**CONSULTATION DRAFT**

**Co-operating for Inclusion**

**School-Community Links: draft charter**

Launched by Children’s Quarter at Birmingham City University20 November 2018



**Why a Charter?**

We are fortunate to have public services bequeathed to us from previous generations, but we don’t leave our prosperity and well-being up to public services alone? We first take care of our own, and each other’s, health, wealth and happiness. Nor should we leave the biggest factor in our future prosperity and well-being – that is the education of young people – to public services, no matter how excellent the schools, and how dedicated the teachers. As parents, families and as communities, we practise a kind of mutual self-help: we help others to help ourselves. This draft charter is about making more of that self-help potential by providing the reason and means for improving the links between schools and communities and making it easier for them to work together. They matter because links between communities and schools:

* are not well understood and their value is not always acknowledged: students, families and teachers commonly express the view that learning is limited to schooling; although we know it is not;
* can be hard to negotiate and often depend on a very few people – including headteachers in particular – who are typically busy and have difficult jobs and for whom links with the community may never seem such a priority as all the other competing tasks in their diaries;
* cover a very wide range of things, a few of which can be contentious and all of which have to take into account the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people.

So, for example, we would all expect volunteers who help with, say, reading in school to be screened to see that they pose no known threat to children, but we might not need the same level of checking to go on to invite a guest speaker from a local business to give a supervised talk. Likewise, we might not feel easy about a local community trying to influence the curriculum or the way, for example, human rights or science is taught; but that doesn’t mean we need to panic over a community organisation providing play services that extend the school day and make the education a school cam provide more inclusive.

We have tended to let lack of understanding, lack of time and a mis-estimation of the risks and objections of links between schools and communities stand in their way. This draft charter is part of an attempt to try and put that right. Children’s Quarter is a coo-operative of groups that serve children and are committed to doing so inclusively. We have put this draft charter together in consultation with members, but want them – and you – to be more involved in completing it. So you will see there are questions posed throughout the text. Please reply, in whatever form, to Children’s Quarter using the addresses given on the next page.

**Questions**

We think these are the most important areas where a Charter for school-community links can help make more of the potential for education:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Areas we think are important:** | **Do you think these things are:** 1 - very important 2 - quite important 3 - not important |
| 1.Sharing an understanding of communities and why they matter – page 5 |  |
| 2. Enabling community groups to have affordable access to school premises – page 7 |  |
| 3. Enabling schools and communities to share information about what is going on locally – page 9 |  |
| 4. Enabling schools and communities to have shared access to training – page 11 |  |
| 5. Enabling schools to enhance and extend the education they provide – page 13 |  |
| 6. Enabling schools and communities to exchange and share staff and volunteers – page 15 |  |
| 7. Enabling schools for lifelong learning – page 17 |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Do you think these are the right areas: are there others which are more important? Please let us know what you think about this and about the detailed questions under each of these headings in the short sections that follow:

In person, at the event on November 20 or at future Children’s Quarter events; in writing, to Children’s Quarter, All Saints Centre, Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7RA; by email, to: development@childrensquarter.org; or online at: [www.childrensquarter.org](http://www.childrensquarter.org)

1. **Sharing an understanding of communities and why they matter**

We think there are three sorts of community to think about and that all three represent potential for improving education through better schools-communities links:

* the local community made up of most of the people around a school neighbourhood;
* communities represented by all sorts of community groups that exist in and between neighbourhoods, for example sports clubs and allotment societies;
* communities – often made up of families with children who have special needs and abilities – who have special expertise.

**The local community at large**

A community is a group of people with a shared interest and identity. Nearly all of us share a collective interest in the education of young people. We depend on them to make and sustain the world in which we will grow, or have already grown, old? Most of us probably identify quite closely with the place we live. So, there is, in a sense, a broad local community of interest in young people’s education locally; and most people belong to it. When, for example, government spending translates into cuts in schools’ budgets in the place we live, we may sign a petition, put up a poster or talk to our MP about it. We don’t want to see ‘our’ children disadvantaged, even if they are not necessarily our children in the sense that we are their parents.

**A wide range of community groups**

Our society is made up of more than broad local communities. We belong to all sorts of community groups – some are quite formal and most are very informal: they don’t necessarily have books of rules or annual general meetings, but they exist. For example: sports clubs; cultural groups; business associations; faith communities; campaigns, clubs, support networks and self-help groups… These, too, are communities that often have an interest, and sometimes a direct involvement, in young people’s education. As Mick Waters, Professor of Education at Wolverhampton University says: *Schooling is part of education, but not all education takes place in school*.

