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**A close-to-practice study of ‘community schools’ in the
north of Merthyr Tydfil.**

**Prepared for the Welsh Government by
Cardiff School of Education and Social Policy**

May 2022

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 In November 2021 the Welsh Government commissioned five universities (Bangor; Cardiff Met; Swansea; UWTSD; and Wrexham Glyndwr) to undertake: an all-Wales online survey related to the characteristics of 'community schooling'; and some 'close to practice' research with three local authorities in Wales (Merthyr Tydfil, Swansea, and Wrexham) to test out early thinking about community school models. Planning began in December 2021, and the research commenced in February 2022.

1.2 Cardiff Metropolitan University was partnered with Merthyr Tydfil and has worked closely with the Director of Education to identify the research area and research participants.

1.3 The survey was developed by all five universities and was administered by Bangor and Wrexham Glyndwr universities. Initial analysis has been undertaken by Wrexham Glyndwr, and further analysis and interpretation was undertaken by all five universities.

2.0 Methodology and Scope of the Study

2.1 Research Area

2.1.1 The Welsh Government selected the County Borough of Merthyr Tydfil as one of three case studies. The Director of Education and her team requested the research area should comprise the wards served by the cluster of primary schools feeding into Pen-Y-Dre High School. Also included is Bishop Hedley Catholic High School, a voluntary aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school with a catchment area extending considerably beyond the research area. Bishop Hedley and relevant feeder primary schools have been included because they are located within the geographical communities included in the research area.

2.1.2 The research area for the Merthyr Tydfil case study is considerably larger than the other two studies in the project; consequently, this has allowed researchers to identify phenomena within and between the communities that make up the research area. The sample frame for the schools is restricted to headteachers, parents, and young people. The final report will comment on sampling recommendations for future studies.

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1 A profile of the research area has been compiled via documentary analysis, and information emerging from research data. Profiling has been informed by the following information sources:

- Population by ward/ school
- WIMD rankings and features of deprivation by ward
- Pupils living in 10% and 20% most deprived areas in Wales
- School attendance and exclusion figures
- Eligibility for free school meals (eFSM) figures

- Health and wellbeing data – wards/ schools (difficult to obtain current data)
- Local development plans
- School improvement data
- Community resources

2.2.2 Field notes have been compiled of observations made during visits to schools and other facilities in the community.

2.2.3 Research participants have been interviewed using both group and individual semi-structured interviews.

2.2.4 The Welsh Government had stipulated a data collection framework based around the characteristics of a community school emerging from the 2020 Estyn report. These characteristics framed the focus of enquiry whilst allowing additional data to emerge according to the experiences of research participants.

2.3 Research Sample

2.3.1 The research team was directed to focus on the two secondary schools and seven feeder primary schools in the research area. The local authority identified personnel from the schools and associated services to act as key informants. The local authority also set up group and individual interviews with relevant elected representatives of Merthyr Tydfil council, and with governors of most of the nine schools taking part in the study.

2.3.2 Families attending schools in the research area largely live in the four wards of Dowlais, Penydarren, Vaynor, and Gurnos. There were some exceptions to this but most parents and young people who participated in the study live in these wards.

2.3.3 The research team was keen to incorporate the voices of parents and young people from the schools in the research area. Two members of the team visited the schools to meet with young people and, to a lesser extent, parents. As data emerged from parents and young people, it was possible to identify additional stakeholders, such as voluntary organisations, who could also be invited to participate. The research team encountered pragmatic issues around informed consent which affected the ability to collect data outside the school contexts.

2.3.4 The research approach has been iterative in that a process similar to theoretical sampling has been undertaken in response to data emerging from interviews and documentary analysis.

2.3.5 The sample composition is included in Appendix 1.

2.4 Analysis of interview data

2.4.1 Data have been analysed using thematic analysis. Generation of themes has been both inductive (emerging from the interview data) and deductive (according to the analytical framework supplied by the Welsh Government).

2.4.2 Inductive analysis has been based around novel themes generated from data. Careful use of open questions during semi-structured interviews stimulated discussion which has resulted in generation of new understanding and ideas.

2.4.3 Deductive analysis was informed by the Welsh Government stipulation that an analytical framework should be based around the characteristics of a community school emerging from the 2020 Estyn report.

3.0 Profile of Communities

3.1 Research context: Merthyr Tydfil Borough

Merthyr Tydfil Borough (MTB) has a population of 60,424 and comprises eleven electoral wards, each divided into two or more Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). The division of wards into LSOAs allows specific areas of deprivation within MTB to be identified based on WIMD rankings. The index is designed to identify ‘small areas where there are the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation.’ (WG Statistics for Wales, 2019: 2).

The wards in Merthyr Tydfil against numbers of LSOAs, numbers of elected members, and mid-2020 populations are shown in Table 1.

Wards	No of LSOAs	No of elected members	Mid-2020 population
Bedlinog	2	2	3764
Cyfarthfa	4	3	7585
Dowlais & Pant	4	4	6787
Gurnos	3	4	5587
Merthyr Vale	3	2	3675
Park	3	3	4189
Penydarren	4	3	5513
Plymouth	3	3	5302
Town	4	4	8021
Treharris	4	3	6410
Vaynor	2	1	3591
MTB	36	32	60,424

Table 1: Wards of Merthyr Tydfil against LOSAs, elected members, mid-2020 populations (WG Stats Wales, n.d.)

2019 WIMD data for MTB

According to the 2019 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), Merthyr Tydfil has the second highest percentage of LOSAs, 77.8% (or 28) in the most deprived areas 50% of Wales; only Blaenau Gwent has a higher percentage (85.1% or 40 areas). (WG Statistics for Wales, 2019.)

The WIMD is based on eight domains: Income, Employment, Health, Education, Access to Services, Housing, Community Safety, and Physical Environment. According to WG guidance on the index, ‘Deprivation is the lack of access to

opportunities and resources which we might expect in our society. The domains used in WIMD relate to both material and social aspects of deprivation.’ (WG Statistics for Wales, 2019: 3).

To illustrate the complex mix of indicators that sit behind the allocation of domain ranks, the table below presents the indicators and data sources used in the 2019 WIMD to identify areas of deprivation relating to Education:

Education	2019 data source
Foundation Phase Average Point Score	Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) and National Data Collection (NDC), Welsh Government
Key Stage 2 average point score	PLASC and NDC, Welsh Government.
Key Stage 4 average point score for core subjects	National Pupil Database (NPD), PLASC and Welsh Examinations Database (WED)
Repeat Absenteeism (%)	NPD and PLASC
Proportion of Key Stage 4 leavers entering Higher Education (%)	PLASC, Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Record
Adults aged 25-64 with no qualifications (%)	2011 Census, Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Table 2: Education domain of WIMD: indicators and data sources (WG Statistics for Wales, 2019)

2019 WIMD data have been analysed to identify areas that are among the 10% and 10-20% most deprived. The analysis shows that 8 of the 36 LSOAs in MTB (22%) have overall index rankings that place them among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales; a further 3 LSOAs (8%) have rankings that denote the 10-20% most deprived areas. In total, based on the overall index data, eleven LSOAs (31 %) are among the 20% most deprived areas. The overall rankings for these LSOAs are shown in the table below, together with an overview of their domains with Decile Group 1 and 2 rankings (1-191 and 192-382, respectively):

LSOAs	Overall WIMD ranking (1-382)	Domains in Decile Group 1 (10% most deprived)	Domains in Decile Group 2 (10-20% most deprived)	No of domains in Decile Groups 1 & 2 (20% most deprived)
Cyfarthfa 2	65	Income, Employment, Health	Education, Access to services, Community safety	6
Dowlais 1	127	Employment, Health, Physical environment	Income, Education, Community safety, Housing	7
Dowlais 4	352	Health	Employment, Community safety, Housing	4

Gurnos 1	56	Income, Employment, Health, Education, Community safety	Access to services	6
Gurnos 2	106	Income, Employment, Education	Health, Access to services, Community safety	6
Gurnos 3	164	Income, Employment, Health	Education, Community safety	5
Merthyr Vale 2	34	Income, Employment, Health, Education, Physical environment, Housing	Access to services	7
Park 3	153	Income, Employment, Health, Housing	Community safety, Physical environment	6
Penydarren 1	5	Income, Employment, Health, Education, Housing	Access to services	6
Penydarren 2	258	Health	Income, Employment	3
Town 1	337	Community safety, Housing	Employment	3

Table 3: Overview of LSOAs in MTB in Decile Groups 1 and 2, with domain categories (based on MTCBC data^a)

These data illustrate the scale of deprivation related to domains across different wards in the Borough. However, it is worth noting that consideration of the WIMD index rankings and rankings for individual domains presents a complex picture. A number of LSOAs have relatively high overall rankings, with high scores for several domains, placing them in the 50% least deprived areas, but have low rankings for one or more of the eight domains. Penydarren 4, for example, has an overall index of 688, placing it in Decile Group 4 (30-50% most deprived), with five domains in Decile Group 5 (40-50% most deprived). However, Housing, is ranked 83, in Decile Group 1, placing the LSOA among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales for this domain. WIMD figures for wards in the research area will be considered in more detail below.

Across MTB, more than two-thirds of LSOAs (69%) have one or more domain rankings that fall in Decile Groups 1 or 2, positioning them among the 10-20% most deprived areas for those specific domains.

Further analysis identifies LSOAs that are among the 10%, 10-20% and 20-30% most deprived areas in Wales, as shown in the table below. LSOAs that fall within the research area are highlighted in bold:

Deprivation Group	1 (10% most deprived)	2 (10-20% most deprived)	3 (20-30% most deprived)	1 + 2 10-20% most deprived	1 + 2 + 3 10-30% most deprived
No of LSOAs	8	3	6	11	17
% of LSOAs in MTB	22%	8%	17%	31%	47%
LSOAs	Cyfarthfa 1 Dowlais 1 Gurnos 1 Gurnos 2 Gurnos 3 Merthyr Vale 2 Park 3 Penydarren 1	Dowlais 4 Penydarren 2 Town 1	Bedlinog 1 Cyfarthfa 3 Merthyr Vale 1 Plymouth 1 Town 3 Treharris 4		

Table 4: Deprivation Groups 1-3 against LSOAs (based on MTCBC data^a).

These data show that almost half (47%) of all 36 LSOAs in MTB are among the 10-30% most deprived areas in Wales, while almost a third (31%) are among the 20% most deprived areas. It is worth noting that the majority of LSOAs in the latter category (7 of 11; or 64%) are located in the research area.

Health and Wellbeing in MTB

National survey data for 'General health and illness', 2018-19 to 2019-20, for MT and Wales are shown in the table below. Figures represent the percentage of adults (16+) in the population.

	Health in general – Good/ Very Good	Health in general - Fair	Health in general – Bad/ Very Bad	Any longstanding illnesses	2 or more longstanding illnesses	Limited at all by longstanding illness	Limited a lot by longstanding illness
MT	67	21	12	44	16	35	20
Wales	72	20	9	47	20	34	18

Table 5: General health and illness, 2018-19 to 2019-20: MT and Wales (WG Stats Wales, 2020)

These data suggest that the general health of adults in Merthyr Tydfil is an issue of concern. Only two thirds (67%) report good/ very good health (compared with 72% nationally), while 12% report their health as bad/ very bad (9% nationally). In line with a high national figure (47%), almost half of the adults in Merthyr Tydfil have longstanding illnesses (44%), and a fifth (20%) feel they are 'limited a lot' by such illness.

In terms of young people in MT, a 2017/18 School Health Research Network report on the health and wellbeing of Merthyr Tydfil students (Years 7- 11 across 4 schools) shows only 17% were physically active for more than 60 mins each day in the week before the survey was conducted. This figure may seem surprising, given enthusiastic reports of participation in school sports activities in student interviews.

3.2 Overview of Research Area

The research area covers the wards served by Pen y Dre High School and Bishop Hedley Catholic High School, and their seven feeder primary schools. Table 6 shows

Schools	Wards
Dowlais Primary School Pantyscallog Primary School	Dowlais
Goetre Primary School; St Aloysius RC Primary School; Pen Y Dre High School	Gurnos
Gellifaelog Primary School; Bishop Hedley RC High School	Penydarren
Gwaunfarren Primary School	Park
Ysgol Y Graig Primary School	Vaynor

Table 6: Schools in research area against wards

the location of the schools in relation to wards:

(Source: MTCBC
Schools Dept, 2017)

According to the 2019 WIMD, rankings for the eight domains for the LSOAs in the research area vary considerably. Rankings that fall within Decile Group 1 (10% most deprived) are highlighted in red; those in Decile Group 2 (10-20% most deprived) are highlighted in blue. Those that are within the 50% most deprived areas are in bold.

LSOA Name	2019 WIMD		Income	Employment	Health	Education	Access to Services	Community Safety	Physical Environment	Housing 2019
Dowlais 1	127		257	189	55	220	538	282	159	252
Dowlais 2	935		962	812	818	790	938	662	1079	724
Dowlais 3	629		844	713	393	606	1144	864	638	192
Dowlais 4	352		480	378	107	576	1327	306	729	337
Gurnos 1	56		62	38	63	168	310	51	1547	861
Gurnos 2	106		101	89	203	129	284	245	1661	879
Gurnos 3	164		134	191	108	247	462	380	1307	659
Penydarren 1	7		10	35	22	5	294	484	1233	168
Penydarren 2	258		243	309	126	386	417	801	1341	737
Penydarren 3	1012		996	903	798	1123	1058	696	728	628
Penydarren 4	688		840	834	415	856	1247	858	902	83
Vaynor 1	1051		970	693	831	1111	1166	900	1561	982
Vaynor 2	1063*									

Table 7: 2019 WIMD rankings against LSOAs *2014 rankings; 2019 data for Vaynor 2 unavailable (MTCBC data^a).

The WIMD data will be considered in detail in the ward profiles that follow.

3.3 Ward profiles

The following sections consider each ward in the research area, presenting general information and analysis of 2019 WIMD data; summarising community resources; and profiling the schools in each ward.

3.3.1 Dowlais and Pant Ward

The mid-2020 ward population was 6787, representing 11.2% of the total population of the County of Merthyr Tydfil.

2019 WIMD data

2019 WIMD rankings for the four LSOAs in the ward are presented in the table below. Figures denoting Decile Group 1 (10% most deprived areas) are highlighted in red; those in Decile Group 2 (10-20% most deprived) are highlighted in blue; 50% most deprived areas in bold.

LSOA Name	WIMD		Income	Employment	Health	Education	Access to Services	Community Safety	Physical Environment	Housing 2019
Dowlais 1	127		257	189	55	220	538	282	159	252
Dowlais 2	935		962	812	818	790	938	662	1079	724
Dowlais 3	629		844	713	393	606	1144	864	638	192
Dowlais 4	352		480	378	107	576	1327	306	729	337

Table 8: 2019 WIMD rankings for LSOAs in Dowlais (MTCBC data^a).

All four LSOAs in Dowlais have rankings that place them among the 50% most deprived areas in Wales. Two LSOAs, Dowlais 1 and Dowlais 4, have overall rankings that place them in the 10% and 10-20% most deprived areas in Wales, respectively.

Dowlais 1 has the lowest overall ranking (127), positioning it among the 10% most deprived areas, while Dowlais 4 (352) is ranked among the 10-20% most deprived areas.

In terms of the domains, Dowlais 1 has the lowest rankings for every domain, and is ranked as among the 20% most deprived areas for all domains, apart from Access to Services. Figures for Employment, Health and the Physical Environment are particularly low, placing this LSOA among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales for these domains. Health is also in this category for Dowlais 4. Both LSOAs have rankings for Employment, Health, and Community Safety that place them among the 20% most deprived areas.

These data show the considerable variation in levels of relative deprivation across the LSOAs in a single ward. This will also be observed in the data for Penydarren ward.

Community Resources

Dowlais Community Centre

The Centre is run by Stephens & George Charitable Trust, a children's literacy charity which aims to empower young people. Facilities include a gym, large hall that can be hired for various purposes, a book store, and a café. There are yoga, pilates, and other fitness classes, and activities for children including messy play. The community centre hosts the Pupil Referral Unit for several sessions per week.

