

Eco Schools & Community Cohesion – A Shared Agenda

A Briefing for the Eco Schools Forum

A key parallel is the sense of making a commitment that will make a positive contribution to local communities and society in general. Sharing an outward facing approach, nurturing and valuing participation in activity that supports that commitment, and, seeing cohesion as integral to the way in which a school functions as opposed to an ‘add on’.

✧**The Duty:**

Section 21 (4) of the Education Act 2002 (as inserted by Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) states that:

‘The governing body of a maintained school shall, in discharging their functions relating to the conduct of the school –

- (a) promote the well-being of pupils at the school, and
- (b) in the case of a school in England, promote community cohesion’

This duty came into effect on 1 September 2007 and from 1 September 2008, HMCI has a duty under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 to report on the contribution made by schools to community cohesion.

✧**What is meant by community cohesion?**

- a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities
- a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued
- a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all
- a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and the wider community

✧**Key words:**

✧ **Belonging** ✧ **valuing diversity** ✧ **equity** ✧ **strong and positive relationships**

✧**How does a school contribute to community cohesion?**

All schools will already be undertaking work and activities that contribute to community cohesion. Locally in Swindon there are many examples of projects and initiatives that make positive connections with community cohesion.

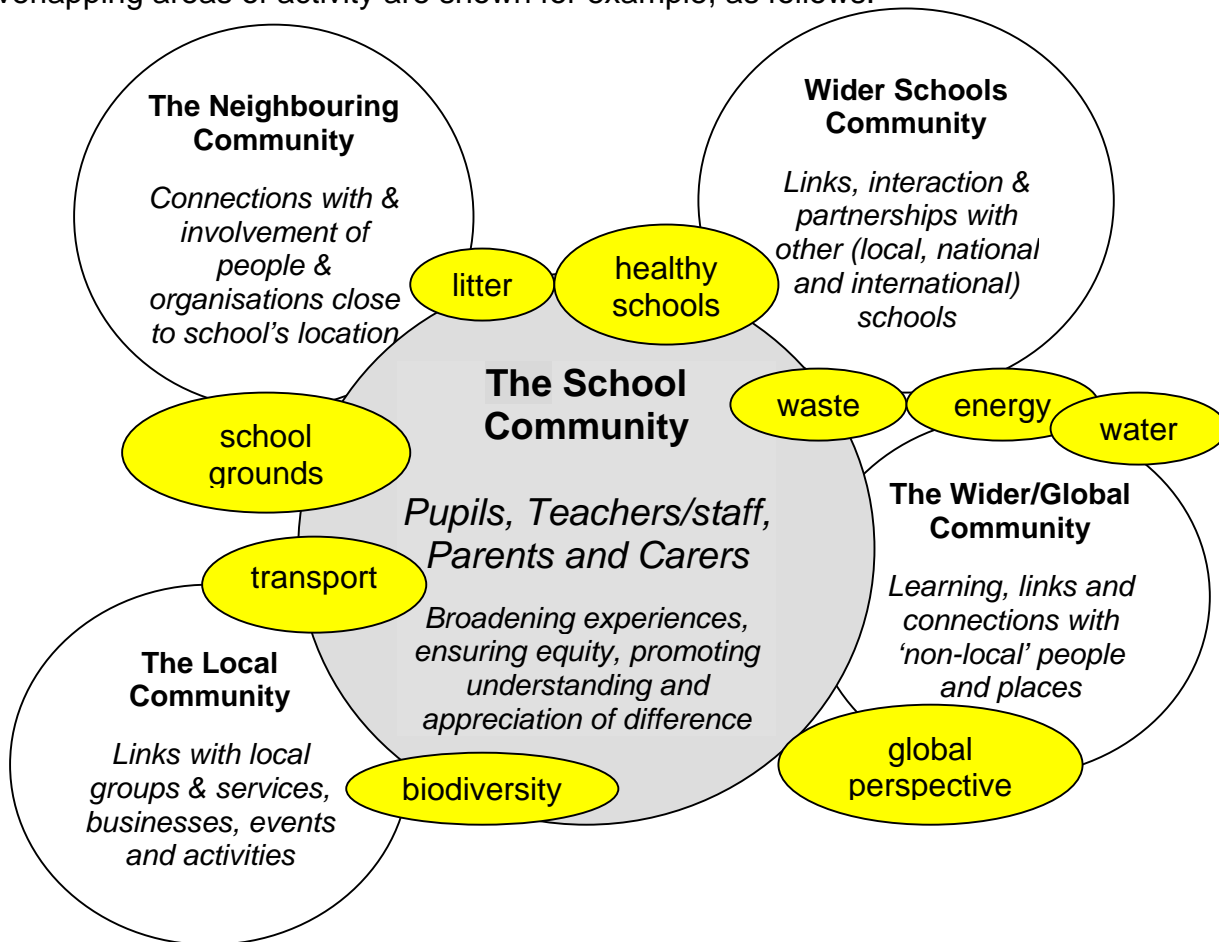
We need schools to have a key role as schools have a unique and vital set of relationships which give them a powerful position to make a difference to this agenda. Some of this will rely on existing activity whilst some areas will require a new approach.

