore, in deprived areas, adults are often poorly educated, intimidated by formal learning and unwilling to avail of traditional learning opportunities at FE Colleges for example. Local school facilities can provide a more informal, familiar and friendly place to learn, offering in many cases the first step to improving human capital and escaping social exclusion.

The community use of schools also engenders a sense of 'community ownership' of the facilities. The evidence would suggest that this would tend to reduce wilful destruction of the school grounds, which is often the main public resource available in disadvantaged areas.

The main focus of this study was the extent to which schools could be used as a resource in the community. It is, however, also worth exploring key evaluation concepts such as deadweight<sup>2</sup> displacement<sup>3</sup> substitution<sup>4</sup> and inequity<sup>5</sup>. Based on the results of PricewaterhouseCoopers' research on the wider impacts of school investment, a study conducted on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills in England, the literature review suggests that, in relation to broader benefits, school investment is likely to be characterised by relatively low levels of deadweight, displacement, substitution and inequity.

Qualitative evidence suggests that this is particularly the case in relatively deprived areas and likely to be less so in more prosperous areas. Three particular 'drivers' underpin this finding:

- ◆ **'Captive' constituency:** all children attend school, notwithstanding exceptional cases;
- ◆ **Accessibility:** schools tend to be accessible physically, which is particularly important within areas of high deprivation/social exclusion. In addition, since schools can command a sense of 'ownership' amongst most sections of the community, they tend not to suffer from some of the psychological barriers, or 'chill factors', experienced by some other forms of provision; and
- ◆ **Local economic impact:** there is some evidence to suggest that a significant amount of school capital investment, particularly in relation to smaller projects, is conducted by contractors from within the local community, ensuring relatively little leakage of the direct economic benefits.

- 
2. *Deadweight: Would the outcome have occurred in the absence of school investment?*
  3. *Displacement: Did the school investment displace other activities in the local community/economy?*
  4. *Substitution: Did the investment result in other school-based activities not happening?*
  5. *Inequity: Were the benefits of the school investment accessible to all groups within society?*

This indicates that there are significant *additional* benefits to be gained by 'opening up' the use of schools to the wider community in Northern Ireland.

Maximising the use of schools avoids the costly duplication of facilities and structures and allows under-utilised schools to be used many more hours each day by a wider range of users. Such use of schools involves many stakeholders in addition to those traditionally tasked with the delivery and management of education. These include different Government departments, agencies, local authorities, school management and local community organisations.

If the community use of schools is to function effectively, it is essential that all the details/arrangements for the shared use of facilities be anticipated and carefully resolved. This requires a joined-up and responsive approach from Government. The opportunities for community use of schools can only be fully realised when stakeholders co-ordinate their efforts and resources. Given that the community use of schools can impact on needs normally considered outside the sphere of education, some of the literature suggests that it may be appropriate to allocate additional resources to school budgets to ensure the optimum funding.

It is also important that an exclusively 'top-down' approach to the organisation and management of community use of schools is not adopted. The community and voluntary sectors have a key role to play in identifying local needs and assisting the development of programmes that are responsive to local circumstances.

Furthermore, considerable attention is paid in the literature to ways of using IT to maximise the community use of schools. In part, this relates to creating alternative forms of learning beyond the restrictions of conventional methods, locations and schedules. There has been a major growth in the use of computers in schools to access the internet, which opens burgeoning opportunities for shared materials and networking among teachers and learners.

There are a number of common barriers that must be overcome when school facilities are used for activities other than the primary purpose of educating pupils. In general, they are: architectural design; operational and maintenance costs; lack of capital funds; legal obligations; and protection of school property.

## 2.2 Policy Implications

An important element of this study was to assess the consistency of community use of schools with Government policy objectives in Northern Ireland. The Executive defined a number of priorities and common themes to underpin its vision for the future of Northern Ireland. These are: growing as a community; working for a healthier people; investing in education and skills; securing a competitive economy; and developing North/South, East/West and international relations.

The research suggested that the community use of schools, to some extent, positively contributes to all of the Executive's priority areas with the exception of 'developing North/South, East/West, and international relations', and particularly contributes to the 'growing as a community' priority. For example, adult learning contributes to 'growing as a community', 'investing in education and skills' and 'securing a competitive economy'. Therefore the development of community use of schools would seem to be desirable, providing the Executive with a valuable policy instrument.

## 2.3 Evidence of Community Use of Schools in NI

Information supplied by the Schools' District Inspectors provided an indication of the range of activities occurring within schools, based on the six basic categories of activities. The evidence suggests that schools' facilities in Northern Ireland are indeed utilised by the local community, most commonly for adult learning, youth activities, and leisure and recreation. However, there is little evidence that would indicate the existence of an integrated approach in relation to the provision of these activities.

