

# Postcards from some of Scotland's Inspiring Schools

Daniel Murphy



A journal of a tour round Scottish schools, 2013,  
written to accompany the book **Schooling Scotland:  
Education, equity and community.**

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*This online resource complements the book by Daniel Murphy, 'Schooling Scotland: Education, equity and community', published in the Postcards from Scotland series by Argyll Press.*

**Author's Introduction**

I am at an age where I can safely say that more of my life is behind me than in front of me. I've seen a lot of change in education since 1963. I was 11 years old then. Along with almost every other child in Primary 7 in Scotland, I sat the 'quali' (qualifying exam). The results decided who went on to a six-year senior secondary, following an academic curriculum leading to Higher examinations, and who would go to a three year junior secondary with a more general basic curriculum. Many at the time were unhappy with that divisive system, which failed to offer many children the right opportunities at the right time and so limited their potential. By the time I graduated from University in 1973, selection was already gone from most Scottish state schools. I signed up to train as a teacher, enthused by and committed to the vision of a comprehensive school where all children in a local community would together receive an education that liberated their full potential: my student idealism of the late 60s and early 70s was changed into the practical task of improving children's chances. More equitable and more open school education seemed to be the route to a fairer, better society. I threw myself into a career that I believed could deliver that, starting with a succession of temporary teaching posts - in Barmulloch in Glasgow, in rural East Coast Malaysia, in an out-of-school unit in Alloa for children excluded from mainstream school because of their behaviour - before settling into a job in a Stirling comprehensive school as a teacher of History, Modern Studies and Learning Support. In due course, I took my enthusiasm and commitment into various other roles in the Scottish education system as a Head of Department, a local authority school Adviser and as a Depute Headteacher, along the way working on various national development groups and committees. In 1992, I was appointed to be Headteacher in a great school community at Crieff High School and went on to lead two other very

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different, but equally warm and exciting, school communities: McLaren High in Callander and Lornhill Academy in Clackmannanshire. I also spent some time, between 2000 and 2003, developing and leading the Scottish Qualification for Headship at the University of Edinburgh, researching, writing and teaching about the role of the headteacher and the challenges facing schools. Now, in semi-retirement, I am once more at the University of Edinburgh, working with school leaders and have the time to reflect back on my career and to consider the future in the light of what I have learned in the past.

Looking back at my career, I can remember many stand-out moments when it seemed that the school experience, and my part in it, was improving the life experience and life potential of many of the young people I met in school. I was continually amazed at their talents, their energy, their resilience. I met and worked with some great colleagues. I learned something new about myself and about life every single day. Though there have been many times when my enthusiasm was blunted by the inertia and complexity of the system, it was constantly renewed by the children and young people I worked with.

A chance encounter with Carol Craig at the annual conference of School Leaders Scotland (the national organisation for those in leadership roles in schools) led me to write the book which accompanies this online journal. Carol had been speaking very powerfully at the conference on the theme of her book in the 'Postcards from Scotland' series, [\*The Great Takeover: how materialism, the media and markets now dominate our lives\*](#). In her talk, she outlined her ambition to begin a national conversation about Scotland's future. She wanted the series to get people thinking and talking about what kind of society we wanted Scotland to be. I loved the idea behind the project - that we should not settle into a comfortable complacency; that we should embrace hard questions about the kind of society we live in - and the kind of society we want to live in - and that we should challenge each other's ideas in hard conversations. When she told me that she was looking

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for someone to write a book on school education, I readily volunteered. I wanted to share my enthusiasm and concerns, my knowledge and experience from forty years on the inside, to present a short account that would challenge the reader to think about Scotland's future, and how schools can and should contribute.

As part of the background research for the book, I visited a number of schools in different parts of Scotland in 2013 and wrote up my visits as a kind of 'tour journal'. I enjoyed my visits and learned a great deal from the teachers and pupils whom I met. Things move fast in school education these days, and no doubt there have been further developments in each of the schools I visited since then, but the inspiration and sense of community I found in these schools will not have changed. I hope you will read the account of that tour in this downloadable publication and that you will enjoy the journey as much as I did.

The printed book, [\*Schooling Scotland: Education, equity and community\*](#), takes a longer term view of the Scottish schooling system as a whole. It argues for some changes, to help the system as a whole move forward. It's not a job for schools or teachers alone, however enthusiastic and capable they are. We need further national system change to liberate the talents and enthusiasm of those at local level and move closer to realising our vision that every child in Scotland should achieve his or her potential. That means creating systems and structure that will help reconnect communities and schools - we need to work together to give Scotland's children the best education possible. When the system works to support collaboration not competition and inclusion not exclusion, we will be closer to realising that vision. The underlying argument of the book is that education is not a 'service' delivered in separate schools by professionals, but a joint project, undertaken by parents, teachers, children and the wider community around them.

'It takes all Scotland to raise a child'.

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Each of the schools I visited was already well down this road, with strong connections to the local community and beyond.

If you are interested in further reading, I have collated some useful background references on Scottish schooling,

I am an occasional blogger ([www.dannymurphyvso.wordpress.com/](http://www.dannymurphyvso.wordpress.com/)) and twitterer (@DannySMurphy) and welcome feedback /discussion of any or all the issues raised in the book or in the associated references and online journal, also available from the book's homepage: [http://www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk/book\\_07.html](http://www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk/book_07.html), where there is also a link to a facebook page for further discussion and debate. If tweeting, use the hashtag #SchoolingScotland. In the text that follows, you can connect directly to websites by clicking the blue hyperlinks such as [www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk](http://www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk).

Now on with the tour!

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**'Wee Pans' (Prestonpans Infant School): community and school working together.**

Prestonpans is a small Scottish town with a big character. It sits east of Edinburgh on the south bank of the Forth Estuary looking over to Fife. Its history, enacted on prize-winning murals all around the town, goes back to the Middle Ages. Prestonpans stood briefly at the centre of the national story in September 1745 when it gave its name to the battle won by the troops of Bonnie Prince Charlie, spurring him on to the invasion of England. In 1922, one of the world's oldest golf club, the Royal Musselburgh, founded in 1774, moved to a parkland site on the west side. On the shore on the east side of the town, between Prestonpans and the neighbouring town of Cockenzie, sits the massive industrial behemoth of Cockenzie power station, which held the dubious distinction of being the UK's least carbon-efficient power station until its closure in 2013. Salt-panning, brewing, mining and fishing were the traditional industries, but in common with many Scottish towns, these have all but died out in recent years and as new housing has sprung up, close to the railway station and the busy A1 route in to Edinburgh, commuting has become a more common experience.