The Dowlais Engine House

The Engine House is the venue for a charity run youth club, the Pant and Dowlais Girls and Boys Club, open Monday to Friday, 4 to 8pm. Young people pay £3 per visit, which allows them to take part in all the club's activities. The venue also hires out facilities, and currently houses privately run karate and judo clubs, with separate fees.

Minibus transport has previously been available free of charge but stopped during the pandemic. They have now started picking young people up from school but parents have to collect.

During school holidays, there is daily provision from 9am to 4pm, at a charge of £6/day. This includes a breakfast club.

Activities include football and other sports, Xbox, Playstation and other computer activities, homework help. There are facilities for dance and drama. The centre hosts a number of group sessions and clubs across the generations including young carers and older people plus many others.

Dowlais Rugby Club caters for young people aged 8 to 15. Pupils from local schools are active in the club, which organises teams for different age groups (e.g., under 9s). Members train on Wednesdays and play matches on Sundays.

Dowlais Library houses the main local history and Welsh language collections for Merthyr Tydfil Public Libraries. The library provides public access to computers, a printer and photocopier, and has free parking (Wellbeing Merthyr, 2020). Interestingly, using the library was mentioned by just one primary pupil.

Dowlais Community Nature Garden

The garden has been developed by the Dowlais and Pant Community Action Group, organised by councillors for the ward. Started in 2017 and finished in 2018, it has received the 'Keep Wales Tidy' Green Flag Award. The Action Group is currently working to create a number of other gardens in the ward.

(<https://dowlaisandpant.com/the-gardens>)

Active Kids Group

The group was set up by a councillor to encourage children to get involved in biodiversity projects, working with parents/ grandparents. They are currently working on creating a garden in an area between Edward St and Trevor Close in Pant.

School Profiles

Two of the seven feeder schools in the study are located in Dowlais and Pant ward: Dowlais Primary School and Pantyscallog Primary school.

Dowlais Primary School

In 2021, the total number of pupils of all ages in Dowlais Primary was 191. Of these, 11% were identified as living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, and 43% in the 20% most deprived areas (MTCBC data^c).

There were 138 statutory school age pupils (5-15), almost a third (29%) of whom were eligible for free school meals in 2021. The 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was 21%, below the LA average for primary schools in MTCBC (22.3%), but in line with the national figure (21.3%) (MTCBC^b).

Table 8 shows the percentages of pupils identified as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME), having English as an Additional language (EAL), and having Special Educational Needs (SEN). 'SEN School Action' refers to SEN pupils who are provided with interventions additional to or different from those usually provided in the curriculum. 'SEN School Action Plus' relates to SEN cases where teachers and the SEN Co-ordinator receive advice or support from external specialists to implement interventions additional to or different from those provided through 'School Action' (WG My Local School, 2021). The table also shows the pupil-teacher ratio (PTR).

School	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action *	SEN: School Action Plus*	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Dowlais	191	25.2%	9.4%	7.2%	7.9%	4.3%	18.4
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3%	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0%	21.9

Table 9: Dowlais Primary School: 2021 Demographic Data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021)

A quarter (25.2%) of the pupils at Dowlais Primary were BAME in 2021, approximately double the LA and national figures, and considerably higher than for other feeder primaries in the research area, apart from St Aloysius (24.6%). Perhaps linked to this high proportion of BAME pupils, there was also a higher percentage of EAL children (9.2%) compared with LA and national data (6% and 5.2%, respectively). This relatively high proportion of EAL children may present additional challenges for the school in terms of speech and language provision. It is worth noting that this ethnicity data reflects a change since the school's last Estyn Report in 2016, which states that 'Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the main language. No pupils speak Welsh at home.'

The proportion of pupils requiring SEN School Action (7.2%) was slightly lower than the LA and national averages (10.1% and 11.1%, respectively); SEN School Action Plus (7.9%) was slightly higher than for the LA (6.7%), but similar to the figure for Wales (7.5%). 4.3% of pupils are SEN Statemented, higher than LA and national figures (1.3% and 2.0%). (WG My Local School, 2021.) It is worth noting that this

reflects a change from data in the school's 2016 Estyn Inspection Report, where there were no SEN statemented pupils.

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Dowlais Primary	93.0	91.9	4.1	8.8	24.8	34.3

Table 10: Dowlais Primary School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d).

Most notable here is the percentage of pupils with less than 80% attendance in 20/21, which has doubled compared with the previous year; the rate of exclusion is also higher than in 2020/21. These changes may be due to the impact of the pandemic, but more research would be needed to investigate causes.

The individual school budget per pupil for Dowlais Primary School was £4645, higher than the LA average of £4232. The PTR is 18.4, lower than the LA and Wales ratios (21.5 and 21.9, respectively). This relatively low ratio may allow staff to give more individual attention to students with special needs, such as SEN statemented children.

The most recent Estyn Report was in 2016, when the school was rated 'Good' for both *Current performance* and *Prospects for improvement*. No details of the next inspection are available.

N.B. It has not been possible to access recent attainment data for primary schools in the study.

Pantysgallog Primary School

Pantysgallog Primary School is located in the village of Pantysgallog in Dowlais and Pant ward. In 2021, 324 pupils of all ages were enrolled in the school. Of these, just over a third (34.3%) were living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales; almost half (47.2%) were in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales (MTCBC data^c).

Of the 201 statutory school age pupils (5-15), almost a third (28.4%) were eligible for free school meals in 2021; the 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was 23.8%, slightly higher than the LA and national figures (22.3% and 21.3%, respectively) (MTCBC data^b).

Table 11 presents 2021 demographic data for pupils, with the pupil-teacher ratio:

Primary School	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Pantysgallog	324	5.0%	no data	7.0%	3.5%	- *	27.1
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3%	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0%	21.9

Table11: Pantysgallog Primary School: 2021 Demographic Data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021)

* Figures for *Statemented SEN* pupils are not available where data is insufficiently robust, or otherwise unavailable.

Only 5% of pupils were identified as BAME, half the LA figure and less than half the Wales average. This represents the second lowest BAME figure for the feeder primaries, with only Gellifaelog having a lower percentage (4%). No EAL data were available.

SEN School Action and Action Plus percentages were below the national average in 2021; no data are available for SEN Statemented pupils

Attendance and exclusion figure for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Pantysgallog Primary	94.5	92.1	1.1	6.6	0.0	0.0

Table 12: Pantysgallog Primary School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d)

The figures show a slight fall in the proportion of sessions attended between 19/20 and 2020/21, but a six-fold increase in pupils with less than 80% attendance, although the figure is still relatively low at 6.6%. These changes may be the result of the transition to online teaching during the pandemic. The school had no exclusions in 19/20 or 20/21, down from 4% in 2018/19.

The 2021 budget per pupil for Pantysgallog Primary School was £3968, slightly lower than the LA average of £4232. The PTR is 27.1, higher than the LA and national figures (21.5 and 21.9, respectively).

The last Estyn Inspection was carried out in July 2014, when the school was rated 'Adequate' for *Current Performance* and 'Good' for *Prospects for Improvement*. A subsequent Monitoring Report (Estyn, 2015) found the school had made good progress with respect to the key issues for action following the Estyn visit in September 2015, and the school was removed from the list of schools requiring Estyn monitoring.

3.3.2 Gurnos Ward

Gurnos ward had a mid-2020 population of 5587, many of whom live on the Gurnos Estate. The estate was built in the late 1950s and early 60s and expanded in the 70s. It was originally regarded as a symbol of regeneration but the closure of mines and iron works in the area led to high levels of unemployment, poverty, and a range of social issues:

...the loss of industrial production and rising levels of unemployment in the area were followed by corresponding increases in social problems, such as crime, educational under achievement and substance dependence. (Braithwaite et al., 2007: 63)

There is a local perception of two estates, New Gurnos and Old Gurnos, separated by the Prince Charles Hospital.

2019 WIMD data

2019 WIMD data point to high levels of deprivation in all three LSOAs in Gurnos ward, as shown in the table below:

LSOA Name	WIMD		Income	Employment	Health	Education	Access to Services	Community Safety	Physical Environment	Housing 2019
Gurnos 1	56		62	38	63	168	310	51	1547	861
Gurnos 2	106		101	89	203	129	284	245	1661	879
Gurnos 3	164		134	191	108	247	462	380	1307	659

Table 13: 2019 WIMD rankings for LSOAs in Gurnos ward (MTCBC data ^a).

Gurnos is the only ward in the research area where all the constituent LSOAs are ranked among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales. In terms of domains, apart from Physical Environment, all are ranked as among the 20% most deprived. Gurnos 1 and Gurnos 2 have six domains in this category, and Gurnos 3 has five. Based on the consistency of these low rankings, Gurnos can be identified as the most deprived ward in the research area.

Community Resources in Gurnos Ward

The following resources have been identified:

Calon Las Community Hub

Calon Las Community Hub (previously 3Gs/Communities First) opened in September 2018, with the aim of providing a range of essential services and activities under one roof in Gurnos. The multi-agency hub received £40,000 of Welsh Government funding for refurbishment to transform it into a space for service provision and community groups to meet.

The building is managed by Merthyr Valleys Homes (MVH), the local stock transfer housing association. It currently houses a range of services, including: Families First;

employability services; MVH; youth services; Barnardo's; community police; parenting support; adult and community education; and community development. There is a community café which has been closed during the pandemic years but is in the process of re-opening.

The hub serves as a centre for community engagement activities.

Youth club: The club was mentioned in student interview data. It is run by Merthyr Valleys Homes.

Calon Las Environmental Project: Groundwork are inviting people to get involved in a project (running from April 2021 to April 2023) to establish a polytunnel and recycling facility at the back of the building. They plan to create raised beds and plant green space around the area (Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil, 2021).

Skills Club - Community Learning: The clubs are designed to help people improve their skills in Maths and English; letter writing, form filling; budgeting; supporting their children with school work. Due to covid, delivery is via a blended learning option and people can join the course from their own home. (Dewis Cymru, 2022)

Flying Start – Merthyr Tydfil

'Flying Start is the Welsh Government's flagship early years programme for families with children under 4 years of age.' It provides:

- Free quality, part-time childcare for 2–3-year-olds
- Enhanced Health Visiting & Midwifery service
- Access to Parenting Programmes
- Support for Early Language Development
- Family Support services (Source: Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council, n.d.)

Flying Start provision targets families in LSOAs that are among the 10-20% most deprived areas in Wales, based on 2019 WIMD data. This means there is 100% coverage in Gurnos, partial coverage in Dowlais and Penydarren, and no provision in Vaynor.

Church Community

A close and supportive church community was reported by one head teacher.

Gurnos Schools

Pen Y Dre High School and two feeder primaries, Goetre and St Aloysius, are located in Gurnos ward.

Goetre Primary School

The school is situated in Gurnos ward, on the outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil. According to the 2013 Estyn Report, Goetre Primary School evolved from the amalgamation of Goetre Junior School and Goetre Infant School in May 2011. The current school

‘...serves an area that is one of the most challenging and deprived areas in Wales’ (Estyn, 2013).

In 2021, 487 pupils of all ages were enrolled in the school. Of these 91% were identified as living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales and 93.4% in the 20% most deprived areas (MTCBC data^c). These figures are much higher than for the other feeder primaries, apart from St Aloysius (91.9%), reflecting the fact that all three LSOAs in Gurnos are among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales (see Table 13 above).

Of the 361 statutory school age pupils (5-15), almost two thirds (61.2%) were eligible for free school meals in 2021; the 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was 53.9%, more than double the LA and national figures (22.3% and 21.3%, respectively) (MTCBC data^b).

Table 14 presents 2021 demographic data for pupils, together with the PTR:

Primary Schools	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Goetre	487	7.2%	1.9%	7.2%	12.5%	1.7%	20.5
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3%	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0%	21.9

Table 14: Goetre Primary School: 2021 Demographic data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021).

Percentages of children identified as BAME, EAL, SEN School Action, and SEN Statemented are lower than the Wales averages. However, the proportion of SEN School Action Plus pupils is much higher at 12.5% than the LA and national figures (6.7% and 7.5%, respectively).

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Goetre Primary	92.9	84.8	4.0	27.7	52	15

Table 15: Goetre Primary School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d).

There was a notable decrease in the percentage of sessions pupils attended from 19/20 to 20/21 (92.9% to 84.8%). This was accompanied by a dramatic rise in the proportion of pupils with less than 80% attendance, which increased sevenfold (from 4% to around 28%).

The budget per pupil for Goetre Primary School in 2021 was £4712, representing an increase of about £500 per pupil compared with a budget of £4,219 in 2013-14. The current figure is the second highest among the feeder schools, with only Ysgol Y Graig having a higher amount (£4915). Goetre’s PTR is 20.5, slightly lower than the LA and national ratios (21.5 and 21.9, respectively).

The last Estyn Inspection of the school was in December 2013, when the school was rated 'Adequate' for both Current Performance and Prospects for Improvement. Follow-up reports on 2013 recommendations were carried out in 2015 and 2017. According to the 2017 report, the school was 'judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in December 2013', and it was removed from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

St Aloysius RC Primary School

In 2021, 160 pupils of all ages were enrolled in the school. Of these 88.1% were identified as living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales and 91.9% in the 20% most deprived areas (MTCBC data^c). These figures are much higher than for the other feeder primaries in the research area, apart from Goetre (91.2% and 93.4%, respectively). As noted previously, this reflects the fact that all three LSOAs in Gurnos ward are among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales (see Table 13 above).

Of the 128 statutory school age pupils (5-15), almost 28.1% were eligible for free school meals in 2021, slightly above the LA average of 25.6%. The 3-year average of 26.2% for 2019/20/21 was also higher, compared with LA and national averages for the same period (22.3% and 21.3%, respectively) (MTCBC data^b). Comparison of 2021 FSM data highlights a significant difference between Goetre and St Aloysius, in that the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in Goetre is twice that in St Aloysius. This may reflect the proximity of Goetre school to the Gurnos Estate, which is known to have high levels of unemployment and poverty.

Table 16 presents 2021 demographic data for St Aloysius pupils, with the pupil-teacher ratio:

Primary School	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
St Aloysius	160	24.6%	16.4%	16.4%	-	-	22.2
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3%	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0%	21.9

Table 16: St. Aloysius Primary Schools: 2021 Demographic Data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021)

A quarter (24.6%) of all pupils at the school were BAME in 2021, more than double the LA average (9.6%) and almost double the national average (12.9%). This corresponds to a relatively high percentage of EAL pupils (16.4%), around three times higher than LA or national averages (6% and 5.2%, respectively).

Regarding SEN provision, a larger proportion of pupils (16.4%) require SEN School Action compared with LA and national averages (10.1% and 11.1%, respectively). No data was available for SEN School Action Plus or Statemented children.

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
St. Aloysius	94.3	91.8	4.7	9.2	0.0	6.7

Table 17: St Aloysius Primary School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d).

There was a slight fall in the percentage of sessions attended from 93.4% in 2019/20 to 91.8% in 2020/21. This was accompanied by a rise in the proportion of pupils with less than 80% attendance, which almost doubled from 4.7% to 9.2% over the same period. These changes are not dramatic but may signal some degree of disengagement during the pandemic. Most notably, there were no exclusions per 1000 pupils in 2019/20 but 6.7 in 2020/21. The significance of this figure, however, needs to be seen in the context of the school's relatively small population of 160 pupils.

In 2021, the school budget per pupil was £4216, in line with the LA average of £4232. The PTR was 22.2, also in line with LA and national figures (21.5% and 21.9%, respectively).

The last Estyn Inspection was in June 2013, when it was rated 'Good' for both *Current Performance* and *Prospects for Improvement*. Details of the next inspection are not currently available.

Pen Y Dre High School

Pen Y Dre is undergoing major refurbishment, which has been delayed by the pandemic.

In 2021, 764 pupils of all ages were enrolled in the school. Of these, 50.8% were identified as living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, and 65.1% in the 20% most deprived areas, slightly higher than the figure for all secondary schools in the borough, 61.3% (MTCBC data^c).