There is little evidence to indicate that the school facilities in Northern Ireland are used for the provision of social services and health care, or of widespread resource use and information dissemination. The literature review and the 'mini-case studies'<sup>6</sup> would suggest that these are areas where, potentially, significant community benefits could be realised. However, it is possible, given the segregated

---

6. *A sample of schools/initiatives which demonstrate the broad range of community uses to which school facilities can be put were identified in the trawl of the existing literature. These form the basis of 'mini-case studies' in the main report.*

nature of schooling in Northern Ireland, that the benefits of the community use of schools may not be fully realised if particular schools are perceived as being 'off-limits' by sections of the community, thus reducing accessibility.

## 2.4 Developing the Community Use of Schools in NI

In order to progress the transition from traditional to community use of schools, a number of key elements are essential, including:

- ◆ **Ethos:** a change of ethos that has implications for the school at all levels from management and building use to teaching processes is necessary. It is necessary for *all* stakeholders involved in the school process to buy into and accept the challenge of managing the change process;
- ◆ **Leadership:** clear leadership is necessary to manage the change process effectively. As the 'community use of schools' approach covers a wider range of stakeholders, the management process becomes more complex and in need of leadership;
- ◆ **Integrated approach:** fundamental to the success of the 'community use of schools' model is the extent to which an integrated approach is taken to the implementation of the new processes. As the community model widens the stakeholder base to include individuals outside the school environment it is necessary that they work effectively together and weave together the various components of the change process;
- ◆ **Targets:** as with all changes in management processes, particularly those that evolve over time, it is desirable to have a set of targets against which to measure progress and identify problems. There must be a level of transparency and accountability with the targets so as to promote good practice and intervention where necessary; and
- ◆ **Resources:** as with any change of management within the school environment, resources represent a constraint on the ability to successfully implement and manage such a change. It is important that the change management leadership team think creatively about how to use existing resources, both in terms of school workers, external partners, capital building, and equipment and premises.

### **3. THE PROJECT**

The Project was undertaken for the Department of Education by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The cost of the project was £12,650.

### **4. FULL REPORT**

The full report entitled “Community use of Schools - an International Literature Review” is available from the Department of Education, price £5<sup>7</sup>.

*This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.*

---

7. *Each educational establishment and library is entitled to one free copy.*



## REFERENCES

Addo, M. A wish list for the Learning and Skills Council, *Adults Learning*, Vol. 12 No 7, March 2001

Beeton, K. *Modernising the Schools Infrastructure in England*, DfEE, 1999

Davis, S. M., Hunt, K., & Kitzes, J.M. Improving the health of Indian teenagers: A demonstration program in rural New Mexico, *Public Health Reports*, 104 (3), 1989, pp 271-8

Dreier, W. H. *What happens when the high school leaves the community?* (Report No. ERIC ED 219-217). Paper presented at the Annual National Conference of People United for Rural Education, Des Moines, Iowa, Feb. 5-6, 1982

Dryfoos, J. G. *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth and Families*, 1994

Fielding, R. *Better Schools for a New Century*, 1999

Flora, C., & Flora, J. Entrepreneurial social infrastructure: A necessary social ingredient, *The Annals of the American Academy*, 1993, p. 48-58

Haggart, J. Friends and Family ...it is good to learn, *Adults Learning*, Vol 12 No 1, September 2000

Kretzman, J., & McKnight, J. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: Assisting Christians to Act Publications, 1993

Lyons, J. B. *Alternative Use of K-12 School Buildings: Opportunities for Expanded Uses*, US Department of Education, 2000

Melaville, A. *Learning together: A look at 20 school-community initiatives*, 1998

Miller, B. A., & Hahn, K. *Finding their own place: Youth in three small rural communities take part in instructive school-to-work experiences*. Charleston: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools ED 413-122, 1997

Petkovich, M. D. & Ching, C. T. K. *Some educational and socio-economic impacts of closing a high school in a small rural community*. Reno, NV: Agricultural Experiment Station, Max C. Fleischmann College of Agriculture, University of Nevada, 1977

Rickert, V.I., Davis, S.O., Riley, A.W., & Ryan, S. Rural school-based clinics: Are adolescents willing to use them and what services do they want? *J School Health*, 67(4), 1997, pp 144-8

Salant, P. *What difference do Local Schools make?* Annenberg Rural Trust Policy Program, and A Walther, 1998

Schorr, L. *The intersection of School and Community*, 2000

Sederberg, C. H. *Economic role of school districts in rural communities*, 1987, pp 125-130

Smith, M.K. Community Schools, *The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, 1996 updated 2001