There are strong links between community cohesion and the National Framework for Sustainable Schools, Eco School Programme, Healthy



Schools Status, KS1 and KS2 Citizenship and Geography and the Every Child Matters Outcomes.

A commitment to the Eco School Programme can support community cohesion. The overlapping areas of activity are shown for example, as follows:



Schools can use Eco Schools activity as examples of their contribution to community cohesion.

✧ How else can Eco Schools help?

The various stages established for schools to work through as part of the Eco Schools Programme work effectively if adapted for community cohesion:

Stage 1: Identify a lead person

This could be a school governor with specific responsibility for community cohesion, teacher or partner.

Stage 2: Carry out a cohesion review

Consider the areas of evaluation listed below in preparation for inspection. It's helpful to know areas of strength and weakness to invest energy and resources.

Stage 3: Write an action plan

This can/should include activity/projects from other plans like Healthy Schools or Eco Schools. There are three areas of activity, namely

- **Teaching, Learning and Curriculum**

Children learning about and valuing diversity, positive citizenship, connecting with other faiths and communities, consideration of global issues, participation and voice

in school and other forms of decision making, exploring identity and developing relationships beyond their day to day experiences

- **Equity and Excellence**

Ensuring existing responsibilities relating to equalities are effectively in place and implemented, equity of achievement, removing barriers to access and participation in learning and wider activities and ensuring narrowing the gap between variations in outcomes for different groups

- **Engagement and extended services**

Providing means for children and young people and their families and communities to interact with people from different backgrounds and build positive relationships including links with different schools, delivering extended services – letting the outside world into the school environment, the school as a facility for local people, responding to local needs, participation from the wider community and services that build positive interaction and achievement for all groups

An Action Plan should capture

- a) activity that is already happening or planned
- b) activity that is specified in relation to identified needs
- c) activity that is identified but optional or aspirational – reliant on time/resources

Stage 4: Promote the message/commitment

Review core policy documents and styles of communication. Achieving cohesion relies on predominantly communication across school communities that is accessible and inclusive.

Stage 5: Take action

Stage 6: Monitor and review

This could be an update of the cohesion review and should also include feedback from members of the connecting communities (e.g. school, neighbouring, local).

✧ **What are the benefits?**

Community cohesion is very positive for schools. It offers opportunities to knit together other streams and priorities under a connected agenda. More importantly it supports the entitlement for children and young people to achieve the Every Child Matters Outcomes.

For example, a school that is able to evidence a commitment to cohesion will demonstrate that it has an understanding of both the school and local community, that pupils and their families – particularly those less likely to be engaged – are connecting effectively with the school.

Community cohesion links to promoting new skills and behaviours for pupils, school improvement in terms of support for learning and achievement and promoting sustainable communities.

Eco Schools is a very complementary strand of activity. It offers scope to demonstrate promotion of citizenship, democracy and pupil decision making, local well-being, inclusion and participation and the global dimension.

❖ **Helpful Evidence to Capture:**

It's helpful for a school to appoint a lead person to collate and capture what is happening in school so that you don't start from the beginning at inspection.

1. Know your communities (school and neighbourhood)
2. Identify areas of local need (e.g. in terms of access to resources, learning gaps or local leadership)
3. Identify connections with local communities (e.g. facility hire, learning sessions, local surveys, attendance at local meetings, volunteering, shared interactions – fetes, bands etc.)
4. Identify how the school promotes common identity, appreciation and valuing diversity, human rights and democracy? (e.g. curriculum projects, connections with diverse communities – celebrations, talks in schools, events, equalities policies, recruitment, governors)
5. Record outreach activity promoting learning or positive experiences to wider communities (e.g. work with parents and governors, training or celebration opportunities, positive dialogue, coffee mornings)
6. Record activity that targets individuals, communities or other areas of need (e.g. family learning sessions, targeted support, promoting access to behaviour support)
7. Record/collate communication material (e.g. newsletters, email alerts, web information, letters etc.)

❖ **What's next?**

- **Heads Up for Community Cohesion on Friday 6th June 2008 – see presentations and related documents on www.swindon.gov.uk - follow links to community and living, community cohesion and schools**
- **Checklist for the duty to promote Community Cohesion**
- **Connecting with extended services to support schools deliver the duty**
- **New SACRE project to develop faith clubs in 5 secondary schools**

For further information;

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