A third (33%) of pupils were eligible for free school meals in 2021, higher than the 23.4% average for secondary schools in the borough. The 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was slightly lower at 31.4%, again higher than the borough average (20.9%) (MTCBC data^b). These figures are similar to the FSM data for Goetre Primary and reflect the level of deprivation across the LSOAs in Gurnos ward, although the school catchment area includes all wards in this profile.

Table 18 presents 2021 demographic data for Pen Y Dre pupils, together with the PTR:

High Schools	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Pen Y Dre	764	5.6%	-	15.7%	23.6%	1.3%	16.5
LA		9.2%	1.8%	14.1%	11.7%	1.6%	17.5
Wales		11.4%	2.9%	12.0%	7.3%	2.4%	17.3

Table 18: Pen Y Dre High School: 2021 Demographic Data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021)

The percentage of BAME pupils (5.6%) is much lower than the LA average (9.2%) and half the Wales figure (11.2%). There is no EAL data available for 2021 but in 2020 the figure was 1.1%, below the LA and Wales averages that year (2.1% and 2.8%, respectively).

The percentage of SEN statemented students (1.3%) is in line with the LA average (1.6%) and lower than the Wales average (2.4%). However, figures for SEN School Action (15.7%) and School Action Plus (23.6%) are higher, especially the latter, which is twice the LA figure and three times higher than the national average (11.7% and 7.3%, respectively).

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Pen Y Dre	92.9	86.9	3.3	20.3	53.5	71.2

Table 19: Pen Y Dre High School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d)

There was a slight decrease in the percentage of sessions pupils attended from 19/20 to 20/21 (92.9% to 86.9%, respectively). However, there was sharp rise in the proportion of pupils with less than 80% attendance, with a sixfold over this period, from 3.3% to 20.3%. In line with other schools in the study, these changes may be related to the pandemic, and students' difficulties in adjusting to new ways of learning. As noted previously, young people in deprived areas may not have been able to access electronic devices, the internet, and/ or the home support necessary for them to successfully transition to online learning. It is interesting that the number of exclusions also rose dramatically over the same period. This may be due to some students disengaging from online learning over the pandemic period.

The budget per pupil at Pen Y Dre in 2021-22 is £4765, slightly higher than the LA average of £4737, and a marginal increase on the 2020-21 figure of £4745.

With regard to attainment, the table below presents 2019 Key Stage 4 attainment scores for both high schools in the study:

School	Capped 9pts score (interim measures)*	Literacy points score	Numeracy points score	Science points score	2019 Welsh Baccalaureate Skills**
Pen Y Dre	328.8	36.5	31.5	29.8	29.4
Bishop Hedley	396.8	41.9	43.0	47.5	41.0
LA	313.4	34.7	32.4	32.7	30.8
Wales	354.4	39.0	39.0	36.8	36.4

Table 20: 2019 Key Stage 4 (Year 11) Attainment Indicators: Pen Y Dre and Bishop Hedley (WG My Local Schools, 2021)

* The 'Capped 9 points score' represents the average of scores for the best awards for all individual learners in a cohort, capped at 9 GCSEs or equivalent; 3 of 9 are subject specific.

**The 'Welsh Baccalaureate Skills' score is the average of scores for the Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate awards for all individual learners in the cohort.

These 2019 figures show that KS4 attainment at Pen Y Dre is roughly in line with attainment in other schools in the borough. The Capped 9 Point score and Literacy score are slightly higher than the LA figure, while scores for Numeracy, Science and Welsh Baccalaureate Skills are slightly lower. It is worth noting, however, that LA scores for all attainment measures are lower than national figures. This is particularly noticeable for Capped 9 Point scores, where the Wales figure is 354.4, compared to 313.4 for the LA. These differences may reflect the high level of deprivation across the MTB.

The table shows that Bishop Hedley scores are higher than Pen Y Dre's across all measures. They are also higher than LA and national scores for all measures. Bishop Hedley has a catchment area that extends throughout and considerably beyond the county borough incorporating a broad range of geographical communities which makes comparison difficult.

The last Estyn Inspection of the school was in December 2015, when it was rated 'Adequate' for *Current Performance* and 'Good' for *Prospects for Improvement* (Estyn, 2015). A follow-up Monitoring Report in 2016 removed the school from 'requiring Estyn monitoring' (Estyn, 2016).

School Resources

Pen Y Dre has a swimming pool, artificial grass pitch, hall and climbing wall. Facilities are not currently being hired out to the community, in part due to the ongoing refurbishment, but there are also concerns about staffing after-school provision and insurance costs.

3.3.3 Penydarren Ward

The population of Penydarren ward mid-2020 was 5513. The ward includes Galon Uchaf Housing Estate, built in the 1930s to replace some of the worst housing in the Borough.

3.3.1 2019 WIMD data

Table 21 shows 2019 WIMD rankings against constituent LSOAs in Penydarren ward:

LSOA Name	WIMD		Income	Employment	Health	Education	Access to Services	Community Safety	Physical Environment	Housing 2019
Penydarren 1	7		10	35	22	5	294	484	1233	168
Penydarren 2	258		243	309	126	386	417	801	1341	737
Penydarren 3	1012		996	903	798	1123	1058	696	728	628
Penydarren 4	688		840	834	415	856	1247	858	902	83

Table 21: 2019 WIMD rankings against LSOAs in Penydarren (MTCBC data^a).

The data illustrate dramatic differences in levels of relative deprivation across the four LSOAs in the ward. For example, Penydarren 1 has an overall ranking of 7, placing it among the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, while Penydarren 3 is ranked 1012, identifying it as among the 50% least deprived. Underpinning its low overall index ranking, Penydarren 1 has five domains in the 10% most deprived category: Income (10), Employment (35), Health (22), Education (5), and Housing (168). In contrast, none of the domains in Penydarren 3 are in this category, and rankings for Income (996), Education (1123), and Access to Services (1058) are in the 50% least deprived category.

Penydarren 2 is the second most deprived LSOA in the ward, with an overall ranking of 258 that places it among the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. It also has three domains in the 20% most deprived category: Income (243), Employment (309), and Health (126).

Penydarren 4 has an overall ranking of 688, placing it among the 30-50% most deprived areas, and has five domains ranked among the 30-50% most deprived, and one, Access to Services, ranked in the 50% least deprived. Housing, however, is ranked among the 10% most deprived areas. In this respect, Penydarren 4 is similar to Penydarren 1, whereas Housing is ranked among the 30-50% most deprived areas for the other two LSOAs in the ward.

Community Resources

Sandy Park

This was identified as an area for improvement under Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's 2016 *Open Space Strategy*.

'The local ward members, local authority officers, and third sector and community organisations, were all keen to work together to improve the area. This also ensures compliance with the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015.' (Play Wales, 2022)

Students in Gellifaelog school reported active engagement in planting trees in the park.

Penydarren BGC, The Bont Playing Fields

Primary students reported using the playing fields. However, it is unclear whether the football club has any formal connections with schools in the area.

Penydarren Schools

Gellifaelog Primary and Bishop Hedley High School are located in Penydarren ward. As noted earlier, Bishop Hedley serves a population considerably beyond the county borough.

Gellifaelog Primary School

In 2021, 253 pupils of all ages were enrolled in the school. Of these, just over around a fifth (19.8%) were living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, and almost two thirds (63.6%) in the 20% most deprived areas (MTCBC data^c).

Of the 180 statutory school age pupils (5-15), almost half (47.8%) were eligible for free school meals in 2021, compared to the LA average of 25.6%; the school's 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was 40.1%, almost double the LA and national figures (22.3% and 21.3%, respectively) (MTCBC data^b). The large proportion of children eligible for free school meals reflects the high levels of deprivation identified in parts of Penydarren ward, where Income and Employment rankings place two LSOAs among the 20% most deprived areas in Wales (see Section 3.3.1 above).

The table below presents 2021 demographic data for pupils, together with the PTR:

Primary School	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Gellifaellog	253	4.0%	5.0%	6.7%	4.4%	-	22.4
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3%	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0%	21.9

Table 22: Gellifaelog Primary School: 2021 Demographic data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021).

The percentage of BAME pupils (4.0%) is much lower than LA and national averages (9.6% and 12.9%, respectively). The proportion of EAL students (5.0%) is comparable to LA and national figures (6.0% and 5.2%, respectively).

SEN School Action and School Action Plus figures are slightly lower than the LA and national averages; no figures are available for SEN Statemented pupils

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Gellifaelog	93.1	87.7	5.3	19.1	12.2	0.0

Table 23: Gellifaelog Primary School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d).

The data reveal a slight decrease in the percentage of students attending sessions from 2019/20 to 2020/21. However, there was a marked increase in the proportion with less than 80% attendance, from 5.3% in 2019/20 to 19.1% in 2020/21. As for other primary schools in the study, this change may reflect difficulties experienced by some students in the transition to online learning during the pandemic. High levels of deprivation in parts of Penydarren ward may have limited students' access to devices/ internet; quiet study spaces; home support for learning. Another notable change over this period relates to exclusions, which fell dramatically from 12.2 per 1000 in 2019/20 pupils to 0.0 in 2020/21.

The school budget per pupil in 2021 was £4084, slightly lower than the LA average of £4232. The PTR was 22.4, roughly in line with LA and national ratios (21.5 and 21.9, respectively).

The last Estyn Inspection was carried out in March 2014, when the school was rated 'Good' for both *Current Performance* and *Prospects for Improvement*. Details of the next planned inspection are not available.

Bishop Hedley High School

In 2021, 586 pupils were enrolled in the school. Of these, more than a third (37.4%) were identified as living in one of the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, and more than half (56.5%) in the 20% most deprived areas. This figure is lower than for Pen Y Dre (65.1%), and lower than the average for secondary schools in the borough (61.3%) (MTCBC data^c). As already noted, the extended catchment area of Bishop Hedley makes comparison difficult.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2021 was 18.9%, considerably lower than Pen Y Dre (33%) and slightly lower than the average for secondary schools in the borough (23.4%). The 3-year average (2019/20/21) was 18.2%, also much lower than Pen Y Dre (31.4%), and slightly below the LA average (20.9%) (MTCBC data^b).

Table 24 presents 2021 demographic data for Bishop Hedley High School and Pen Y Dre pupils, together with PTRs. Pen Y Dre data are included here for comparison purposes:

High Schools	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Bishop Hedley	586	29.4%	6.5%	17.3%	3.8%	-	18.5
Pen-Y- Dre	764	5.6%	-	15.7%	23.6%	1.3%	16.5
LA		9.2%	1.8%	14.1%	11.7%	1.6%	17.5
Wales		11.4%	2.9%	12.0%	7.3%	2.4%	17.3

Table 24: Bishop Hedley and Pen Y Dre High Schools: 2021 Demographic Data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021)

These data show that Bishop Hedley has a much larger proportion of BAME and EAL students than Pen Y Dre (29.4% and 6.5%, respectively). It is worth noting that the BAME figure for Bishop Hedley is three times higher than the LA average (9.2%) and more than double the Wales average for secondary schools (11.4%). Similarly, the percentage of EAL students at Bishop Hedley is much higher than Pen Y Dre (6.5% compared with no 2021 data, respectively), and higher than LA and national figures (1.8% and 2.9%, respectively). The Bishop Hedley figures reflect the ethnic diversity of the school population, which includes students from Polish, Portuguese, Filipino, Romanian, and Sri Lankan families.

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Bishop Hedley	92.2	86.2	5.1	22.4	45.0	29.3

Table 25: Bishop Hedley High School: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d)

With regard to levels of attainment, the table below presents 2019 Key Stage 4 scores for both high schools in the study:

School	Capped 9pts score (interim measures)	Literacy points score	Numeracy points score	Science points score	2019 Welsh Baccalaureate Skills
Pen Y Dre	328.8	36.5	31.5	29.8	29.4
Bishop Hedley	396.8	41.9	43.0	47.5	41.0
LA	313.4	34.7	32.4	32.7	30.8
Wales	354.4	39.0	39.0	36.8	36.4

Table 26: 2019 Key Stage 4 (Year 11) Attainment Indicators: Pen Y Dre and Bishop Hedley (WG My Local Schools, 2021).

As noted previously, the data show that Bishop Hedley scores are higher than Pen Y Dre's across all measures. They are also higher than LA and national scores for all measures. These differences in attainment at KS4 may reflect the differences in catchment area.

School Resources

The school has an indoor sports hall with a 3G surface. This is an invaluable resource for the community, especially for football and rugby training, and particularly during the winter when the weather is an issue. There is also a sports hall that is used for other football clubs and archery.

In the past, the school has run adult cookery sessions in its cookery rooms, and held parenting classes, in liaison with the Archdiocese. It has also run parenting classes and English language classes for EAL learners' parents.

3.3.4 Vaynor Ward

In many respects Vaynor is the outlier among the wards in the research area, as it spans a wider geographical area than other wards, is more rural, and has a relatively small mid-2020 population of 3591.

2019 WIMD data

The table shows 2019 WIMD data for Vaynor 1 and 2014 WIMD data for Vaynor 2, as this is the latest available.

LSOA Name	WIMD	Income	Employment	Health	Education	Access to Services	Community Safety	Physical Environment	Housing 2019
Vaynor 1	1051	970	693	831	1111	1166	900	1561	982
Vaynor 2	1063	973	687	918	1321	1177	628	1602	1155

Table 27: 2019 WIMD rankings for LSOAs in Vaynor 1; 2014 rankings for Vaynor 2 (MTCBC data^a).

The overall index rankings for Vaynor 1 and 2 identify these LSOAs as among the 50% least deprived areas of Wales. This is in stark contrast to other wards in the study, where one or more LSOAs are in the 10% or 10-20% most deprived areas.

With regard to individual domain rankings, Vaynor 1 has five domains ranked in the 50% least deprived areas (Income, Education, Access to Services, Physical Environment, and Housing); the three other domains are in the category of 30-50% least deprived.

Based on 2014 WIMD data, Vaynor 2 has six domains ranked among the 50% least deprived areas, with only Employment and Community Safety rankings placed in the 30-50% least deprived category.

Overall, the data suggest that Vaynor is not characterised by the high levels of deprivation identified in other wards in the research area.

Community Resources

At Play Kids Club - @Play – Cefn Coed

This club is 'an after school & holiday play provision, where children aged 3-11 years can socialise, explore & have fun in a safe, stimulating environment!' (School and college listings, n.d.).

Gellideg Foundation: Past/ potential youth provision

Until recently, the Gellideg Foundation ran a youth club in Trefechan. It is not clear whether this formed part of the Foundation's delivery of the *Communities First* programme in the mid cluster of Merthyr Tydfil that includes Trefechan. According to the Foundation's website:

'Our Communities First supported Extending Youth Horizons programme provides young people with new opportunities to develop their emotional, social, physical and cognitive skills. Young people take part in music and singing classes, art and craft, games and sports and cultural activities amongst many other things!' (Gellideg Foundation Group, 2013).

Interviews with councillors and parents of pupils at Ysgol Y Graig, however, indicate that the youth club is no longer operational and there is currently no youth club provision in the ward. Councillors have reported ongoing discussions with the Gellideg Foundation, but it has not been possible to clarify any future plans for Trefechan.

Cefn Coed Community Centre

The Community Centre serves as a venue for LA tutors to work with students being educated outside school.

The only youth provision is in the form of kickboxing classes (5-year-olds to adults). The centre also runs dog training classes. A previous youth club closed about six years ago.

Cefn Coed RFC

The club runs a number of youth teams (for example, under 12s). Parents interviewed during the research reported that Cefn Coed Rugby Club was a hub for community activities, many of which were organised by members of the club and the local community.

School in Vaynor

Ysgol Y Graig Primary School

In 2021, the total number of pupils of all ages enrolled in Ysgol Y Graig was 207. Of these, just 14.5% were identified as living in the 10% most deprived areas in Wales, and 15.5% in the 20% most deprived areas (MTCBC data^c). The latter figure is by far the lowest percentage among the seven feeder primaries in the study, where, excepting Ysgol Y Graig, the proportion of students living in the 20% most deprived areas ranges from 42.9% (Dowlais) to 93% (Goetre). The relatively low figure for Ysgol Y Graig reflects the WIMD data for the two LSOAs in the ward.