There is a strong sense of local community in Prestonpans, the pride in the town's heritage reflected, for example, in the songs of well-known local musicians Davy Steele and Alex Hodgson, in the annual Gala Day, in a work of heritage art completed by over 100 volunteer embroiderers - the Prestonpans Tapestry, now on tour - and in the tales of Tim Porteus, town storyteller, a regular visitor to local schools, sharing his fund of local stories, his knowledge and contacts. Recent changes in employment and housing, with commuters in the new houses on the town's fringe and a growing Polish community, have introduced more complexity into the cultural mix. While it may lack the diversity of

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bigger urban centres, it is a community where the social and economic changes of recent times continue to have a big impact.

There are four schools in the town: Prestonpans Infant School for ages 3 - 8 ('Wee Pans'), Prestonpans Primary School, St. Gabriel's R.C. Primary School and Preston Lodge High School, which takes in pupils from the adjoining towns and countryside. I visited the Infant School, situated behind the High Street, in mid-June. The most difficult thing about my visit was getting into the school: after parking in the small rear car park, I took the long route round to the school office, which is handily situated for those who know where the main entrance is! There is a mixture of new and older buildings, but the grounds, even the older playground, were lively with bright play spaces and flower beds, and the open classroom windows carried out on the air the purposeful sounds of children chattering and singing as they worked away.

I was greeted by Sheila Laing, the inspirational headteacher I had come to see. I first met Sheila in 2001 when she had signed up for the Scottish Qualification for Headship programme at the University of Edinburgh - a new national programme to 'train' the next generation of headteachers. The 'accelerated route', which Sheila was following, required candidates to prepare a portfolio of work they had already done in school, showing how they had matched up against the Standard for Headship. The Standard set out clearly, for the first time, what a competent Scottish headteacher should be able to do. The portfolio Sheila presented, based on her work in Royston and Forthview Primary Schools in Edinburgh, was outstanding. Over the years since, she has continued to blaze a trail for the kind of education that starts from the child.

Earlier in the year, I had asked Sheila to speak about her work to an international group of Masters degree students who were studying Educational Policy and Practice in Edinburgh. She began the talk by highlighting the challenges facing Scottish educators and the



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policies and values that underpin her practice. In her view, the biggest challenge of all for those working with young people in Scotland was identified in the OECD report of 2007:

*Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide.*

Since the theme of the course was how to move policy into practice, she listed a number of the Scottish government policies that influenced her thinking. It was quite a list (see the box below)! If policies could sort educational inequality, it would have been sorted long ago. If policies could make every child achieve her or his potential, we would be a nation of world-beaters! Listening to Sheila listing the policies, I was reminded of a talk given by John Carnochan, recently retired head of the Strathclyde Violence Reduction unit: 'No-one ever talks about the problems they have writing a policy,' he said, 'People have no problems writing down all the great things they want to happen. 95% of the challenge is in 'implementation', in making it work.'

Coming, as they did, from different cultural backgrounds, the University students were somewhat bemused by the plethora of Scottish Government policies and initiatives designed to support children. Why so many and why did they not all fit neatly with each other? One of the Chinese students asked, 'How can school teachers in Scotland possibly know what all the policies were, far less what was contained in them?'

The students responded much more positively to Sheila's description of her work - what she did, not what she read; her enthusiasm and her determination to break down all the barriers that might stand in the way of children achieving their full potential. She may know the policies, but it is what she does that makes the difference.

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Back to my visit to Wee Pans. Sheila led me to the staffroom where a group of parents had stayed on in school after bringing their children in. She had asked them to share their thoughts about the school with me. Their testimony was impressive. They spoke of a welcoming, inclusive school, one that brought the community together, one that supported parents as well as valuing and supporting every child, one that put the children first. Charlotte told me about the garden, cultivated each year by a different group of pupils. Each new group would take over the garden in December of Primary 2 and look after it all the way through to December of Primary 3, so that they could follow through an entire growing season, from frost and snow, through sowing and planting to harvest time and winter tidying. Everything was done by the pupils. Successful funding bids and partnerships have helped with planting the orchard, seeds are brought on in the classroom, flowers, vegetables and fruit flourish and lessons are learned through doing, not just reading. Parent and community volunteers and pupils helped clear the thin bank of woodland in the school grounds so that it could become a place for exploring, a place for learning. There, nursery pupils are following a 'forest schools' programme. Boys obsessed with picking up the biggest stick learn how to carry it safely by dragging it behind them, rather than flaying it in front. Little beasties are collected and discussed. Bark rubbings are brought back into the classroom. Once some children have success, others want to follow. A 'nurture group', for children who need a little bit more TLC<sup>1</sup> than the rest, has planted its own flower garden, bringing pride and confidence. The Community Council gifted some bulbs to the school which the Primary 3 pupils planted at the power station site. Children through their student council have mapped out how they want the grounds to develop and wherever possible make the development happen: a Wee Pans website post shows Council members painting the wooden bridge (<http://www.edubuzz.org/prestonpansinfant/>). Partners in the Council and the community have

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<sup>1</sup> 'tender loving care'

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been brought in to help. All the school grounds have been opened up for learning. One of the parents, Kevin, is vice-chair of Prestonpans Community Council. He is full of praise for the 'get up and go' he finds in the school: "when the community council suggests something, Wee Pans says 'yes, let's do it!'".

- Child Poverty Strategy 2011 - 'to improve children's wellbeing and life chances ....and to tackle intergenerational cycles of deprivation';
- Early Years Framework 2008 - 'helping people to secure the best outcomes for themselves'
- Equally Well 2008 - ways of reducing health inequalities in Scotland;
- Curriculum for Excellence 2004 to the present - the new curriculum for Scotland which gives a high priority to developing children's personal capacities, not just their academic abilities;
- Parental Involvement Act 2006 - 'parental involvement is about parents and teachers working together in partnership to help children become more confident learners';
- Equality Act 2010 - protecting against unfair discrimination of any kind;
- Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) 2008 - working from where the child is, not where we want them to be, and ensuring that the different agencies (education, health, social work police...) work together better to support vulnerable young people.