**Communities with expertise in children with special needs and abilities**

The community groups in a place are part of the education available to young people who live there; and, of course, there are families – grandparents, parents and siblings. Families play an even greater part in educating young people. Sometimes, however, children don’t ‘fit the box’ – they have needs and abilities different to those commonly catered for by local services, including schools. Families of these children frequently join or form community groups that are based in interests shared with other families with children who also have special needs and abilities. These groups typically become very well-informed – but not professionally qualified – in how to get the best from those children. They are, in other words, experts in education for young people with special needs and abilities.

**Questions:**

**1a) Do you think this description of community is valid and would help people making school-community links?**

**1b) Do you think looking at these three different sort of communities helps and that they all might have a part to play in improving education through better links with schools?**

**1c) Do you think there are types of communities that we have left out or not highlighted properly?**

**1d) Is there anything that would be useful to add about communities in the final Charter?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates this understanding of communities and why they matter, please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**2. Enabling community groups to have affordable access to school premises**

Schools manage valuable public assets including: halls, that could be used for events; classrooms, that could be used for meetings and for informal adult education; school grounds, pitches and sports facilities, that could be used for physical exercise, training and sporting and cultural events.

**What’s stopping us?**

We think the main barriers to opening up school buildings and grounds for community use are school concerns about: safeguarding of children; site security and damage to property; reputational issues (compounded by a lack of knowledge of local community groups); fear of negative responses from both Ofsted and the local authority; and the lack of example of how opening up facilities can be done to benefit both communities and schools.

**What might help us?**

We thinkthe problem here is concern about risk and that ways of overcoming and managing risk would be useful, eg:

* **Government and local authority policy** that supports community use of school facilities;
* the negotiation and packaging of **insurance** to enable schools to hedge risks without spending undue time on doing so;
* **case studies and models** of how to manage community access in a way that benefits schools as well as communities in practice; and
* **better shared information** between communities and schools.

**Questions**

**2a) Do you think this description of the importance of enabling community groups to have affordable access to school promises is right?**

**2b) Do you think the list of barriers to communities making more use of school premises is correct – are there things to add?**

**2c) Is the list of things that could help accurate and complete – are there things you would add?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates the importance of communities being able to use school premises or ways around the barriers to it, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**3. Enabling schools and communities to share information about what is going on locally**

Schools and community groups both make information available to local people (through websites, Facebook groups, newsletters etc) about what is going on in the neighbourhoods they serve. There are often, however, no links between these school and community information resources. In particular, schools tend to confine themselves to news and information relating directly to the school itself. They often have no links to neighbourhood groups or groups that provide services to children, young people and families.

If schools and communities made links between their information resources and came to share more information then both would have better local intelligence and parents and residents could make better informed decisions. Knowing more about each other should lead to greater understanding and, in time, more trust. Showing how we work together would help others, including Ofsted, see how schools are adding value through community partnerships.

**What’s stopping us?**

We think the main barriers to linking and sharing information are lack of information about how to do so safely; and concerns about: data protection; advertising by commercial bodies; and fear of being seen to endorse or unfairly promote one group as opposed to another.

**What might help us?**

We think the starting point here is overcoming a lack of information. Some simple things might help us to win the mutual benefits of linking and sharing:

* **straightforward technical information** about how to link websites and how to use a shared drive etc would help schools and communities be more confident;

* **legal advice about data protection** relating to personal information and defamation specifically aimed at enabling school-community information sharing;
* a **set of model arrangements** to enable sharing and linking of information resources between schools and community groups piloted by community groups which provide services to children, young people and families.

**Questions**

**3a) Do you think this description of the importance of enabling schools and communities to share information about what is going on locally is right?**

**3b) Do you think the list of barriers to communities and schools sharing information is correct – are there things to add?**

**3c) Is the list of things that could help schools and communities share information accurate and complete – are there things you would add?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates the importance of communities and schools sharing information or ways around the barriers to it, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**4. Enabling schools and communities to have shared access to training**

Schools and community groups both have staff and volunteers who, themselves, need to learn. Joint training would reduce the costs and enable informal sharing of knowledge and expertise across organisations. Specialist support could be cascaded and valuable information gained on both sides in, for example, areas like Speech and Language and in educating children with autistic spectrum conditions. We believe a spirit of professional generosity on the part of teachers would be repaid by access to the know-how of the network of support in the community that helps, and understands, individual children. So, for example, teaching staff could gain access to experience and expertise that they would not be able to get from traditional training courses.