Of the 144 statutory school age pupils (5-15), 22.9% were eligible for free school meals in 2021, compared to the LA average of 25.6%. The school's 3-year average for 2019/20/21 was 20.2%, slightly below LA and national figures (22.3% and 21.3%, respectively) (MTCBC data^b).

The table below shows 2021 demographic data for Ysgol Y Graig, with the PTR:

Primary School	No of pupils	BAME	EAL	SEN: School Action	SEN: School Action Plus	SEN: Statemented	PTR
Ysgol Y Graig	207	11.1%	5.6%	no data	9.7%	3.5%	19.8
LA		9.6%	6%	10.1%	6.7%	1.3	21.5
Wales		12.9%	5.2%	11.1%	7.5%	2.0	21.9

Table 28: Ysgol Y Graig Primary School: 2021 Demographic data (WG Stats Wales, 2021 and WG My Local School data, 2021).

In 2021, the student population of 207 included 11.1% of BAME children. This figure is roughly in line with LA and national figures (9.6% and 12.9%, respectively). Similarly, the percentage of EAL pupils (5.6%) reflects LA and national averages (6.0% and 5.2%, respectively).

There was no data for SEN School Action, but 9.7% of pupils required School Action Plus, suggesting the school needed the support of external agencies to assist in the management of SEN provision. This figure is slightly higher than LA and national averages (6.7% and 7.5%, respectively). The percentage of SEN Statemented pupils (3.5%) is also higher than LA and national figures (1.3% and 2.0%, respectively), although the figure is relatively low.

Attendance and exclusion figures for 19/20 and 20/21 are shown in the table below:

School	Percentage of sessions attended		Percentage of pupils with attendance less than 80%		Exclusions per 1000 pupils	
	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21	19/20	20/21
Ysgol Y Graig	93.7	92.8	3.0	5.8	36.5	42.8

Table 29: Ysgol Y Graig: Attendance and Exclusion (MTCBC data^d)

There was little change in the percentage of sessions students attended between 2019/20 and 2020/21, but the proportion of students with less than 80% attendance doubled, from 3.0% to 5.8%. However, this figure is still low, and the lowest compared with other primary schools in the study, where 2020/21 figures range from 5.8% to 27.7%, averaging 11.5%. The number of exclusions per 1000 pupils is relatively high compared with other schools, with an increase from 36.5 to 42.8 per 1000 students between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

In 2021, the budget per pupil at Ysgol Y Graig was £4915, substantially higher than the LA average of £4232. The PTR was 19.8, slightly lower than LA and national ratios (21.5 and 21.9, respectively).

The school's last Estyn Report was in November 2019, when it was rated as follows:

- Standards: Adequate and needs improvement
- Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement
- Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement
- Care, support and guidance: Good
- Leadership and management: Good (Estyn, 2019)

No details of the school's next inspection are currently available.

School resources

Ysgol Y Graig has a room, with its own kitchen facilities, which could be used by the community. Governors are keen for this resource to be utilised as pandemic conditions are lifting.

3.4 Summary

The timing of this study, following two pandemic lockdowns means that some data are unavailable or in need of updating. Nevertheless, the detail of demographic and attainment data reveals that the research area includes a mix of geographical communities each of which, on the basis of ward data, has its own challenges as defined by WIMD. Vaynor ward is somewhat unique within the study in that it spans a wider geographical area and has lower population than the other wards. Vaynor's WIMD scores are relatively lower than the other wards in the study.

School attainment data reveal some areas of strong performance and some challenges, all of which need to be considered within the context of the WIMD data. Qualitative data in section 4 of this report reveal the fact that head teachers and community-facing service providers are acutely aware of the challenges faced by their communities, and have demonstrated strategic thinking and operational actions designed to ameliorate local challenges.

Qualitative data also reveal a high level of community activism and development activities throughout the research area. This is exemplified in various ways reflecting

local community characteristics. The timing of the study has meant that much of this activity has been in abeyance. As community and statutory provision and activity begin to emerge once again, there is a timely opportunity to look holistically at the communities within this research area, with the aim of taking forward the community schools agenda of improving equity and attainment for all. Schools are major players amongst others in achieving this agenda, with additional possibilities offered by forthcoming rebuild and refurbishment of school buildings.

Section 4 of this report reveals that schools in the research area are community focused and aspire to be more so; and that community-focused service-providers are keen to work with schools as partners.

School sites and redevelopment

At the time of the data collection Ysgol-y-Graig primary school had recently moved into a new purpose-built building. There were plans for both secondary schools to be redeveloped within two years. Bishop Hedley is to become a 3-16 school; Goetre School will be rebuilt on land adjacent to Pen-Y-Dre; and Pen-Y-Dre will undergo a major refurbishment.

4.0 Thematic Analysis (deductive) based on themes from Welsh Government characteristics of community schools.

4.1 Work with the LA and third sector partners to provide specialist services that address the needs of the children, families and the community; Have specific staff dedicated to this work.

4.1.1 Have specific staff dedicated to this work

Most schools had appointed to roles such as ‘parent engagement officer’, ‘family liaison officer’, and ‘team around the family’. This was largely seen as a role identifying where children, young people and/or parents would benefit from additional support in a range of areas. In some cases, this role had been extended to encompass inclusion, safeguarding, and some provision relating to Additional Learning Needs (ALN). The term Family Liaison Officer (FLO) will be used to encompass all titles for this role.

The various FLO roles, which were mentioned by headteachers and by parents, were likely to include a combination of in-school support provision and signposting or referral to other support providers in the voluntary or statutory sectors. Schools tended to describe the school-based family liaison role as enabling a holistic approach to young people and families. For faith schools this was linked with the Roman Catholic ethos, however all schools in the study described their own holistic approach. Most operated flexibly and responsively, often seeking solution-based approaches from within the school’s resources before reaching out to other services.

One school described the FLO role as follows:

'The parent comes in with the need, then we put in sort of, a central referral form into the authority, [Early Support Hub]. So it's like that tailor made support arm then so they get directed to parenting classes and things like that, in those facilities...she's working closely with the children, most of the children have got behaviour issues who she's working with. And therefore, perhaps attendance is an issue with those children. And she's running the nurture class within the school twice a week now. Just to give those children a bit of breathing space from the normal curriculum'.

The following description highlights the importance of deep and detailed knowledge about the child and the family.

'we've employed an education inclusion officer who's also our family liaison officer who works very closely with the designated safeguarding lead. So she's got her eye on it all. So if there's an attendance issue, as the family liaison officer, she might know of those issues, but also the safeguarding. So in the first instance, we sort of ask those pertinent questions. You know, to talk to the child, talk to the parents, it may be something as simple as they haven't had their benefits this month. They haven't got the money to send the child to school in uniform. So we would use PDG [Pupil Deprivation Grant] to be able to sort of supplement them for that but the monthly school meals Allowance And then we refer out to the various agencies from MASH [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub], CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services], you know, whatever agencies that are to do at our disposal, before we even start to think about going further down the road'.

One service provider suggested the FLO role has immense potential:

'You would like to think that that is the bridge between schools and the wider community-based preventative services... I would like to think that those family liaison officers will know all about these wider services and bring that knowledge back to the schools so that individual staff, teachers, support assistants, senior management, are aware that if they've got a child who's displaying challenging behaviour and mum's pregnant and not coping then there's this service out there that can, you know, so you would like to think that there's a kind of knowledge that's been brought into the school through those family liaison.'

Despite schools making it very clear that FLOs have a holistic approach to their work, it was perceived by some participants from external agencies that the FLO role is focused primarily on attendance. One such participant voiced the view that the national strategic focus on attendance needed to be broadened out to include a more community focused approach:

'Yeah, I think the tendency is to think of attendance in isolation to other stuff and. And you know, we've reached the point really clearly, certainly post COVID with the persistent absenteeism and the anxiety and Welsh Government direction and all that kind of stuff where there's absolute clarity that attendance won't be dealt with just by looking at attendance. You know, and it has to be looked at in that broader context of community schools and in terms of family liaison and, you know, working more closely with children's services and health and other agencies. ... attendance is not

going to improve if we just kind of you know try and incentivize better attendance’.

4.1.2 Work with the LA and third sector partners

Exploration of this theme was highly reliant on the reported experiences of statutory and voluntary organisations, the perspectives of school professionals, and to a lesser extent comments from parents and young people. Governors were also keen to emphasise the importance of partnership working:

We've got to be involved more in partnership and working with our partners with our not just our local government partners, but our health partners and others, you know, voluntary organisations, as well as what they want and what they would like to see.’

The timing of the research, as schools and other services emerge from the pandemic, highlighted some issues that were peculiar to the contemporary unprecedented situation. There was little in the way of documented accounts of customary service delivery patterns and partnership working. Faith schools were able to draw on additional support provision accessed via the parish, and this had clearly been an integral part of the faith based holistic focus on social and moral wellbeing and development for families.

Interview data reveal there is largely consensus amongst research participants that promotion of effective links between schools and LA and third sector partners requires a co-ordinated and consistent approach across and within a range of stakeholders including schools. This co-ordinated approach was not always in evidence as one participant noted:

‘I think it's key, you have to work with everybody, it doesn't work if partners don't come on board. I don't think people see that. Yeah, they say, like, look what I'm doing... but yeah, if you did this with other people or whatever, you could do something even better. Yeah, I think I really think to make community schools work, obviously, the school needs to be on board.

Throughout the study views were expressed about parents needing professionals they could trust as an initial point of contact for requesting services. There was a tendency for many head teachers to suggest that schools are the key first point of contact for parents seeking services for themselves or their child. This view also emerged from interviews with parents, however it must be noted that most of the parents interviewed had excellent relationships with the schools. Parents who are disengaged from schools were not included in the study.

A representative of a community-based service provider acknowledged and praised the existence of productive partnerships with schools for ensuring that parents and young people are able to access services. However:

‘There's another set of families who don't engage with schools so... we see lots of parents who've had negative relationships with schools and shut down to schools and will not go to the school’.

In these cases, parents were able to refer themselves, or referrals and signposting might be made by other agencies:

‘But if it wasn't for those partners, then those parents potentially wouldn't be getting support. So not all parents engaged with schools... lots of parents don't engage with schools, there's reasons behind that’.

It could be argued that this does little to mend troubled relationships between schools and disengaged parents, indeed one school explained that FLO also worked to a mediation remit:

‘Barriers have been built between the parents and the school. So she's really there to be sort of a mediator and to break all the barriers down for us, and to just almost become a friend of all parents to get them on side. And then hopefully, the children will become on side.’

The multi-agency Early Help Hub was seen by most schools and agencies as a crucial referral point for FLOs to secure community-based services for children and families, and the inclusion officers were also seen as a resource for support and signposting to other services. A FLO network, which had been suspended during the pandemic, had begun to meet again to share good practice.

Discussion of sharing good practice also extended to the sharing of services between schools:

‘With schools, they want to be community focused. But I don't think that the schools can do it by themselves. I think it needs people embedded within the communities, those activities, and to work in partnership it needs, it needs everybody to come together. And but I don't know whether those people are there at the moment...you know, like some sort of consistency’.

The idea of community liaison was also voiced by governors and other community stakeholders. They explained how there are similar roles in the local authority such as School Liaison Officers; however, they envisaged the community liaison or champion role being much more. The champion would not be linked to one school but work in and between schools and the community; taking a holistic approach to motivate and empower people to get involved in education and wellbeing activities and meet the unique needs of each community:

‘It can work, but it just needs buy-in from everybody. I think it needs the support of additional workers that are not directly attached to schools. They would be community engagement workers and they would link to the youth service, they link to the schools. I think that's the only way to engage.’

‘There has to be that liaison link between the schools and the multi agencies, you know...So I think there's just a little bit of a missing link there as to who it is ... So whether that's somebody in the school as the community liaison officer or something like that, I know we've got those in the local authority. But I just don't know whether that's gelled.’

For head teachers the vision of a community champion was someone who would understand the uniqueness of their school communities; a person who could support,

engage and improve connections between the school, the family and the health and wellbeing of stakeholders in the community:

‘Is there someone who could chase this for us rather than five or six of us now going off and all trying to engage these individuals? Is there someone who could be a community champion as part of the local authority who can do that? Can the inclusion team actually look at that support?’

There were mixed views as to the extent to which effective working partnerships operated between schools and voluntary and statutory sector providers of specialist services. Some governors and some representatives of service providers expressed views that suggested a more consistent approach or ethos was needed across all schools. This caused some to comment that the community liaison role should not be based in individual schools but should sit at community or at cluster level:

‘At an individual school level you could employ somebody to be a sort of a community champion or manager... that person is going to again reflect the culture, the philosophy of the head teacher. If you place that person in the cluster you’re then shaping the sort of community philosophy of the schools in the cluster, and I think what you what you get then is you get a smoothing out of those that are extremely inclusive and those that aren’t and there’ll be compromise and you’ll get I think a better model than.... You know, really inclusive schools are probably likely to be quite community focused as well, and therefore they would appoint somebody that is passionate about community and will get the job done and will tie in nicely, and a non-inclusive school won’t be that fussed and might even you know not want to be engaged, whereas at a cluster level, I think it works, it works better...but absolutely sitting on the school side rather than the authority side’.

There were additional suggestions, from head teachers and from other stakeholders, that the community liaison or champion role, whilst being school-facing and designed to encourage parents and young people to make use of specialist services located in the community, should not be school based.

‘I think it needs to be someone else, but I think it needs to be sort of dovetailed within the school as well do you know? I don't think we've got the skills within the school to do it. I think it needs to be external agencies. I think it needs to be hand in hand with the school having input into what is needed, rather than somebody else take over I think the school need input into what would or would not be needed...I think we do get some of that because like (name omitted) does a lot of community stuff ...but we kind of need like a joined up thinking and a holistic approach with regard health and you know, even like the dental services separate to health, which just doesn't make sense. It's lifestyles, really, the community we see here, the lifestyles are really challenging, but we need like a joined up holistic approach. So someone's coordinating it all, I suppose, rather than it being disjointed.’

‘I think, the local authority, or somebody needs to fund community workers, who can do these things for them ...they can engage the participants ... it can't

be the school because ...it needs to have that friendly away from the school, you can talk to us approach.'

Historical community-based projects such as Communities First were mentioned as exemplars for having built trust within the community. In the words of one participant:

'Communities First was so active ... it played such a key role in people's lives, in supporting people, and that just went, you know, they just ended'.

'[Communities First] had good staff who could think outside of the box to do activities and to develop these relationships and had the trust of the community as well to go in there'

4.1.3 Provision of local authority and voluntary sector services,

Service provision was perceived by some participants as unevenly distributed between the geographical communities represented in the study. One parent commented:

'But again, that's provision for if you're Sure Start [sic], so if your children are under a certain age, they can have free swimming lessons in Pen-y-Dre. So there's lots of things postcode related'.

Whilst the provision of free swimming lessons could not be verified, it is certainly the case that service provision is unevenly distributed, as borne out in the documentary analysis. Families in a number of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the research area can access additional support through Flying Start because they live in areas that are among the 10-20% most deprived in Wales (See section 3). This means provision is not only inconsistent across the wards in the research area, but within wards, since a ward may only have some LSOAs identified as areas of high deprivation, as in the case of Penydarren and Dowlais. Since all three LSOAs in Gurnos are among the 10% most deprived areas, families there are able to access a range of integrated health and early years support, including language development programmes, confidence-building, and literacy, which are not available to families in other LSOAs. Vaynor has no coverage. It was noted however that this is likely to change, but not immediately:

'At the moment it's only 40% of our county boroughs covered by Flying Start. So it's a geographically targeted program and the Welsh Government has announced recently that it's got a commitment to extending it beyond the geographical boundaries. And so from September, there's going to be a phasing in of Flying Start across all areas in Wales. But that will be over a three-year period at least.'

The Calon Las centre is a community hub located at the heart of the Gurnos communities. It serves as a focal point for a range of community services aimed at improving outcomes for children and young people. The centre hosts a range of statutory and voluntary sector provision and there is also a community café on site. At the time of the research the centre had not fully opened to the public after the pandemic, but services were operating out of the building by

arrangement/appointment. Plans were in place to open again to the public, however some commentators felt that the centre needed to take a more integrated multi-agency approach and to work more closely in partnership with schools as partners.