*This is just a selection of the policies that regularly crash onto the headteacher's desk. In addition there are similar policies within each local authority such as 'Access and Inclusion' or 'Raising Attainment' or 'Promoting Active Learning', reams of documents of 'advice' from Inspectors such as their 'Journey to Excellence', 'indicators of good*

The partnership of parents and school carries on into the building. A number of parents had followed the 'Raising Children with Confidence' programme, which allows parents to learn some basics about Child Development. They told me that, through supportive discussions in the group, they had seen how to apply their new knowledge in their relationships with their own children. Others had followed the more intensive 'The Incredible Years' programme, aimed at the parents of 2-9 year olds, run with a creche

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mornings and evenings. Pressures on relationships in the home, pressures from outwith the home caused by work, or lack of work, can affect children. Parental insecurities and inconsistencies can lead to inconsistent or troubled behaviour in children. I have almost never, in my years as a teacher and headteacher, met a mother who did not love her children. But sometimes, no matter how much a mother loves her child, she may not know how best to react to a child's behaviour - to be strict or to be loving, to tighten control or to give way. This research-based programme, originating in the US but widely used across the UK, gives parents strategies to support and develop children through the emotional highs and lows of the early years, to reduce problems with behaviour, to increase the child's social skills. Kathy Lamb, who is part of the East Lothian team which supports families and children facing these kinds of difficulties, has run 'Incredible Years' sessions in a number of settings, but was eager to tell me that the sessions in Wee Pans were particularly successful with sustained high participation rates. She put this down, in large part, to the welcoming and supportive atmosphere across the school, from the reception staff and the janitor to the headteacher: little words of encouragement, a friendly smile, feeling welcomed, feeling you belong. 'An important part of that,' one of the parents told me, 'is not feeling that you are being judged for how well or how badly you are doing.'

Tim Porteus, a former pupil of the school himself, with a deep love of Prestonpans and a wide experience in community education, is full of praise for what goes on in the school. For Tim, learning is a continuous process, across the family, the community and the school. Every bit as important as formal learning in the classroom is the informal learning that takes place in more open, creative spaces. He encourages new stories as well as old through a charity which he founded, 'Young Storytellers of Scotland'. Tim is in and out of the school all the time, bringing the community into the school and linking the school to the community. He wants young people to have a strong sense of identity, not an

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exclusive identity but a confident one. Part of that is a strong sense of place, but also an understanding of difference and an open attitude to the future. He was passionate about the role of the school in forming children's sense of who they are: 'this school brings in the different shards of a fragmented community and builds a sense of identity'.

A parent new to the area, Kirsteen, spoke about how confident her son had become since attending the school. In her previous school she had felt on the outside: 'in three years there I was less involved than I was after six weeks here!' 'People here don't just talk, they get on and do things'. One such 'thing' was an initiative to bring in younger mothers and give them some support. 'Wee Pans Stay and Play' aimed to reduce the isolation that mothers, particularly younger mothers, can feel. Sheila does this kind of work extremely well - putting people together, supporting them to help themselves. The word 'community' crops up a lot, but it's not an exclusive community, it's a community where the children are at the centre.

A good example of this is how the charity Patchwork (*'Parents And Their Children's Health Work'*) has been brought into a closer relationship with other services and organisations. Patchwork is a charitable organisation based in Prestonpans, but covering the whole EH32 area. It provides health information services for pre-school children and their parents. I met up with two enthusiastic parent members of the Patchwork committee, who talked to me in the headteacher's office, while their small children came and went and their toddlers crawled about playing elaborate games in and out the furniture. They told me how, through the networks of formal and informal contacts based around Wee Pans, they had developed from an organisation doing good work 'in its own bubble' to being part of a much wider group, getting involved in the Gala Day, for example. One of their areas of expertise, where they have organised training, is in 'baby massage'. They strongly believe that the physical contact of baby massage, its sounds, its touch, helps parent and child to

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grow together, but the programme is about much more than the physical massage. They have found that the social interactions and conversations around the training can be powerful. Training has been very popular with local mums, with almost 100 trained in just a few months. Enthusiasm for massage has spread round the community. Sheila was keen to bring more fathers into the school and somehow the idea of a Dad's back massage day, with a slice of pizza thrown in, was born.

There has been a lot of media chat recently about the absence of male role models in many families, the absence of male teachers in many nursery, early years and primary school settings. In Wee Pans, they don't chat about this. They get up and do something about it. Over 80 Dads, Grandads and Uncles turned up, queuing round the block outside school as they waited to get in and have their backs massaged by a little one. It was, by all accounts, a fabulous fun day, with many of these men in the school building for the first time ever, having a great time with their kids. There is a heartwarming video of the day on the Wee Pans website. Another local charity that Sheila has brought into the school is 'Dadswork', a group which helps to support fathers in their parenting, including a playgroup session for dads to come in and learn with and from others. On the side of these kinds of activities, relationships are formed which then feed into other aspects of community life, such as the rich round of summer activities. These included a 'Go Mad with Dad' day in the summer, when all kinds of activities for Dads and their kids took place. 140 Dads and male carers turned up with their children., altogether over 400 people coming together for a fine community event based around the school.

Towards the end of the morning, I met Ann Leitch, a nursery nurse in the school. Warm and friendly, Ann comes over as someone you would like to be with your children. She obviously knows the community inside out. Under Sheila's leadership, she has been given a bit of freedom to work with the 'nurture group', children who for various reasons have

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been finding it hard to settle in school and need a bit of extra care and attention. Among other activities, she has developed a special garden with this little group of children. Ann was also behind a 'water exploration day' that happened recently in the school: some of the resulting fun and games can be seen on the Wee Pans website. The initial idea was a day for Primary 1s, but as more people got involved, and ideas grew, it expanded. While teachers were picking out more formal aspects of learning about water, its properties and importance for life, some of the experiments got bigger and bigger. A Heath Robinson style plumber's nightmare was constructed in the school grounds when Ann sourced some bits of disused piping from a local scrapyards, famous in the area, which was set up by her grandad - Sam Burns' scrapyards: another advantage of the community connection! Children had great fun 'painting' the trees and the paving stones ..... with water.... then watching how it dried! That kind of open-ended exploratory play is so important for young children. Often in schools these days, when so many teachers commute into the school at the start of the day and away again after school finishes, staff like Ann, who live in the area, provide some of the best connections between school and community in the many important informal interactions of a school day. "Staff see the benefits of what we are doing for the children," Ann tells me. A sign of this is that fifteen staff volunteered to follow the 'Confident Staff, Confident Children' training programme over 8 weeks at the start of the year. This programme aimed to develop their insight and skills in the supportive roles Sheila wants them to play. It sits well alongside the programmes of child development being run for parents.