Terwilliger, S.H. *Early access to health care services through a rural school-based health care*, 1994, pp 284-9

*A Guide for School Governors: Developing School Buildings*, RIBA Schools Client Forum

*Building Performance: an empirical assessment of the links between schools capital investment and pupil performance*, report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers, DfES Research Report Series, RR242, January 2000

*Community Use of Schools*, US Department of Education, 1998

*Design Issues for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools*, US Department of Education

*Financing Improvements for Out-of-School Time and Community School Programs*, The Finance Project, 2000

*Making Current Trends in School Design Feasible*, Public Schools of North Carolina, 2000

Ofsted, *Family Learning: A Survey of Current Practice*, The Stationery Office, 2000

*Planning Guidelines for Primary Schools*, Department of Education and Science, County Offally, 2000

PEB Exchange. The journal of the OECD Programme on educational building

Raham, H. *Full Service Schools*, School Business Affairs, June 1998

*Riches beyond price: Making the most of family learning*, NIACE, 1995

*Schools as Centers of Community*, US Department of Education, 1999

*What Schools for the Future*, OECD, Paris, 2001

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centres*, US Department of Education, 2000

Miller B. The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development:  
[gopher.ael.org/~eric/digests/endorc953](http://gopher.ael.org/~eric/digests/endorc953)

Community Schools:

[eric-web.tc.Columbia.edu/community/community-schools/](http://eric-web.tc.Columbia.edu/community/community-schools/)

Evaluation of Community Schools:

[www.communityschools.org/evaluation](http://www.communityschools.org/evaluation)

Examples of Model School-based Collaboratives:

[smhp.psych.ucla.edu/worktogh/models1](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/worktogh/models1)

Funding of Community Schools:

[www.communityschools.org/funding](http://www.communityschools.org/funding)

Parent Brochure, What Should Parents Know about Schools as Community Learning Centres?:

[www.accesseric.org/resources/prent/clcs](http://www.accesseric.org/resources/prent/clcs)

Research on Initiatives: National Models:

[www.communityschools.org/evaluation/eval2](http://www.communityschools.org/evaluation/eval2)

School Construction and Renovation, Community Schools Online:  
[www.communityschools.org/newsletter9](http://www.communityschools.org/newsletter9)

Sustainability Planning Checklist:  
[www.communityschools.org/fundingchecklist](http://www.communityschools.org/fundingchecklist)

## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS (2000 TO DATE)**

Three years later: a follow-up survey of teachers who qualified in 1995.	RB 1/2000
Immersion education: a literature review.	RB 2/2000
From pre-school to school: a review of the research literature.	RB 3/2000
The effects of the selective system of secondary education in Northern Ireland.	RB 4/2000
Department of Education funded research 2000/01.	RB 1/2001
Assessment of the effectiveness of the Youth Service Community Relations Support Scheme (YSCRSS) during 1998/1999 and 1999/2000, in relation to the needs of youth and community groups.	RB 2/2001
An investigation of the provision for health education in schools during 1998/99.	RB 3/2001
Careers provision in schools at Key Stages 3 and 4.	RB 1/2002
Evaluation of Raising School Standards Initiative (RSSI) using Value Added measures of school performance.	RB 2/2002
Literature review: effectiveness of different forms of interventions in the schools and youth sectors.	RB 3/2002
Outcomes for pupils who received an Irish-Medium education.	RB 4/2002
Multiply-suspended pupils: their educational career and support projects available to them.	RB 5/2002
Reducing the bureaucratic burden on schools.	RB 6/2002
Developing linguistic accuracy in Irish-Medium primary schools.	RB 7/2002
Bullying in schools: A Northern Ireland study.	RB 8/2002

## PURPOSE OF DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESEARCH BRIEFINGS

The Department of Education (DE) places a high value on the wide circulation of research results to ensure that research has the maximum impact on policy and practice in education. DE Research Briefings are designed to provide attractive, interesting and easy access to research findings for policy makers, researchers, teachers, lecturers, employers and the public to facilitate informed discussion of education issues. Research cannot make decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education. Nor can it by itself bring about change. But it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

**The full range of DE Research Briefings can be accessed at the DE Internet site - [www.deni.gov.uk/facts\\_figures/](http://www.deni.gov.uk/facts_figures/)**

**DE Research Briefings may be photocopied for use within your own institution.**

A limited number of additional copies may be obtained from:

Statistics and Research Branch  
Room G2, New Building  
Department of Education  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
BANGOR  
Co Down  
BT19 7PR

Telephone: 028 9127 9391  
Fax: 028 9127 9594  
e-mail: [statistics2@deni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics2@deni.gov.uk)

**Edited and produced by Statistics and Research Branch,  
Department of Education**