One senior leader commented:

‘Operational command meetings implemented during lockdown periods demonstrated the strength in the Local Authority’s ability to harness partnership working, the work undertaken during these periods has been a springboard for strengthened relationships and motivation for agencies to work in a coproduction style oppose to as isolated elements to support plans. There is clear learning from these programmes of work around normalising that all families need support at various points throughout family life and that there are clear benefits to having joint meetings with families that allow assessments to feel less formal and more supportive.’

This comment suggests the time is right for a collaborative, multi-agency approach.

4.1.4 Summary

The FLO is very much seen as a school-based role that requires holistic knowledge about families and their circumstances. This clearly needs to remain a school-based role and also forms a major part of the schools’ response to ‘understand needs of families and the community and adapt to those’ outlined in 4.4 below. During the pandemic primary schools have noticed significant reduction in access to health, social care and other services for children and families which have seriously impacted on the school community. There is a perception that services have been slow to recover which means the school is picking up more of a role in dealing directly with issues brought to them by parents and children. This may be having an impact on opportunities for the FLOs to refer on and signpost, meaning much more health and wellbeing intervention is being held within the school. Secondary schools were less likely to comment on a slow return to normal service provision.

There was much evidence of FLO good practice but this is reliant on parents having good relationships with the school; whilst FLOs can develop relationships this may not always be possible or achievable, and there will be parents who prefer to seek assistance from other service providers. It is therefore important that the FLO role remains a school-based provision, offering some school-based interventions but primarily acting as a referral point to other specialist service providers. The locus of the fault line appears to be the experience, particularly in primary schools, that the specialist service providers are not yet offering a full service.

Some schools commented that their FLOs had several roles which could include ALN, inclusion such as safeguarding. The encompassing of other roles fits well in the context of this being holistic, but schools may need to consider whether this indicates the need to put more staffing resource into the role. Issues around the sustainability

of funding FLO roles, schools need more reassurance that these roles can continue as an integral part of delivering community school practice.

The criterion in 4.1 at the head of this section requires the school to work with the local authority and third sector partners to provide specialist services that address the needs of the children, families, and the community. This may be interpreted as the school being the agent of provision. It is clear from the contributions of various stakeholders, including schools, that in many situations schools perceive themselves as having become the principal hub from which the spokes of service delivery radiate, whether via referrals to agencies (with its associated problems) or by provision (e.g., after-school clubs). Currently (possibly related to the pandemic) the hub has shifted from referral point to delivery point in primary schools, with Family Engagement Officers delivering rather than referring.

This relates only to provision for the children and families of the school – NOT the community. Schools have been understandably focused on their main duty to educate pupils and their responsibility to promote high standards or educational achievement. Given the FLOs' clear function as school-based practitioners with a role in referring to community-based services, additional roles are needed

If the community school concept can be seen as a jigsaw, schools place a number of fundamental and crucial pieces into that jigsaw, they are not the jigsaw itself. Schools and other community-facing services are in agreement that community managers/champions need to be appointed. There is agreement that these community manager/champion roles should be shaped by the schools and other service providers, they should work with schools and other service providers to make sure there is appropriate and adequate service provision for children and families, to facilitate and broker relationships and information exchange between schools, other service providers and communities, thereby helping to embed excellent multi-agency, inter-professional working. The community manager/champion post holders need to demonstrate a profound and accurate understanding of the composition, culture, and needs of the community.

Investment is needed to make possible the continued sustainable funding of FLO roles to work within schools, and the development of a team of community-based professionals providing additional services under the management and co-ordination of the community manager/champion. Whilst this model would require investment, there would be clear outcomes in delivering the community schools ethos to address equity and the achievement gap.

Investment in community managers/champions could be from a range of related service budgets include health, education, social services, etc. Additionally the investment would result in efficient, effective delivery of services by understanding community needs and negotiating/brokering shared services throughout the cluster.

One research participant who holds many community roles in the research area stated:

'The local authority need to be on board, the local authority need to invest. The Welsh Government need to invest in it, and you need to invest people into it. Infrastructure in terms of community workers, whoever they may be.'

4.2 Have a strong vision, driven by the head teacher

4.2.1 Whilst the community schools vision was generally well articulated by head teachers, and this was reflected during interviews with governors, the depth of exploration was affected by the mode of interview. Individual interviews appear to have offered head teachers more opportunity to voice and evidence their community school vision.

4.2.2 It was certainly the case that agencies outwith the schools were aware of the importance of the head teacher's strategic vision:

'It comes down to the ethos of the leadership of the school I think in that respect.'

'I think leadership is really critical. You know, unless you've got a visionary leader who is willing to embed those principles and those approaches [of greater integration between schools, communities and services] across their school structures, then it's difficult, you know. And unless you've got schools who see the child in the context of the family rather than just the child they're seeing. You know which is, I think a lot to do with community, you know, and it's the what's in it for me question.'

'We got some schools that really engage with us, you know, and they, really, you know, welcome any sort of guidance and things like that with us and have got you know attendance and parental engagement you know on the forefront like you said and you've got other schools then that we sort of can't sort of get into and can't sort of dig into and try and sort of engage as well. So yeah there is a mix.'

So when it comes to Community Schools, I think there's been inertia and it's partly because of that that sort of how do you define historically community schools? Is it about just making the caretaker willing to you know open up a building or close it later in the day and for community groups to have access to the building? Does that make it a community school? No. And so that journey, I really welcome the Welsh Government's involvement on this because I think in order to drive that forward at an operational local level it does need, I think, to be steered because otherwise it just morphs into whatever the head teacher feels that the school participation in that agenda should be, and that's what we don't want. And that's why the Pen y Dre cluster's a really good one because there's a real mix of ideology there. There are some that are community driven. There are some that think they're community driven by a different definition and then there are those that really aren't that fussed about that aspect.'

4.2.3 There is no evidence in the data to suggest any of the head teachers 'really aren't all that fussed about that aspect'. Every head teacher who took part in the research demonstrated their commitment to the community schools ethos. Whilst it is acknowledged above that the individual interviews offered more opportunity to explore vision, nevertheless every head teacher gave an account of how they believed they were following the community schools vision. Perhaps the relevance in the above quotation is the 'mix of ideology'. Although no real discrepancies showed up during the head teacher, governor, or parent interviews, it was certainly the case that some comments outwith the school context had noted differences in vision and ethos as demonstrated through practice (see 4.2.2). The main differences noted in the data relate to how the term 'community' is perceived in the notion of a community school. Some saw community as children and families who attend the school. Others saw community in its wider geographical and neighbourhood context. For faith schools there was also a community centred around the parish. The definition of community will clearly have an impact on the head teacher's vision, and is exemplified to some extent in the comments below.

When head teachers were asked specifically what makes a school a community school, the following responses were received:

'The school sits as part of the community, but also serves the community.'

'It serves to be a hub, in essence for, for the community to not just to use this for premises, but to use the expertise of the staff within, for the staff to work and become part of the community to be a base for lots of things that go on, to link with the schools in the locality, to link with organisations within the locality.'

'Having the school firmly rooted at the heart of its community, not only geographically, but also in terms of its ambition for itself and for others, trying to see communities as ... not just the staff and pupils directly involved in the day-to-day business of schools.'

Where we've built our success and we've transformed the school's fortunes is by reaching out to the community and trying to ensure that as many people as possible have a stakehold in the future of our young people because we see them for such a relatively short time as part of their young lives. And clearly that's being shown in the tensions, and the challenges around that have been exacerbated during the pandemic and the ongoing pandemic.'

4.2.4 Summary

All head teachers articulated an ethos that indicated they had a belief in the notion of community schools as laid out in the Welsh Government defined characteristics of a community school. This should not be surprising because most of those characteristics reflect good practice for a school regardless of the community school definition. Evidence from external stakeholders affirms the importance of visionary leadership in taking forward the community schools ethos.

There were differences in how schools were perceived by service providers, agencies, and governors. It was widely recognised that leadership is crucial in taking

forward the community schools ethos, and some schools were viewed as being less inclined to engage with the wider community and structures of service provision.

The group interview with primary school head teachers revealed a willingness to work together across the cluster as a means of improving access to service provision for parents and children. This was very much aspirational and it was clear that, despite universal support for the idea it was unlikely to develop fully without the intervention of a specific job role to take forward this vision consistently on behalf of the schools.

In individual interviews head teachers had more opportunity to voice their vision in relation to a deep and evidenced understanding of the needs of their wider geographical communities and the ways in which their schools could contribute as a locus for community activity and development.

Comments articulated in other sections reveal some of the challenges to implementing the vision, and some differences in the meaning of 'community' in community schools.

4.3 Work with parents and families as equal partners; Provide opportunities for consulting and communicating with parents to ensure their voice is heard

4.3.1 The two characteristics above are related but different. Both require the voices of parents to be heard. Communicating with parents was strongly in evidence, and its importance had been brought sharply into focus because of the pandemic. Schools were keen to emphasise communication had been a two-way process during and since the lockdowns.

The practice of consulting with parents was variable and, to a certain extent, open to interpretation. This could be taken to mean consulting with parents about their child's learning, or it could mean consulting about policies, procedures, services, facilities etc.

The notion of parents and families as equal partners was also open to interpretation. This could be understood as parents and families being equal partners in the child's learning, in the community life of the school, or in the running of the school, for example via representation by parent governors. With notable exceptions this theme was underdeveloped in head teacher and governor interviews. When asked about parent engagement most responses were around getting the parents on board with issues around attendance, helping with children's learning etc.

4.3.2 On the basis of a limited sample of parents from 3 primary schools, most of the schools have communication mechanisms in place, usually using ICT and text messaging, for keeping parents informed of key information about the daily operation of the school. All parents interviewed were satisfied with this communication and were unsympathetic about parents who claimed they were not sufficiently informed of key operational issues.

4.3.3 There was less evidence of parents being involved in decisions at a policy and strategic level. Two schools had processes in place for input into policy decisions, and one school had developed a 'parent parliament' to sit alongside the pupil parliament. Unfortunately, the parent parliament had very poor levels of participation and, despite considerable efforts on the part of the school in terms of timing and other incentives, the group finished with zero participation. The head teacher was clearly keen to provide opportunities for consulting with parents and to hear their voices in the strategic context:

'I'd certainly want parents involved in, in having a say and in the planning and feeling that they're being done with rather than to,'

The same head teacher found that some parents were difficult to engage as partners in their child's learning, despite clearly demonstrated efforts to make that process as easy and accessible as possible.

A senior manager from one service provider noted:

'Within the Local Authority, as with all Local Authorities, we are on a continual journey of learning how to best support learners and their families. There has been pockets of successful pilot work where early help assessments and interventions have been targeted on specific education sites. This has clearly provided opportunities for consulting and communicating with parents to ensure their voice is heard'.

Some parent governors took part in the research interviews, and most schools had one or more governors represented in the study, but there was little mention of involving parents in the decision making. Parents at one primary school mentioned that communication processes gave them the opportunity to offer views on new policies. Parents at another primary school were very clear that they would contact one of the governors if they wished to make a point about a school related matter.

4.3.4 One governor refers to the importance of getting parents engaged but the process is difficult:

'I think there needs to be a greater focus on family engagement as well. You know, I think that we talk about the community, and we have people who are really eager to engage. So, if we were talking about a community focused school, per se, type of thing, you've got those people there. Whilst I think there's a little bit of, you know, grappling around who is the connection between it all, I think we can address that and sort that out. But I think it's really getting that family engagement as well, you know, getting those families involved. So they feel part of the school, you know. I think that's what we need to do is really get over that. Yes, what's the word I'm looking for get over that fear factor of what school is, you know, it's not that fearful establishment.'

A similar view was put forward by a head teacher:

'They are very, you know, they're very fearful of coming back to a place that may have not been a happy or successful time for them. So for every head of year we've appointed a non-teaching support called a learning coach... That's

been a really nice way of engaging parents because they know these learning coaches, they know they're not teachers and they may feel there's less of a formality and or barrier to engage in with school.'

A number of participants from agencies outwith schools also noted the challenges of getting parents who had had negative experiences at school to engage with services that are school based:

'I think the experience of a lot of our parents is that they didn't have a very good experience at school. And so therefore their perceptions of schools then is very much a them and us. And there's kind of a negative connotation to schools.'

Another head teacher felt the lack of engagement related to parents feeling they did not have a role in their child's learning – that it was solely the responsibility of the child and the school. This head teacher had noticed significant participation from some parents via a recent initiative based around setting up conversations in community locations:

'We invite parents then to talk about what we expect of them what they expect of us and have that open relationship. But we also do a supported study skills session for parents to be able to support the children in being able to be independent, but what the demands of revision potentially are going to be over the two years sort of study skills that they are going to need the revision strategies that they potentially are going to have to use, but also things like organising their time, you know, just the sort of minor things, the equipment that they're going to need. The quiet space or the dedicated workspace just to have that out in the open.'

Only one head teacher made the very important point that parents are a diverse group 'from parents who work as clinicians and consultants at Prince Charles [Hospital] to those who work within the home or without employment at the moment.' This comment recognises there are a range of different reasons to explain why a parent might not have the time or the motivation to engage with the school, or even with their child's learning. It is a complex situation requiring a nuanced set of responses.

4.3.5 It was generally felt by a range of participant types that it is easier to engage with primary school parents than it is with secondary school parents. This relates to the fact that primary school parents tend to accompany their children to school. The opportunities this presents have been noted at various points in section 4.1 above. The disadvantages of the secondary school transport situation are well articulated in this quotation which captures what a range of participants expressed at various points:

'It does hinder that relationship building I think because as you say, 60% of our children come in school transport and then the rest of them either with either walk to school if they live locally or service bus into town and walk or they're dropped off by parents and then is literally just drop off and pickup'.

Communication via telephone and other forms of smart communication had become particularly important for communicating with secondary school parents, but these methods were equally evident in primary schools.

Some of the schools are moving to an 'all through' school. This was generally thought to be beneficial for parental engagement because the relationship with the school would begin at age three and there would be opportunities to engage parents and develop relationships throughout the thirteen years of schooling.

4.3.6 Summary

The term 'parents' has been revealed as a diverse group with a diverse range of needs and characteristics which might affect the way in which they engage with schools. Schools who recognised the need to develop a range of approaches tended to have more success in engaging with a wider range of parents. That being said it was broadly acknowledged by head teachers, external stakeholders, and parents themselves, that engaging with parents is a complex and difficult task.

The nature of engagement with parents needs clarifying. In the community schools ethos there are many levels of engagement including communication, consultation, service provision, and equal partnership. These all have specialist areas of practice associated with them. Some practices such as communication and areas of consultation and partnership related to a child's learning fall quite clearly within the professional remit of the school. Other practices might be considered to fall within a community development brief or, in the case of parents unwilling or unable to work with the school, within the brief of other agencies. The idea of community co-ordinators/managers/champions outlined in section 4 above could offer consistency of approach in partnership with schools.

4.4 Understand needs of families and the community and adapt to those

4.4.1 The bounded nature of geographical communities and their idiosyncratic needs is well triangulated in the data. This is a complex and note-worthy phenomenon; whilst there was consensus that the uniqueness of each of the communities should be observed, some voices call for a broadening of perspectives and more inter-community engagement. Some governors were particularly vocal in this regard. The comments below came from school governors:

'Sometimes what you have is there's one organisation doing something, and somebody else doing something, whereas if you're doing together it would be more successful, and then more beneficial.'

'I'm different I develop partnerships, while other communities work in silos, and they like don't work together'.

4.4.2 One head teacher made a comment about closed communities, and this was echoed by a group of parents at the same school:

'And I really do think that especially where my school is based ... parents very rarely leave the community ... and things need to come to the schools or come to a central point. And maybe initially just to build those relationships and then you know parents would have the confidence, then maybe not come to schools as the first point of call all the time. If they built a relationship with somebody can help them with their finances or help them with, you know, their mental health and they have the empowerment to do it themselves hopefully then in the future.'