A key support to Sheila in her work has been the 'Support from the Start' initiative in East Lothian. It started as a pilot in 2009, bringing Health, Education, Social Work and voluntary groups together to try to improve the poor health outcomes of some young children in the area. From the start, those involved were encouraged to collaborate not compete (as different services sometimes do), with funding available to support good

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ideas. There are all the usual formal structures and systems that you would expect, with people round the table at a quarterly meeting and frequent e.mail circulation keeping all parties informed about what is going on, but just as important is the informal side. People begin to trust each other and to want to do things with and for each other when they meet each other and understand that they share a common purpose. For Sheila it is all about the children: getting people together, getting people doing things together, makes that clear. She can't be bothered with lots of meetings that go nowhere. In her job she sees more than most the daily pressures that parents face, the impact of family and social pressures on children's understanding of the world and their place in it, but she also sees the other side, every single day: the joy that children bring to adults under stress, how easily a problem shared can become a problem solved, how the intense pressure within the home can be released in a community event. Her calming presence shelters the school community and allows those within it to flourish. As we stood in the sun watching the lines heading into school after lunchtime, one wee girl came up to Sheila with what we used to call a 'torn face'. Sheila gave her a reassuring word and a big hug, and she trotted off happily to class. It reminded me of my days chasing in latecomers at the end of lunch hour as the bell rang. I never gave a 'torn-faced' teenager a hug, but sometimes a little greeting, a bit of teasing delivered with a smile, 'How's Martin today?', 'We can't start school till you're back in Leigh-Anne', meant the same thing.

Sheila is only too aware that the conventional more technical aspects of school leadership need her attention - next up for the teachers she was planning a close look at assessment in the school: improving consistency across classrooms; using teacher assessments to help children to learn better and parents to know what they can do to help them. But she sees school, and the learning that takes place there, as being about much more than what happens in the classroom: bringing parents into the school - its grounds, its buildings, the children's experiences - is essential. Equally essential is for her to get out of the office



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into the school, and to get the school into the community. Inevitably this leads to long hours. Her presence at community events in the evenings and weekends, joint work on community or educational projects, sharing discussions on child development - all of these build relations of trust and common purpose, a sense of identity and community, from which the children benefit. She has built on existing community strengths by her work to bring other professions together - health visitors, social workers, family support worker, substance abuse workers, community education. She has reached out to and benefitted from the work of other organisations in the community - the community council, the Gala Day committee, Patchwork, Dad's Work, the town storyteller, local businesses. Joyful community events such as the 'Dad's Pizza Massage' make clear that the children's education is everyone's business, that everyone is welcome, that school education is not a 'service' provided to 'customers', but a joint project of the community, professions and families together, where everyone has a part to play and is welcome to play that part.

In the Scottish educational tradition of simpler past times, part myth part history, the parish school was at the heart of a community where everyone knew each other. In the fragmented communities of the 21st century, where it could be said that the local community only ever comes fully together in its local schools, Wee Pans is a shining example of the role the school can play in building a sense of community. Rooted in a strong school community, children grow in confidence and thrive. If isolated, seen only as individual learners in the classroom, some children are inclined to wither.

You can find out more about Wee Pans at <http://www.edubuzz.org/prestonpansinfant/> .

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### Bucksburn Academy, Aberdeen: what will we do when the oil runs out?

Bucksburn sits on the western edge of Aberdeen, near to Dyce Airport. Though regularly buffeted by cold North Sea winds, the city has avoided the harshest economic winds of recent years. Higher oil prices have sustained the oil industry in the area and its impact is felt all over the area: the elevated house prices along Deeside; the thriving service sector; full hotels; high levels of employment, with skill shortages in some areas of engineering. No-one in Aberdeen is complacent. The oil will run out. Like any port city, it has its share of social problems. The council has had its fair share of financial difficulties in the recent past. Yet there is a dynamism about the place.

Aberdeen is a beautiful city, with its two rivers, its beach front, its stunning granite buildings and vibrant city centre, recent controversy around the Union St Gardens aside. Bucksburn is a nicely contained, quiet suburb on its western edge. It has a variety of housing types and an industrial estate, but lots of surrounding greenery soften its edges: golf courses, woods, farmland. Bucksburn Academy is a relatively new school, resulting from a merger onto one new campus of two previous schools, Bankhead Academy and Marlpool School. The school draws most of its pupils from the neighbouring primary schools of Bucksburn, Newhills and Stoneywood and also from the village of Kingswells, just outside the city. Pupils who attend the Additional Support Needs wing, who share the social and specialised teaching areas of the school, come from all over the city. The bright new buildings, opened in 2009, are pleasant and airy. Inspectors liked what they saw *inside* the building when they reported very positively on a recent inspection visit. I had first heard about Bucksburn Academy from Morag Watson of WWF. WWF is playing an important role in Scottish education, not just by working with teachers but by working behind the scenes on 'sustainability': working with 'policy makers' is part of its mission.

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*WWF Scotland believes that learning has a vital role to play in achieving One Planet Future - a sustainable future where humans live in harmony with nature and within the limits of our planet. (WWF Scotland website).*

I have had a lifelong interest in environmental sustainability. As a young teacher in the late 70s, I ran a very successful recycling project in school, with a team of committed student volunteers helping my little cartoon character 'Wastesaver Sam' to spread the word around the school. In the absence of regular council collections, we stored huge quantities of waste paper in the school building before loading the school minibus for a termly run to the recycling centre, but were forced to stop following a fire brigade risk assessment of our paper store! As a member of Friends of the Earth since the 70s, I have been delighted to see how much the 'green agenda' has taken off in Scottish schools. Morag is one of those working 'behind the scenes' to make this happen. Recently, for example, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), the body which regulates the teaching profession in Scotland, revised the 'Standards' which set out clearly what a qualified teachers should be able to do and how they should behave. The Standards are used in teacher training, on entry to the profession in the probationary year and throughout a teacher's career, and include a new Standard for 'leadership'. It is against these Standards that a teacher's competence to practise is judged. In line with the political consensus in Scotland that we need to take more account of our environment in all that we do, the new Standards also now include a section on sustainability. Morag was a member of the Advisory Group on sustainability that influenced the Standards and will go on to produce advice and support for teachers.