**What’s stopping us?**

We think the barriers to sharing access to training between schools and community groups are: that training opportunities are often in short supply; that coordination is difficult (without the kind of information sharing we have highlighted elsewhere); and that professionals are not always confident that people outside their professionalism can be learnt from, or can learn effectively with them, or that they can pass on training effectively.

**What might help us?**

Identifying training needs and planning how to address them jointly would help overcome these barriers and provide a spur to information sharing between schools and community groups. In particular, planning ahead – rather than last minute invitations to take part in training – would enable best value. A training plan could result from ‘speed dating’ sessions involving teachers and staff and volunteers from services which area supporting children and young people in the community. Enabling teachers and teaching assistants to talk, with professional generosity about the value of what they are able to learn from the groups and networks that support children’s learning and development outside school, would help to confirm the benefits of doing so to others in the profession.

**Questions**

**4a) Do you think that planning and organising joint training and the exchange of expertise between teaching staff and staff and volunteers with groups that support children in the community is a priority?**

**4b) Does the list of barriers to communities and schools organising joint training make sense – and does the notion of ‘professional generosity’ make sense?**

**4c) Is the list of things that could help schools and communities benefit from joint training complete or are there things to add?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates the value of communities and schools organising learning together or ways around the barriers to it, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**5. Enabling schools to enhance and extend the education they provide**

Some community groups can provide schools with the means to enhance and extend learning. For example communities can provide: expertise in working with groups of children and young people that are vulnerable to social exclusion - including disabled children and children with autism; minority ethnic children; children have a first language other than English; children with dyslexia or speech problems or who find English or Maths particularly difficult to learn. Communities could also help schools extend what children and young people are able to learn through, for example: enabling breakfast and after school clubs; tutoring gifted and talented children is specialist areas; and providing work experience for young people. In particular, we think school-community links can make education more inclusive. That is, extend the range and ability of school education to benefit all children and young people regardless of their needs and abilities. There are, in addition, wider potential benefits for schools ranging from reduced vandalism and anti-social behaviour to access to community facilities and the poetential of raising funding through community partnerships.

**What’s stopping us?**

We think lack of time and awareness and some worries about risk are what stop schools making better links with their communities. We think that community groups sometimes don’t make links with schools because of past experience and because they feel their motives in doing so are likely to be questioned.

**What might help us?**

Some of the information and resource sharing that we have mentioned elsewhere in this draft charter could help. What might also enable the benefits of school-community links in this area is guidance from government making it clear that there is an expectation that communities could, and should, be seen as involved in education. We have called this document a ‘draft charter’ partly because we need your insight and experience to help us make it complete; but also because we think that the final document might take the form of a charter – a setting out of responsibilities that schools, communities, councils and central government and others could sign up to confirm that expectation and a willingness to realise the potential of links between communities and schools.

**Questions**

**5a) Do you think there is valuable potential for schools from links with communities that gets beyond ‘good PR’?**

**4b) Are there other reasons that put communities and schools off from working together to extend and enhance the education provided in schools?**

**4c) Does the idea of a charter for school-community links make sense and do we need government to take a lead or are there also things we can do ourselves to make a start?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates how links with communities help schools extend and enhance what they do or ways around the barriers to them doing so, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**6. Enabling schools and communities to learn from each other through sharing people**

Schools and community groups both have staff and volunteers with expertise and experience. We value the professionalism and hard work of teachers who are passionate about education in schools. We don’t think it detracts from that to value also the know-how and dedication of people who are involved in voluntary and community groups that help support children and play a part in their education – in a wider sense – outside school. One key way in which communities and schools could enable themselves to work together better as organisations, therefore, is through staff exchanges. Such exchanges could enable key people involved in educating children – particularly those vulnerable to exclusion - to: learn about each other’s practice; and build networks of support around vulnerable children so that they can stay in school and not be excluded.

**What’s stopping us?**

We understand that the teaching profession and trade unions representing its members are cautious about de-skilling or presenting teaching as something which ‘anyone can do’. We don’t believe it is; but we do believe there is a wider pool of people with serious expertise and experience who could contribute to school education; and that teachers would not be wasting their time by taking opportunities to extend their careers by working in community education and support beyond the school gate. There is a degree of perceived risk in enabling staff exchanges which we think is likely to discourage headteachers, their teams and governing bodies.