Another head teacher from the same geographical community commented:

'The community ... is quite a closed community. People don't tend to come here. People don't tend to leave here. It is that sort of community. There are very few outsiders ... So I think the people, the support we have within the community ... we are very popular, and they give us a lot of support.'

Commenting on the same community, another head teacher thought it was important to raise community aspirations and break the cycle of limited community mindset by taking a holistic joined up approach. This was echoed in a comment from a different head teacher

'I do feel that in the community that we live in, people have got into a rut, and they struggle with their own mental health, and then it has an impact on the children. And we have to try and do something to promote positivity and aspirations within the community.'

One community-based service provider acknowledged this concept of closed communities, suggesting that families need services to be located close together so that they are accessible without transport:

'I think I think location is really important and you know particularly where you may have them drop an older sibling off at school. So then to expect [parents] to be somewhere else with a younger child by you know quarter past nine and we've got the lowest car ownership in Merthyr and we did have, I don't know if that still stands, but at one point the lowest car ownership. So there's a reliance on foot or public transport. So there's a commitment ... that all of our services should be pram pushing distance....no more than 15 minutes' walk. So we ought whenever we plan our services, it's always with that in mind, because our families don't particularly travel very well from one community to another.'

Some schools had catchment areas that extended beyond the immediate geographical location of the school. This was recognised by the relevant head teachers and without exception they spoke of a practice of meeting families at home or at community venues close to home:

Quite a few of those families don't drive. So you know, expecting them to come over if you've had parents meetings with, you know, return to school or following an exclusion or where the child is at serious risk of exclusion. Some of these parents come up with by taxi, you know, that's a big ask. So meeting them where they are, is really appreciated by them, that we're going the extra mile, you know, even things like delivering uniform. If, if a parent of a child is

struggling or parents are struggling financially, going out and visiting parents if they're ill, or going out and visiting children'.

Whilst some might see the closed nature of communities as fostering a deficit model, there were those who thought the boundaried, idiosyncratic communities should be celebrated. In contrast with other governors, some governor participants highlighted the importance of celebrating and acknowledging the uniqueness of their communities, and the distinct ways in which they operate:

'Each of our communities are very similar, but they have different needs. I think we need to take that into consideration ... as to whether those needs have been identified. And whether we are meeting those needs of the different schools, because although they're very similar, the communities themselves can be quite different.'

They also viewed the distinctive aspects of their communities as an asset rather than a drawback and proposed that such differences should be maintained and drawn upon in order to work collaboratively:

'We are different, but those differences make us stronger and better, and I think that we need to sort of like, celebrate how we do things and do things together'.

4.4.3 The data show that head teachers have a keen awareness of the wide-ranging needs of families and the ability to adapt rapidly to changing needs. This was especially important during the pandemic, when families turned to schools for support and guidance in areas where the usual services were unavailable or difficult to access. Head teachers reported the challenges they faced as they engaged with families in unfamiliar areas, where they felt they had insufficient expertise:

'I think we've had to change very, very rapidly and very significantly really over the last couple of years.'

'I think that at the start of the pandemic really we had this time where social services weren't able to do visits on site with families and were sort of more office based, I think. At that point we became the sort of go to place because you know children were coming into school hubs and were able to access us at school settings and schools were setting up places for vulnerable children to be able to come into school still whereas social workers couldn't necessarily actually go out and do that face-to-face work that they would do to start with.'

4.4.4 It has already been noted in 4.2.3 that the term 'community' in community school has been understood in a variety of ways. This ranges from the children and families linked to the school, to the wider geographical community and neighbourhood. A manager from a community-based service provider spoke of the relevance of 'catchment area' to the notion of a community school. This was particularly noted in the case of the perceived ebb and flow of choice of secondary school.

'I'd almost want it to be defined by community rather than catchment, so when we're talking about, you know, a catchment area, community schools, sometimes the catchment doesn't fit. The community fits, and you know it becomes then detrimental to developing community schooling if you're trying to merge different bits of catchment areas, if you see what I mean. So I think it is a really important kind of distinction and area to get right because otherwise it can you know it what's more important is it the community aspect or is it the catchment aspect or the group of schools aspects and I think it's got to be the community aspect.

One of the secondary schools in the study had received just over 20 applications from outside the traditional catchment into the school. The head teacher revealed:

'We don't actually market our school outside our identified community. We think ethically that children are best served by going to their local community school as long as that school is good enough to meet the ambitions and aspirations of its community. So we don't encourage applications from outside our community. We accept them because obviously there is parental choice.'

4.4.5 One governor commented:

I think that one of the things that we need to do as well is what do our communities learn from a community school? So we need to go out, and I'm sure you will be out into the wider community to find out what they want from our schools, and to the parents out to the community to find out what use would you make off of the school? If we were to turn them into some form of community school? I'm not quite sure myself yet what that would look like. So I'd be interested when, as the research progresses, to know what that looks like.

Further research is needed to consult and engage with families and communities to discover what they would like their community schools to look like and how they should operate. Parents from the newly built Ysgol y Graig were happy that they had the opportunity, along with the rest of the community, to express their views on the location and design of the school.

4.4.5 Summary

It is clear from interviews that all schools and additional stakeholders have been able to identify the needs of communities. In the case of the research area, it was noted that the geographical communities within the cluster are quite diverse. The community profile in section 3 identifies the diversity of demographic characteristics represented amongst the communities in the research area, and the extent to which this may affect their entitlement to funding and services.

It is significant that head teachers and the broad range of stakeholders all recognised their community's unique cultural characteristics but there was less agreement on the best way to respond. Comments made elsewhere in this report

refer to differences in approach and ethos between schools, and there is certainly some diversity of opinion across schools and agencies as to the most appropriate way to respond to localised needs. It is likely that a range of approaches is needed to respond to community needs, and these are considered in the relevant sections of the report.

Further work is needed to seek the views of specific communities in relation to community schools.

4.5 Provide varied family learning programmes to engage and develop parents

4.5.1 Parents differed in their opinions about the school being an appropriate place for delivery of family learning programmes. Differences in parents' views are likely to be influenced by their own childhood experiences at school, as well as their relationship with their children's school. Negative views may be related to fear of being exposed to the negative reaction of other parents/ neighbours if they are seen to be taking part in learning programmes at school. Parents and head teachers reported several generations of the same families attending their schools. The way in which a parent experience that school as a pupil is therefore going to be influential in their willingness to engage in family learning.

Parents at one primary school felt that their warm and close school community offered a safe space for parents to engage with family learning:

'I wouldn't want to go into a room with people that I didn't know and say, you know, I'm not very good at reading. And I would say, I'd quite happily say here in front of everybody. Because I feel comfortable around these people. But I mean, I wouldn't feel like that in a room of people that I've never met before.'

Parents at another school in the same geographical area were less convinced that parents would be inclined to come to the school for family and developmental learning, although it was felt that there were prospects for change.

4.5.2 Some agencies outwith the school were more reserved in their view of the school as an appropriate place for family learning. This was perhaps influenced by the fact that those agencies tended to work with parents who were not likely to engage with the school:

'It depends on the parents' experience of school life as well. You know the families we work with, there's a historical experience of non-attendance, exclusions, or bullying that the family have experienced and the parents could have trauma. They could look at a school and think I'm not walking through those doors, there's a barrier.'

One school referred to the FLO role as being encouraging to parents and building bridges with those who had been disengaged. An external service provider agreed that this was a crucial role for the FLO:

'FLOs should open up that school, be welcoming to the parent, have no judgement. I think it would be beneficial for the family to go in and use that space and see what their child is doing in the school. It could break down a lot of barriers because there is stigma attached to a school depending on the parents' experiences.'

4.5.3 A number of community-based practitioners and some governors spoke of there having been effective family learning programmes at most of the schools via family engagement/family liaison staff. One project frequently referred to was Families and Schools Together (FAST).

'FAST Families and Schools Together, So it's working as a hub. You go into the schools in the evening, with parents, and you would have staff and you'd have community workers working that were working in hubs, you'd come together to have a meal, and you do art and table based activities. You did work with children, table based activities and stuff and it was really, really good.'

Other comments reflected the prospects for community schools to be the locus for generating family learning in the future:

'It's a really good place for family education and I think you know there's so much stigma attached to adult learning in that kind of school context. And there's been a lot of good work done around parents coming in and reading with their children and learning themselves in that process. I would look for a really good community school to be one where actually the family could come in, work could be done with the family.'

4.5.4 Views were expressed by primary head teachers and one of the secondary school teachers that parents tend to provide less support for learning as the child becomes older. The suggested reasons for this differed. In the case of primary schools:

'I think they can support, some of them could support the children when they are younger. But then as the children go through our school once they get into the junior department, some parents are reluctant to support the children because of their low skill levels. They don't feel like they can support the children and I don't want to be negative towards, about everybody. But there are quite a few parents who, who lack the skill level and I feel we could do more to support them as a community.'

There was a different perspective about secondary school:

'I think by the time that the children get to secondary, the parents feel that they've almost done their job in terms of the schooling element, and that they're ready to fly and be independent, which they're not, you know, the vast majority of children are not ready.'

Early engagement with parents was thought to be key. It was thought that the 'all-through school' model offered opportunities to engage with parents when the child is aged 3 and continue that engagement throughout. One primary school teacher felt

that the school should be pro-actively involved with the family from birth to develop relationships as soon as possible.

4.5.5 One governor felt that a lot of work had gone on pre-pandemic in relation to extra-curricular family learning. In many cases this had been initiated by community-based practitioners, although the schools also reported having initiated family learning activities, and this was affirmed by some of the pupil interviews.

The importance of engendering a sense of belonging for family members, including wider family and grandparents, was articulated by many categories of participant as one of the challenges post-pandemic. The consequences of not being able to invite parents into the schools was keenly felt across all schools.

During the pandemic one of the secondary schools had set up an adult basic education club for parents of some of the learners who were struggling. This was a basic literacy and numeracy provision with refreshments on offer. Safeguarding checks were all in place and it was offered at the end of the school day so that parents and children could learn together. Unfortunately, take-up was low and at this point in the research it has not been possible to analyse why that was the case.

4.5.6 During the group interview with governors, many comments were made about trying to get families back into the school following the pandemic restrictions. There was some agreement around the fact that the school building would be an enabling factor. Where a school had been refurbished and was able to offer a community room, this was felt to be a valuable asset for family learning:

‘There are classes that we know that we can run in the future now that restrictions have lifted. You know, we've run successful family programmes in schools. And we have those facilities, excellent facilities now as well, to drive that agenda forward to actually get better links with our parents, because I think that's obviously been lacking, you know, parents drop their children off in school. Well, now we have those facilities within the school to be able to work from them in and we have the room in the school, which we've never really had before. It is a purpose built for them as well.’

4.5.7 Summary

At the time the research took place there was limited evidence of family learning taking place because of pandemic restrictions. It was clear, however, that valuable family learning had occurred in the past. The prospects of a return to family learning activity seem good although the uneven take-up by parents is a matter of concern.

It was clear that some parents and other family members experienced barriers of various kinds in relation to engaging with the school. The job of tackling this appeared to fall into the remit of the FLO role.

The availability of community rooms and facilities was considered an enabling factor for family learning. The schools due to have a refurbishment or newly built school could take care to design in community spaces clearly delineated for family learning.

4.6 Provide help and encouragement to families so that they can effectively support their child's learning at home

4.6.1 Due to the timing of the study, comments in this section largely focus around the extreme challenges of providing support for families who had children being educated on-line as a result of the pandemic. This is the most recent experience of schools and it has therefore been analysed separately from section 4.5, which deals with family learning and is, by virtue of the pandemic restrictions, largely historical.

4.6.2 There were many comments from head teachers about the 24 hours a day, seven days a week working/learning culture that had emerged during the pandemic.

'We're on call 24/7 due to the blended learning and the online platforms. I think it's been taken to the nth degree now, where we're contacted weekends, all hours of the day and night.'

'Many times I say the staff will not respond after five o'clock, I've got a team of professionals who sit beneath me, and, as another Head said, they just feel they just have to respond because they're that loyal to the children and their families.'

It must be stated that schools, along with many other community-facing services, have had challenges and experiences which are unprecedented. Some headteachers reported having learned through the experience of the initial lockdown and were therefore concentrating on working with teachers and families to develop boundaries. One head teacher spoke in detail about the importance of working with parents to educate them about the boundaries of the home learning situation. A handbook and training sessions had been developed for parents.

4.6.3 Interviews with parents revealed specific examples of how ICT was being used to help them effectively support their children's learning at home. These were all parents of primary school children.

4.6.4 Summary

There is clear evidence from parents in the primary school interviews that ICT processes are in place to facilitate parents supporting their children's learning. For parents who are engaged with these processes there was largely a high level of satisfaction. It is perceived that parents support their children's learning at home less as the child progresses through the stages of school. Suggested reasons for this include the education levels of the parents (addressed under adult and community learning and under family learning), and disengagement from the school as a result of previous experience (addressed by FLOs and external agencies).

4.7 Have strategic plans about how they will work with families and the community; Evaluate the impact of their strategies.

4.7.1 All head teachers mentioned ideas for solution-focused activities and interventions designed to deliver community school outcomes. In the case of the primary school group interview there was consensus around the need for a co-ordinated approach, potentially via the employment of community managers/liaison officers/champions. The idea of this role was underpinned by a need for a more co-ordinated consistent approach, and it is likely the holder of such a post could work on delivery of a shared strategy for the cluster. The group interviews did not offer much opportunity to explore the details of the schools' individual strategic plans.

4.7.2 Individual interviews offered more scope for discussing strategy. When asked specific questions about how community focus is articulated in the school's strategic plans, the responses understandably tended to focus around national, regional, and local policy imperatives, and school improvement plans. Head teachers were able to consider the ways in which these strategic goals corresponded with the Welsh Government community school characteristics. These recently published characteristics would not have been known at the time the strategic plans were written. The fact that head teachers were able to give responses indicated the extent to which community focus was inherently bound into the vision for their school. The following responses were received:

'I would say the community focus is, is kind of intentionally woven into our six main priorities. So for example, in teaching and learning, you know, one of the ways that strengthen a community focused school is to understand that everyone can have equity within the curriculum and everyone has an equal chance to be themselves, be the best they can be and to succeed.'

'The rise now academic standards has spoken to communities who may have felt that the school wasn't traditionally for them.'

'So it's focused purely on school improvement. And I think the improvement is to bring parents on board much more in not just in an operational sense, but in a strategic sense ... I'd certainly want parents involved in having a say and in the planning and feeling that they're being done with rather than to. So we've got leading learning outcomes and standards, engaging in values and ethos, and engaging in innovation. And each one of those strands has got a community focus purely through things like parent voice, engaging parents in the outcomes that their children have.'

4.7.3 There was an observation that strategic planning around community schools needs an uplift and more consistency across the authority:

'There are pockets of provisions within schools that can be described as fitting with the community schools agenda, however, the next step for the Local Authority would be around ensuring cohesion in strategic planning actions. Whilst there are clear programmes of work that have bred success across the

prevention agenda aimed at supporting learners within the school setting there will need to be a clear development of authority-wide initiatives to support schools to be effective community schools. Significant foundation work has taken place across the Local Authority to ensure there is a clear Local Authority vision of holistic support for learners through cross directorate working’.

4.7.4 Summary

The recently published characteristics of community schools resonate with all head teachers and their ambitions for their schools. Further work is likely to take place in relation to how the community schools agenda is taken forward in individual and joint strategic planning by schools and other service providers.

4.8 Provide professional learning opportunities to staff and governors to strengthen their understanding; Expect all staff to develop their professional skills in order to undertake their role within the school

4.8.1 The research process has revealed much enthusiasm for embracing the community schools ethos. This enthusiasm exists in pockets of activity and awareness amongst a variety of stakeholder groups. There are ideas arising from existing provision, and a thirst for more information about further opportunities. Possibly as a result of the pandemic working conditions there was a sense in which these ideas could be discussed and turned into actions if the various stakeholders could engage in shared professional learning:

‘We are very fortunate in Merthyr Tydfil, because the partnership arrangements are pretty good between organisations. And you know, we’ve got the third sector, we’ve got the public sectors, and they work very, very well together. However, they’re not as joined up as we would like them to be, and there’s still more work to be done about joining them up. And I think that’s about changing the culture. Now changing culture is a huge piece of work. And that doesn’t happen overnight. So we’re going to have to build on that. For me, it’s about engaging them. For me, it’s about building relationships. And I would say as part of this research... we should do some form of stakeholder events, where we ask our stakeholders to become involved in what we want to see. And I think that could be very effective.’