*'Learning for Sustainability' is a whole-school commitment that helps the school and its wider community develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and practices needed to take decisions which are compatible with a*

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*sustainable future in a just and equitable world. Learning for sustainability has been embedded within the Standards for Registration to support teachers in actively embracing and promoting principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work. (Introduction to GTCS revised Standards) @ <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/standards.aspx> .*

Sustainability also features strongly in the Curriculum for Excellence, where it is highlighted in relation to food, technology, resources, transport and social / political issues. I had heard Morag speak at the Awards Ceremony held by the GCTS for those who gained the Scottish Qualification for Headship in 2012, where she led a session on 'Leading a Sustainable School' based on work WWF had been doing with schools around Scotland. Bucksburn Academy was one of the schools, written up as a 'case study' in the report, '*One Planet Schools: connecting schools and community*' (there's that word 'community' again!) and also in the report *Evidence of Natural Change* @ <http://www.naturalchange.co.uk/resources/downloads/EvidenceofNaturalChangeCaseStudies.pdf> . I wanted to feature a city secondary school outside the central belt and here was one which was also at the leading edge on sustainability. On Morag's recommendation, I contacted Roseleen Shanley, who leads the sustainability agenda at Bucksburn. She could not have been more accommodating, despite her hectic schedule.

Roseleen is one of those teachers all headteachers would love to have in their school. She's got the three essential 'es' of teaching - enthusiasm, experience and energy - and above all, she puts in the extra mile, and a few more, because she believes in what she is doing. She had recently been working three days a week in school and two days a week as a development officer with Aberdeen City Council, working across all the city's schools to support and develop 'Global Citizenship' and

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to encourage and support schools to develop the 'pupil voice' - making sure that the young people in our schools have their say. That was a lot of plates to keep spinning! Roseleen is passionate about sustainability. Her experience within the WWF's 'Natural Change' project ([http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf\\_naturalchange2.pdf](http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/wwf_naturalchange2.pdf)) helped her clarify her leadership role and with the support of her headteacher, Kas Mohamed, she has made great progress in the school.

I really enjoyed my visit to Bucksburn. The atmosphere in school is characteristic of many Scottish schools, relaxed, friendly, purposeful. During my visit, I was impressed, but not surprised, by the mannerly conduct of the students around the school, the easy inclusion of students with significant additional needs and the friendly buzz in the corridors and dining area. To my delight one of the teachers we met as we visited the lunch area was Fraser Maclachlan. Fraser had been Head Boy at McLaren High School in Callander when I was headteacher there in the late 90s. Now a Principal Teacher at Bucksburn, I could see the same leadership qualities I saw in him as a pupil in the relaxed way in which he dealt with the students. It is no bad thing for a young teacher to be popular with the students, but it's not the easy popularity of celebrity or fame; the most popular teachers in school usually have a sense of fun and can relate to the pupils at a number of levels, but are also, in my experience, usually respected for their qualities as a teacher. We had a good bit of chat while a succession of pupils approached him on one thing or another - the usual lunchtime banter of every school: everything from a cheery, 'sir, have you got change for £5?', to a proud declaration from a student whose behaviour was obviously a cause for concern, 'I didn't get into trouble at all this morning sir. How about that?'

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Roseleen had agreed to meet me that morning at the impressively refurbished Marischal College, Aberdeen Council's new HQ in the centre of Aberdeen. From there, we made our way out along the Inverurie Road to the western fringe of Aberdeen, near to the airport. That morning a group of P3 / P4 pupils from nearby Stoneywood Primary School were coming in to be taught by Roseleen's third year class. The class is one of two third year groups at Bucksburn who follow a programme leading to a John Muir Award, a nature engagement tool set up by the John Muir Trust and named after the Scottish-born environmental pioneer. The two 'John Muir' lessons in the week take a 'hand, heart and head' approach to learning: it's not just about what you know, but what you feel and what you do with your knowledge.

*"By doing physical work, using their hands, people develop a sense of care for the environment. This enables feelings to be explored ....In turn, this engages the 'head' in a deeper awareness and understanding ..."* (One Planet Schools).

The John Muir Award, a bit like the Duke of Edinburgh Award, sets out various challenges for those following the programme: discover - explore - conserve - share. The Award started in 1997 and has grown across Scotland, England and Wales - the 100,000th award was made in 2010, by 2014 it was well over 200,000 and the 100,000<sup>th</sup> award in Scotland is not far off. People can gain a John Muir Award by 'discovering, exploring, conserving and sharing'. On this occasion, the S3 students were 'sharing' their 'discoveries' with their primary school visitors. The younger pupils were divided into three groups and rotated around three different learning activities so that by the end of the morning every pupil would have experienced every activity. One was in the classroom, where some of the S3 students had

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prepared a presentation in which polar bears featured heavily! The two other activities were based outside, in the school quadrangle, with a benevolent sunny sky above and the occasional distracting roar of aeroplanes heading for Dyce airport. One group began by working through a quiz set up by the S3 class. The others sat around a display of different animal bones, from sky, sea and land. They discussed the skeletons and the functions of the bones and beaks on display. They were fascinated by the specimens.

The teacher in me had, as soon as the primary class arrived, spotted one little lad who was going to need a bit more attention than the others - interrupting the teacher, niggling his classmates, constantly on the move. He changed completely when his group moved round to the 'skeletons'. The largest bone fragment was of a dolphin's skull. He was fascinated by it, hugging it to himself, stroking its head and talking to it as if it were a long-lost pet. It was extraordinary to see the calming effect this had on him - 'hand, heart and head' right enough! While the primary school pupils were learning, the S3 students were also learning, but learning by teaching. They spoke with enthusiasm about the experiences gained through the John Muir Award, a different kind of space in the school week, 'reaching some parts that other lessons don't reach'. The teachers were in the background, supporting, creating the opportunities for the students to take the lead - this is Roseleen's model. Many schools in Scotland are using the John Muir Award structure to broaden out the learning experience of the students.