**What might help us?**

This is an approach, we think, that needs to be researched, piloted and evaluated professionally and in robust academic terms. A pilot programme in one area could look at the potential extent of exchanges as well as test the value added through a number of them. For this to happen, we think, needs funding from central government and research funders.

**Questions**

**6a) Do you think that staff exchanges between schools and community groups – particularly those with expertise in supporting children who are vulnerable to being excluded from school – is a priority?**

**6b) Are the barriers listed to staff exchanges the most important ones?**

**6c) Are we dependent on government and research funders to support an evaluated pilot of this, or are there things schools and communities can do without further research and/or funding?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates how staff exchanges can add value or ways around the barriers to it, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**7. Enabling opportunities for lifelong learning**

We think school-community links can improve the prospects for both: children making the transition between different kinds of school and the participation of young people and adults in learning beyond 16. By making what is learnt in school more relevant and by putting learners at the centre of a more holistic network for edcuation – with different ways of learning available to them – we believe both adults and children would be encouraged to learn. We have made it clear that our enthusiasm for school-community links isn’t based on wanting to see the community influence what is taught in school. That is a matter for teachers and curriculum professionals and, ultimately, for politicians and others. We do believe, however, that appropriate community links – including with the local business community – could improve the outcomes of learning.

**What’s stopping us?**

We think the main barriers to using school-community links to enable better lifelong learning are lack of awareness and understanding of the value of wider education and support outside school.

**What might help us?**

In service training days and other opportunities for highlighting the work of community networks and groups that could support and extend education could be taken. Some of the other shared activities we have mentioned could help to embed new practices and ways of working.

**Questions**

**7a) Do you think that better schools and community cooperation and links could benefit lifelong learning both as it applied to children moving schools and adults beyond school age?**

**7b) Are we right to think the problem here is mainly lack of awareness?**

**7c) Is there anything that we could do to help schools and communities win the benefits for lifelong learning of working better together?**

**If you would like to give an example that illustrates how school-community links have paid off in terms of lifelong learning or ways around the barriers to enabling it, then please send details or get in touch to discuss through any of the means listed on page 4.**

**8. Finally… ‘risk benefit analysis’ and professional generosity**

Risk and lack of awareness of the benefits involved in taking meaningful steps towards cooperation between schools and communities and the groups within them have figured repeatedly when we have been thinking about barriers to progress. As Tim Brighouse has highlighted, it is easy to talk about the need to take courses of action that involve some degree of risk, but what is often neglected are the skills and tools that people – involved in schools and in communities - need to do so successfully.

We believe that in managing risk, the object cannot be to minimise it, but should be to ensure that it is justified by the potential benefits of taking it. That is: risk-benefit analysis.

Professionals involved in schools and the people who organise community action with educational outcomes need a better understanding of risk and how to manage it, starting with the idea of risk-benefit analysis. There are technical skills and approaches that can help in understanding how to manage risk more effectively in practice.

Technical learning is important, but we do not believe will be an adequate substitute for what we have referred to in this draft charter as ‘professional generosity’. That is: the ability, not to forget or ignore professional standards and approaches, but to use them as the basis for coproducing education that puts children and young people – with their own levels of need and ability – at the heart of the matter; and with schools, families and communities all playing to our strengths to enable it.

**Questions**

**8a) Does risk-benefit analysis give us a good basis for managing the risks involved in taking some of the actions we have mentioned in this draft charter?**

**8b) Are there other ways of raising awareness that you think should be included?**

**8c) Do you have any advice about technical skills involved in risk management or examples of where you have seen them used effectively?**

**8d) What do you think of the notion of ‘professional generosity’ – the understanding that professionalism is important but that coproducing education – with children and young people at the centre of things – is what we should and can be cooperating for?**

**Co-operating for Inclusion**

**School-Community Links: draft charter**

Published by Children’s Quarter, the co-operative of community groups, schools and others, based in Birmingham – which are committed to making services inclusive for the all children and young people including the 1 in 4 who are vulnerable to being excluded from them.

Children’s Quarter is a cooperative registered as a non-profit company limited by guarantee at Companies House with company number 11001331 and registered office at All Saints Centre 2 Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham, West Midlands, B14 7RA