4.8.2 One specific idea for professional development came from head teachers who felt that school teachers and staff could benefit from professional development to spot early signs that intervention from community-based services might be required:

‘In terms of that community approach from professionals, it’s about early intervention, so there’s no point waiting until we’ve got a diagnosis. There’s no point waiting until these things have already happened. But how could we get in earlier so can the professionals actually upskill our staff so that we know what we’re looking for? That doesn’t make us into health professionals either.’

And it's not taking another job for the school because we're doing plenty of that as it is. But actually if we can spot things earlier on, can we intervene at an earlier stage and support some of those social skills?’

Children’s Services reported that they had located some services at education sites and this had provided professional learning opportunities to staff. An extension of this mode of working would be extremely valuable to schools.

4.8.3 Governor training programmes were well developed but tended to be on single issues such as attendance, equity, wellbeing, inclusion, exclusion, healthy schools, careers, additional learning needs, Curriculum for Wales. Whilst these relate to community school themes, they did not appear to be joined up in the form of their coherence around a community schools approach – there is perhaps room for some governor awareness sessions around how their training relates to the community schools agenda.

4.8.3 Participants from other service providers and agencies were able to reflect on their roles as community-based professionals and how their role connects with the idea of community schools. There was very limited evidence of there having been any form of multi-agency collaboration via professional development opportunities.

4.8.4 Summary

Clearly the timing of this study has meant that recent reflections relate to a time when it was impossible for collaborative professional learning. The various community school outcomes and deliverables are located amongst a range of professional groups and governors. There is a strong sense in which professional learning opportunities could be developed on a multi-agency/interprofessional basis for the sharing of good practice. This could begin quite quickly and might eventually be arranged by community managers/champions should those roles emerge in the future.

4.9 Extend and use their assets for wider community use

4.9.1 There were many opinions expressed about extending school facilities and assets for community use. Community use is, in the words of one head teacher:

‘Really defined by the parameters of the building and the and the school day timings.’

Where successful attempts had been made to offer school facilities for community use, these had in some cases been affected by the pandemic.

A head teacher and two governors described a situation at one school where facilities had been offered for community use but this had resulted in damage, the cost of which the school had to bear. Recollections differed but ultimately some sort of protocol and management agreement is needed to ensure the school does not find itself having to fund the costs of community provision.

'It was very difficult because we ended up running into deficit figures with community usage. Because it's the damage as well.'

A number of schools referred to the opportunities offered by refurbishment and rebuild. Some of the schools were unable to offer their facilities for community use because the layout of the school meant it was not possible to securely section off classrooms and school facilities:

'So what when one of the things we're trying to look at what the new refurbishment is how we can do that, as I'm sure any new refurbishment, is that how we do that and make it community usage friendly... maybe separate accesses, because, you know, there's a lot to consider, to the point that, financially obviously is tough at the moment'.

'Our schools are at different stages in relationship to their estate. Now, it's great. I mean, they've got a fabulous new school up there. And it's great, because they've got all the facilities there. But within the schools that we're talking about. Now, we've got those types of facilities, and then make a deal with, you know, as fast as they can to encourage the communities to come in by altering their estates. So the estate issue is one of the points that I want to make.

At the governor group interview there was discussion around why community groups are not making use of school buildings. One governor described trying to find a new venue for a community group:

'It's about opening times and costs...we did approach a couple of schools at the time. And there's the cost of running a session in a school was absolutely prohibitive. And we ended up using another church hall, which was able to offer it at, you know, at a more competitive rate. So I think that is something that puts community and community groups off school buildings, and I can see from the school's perspective as well, they've got to pay for the caretaker. It's not free, so not. But that is something that you really have to think about. Why aren't community groups using schools as much as they could?

Another governor advocated the development of a memorandum of understanding between schools and external stakeholders, in order to express a convergence of will between parties:

'We need a memorandum of understanding in place. Because I think that's where perhaps other areas of the borough or even other schools in other parts of Wales have had barriers put up, you know, because there hasn't been this clear understanding of use, you know, and agreement and so there's been, you know, a little bit of to-ing and fro-ing, whereas I think from the onset, we knew that's what we wanted at [this school]'.

This concurs with the view of one head teacher who felt that clear procedures needed to be put in place to define responsibilities.

4.9.2 Both secondary schools had been able to secure grant funding for the refurbishment of their sports facilities so that they can be offered as community facilities. This was with the assistance of the sports development team at MTCBC. Given the prospects for new-build and refurbishment work at both secondary schools

in the research area, consideration could be given to how sports facilities can be developed in an inclusive way to improve access for members of the community who have disabilities. One agency representative commented:

‘What there hasn't necessarily been is that kind of strategic way of doing it. It's just, yeah, we hear if someone wants to book it rather than going right, how do we maximize what we've got?’

Taking into account earlier sections on community consultation, strategic planning, and the opportunities offered by new and refurbished schools, it would appear that careful stakeholder dialogue and shared planning and accountability, could result in successful outcomes for community sport.

4.9.3 Summary

As the schools begin to emerge from the fallow pandemic years, a real opportunity exists to consider how assets can be extended for wider community use. Careful and comprehensive consultation with the community and other stakeholders could be undertaken to discover what the community needs and wants. Multi-agency and partnership working would result in shared and equitable accountability to take the onus off the school in relation to community provision outside the parameters of what the school delivers. The Pen y Dre/Bishop Hedley cluster is in an excellent position to design their buildings with community use in mind.

4.10 Provide opportunities for adult and community education

4.10.1 Many diverse opinions were expressed about adult and community education. There was universal agreement that its provision is important and needs to be enhanced and extended. Unsurprisingly, given the community schools focus of the research interviews, there was also universal agreement that adult and community education is an important factor in helping parents to support the education of their children. Breaking the generational cycle of literacy and numeracy issues was seen as paramount:

‘Yeah. 100 percent, they have to have a role. Especially in somewhere like Gurnos, where, like I said, people may not have had the greatest of educations and yeah, they need supporting’.

4.10.2 Views were expressed by a range of participant types that adult education, from basic skills through to more advanced courses, was an essential need in the research area. There were varied views as to the required level of the educational opportunity, ranging from basic numeracy and literacy skills and learning activities that promoted social cohesion and wellbeing, through to advanced courses that could raise aspiration and improve career and life prospects.

4.10.3 Several head teachers noted that certain parents lack the basic skills and confidence to support their children in education at primary level and beyond:

'I think they can support, some of them could support the children when they are younger. But then as the children go through the school once they get into the junior department, some parents are reluctant to support the children because of their low skill levels... there are quite a few parents who lack the skill level and I feel we could do more to support them as a community'.

Other participants voiced similar concerns:

'You know, they [schools] are sending work home for parents who can't support them because the children are learning at a higher level than the parents. And I'm not trying to be derogatory. but that's a reality of where they're at.'

4.10.4 Community-based practitioners were more likely than school-based practitioners to think of adult education as a good in itself, for its role in developing communities, broadening horizons, and encouraging aspirations. Those with a good deal of historical experience spoke of projects based around schools whereby volunteers would work with adult learners on literacy and numeracy skills. Adult basic skills provision is currently offered via MTCBC's Adult and Community Learning services and these are being developed for delivery at community venues throughout the county borough. It is too early at this point to assess their impact on the school community and the community in general. Others recalled there having been short courses for adults located in portacabins in the grounds of one of the cluster primary schools.

4.10.5 One participant felt that targeting adult education funding towards specific skills and qualifications has resulted in fewer adult and community learning opportunities that promote inclusion and enhance wellbeing:

'I think that's changed quite drastically over the years and I don't think people engage with it like they used to because it's a little bit more serious. If that makes sense. So, whereas perhaps going back, let me think, how long would I put this back? I don't know 10 or 12 years, you'd have a raft of community education provision sat within all different parts of Merthyr in community settings delivering all manner of opportunities, everything from watercolours, sugar craft, floristry and computers, you know, quite a broad range of engaging learning opportunities. You know, things that people were interested in. I think it's become a little bit, little bit more serious. Umm, so it's become a little bit more, learning as opposed to lifelong learning. Yeah. Yeah, so that element is being taken away perhaps to results based learning.'

'Those more fun activities which engage people in the communities which promote social inclusion, which was good for their health and wellbeing, got people out of the house, made people make friendships and yes, they learned the new skill. From an employability perspective, perhaps it doesn't mean a lot, but from a social inclusion wellbeing perspective, it has such massive, massive value I think adult education has lost that feel a bit of wanting to engage with the community, it's just, it just seems a little bit more serious. It's driven by the funders, really, and the outcomes required at the end of the day.'

4.10.6 Another historical provision, much praised by several community-based practitioners was the Life Support project. The project ran 5 days a week over a

number of years offering a range of learning opportunities in an informal community venue which was self-contained with its own kitchen for informal lunches and refreshments. The project was well funded, was able to offer childcare for those who needed it, with start and finish times suitable for those with school-age children. This project also appears to have broken down some of the barriers of community territorialism in that the project was run from a centre in Galon Uchaf, and people attended from New Gurnos, Old Gurnos, and Penydarren. The Life Support project recruited participants informally outside school gates rather than in partnership with schools. Members of the team would go to the school gates, give out leaflets and chat to people about why they might want to enrol on a course, and would answer questions to allay their fears and anxieties.

The Life Support project encouraged adult learning, in many cases leading to employment, and helped parents engage with their children's learning:

'Some of them would go on to college. Like I said, that's brilliant...and they say to us now that that course helped them to help their children with their homework'.

'It was a course made up of different modules, so they would do I don't know, Maths, English. Do some history. Criminology, yeah, psychology, they would do it all. So, it'd be like going to school during the day. So, it'd be like 9 to 2pm and they would do all these classes. And loads of them have gone on to further and higher education from that. And that was primarily women. Then they started having a couple of men. They won best community project in Wales through Adult Learning.'

4.10.7 Provision such as the Life Support project could be hosted somewhere like the community room at the newly built Ysgol y Graig which has its own self-contained facilities including a kitchen. As other schools in the cluster are refurbished or rebuilt it is possible that such provision could be offered more widely at school premises. One community-based practitioner thought that whilst it would be possible to run the project at school premises, the inter-community mix achieved by the Life Support Project might be lost:

'I don't know why, but I think if there's a course going on in the school, it'd be more parents from that particular school go into it ... I think it's just because they know they know the building... I do think sometimes it is better, like a community building like this because it's not linked really to the school'.

It was noted by commentators describing the success of the Life Support project, that its location at a community venue made it possible for participants to access other community-based services for advice on a range of issues including welfare benefits, housing, domestic violence, and learner anxiety. Locating an adult learning project at a school might mean the access to other services would be lost.

4.10.8 It could be argued that community school outcomes might be delivered where parents feel comfortable about attending personal and educational development courses at a venue such as a school that is familiar to them. Some primary school

parents were of the opinion that schools are a place for children and young people's learning and that they should not be re-purposed as hubs for adult learning. Other primary school parents felt that, given the rather closed nature of their local community including lack of confidence for parents to go outside the community, school may well become a focus for adult learning. Indeed, parents at one of the primary schools were of the opinion that other parents who were nervous about the stigma of needing to access very basic adult learning provision would feel more confident at the school they visit twice a day to drop off and collect their child.

Two primary school head teachers had developed plans for bringing adult learning onto the school site:

'We just started conversations with adult learning groups now about them coming in and doing some blended learning with our parents. It's come from a request from one of our parents who missed out on the parenting programs that we usually have done in the past as a result of the pandemic closures... So I guess for me it's using the facilities that we've got without it impacting on a day to day running of the school that can hit and target those parents that we need.'

'At the moment they're looking at sort of parenting groups and sort of parenting capacity, literacy and financial, especially given the current situation we find ourselves in, and the ever-worsening situation that people will get in as a result of energy prices and so on'.

4.10.9 Learning around life-skills and parenting could be considered a goal in itself or potentially an initial experience on the trajectory to more formal adult learning. Looking holistically at the range of comments offered on adult and community learning it could be argued that a phased approach involving schools, community provision (including that offered by housing associations), and Merthyr College could be developed using a partnership approach to ensure there is a clearly developed trajectory.

Some of the parents who participated in the interviews had made the transition to adult learning at Merthyr College, with a focus on applying for professional job roles. There was little enthusiasm from these parents for adult learning based at schools, although it could be argued that they had already found their way into college and were therefore sufficiently confident in that environment. The Life Support project incorporated visits to Merthyr College to help adult learners feel comfortable with that environment.

4.10.10 As with any provision involving school facilities and resources, there are practical and financial matters to be considered. The provision of community rooms and facilities designed into new-build and refurbishment programmes may well offer suitable venues for adult and community learning, but as one head teacher pointed out:

'If something untoward happened in adult basic education learning on the site after the school hours, as head of that school would I be responsible for that? You know ...who's accountable for it really? And I think if I thought my gosh you know am I actually now responsible for the safeguarding and wellbeing of adults on site up until 9:00 at night? I think a lot of heads would say'.

It could be argued that even during the school day the accountability and additional responsibility for adult learning provision might need clarification. As mentioned in section 4.5, family learning might be considered integral to the role of a school, but adult learning, particularly that which is open to the wider community, could be considered outwith the head teacher's role. Such clarification would also extend to the delivery of adult learning and consideration of whether a separate staffing team or agency should be responsible for planning, delivery, outcomes, governance, and on-site responsibility.

4.10.11 A number of community stakeholders and agencies commented that adult learning should not be limited to academic areas. There were many mentions of other service providers and projects who can deliver more practical and trades-based skills for work. This could be for parents, adults in the community, and young people leaving school. There was agreement that this would be a signposting role for the community school. One service provider located within the research had been approaching schools to raise awareness and create referral mechanisms. Some participants felt there was a danger that this could be overlooked in the community schools agenda.

4.10.12 Summary

The research uncovered a great deal of interest in adult and community learning. In many ways the parameters of the community school role in this link quite closely with section 4.9 above – in that the school may be a conduit or a location for adult and community learning, but there should be clear protocols in place to recognise the parameters of the school's role. Where it is considered that adult and community learning is better delivered at a non-school community location, opportunities should be taken to involve schools in the planning and marketing of the activities to make sure it is accessible and desirable for parents and/or school leavers.

4.11 Provide clubs and activities for children after school hours or in holiday periods

4.11.1 The key informants for this section were 30 Year 6 pupils from 7 primary schools. They gave an excellent account of their engagement with their respective schools. Pupils were articulate and enthusiastic about how they felt about school and the local community, what facilities and activities were available to them in the community, and what was available via school – both during the school day and afterwards. This section concentrates largely on provision of activities and clubs after

school or in holiday periods. This information at most schools was delivered with a positive underpinning sense of school and geographical community.

4.11.2 It was clear that After-School clubs had been popular with young people, and that they are returning at various levels post-pandemic. Primary school pupils were most likely to mention after-school sports activities, such as football, rugby and netball, and some schools provide ICT or digital clubs.

Some primary schools have in-school activities at break or lunch times. In one school, pupils reported that they run their own art and drama clubs during the school day, and suggested the reason as parents not wanting their children to stay after school.

4.11.3 A wide range of non-school youth activities were mentioned by pupils. Many of these were offered at the Calon Las Community Centre, Gurnos; Cefn Coed Community Centre; Cefn Coed Rugby Club; The Engine House, Dowlais; and Dowlais Community Centre. There were also various sports club and private sector provisions - further details of which can be found in Section 3. There was limited evidence of attendance at youth provision in the Gurnos area, and this may be related to the observations of one head teacher on the extent to which youth provision had largely been disbanded owing to funding cuts. Speaking in particular about the Gurnos communities:

'You know it has been pointed out to me that a lot of the fantastic youth groups that used to support our pupils have just been disbanded due to funding cuts. So the sort of extracurricular and the social and the leisure activities for youngsters is being decimated, I think, and specifically the agencies to support our pupils.'