Sustainability at Bucksburn does not stop at the school gates. One of Roseleen's ambitions is to take the school out into the community and to bring the community into the school: getting active in the world outside the school gates. Where better to start than the local community council, whose neighbourhood priorities included

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increasing volunteering, lifelong learning, involving young people more in local matters, and creating green spaces within Bucksburn. Step up the students of Bucksburn Academy. They attended community council meetings, made presentations on their work and got stuck in to some local challenges, changing the perceptions of young people held by some of the older residents along the way. Pupils and staff formed a sub group of the Bucksburn and Newhills Community Council (BNCC) - this later included Kingswells as well. Bucksburn Academy took the lead and developed the Bucksburn Community Sustainability Model (BCSM) in consultation with their community partners. The John Muir Award got pupils involved. The aim was for all generations to work together on sustainable citizenship projects and celebrate together when they received the award for their work. An early target for joint work was to improve the local Sclattie Wood. The school, the community council and a local engineering company (Aker Solutions) tidied up the wood and built a path, put up bat and bird boxes, planted bulbs and plants, and created an outdoor recreational and learning resource. Saturday morning sessions involved pupils, community members, staff from Aker and from the school working together on a voluntary basis. The National Trust for Scotland, the RSPB, and Scottish Natural Heritage also became involved. Some of the work of local primary pupils on 'sustainability' takes place within the wood. The 'John Muir' award programme is an option for senior students at the school as well as those in S3. In recent years, their visits to Sclattie Wood have led to discovery, exploration, conservation and sharing, quite a bit of it in the rain if the photos on the school website are to be believed! Student comments (quoted here from the 'One Planet' report) illustrate the value of the experience:



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*It was fun to get away from school and not have to learn in a classroom but to get out in the country and learn new things that you can't learn in a classroom.*

*I enjoyed being able to help younger and less able pupils and because of this I gained a lot of confidence. I do not usually have to be responsible for others around me but whilst on the projects I have become more aware of my responsibility in a group.*

Another strand to the Bucksburn approach has been, very appropriately for Aberdeen, 'Re-thinking Energy'. Roseleen's first group of student leaders researched a range of alternative energies such as, tidal, wave, wind, solar, biomass etc. In 2012, this led on to them organising and delivering a 'Re-thinking Energy Conference', in association with the local authority's Sustainable Development Officer. Specialists in the various fields were invited to speak in support of the theme, and information and data gathered on what is happening locally, nationally and globally in communities. Delegates from Aberdeen businesses, the community, local authorities, and environmental organisations were invited, with over 120 attending what proved to be a fantastically successful event. This carried on in monthly after-school 'Rethinking Energy' seminars, where pupils and teachers discussed the issues with city council planners and sustainability staff, local councillors, renewable energy companies, Scottish Natural Heritage staff and members of the community council.

The fact that many Bucksburn students have family members working in the oil industry adds to the relevance and importance of this project. I asked one of the students whether there was a conflict of interest, where her father was working in

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oil and she was exploring alternative energy sources as part of her school work. She put me right:

*There is no conflict. People don't realise how much development work on alternative energy is being done by the big energy companies. Many of the people working there are just as committed to a sustainable future as we are.*

Bucksburn has developed links with schools and colleges in Germany, Norway, Sweden and The Netherlands through a European Community funded project on this theme of 'Rethinking Energy' (<https://www.facebook.com/ReThinkingEnergy>). Over lunch at the school, I was lucky enough to meet a group of five students who had just returned from a visit to Sweden with Roseleen. This visit was part of the cycle of visits which will see each school visit each other, forming bonds of friendship and sharing ideas and practice on energy use. Shona, Heather, Martin, Euan and Andrew had learned a huge amount from the experience. Just finishing their third year at the school, they were about to embark on a fourth year that will be heavily focused on examination preparation: theirs was the first year group in Scotland to sit the new examinations which replaced Standard Grade in 2014. They shared with me a short DVD film of the visit that they were in the process of editing. They were already looking forward to picking up the John Muir Award approach to learning again in fifth and sixth year. Before that, they were to play a leading role when Bucksburn hosted the other schools in 2014, when Bucksburn students organised a two day Rethinking Energy conference in conjunction with Robert Gordon University (RGU). On the back of that collaboration, Bucksburn pupils, in collaboration with RGU and Aberdeen City Council, are now bidding for further funding to develop 'renewable energy skills' opportunities in the city.

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While the group I met were impressed with the Swedish school they had visited, with its geothermal heat pumps and hydro-powered electricity generation, they are confident that Bucksburn and Aberdeen has much to be proud of, not least in the strong links being developed with the local community, in the more than one hundred John Muir Awards being made this year and in the enthusiasm and energy of the young people to build a better, more sustainable future. Roseleen's student leaders really value the learning experiences they have had through 'Rethinking Energy'. Coming back from Sweden, Shona had worried about going back to more conventional school learning. She was clearly someone who will do well in examinations but she also understood the limitations of exam-focussed learning:

*"The box will be back on my head and I'll see the world through two little holes."*

Heather shared with me the portfolio of 'discoveries' she collected while going for the award - an impressive document. For her, this different approach to learning had kindled an interest in science and possibly a career in science or technology:

*I wasn't interested in science till I started getting involved with John Muir and Rethinking Energy...*

One of Roseleen's aims with her work has been to ensure that 'sustainability' within Bucksburn is not just dependent upon her. There is some evidence that this is happening with growing numbers picking up the John Muir Award option, the support of the school headteacher, enthusiastic and committed student 'leaders' and some enthusiastic and supportive teachers in Bucksburn and its associated primary schools. On the other hand, not all teachers share her enthusiasm and few would be able to put in the time that Roseleen has. She has built networks, contacts and partnerships between school and community, and with other services and agencies, that have opened up wider

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opportunities for her pupils, and created some unique and valuable learning spaces, but can these be maintained without someone with Roseleen's drive pulling it all together? For the moment, Bucksburn does not need to worry. Roseleen is committed to the school and its pupils and they are reaping the reward. There is a section on the John Muir Award website called 'views from 2050' - people were asked to imagine what Scotland would be like if the government attains its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80%. By then, the young people I met at Bucksburn will be in their 50s. I can certainly imagine them running the country, and doing it well!