4.11.4 Some young people were reluctant to engage in After-School clubs because of personal safety issues when walking home afterwards. In situations where a school has a very large geographical catchment area, transport home from After-School clubs is a major issue. Some of the voluntary organisations provided transport to and from their venues and this may be something schools want to consider for their own after-school provision.

4.11.5 One of the elected councillors expressed concern that opportunities for various forms of music and performing arts appeared to have diminished. Others in the interview were able to confirm the resurgence of the youth orchestra, and drama groups were in existence at a number of schools. The availability of facilities for putting on staged productions was also mentioned, and this may be linked with section 4.1, extending school facilities for community use.

The annual Eisteddfod at Pen y Dre High School was mentioned by a number of primary school pupils, and also the head teacher of Pen y Dre, as being an excellent participative event bringing together all primary schools within the cluster.

4.11.6 Some primary school pupils mentioned activities hosted at Pen y Dre where they were able to meet with pupils from other schools for sporting activities. It was not clear how these activities were organised but it seems some were under the umbrella of Criw Cymraeg. Pupils enjoyed meeting children from other schools and were excited and interested about meeting new friends when they made the transition to secondary school. Transition preparation had been affected by the pandemic but secondary schools had offered various opportunities using the virtual learning environment and pupils felt they had benefitted from this. The majority of pupils were moving to Pen y Dre and felt very positive about becoming part of this much larger school and geographical community.

4.12 Co-locate services so that services that support wellbeing, health and care of children are located on site either permanently or at regular times

4.12.1 This section is very much linked with comments in section 4.1. wherein comments were made about the need for improved partnership working between schools and LA/third sector services. This section is more specific in that it considers the locus of service provision.

4.12.2 There were calls for funding streams to be changed so that they support community-based rather than centralised locations. A range of participants from one particular community felt that even the location of outreach at a nearby community centre was difficult for some parents who would lack the confidence even to visit such a location. In such cases the location of services at schools was considered to be much more accessible.

Suggestions were made about how this could be funded and operationalised.

4.12.3 There was much support from a range of stakeholders for the sharing of external resources between schools in the cluster:

‘You know if we had a joint speech and language therapist who was possibly visiting Ysgol Y Graig on a Monday for an hour, Gwaunfarren on a Tuesday, Dowlais on Wednesday, Saint Aloysius on the Thursday, and we shared that person around because, I know, the amount of children that we have, they've been referred for speech and language and I mean, and this is just an example, but because they don't attend the appointment and the parents don't take them to the appointment they are discharged from the service and we're still back to square one...And I think that has been even further exacerbated by the pandemic because they haven't gone out.

‘But embedding locally or in a cluster basis, CAMHS workers, mental health workers, it works wonderfully. It absolutely does, and it's not rocket science either. Those services coming to the community is the answer rather than the other way around. Than asking the community to travel to some kind of specialist input. So I think community embedding everything works but I don't think you can put the onus on the school. Which again comes back to that community manager type post. Somebody who's co-ordinating that kind of thing, that's a great shout.’

I just think sometimes, you know, we can direct parents to there. We can't physically take the parent there. They can leave here with lots of good intentions. We find parenting classes work best when they're here, because they not going into a building with other adults or strangers where they might be. They know they've got to come here twice a day, to pick their children up. So it's like, you know, where if there was, like, say somewhere 20 minutes away, but they can't get there. But they know they're coming here twice a day, or something. It's something they've got to do.

4.12.3 Views on co-location of services were very much tied up with concerns about health and social care provision having been seriously affected during the pandemic. Many head teachers expressed concerns that they were not getting the service they needed in terms of health and social care provision. It seems, however, that services pre-pandemic were far from adequate, which caused one head teacher to comment:

'I think really it has absolutely been our experience that, the agencies and colleagues who support schools, I think they've been overwhelmed, and I think they're overstretched. And really, I don't want to sort of veer too much into a political point, but we have been living in, you know, over decade of public sector instability. And I think that these cuts [have affected service provision]. So, for example, an EdPsych consultation which may be desperately needed. You know the waiting list may be six months. Well, if you have someone who is so traumatized and vulnerable that they need immediate support and this has a knock-on effect then.'

Co-location of services requires those services to be adequately funded and available in the first place. A community schools ethos cannot compensate for insufficient resources. The recent £25 million Welsh Government Investment by the Education and Welsh Language Minister into community focused schools needs to be accompanied by additional funding or redistribution of current funds to finance the provision of co-located services. The aim of the £25 million is to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment and to set high standards for all. The impact of this funding can only be enhanced by incorporating additional provision for crucial services that impact on a young person's ability to learn.

4.12.4 This discussion needs to be conducted on a multi-agency partnership basis and creative solutions need to be found. For example, if co-location reduces the number of appointments wasted because of non-attendance, and if schools are able to offer consulting rooms, potentially a funding model could be negotiated with service providers that would increase provision as a consequence of co-location.

Some head teachers were acutely aware that finance would be the big issue and were considering ways in which they could pool resources to fund shared co-located provision. It was clear, however, that a sustainable source of funding for comprehensive service provision was simply unattainable:

‘But it’ll come back eventually to finance, you know, we can’t afford as a cluster to employ a, you know, a joint speech and language therapist and education psychologist, a play therapist, somebody who’s going to come in from Citizens Advice to provide financial support and advice of the parents. We haven’t got the capacity to do that within our budget. But where does that money come from? So that’s a huge challenge, but I think that would be hugely beneficial to us as teachers, parents and their children.’

In section 4.1.3 it was suggested that some service providers based at the Calon Las centre could work more closely in partnership with schools. Potential exists to pilot some service provision from school locations. Ysgol y Graig, with its community room, might be a good pilot location as a satellite from Calon Las. This also responds to comments from some governors and parents at Ysgol y Graig who noted that residents of Vaynor ward often have to travel to access services and activities.

4.12.5 The issue of alternative education and Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provision within the local community was raised as an issue:

‘Sometimes you can’t access the provisions outside mainstream school into support vulnerable pupils, certainly those with behavioural challenges.’

Concern was expressed about sending pupils out of the local area because insufficient resource exists within the local community. Removing pupils from their own community where support and resources might be located runs counter to the community schools ethos:

‘The lack of strategies and structures to address those behaviours, apart from permanently excluding them from schools, which then rips any sense of community apart, doesn’t it? So I think that is actually really significant aspect of the dialogue.’

It needs to be accepted that when you lose pupils from mainstream schools they shatter the bonds that tie them to their communities. And then the influences are more maligned influences in any community, whether it’s rural, urban, middle class or whatever the temptation then to find your bonds in different ways through crime, through drugs, through alcoholism, through antisocial behaviour.

Alternative education and PRUs were mentioned infrequently in relation to services that support wellbeing, health and care of children. This provision could potentially be planned into the design of the refurbishment and new-build of schools and perhaps needs to be considered more overtly as part of community schools ethos.

4.12.6 It was noted that Education are the lead referring agency into the Early Help Hub. This has helped service-providers to understand the presenting needs within education settings. It was also noted that cluster analysis would be beneficial to ensure that the services are specific and focused to inform collaborative work with

the local authority and with statutory and third-sector partners. Co-locating services and utilising school assets was seen as a potential solution.

4.12.7 Summary

There was a shared consensus that co-location of services on school sites was a good idea, and the opportunity exists to plan consulting rooms into the design of schools. Creative multi-agency delivery and funding solutions need to be found using the community schools model.

4.13 Secure the involvement and challenge of governors

4.13.1 Governors were strongly represented in the research. They formed the largest group interview and some participants interviewed in other contexts also happened to be governors. The governors involved in the study demonstrated high levels of engagement and interest in the life of the schools and their communities. There was a great deal of knowledge about schools and communities which meant governors were ideally placed for commenting on community school characteristics.

4.13.2 When governance was discussed in a variety of contexts, the representative nature of the stakeholder model was not entirely clear. One primary headteacher mentioned that community governors represent the local community in which schools are located, but was not entirely sure about role community governors play in the community, but assumed that they represent the particular localised communities where the schools are located. This headteacher had the idea that community governors could be the locus of networking and information sharing between schools at a cluster, county, or consortium level, in an attempt to ensure parity of service provision:

‘We have LEA governors and community governors. and rather than have something that's added on, it's about those community governors, perhaps them working collectively within Merthyr. So, each community governor, each of the schools, they work collectively, so that there is equity around opportunities, and then they can bring that information to the governing body and then to school. So, you're not adding another layer, but you are perhaps developing the role of the community governor, because they are coming together now. I don't actually know what they do for the community, if that makes sense.’

The majority of governors who took part in the research were willing to devote time and attention to the furthering of community schools outcomes. This is demonstrated in the range of comments from governors threaded throughout most sections of this report.

4.13.3 Summary

Many governors are well placed at the hearts of their communities and at the hearts of their schools. During this research they have demonstrated considerable knowledge and commitment to the community school model. They have also demonstrated willingness to work in partnership with other governors to share expertise and good practice. Link governors could be allocated a community school brief, and could develop a cluster-based network to share good practice and to integrate knowledge and service provision. Such link governors might also be integrated into other statutory and voluntary sector governance networks to ensure schools are fully represented at this level. This would help in providing the support and the challenge for head teachers and the leadership teams.

5.0 Thematic Analysis (inductive) new themes emerging from the data

5.1 Community Focused Schools

Throughout the study comments were received from a broad range of participants about the terminology 'community schools'. Some schools already have the title 'Community School', and this reflects the school as an entity. Many schools regarded community school characteristics as a process rather than a unit of delivery.

'The process is about including the community in schools & schools in the community - it is not all about schools but how the community and schools become interdependent on each other for the best for the children & young people.'

The term 'community focused schools' appears to be a better fit for the process captured within this research. Representatives of a broad range of service providers, schools, and community members have contributed their ideas with a shared focus on community. The term 'community focused' indicates a range of stakeholders, including schools, which have their individual and collective vision focused on community. Section 4.1 of this report demonstrates strong views that schools should be firmly embedded in delivering what have been termed as 'community school characteristics' but schools cannot be expected to act as the primary locus of delivery.

5.2 Community

Significant differences emerged in the definition of 'community' in 'community schools'. Some participants interpreted community as the school community with peripheral reference to geographical communities or neighbourhoods, others understood community much more in terms of the geographical neighbourhood. Most were somewhere on a continuum between both positions.

Development of a shared understanding of the term 'community' in this context is crucial for ensuring consistency of ethos and purpose in any planned multi-agency or interprofessional working.

5.3 Intergenerational Work

One participant made specific reference to intergenerational work. Regardless of how 'community' is defined, it is surely necessary to include older people in community schools' work. Older people are part of the school community as family members and are obviously part of the geographical community or neighbourhood. There was very little reference to older people or intergenerational work, perhaps owing to the focus of the research. Policy makers may wish to consider how older people are represented in the characteristics of community schools.

5.4 Legacy of community development organisations/interventions and resonance with the characteristics of community schools.

Reference was made by a broad range of participants to provisions delivered via Communities First and other historical community development projects. The reason for this is that many of the intended outcomes of community schools, particularly those related to adult and community learning, family learning, and multi-agency service provision, were being delivered via community development. The idea of the 'community manager/champion' has some resonance with the Communities First co-ordinator role. It is imperative that community schools as a process is able to incorporate the legacy of good practice from historical community development activities.

6.0 Limitations of the Research

The research team has evaluated data collection methods and makes the following recommendations for further research:

- Incorporation of parent voice via community venues.
- Extension of pupil voice using creative engagement activities
- Interviews with Year 7 upwards
- Community voice via community venues across age ranges
- Community and voluntary agencies (via Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil)
- Individual interviews with senior leaders from relevant local authority directorates
- Individual interviews with head teachers and staff teams
- Interviews with representatives of primary health care

7.0 Summary and Recommendations

7.1 The community schools model has been influenced by good practice models in the USA. Figure 1 is an infographic that summarises 4 pillars of good practice in action, and this has been used as a model for analysing the development of community schools practice in the research area as outlined in the table below:

Pillar of Good Practice	Activity	Research Findings
Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities	<p>After-school, weekend, and summer programs provide academic instruction and individualized support.</p> <p>Enrichment Activities emphasise real-world learning and community problem solving</p>	<p>After-school clubs were in evidence. Further exploration would be needed to establish whether these provide academic instruction and individualized support.</p> <p>Group interviews with pupils revealed evidence of enrichment activities which could be built on and developed.</p>
Collaborative Leadership and Practices	<p>Parents, students, teachers, principals, and community partners build a culture of professional learning, collective trust and shared responsibility using strategies such as site-based leadership teams and learning communities</p>	<p>Parent governors and governors who were also parents/grandparents took part in the research as individuals and in the governor group interview. There was potential and enthusiasm for developing this involvement.</p> <p>The researchers did not pick up much evidence of there having been collaborative leadership teams involving parents, students, teachers, senior leaders and community partners. This type of approach was suggested by a number of research participants and is taken forward in the idea of the community champion/manager who could broker collaborative leadership and practices within the cluster.</p>
Integrated Student Supports	<p>A dedicated staff member coordinates support programs to address out-of-school learning barriers for students and families.</p>	<p>This may be similar to the FLO/family engagement/team around the family roles which appear well established although there are concerns about sustainability of funding.</p> <p>Whilst a number of services were actively involved with schools, there were clear gaps and delays in provision. Improvements need to be made in</p>

	Mental and physical health services support student success.	service provision, looking at multi-agency/interprofessional collaborative and shared provision at school sites to provide more cost-effective services.
Active Family and Community Engagement	<p>Schools function as neighbourhood hubs. There are educational opportunities for adults, and family members can share their stories and serve as equal partners in promoting student success</p> <p>Promoting interaction among families, administration, and teachers helps families to be more involved in the decisions about their children's education.</p>	<p>There was much support for adult and community learning. Research participants described successful adult learning provided at a community venue by a community-based service provider. There is potential for developing a mix of provision – some at school locations and some at community venues promoted by schools to parents and school leavers. If adult learning is to be located at school venues there would need to be clear protocols in place regarding accountability and management of the provision.</p> <p>Schools had offered successful family learning opportunities in the past. There were aspirations for this to return post-pandemic, and there had been some recent pilot provision. Off-site provision provided by other agencies could be offered for those who choose not to engage with school-based provision.</p> <p>Schools offered examples of initiatives to help families become more involved in planning and supporting their children's education. These included initiatives to upskill parents (also included in adult and family learning), parent information sessions, and communication via ICT offering learning materials and other resources. Schools were acutely aware that there is more work to be done in developing more nuanced approaches encourage families who do not currently engage. This may need to involve collaborative partners to broker relationships with the school. The FLO/family engagement/team around the family approach is currently being used and there were specific examples of good practice that could be shared via collaborative professional learning practices.</p>

Table 30: Research findings analysed against Learning Policy Institute 4 Pillars of Community Schools (in Oakes et al., 2017).

7.2 Recommendations

- Further research is undertaken to address limitations identified in section 6;
- A series of multi-agency dissemination and visioning events are facilitated using a dialogical model to develop understanding of how a community focused school model could be taken forward in the research area, out of which a task group should be formed to develop a good practice model to underpin planning.



Figure 1; What the Four Pillars of Community Schools Look Like in Action (in Oakes et al., 2017).

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Appendix 1 Composition of Research Sample

Research Sample

Stakeholders	Number & type of interview	Number of group participants
Primary School Head & Deputy Head Teachers	2 x group interviews	Group 1: 6 Group 2: 2
Secondary School Head Teachers	2 x individual interviews	
Parents	3 x group interviews	School A: 5 School B: 3 School C: 3
Primary School Pupils	7 x group interviews	School A: 5 School B: 6 School C: 6 School D: 5 School E: 5 School F: 6 School G: 6
Governors	1 x group interview	14
MTCBC Councillors	2 x individual interviews	
	2 x group interviews	Group 1: 2 Group 2: 2
Agencies and Service Providers	8 x individual interviews	
	1x group interview	2
MTCBC Service Providers	2 x individual interview	
	1 x group interview	2