Of course Bucksburn is not the only school where environmental awareness is being promoted. Green Flags fly from the flagpoles of many Scottish schools, environmental sustainability features strongly in both the primary and the secondary school curriculum, while more and more schools are offering the John Muir Award. On the way back from Aberdeen, I was listening to the podcast version of the BBC Scotland 'Out of Doors' radio programme, which brightens up Saturday morning. One of the items was from Slammanan Primary in Falkirk. Recently the children have become involved in the project to protect the rare Scandinavian Bean Geese, who overwinter on the Slammanan plateau. P4 and P5 children had put together pictures, games and lots of technical information on the Bean Geese migration. They used data downloaded from the GPS units on three of the birds to create maps showing the route taken from Scotland to Sweden. Their work received a special award from the RSPB. This is just one more example. All over Scotland, in many of our schools, there are young people getting involved with the environmental challenges of their local area.

You can find out more about Bucksburn Academy at <http://bucksburnacademy.org.uk/> ..

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### Room 13 - artistic flourishing in Caol

Caol Primary School, with its neighbouring Catholic counterpart Lochside, sits right at the heart of the large village of Caol, just outside of Fort William. Caol is a place tourists will only know from the roadsigns on the busy A830 that heads West out of Fort William towards Mallaig and the Skye ferry. It is self-contained, almost enclosed, by the main road on the North, Loch Linnhe on the south and, on the east and west respectively, the last meandering mile of the River Lochy and the straight final cut of the Caledonian Canal. For a village its size, with a population well over 3000, it has remarkably few amenities. After the nearby Corpach pulp mill closed in 1981, the area, like so many other parts of industrial Scotland further south, took a hit. Social and environmental problems increased, but the community has bounced back, not least through the work of local charity, the Caol Regeneration company, which has a clear vision for the future. On the day I visited the village was picture-postcard perfect. The neat gardens and colourful lines of the Scandinavian-style wooden houses around the school sat small in a vast Highland sky. Its location is stunning, the bright blue waters of the Loch, the ponderous bulk of Ben Nevis towering over. The setting is ageless but the primary school, a 1960s building, with square lines and metal framed windows, is anything but. Highland Council has already designed its replacement, one of a number of community improvements underway.

There are many great things going on in schools around Scotland that are not as widely known as they should be. Room 13 is one of them. I knew nothing about it before Carol Craig, the series editor, pointed me in that direction during one of our discussions about this book. "Go up there and have a look," she said, "It's a very

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different kind of project." When I arrived there was no-one home in the school office, but pupils were only too keen to show me up flights of narrow stairs to Room 13, a dead end at the far end of the top corridor. One bank of windows faces South East, offering a breathtaking view of Ben Nevis, a view I would find extremely distracting were I a teacher in the school. When visible, its powerful squat presence dominates the landscape and the imagination, but most days of the year, as would-be climbers should know, the summit is in cloud, or fog, or snow. Richard Bracken is the current artist in residence at Room 13, Caol. He reassured me that I was expected. It was lunchtime and the studio was in full noisy flow, with the busy chaos of children of different ages, kneeling, sitting, chatting, painting.

Before I arrived, I had of course already done some research on the Room 13 website. There is not just one Room 13 studio but many - 12 countries, 45 schools, more than 80 studios worldwide.. and counting. Ten of them are in Scotland, including the studio at nearby Lochyside Primary, but there are also studios in countries as diverse as Nepal, South Africa and the United States. Yet here in Caol is the first, the founder, the original Room 13. And possibly the only one with that number on the door, a chance number, the number of the surplus room as the school roll began to fall in the 1990s, now the name of an international charitable organisation, Room 13 International - a relatively loose federation of studios within and across countries, held together by a set of common aims (see below). Its origin is, however, very far from common. There was, and is, none of the jargon of educational projects: no 'blueprint', no 'pilot', no 'strategic implementation planning group', no 'action plan', no 'pre-determined outcomes', no SMART<sup>2</sup> targets' and no built-in 'evaluation model'. This was an initiative that grew up from the ground, organically, with a belief in the power of art and an optimistic hope in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> *specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely*

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**The Ten Essential Aims of Room 13 International**

- (1) To support the widespread application of a higher quality of education with particular emphasis on philosophy and the arts.
- (2) To promote intellectual and artistic development across all ages.
- (3) To promote and support the combination of practical and theoretical arts education with basic business management skills, in anticipation of a more creative, more entrepreneurial and more confident society.
- (4) To promote creativity across the curriculum and the value of art for all.
- (5) To promote a more flexible approach to education, particularly the learning and teaching of transferable skills for young people, in order to improve employment prospects.
- (6) To support the provision of studio spaces and basic employment opportunities for working artists willing to engage with the education system.
- (7) To offer, through participation, communication, education and training, a support network and outlet for children who are forced to live within difficult environmental and social circumstances, in all countries.
- (8) To assist in managing some of the social issues facing schools and their local communities particularly those involving young people who are overburdened or undervalued by the current education system.
- (9) To encourage the formation of professional working relationships between businesses and their local schools, whereby class teaching is complemented with regular interaction between students and those who practice professionally in any given field.
- (10) To consult with the young people who elect to associate with Room 13, and to empower them above all in the processes involved.

It started in 1994, when Rob Fairley, an inspirational Scottish artist, spent some time with pupils of Caol Primary School as part of a residency with Highland Council. He gave them some cameras to work with once he discovered that they were not confident in drawing. In those distant pre-digital times, one thing led to another and soon they needed a dark room to print their photographs. Rob's residency was finished but the pupils weren't having it. They organised the school photos for that year, developed, mounted and sold them to parents and raised

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money enough to ask Rob if he would come back. He did, for the next five years, working with them a day a week, while the students who had set up the business, Jackie Cameron and Tina Love, moved on, and each year a new team took over. The business model was set - the pupils would run the organisation and finance. There is absolutely no doubt that it is the children who are in charge. On my visit, I met a few of the then current management team - Korrine and Jordan, joint Managing Directors, Cara who shares the role of Treasurer with Ella, who along with Erin will be Treasurer next year. Jamie-Lee, Emma Jane and Carrie introduced themselves as Studio Monitors - a very important role with so much going on, unfinished works and pots of paint vying for space on the busy studio floor. Natasha was Project Manager and Bethany Secretary. They were all comfortable with their responsibilities. What a wealth of learning there was and what confidence as they told me about their recent visit to the 'Festival of Dangerous Ideas' in Edinburgh and the presentation on creativity they had made at the Scottish Parliament. Fundraising that year included the production of the school photographs, a Primary 7 yearbook, a Fundraiser Fayre and Car Boot Sales. The enterprising character of Room 13 balances and deepens its educational impact. As the Chair of neighbouring Lochyside Primary School studio told an education conference:

*If you are 11 and running a successful business before you have even left primary school, just imagine what you can do with the rest of your life.*

There is no standard model for Room 13. Each studio has its own way of working towards the common aims. In Caol Primary, children can access Room 13 on a drop-in basis at interval and lunchtime. The current management team set a maximum of 15 in the studio at any one time, and a booking system is run by the pupils, but access tends to be self-limiting, based on how crowded the studio looks! Any pupil



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may come to the studio during the school day with the agreement of the class teacher, often when they have completed assigned classwork. When I arrived, at lunchtime, there was a cheerful cacophony of voices and activities. My 'teacher's instinct', deeply ground into me by a lifetime of 'taking charge', immediately wanted to bring order, to tidy up not just physically, but framing and pulling together the activities. I resisted the temptation!! I spoke to some of the young artists, working on different projects, mainly in 2-D, about their work - matter-of-fact conversations with children having fun, enjoying their art work. When young artists approached Richard for help, he often answered them with another question, putting the responsibility back on to them, making them think: 'where did you leave it?', 'what are you trying to show?', 'what do you think might work best?'

Before long, the office bearers sat me down and explained something of their work over the past year, their visit to Parliament, their fundraising. Cara told me about her cousin Jodie, whose response to '9-11' had been part of a body of work which had won Caol Room 13 the 'Barbie prize', a junior equivalent of the Turner. They are used to visitors and, while obviously proud of Room 13 and what it stands for, not in any way 'precious' about it. As term was drawing to a close, getting the next year's Board elected was a key concern. All too soon, lunchtime was over and in whirlwind of random movement, projects were tidied away and the young artists headed back to class. As Richard and I had a bit more time and space to talk, a succession of pupils arrived at the door, some looking for equipment, some 'dropping in' to carry on with work half-finished. Nicole, 11 years old, but with a streetwise maturity, quickly sized me up. Her slightly ironic opening line was meant more for Richard than for me I think. Her eyes shifted from me to him, a barely visible smile playing about her mouth: 'Don't think it's always like this,' she said 'This place is usually a mess!' As she assembled the paints and canvas she

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needed, there were little bits of conversation between Richard and Nicole, sometimes about the work, sometimes other things. A different kind of space, calmer, not timetabled and controlled, an open space in the heart of the school.

As the end of term was approaching, some of the students were getting pieces ready to take home. Some pieces from previous years are still stored against the walls, examples of work that might inspire current and future students, paintings, lino cuts, some 3-D work, some computer modified work. There have been exhibitions, locally and nationally, competition winners, but Room 13 is decidedly not about the 'best work'. It is about everyone's work. One of the students is quoted on a recent exhibition flyer:

*'We believe that everyone can be an artist. We believe that everyone should have a Room 13'*

This is very much Richard's approach, building on the tradition of Room 13 established by Rob Fairley. 'This place gives those who choose to come here freedom, the ability to explore.' Richard enjoys seeing the children going through a process, trying different things, false starts and restarts, achieving something they have talked about and being surprised by it. He does a lot of his own studio work in Room 13 - children are curious about his work as an artist and learn from it. Claire Gibb, Chief Executive of Room 13 International, came along to join Richard and I after lunch. She argues passionately for the potential of this open space, not to be in conflict with the more controlled, directed curriculum of the school but to complement it, to free the imagination rather than constrain it; not to create 'little artists', but to allow children to use art to explore their world and to express it. For Claire, the overly prescribed, standardised experience of art education in school needs to be opened up.

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'We get a lot of visitors,' she said, 'Often they are asking questions, looking for us to give them answers. We haven't got the answers.' But they do have strong belief in what they do. I was struck by the 'ordinariness' of Room 13. Kids like you would find in any school, rivalries, bickering, slipping out the door without tidying up. An underequipped room, one Belfast sink in the corner working overtime. Many schools have created spaces where children who don't quite fit into the class, for whatever reason, that day or that week, can find a little refuge. Many teachers value the 'off curriculum' spaces such as outdoor education, where different kinds of conversations can build different kinds of learning relationships. Many schools have opportunities for their go-getting pupils to take control, run an enterprise, raise money, work as a team. None of these aspects of Room 13 are unique. In Room 13, they are brought together with a vision of the importance of art in education.

The organic bottom-up approach of Room 13 International offers an alternative business model to the clusters of companies hovering around the English education system. Claire admitted that the international network probably could do with a tighter infrastructure. At present, people get in touch and express an interest; informal support can lead to them developing their idea into a studio through a process of peer development and self-sustaining funding. But she is also very aware of the dangers of 'going in with the system'. This is not just an organisational challenge but a curricular challenge as well. The open creative enquiring mindset which is welcomed in Curriculum for Excellence seems to fit better with the principles of Room 13 than the tightly prescribed curriculum of its predecessor, 5-14. Claire and Richard are only too aware there is a fine line to tread. While Room 13 fits very well with and ticks many Curriculum for Excellence boxes, that is not its purpose. In the open space of the studio, children and artist exchange ideas

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as artists working together - there are no pre-determined learning outcomes. Although Richard collaborates with and supports the classroom work of teachers in the school on occasion, it is very much as an artistic partner, not a teacher. In recent work with Primary 5, Richard and Lynne Smith, the enthusiastic class teacher, worked with the class on a 3D model of ancient Pompeii. Half the class worked with him in Room 13, while the other half worked with the class teacher. Class discussions about the experience of the people of Pompeii on the day Vesuvius erupted led to the children talking about how different experiences can be represented and on to making different things. They worked their way from cave paintings to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel, and ended up pasting life size human figures, reminiscent of the body casts found at Pompeii, on the classroom ceiling. Lynne mapped the learning journey in artistic expression against many of the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. The work ticked a lot of the boxes, but it was the open-ended learning process which she and Richard valued.

In many ways, the 'opt-in, person-centred' philosophy of Room 13 sits much more comfortably in Community Education, so I was not surprised to find out that there is a Room 13 community studio in Caol Youth Centre, where, among others in the community, young adults, many of them continuing their interest through from primary school days, can access workshops, summer school activities, materials, artistic support. This is the vision which will underpin the new community school campus in Caol. The design is already complete, and contractors were due to start demolition and building work in spring 2014, with completion around 2016/7. A joint campus building will replace Caol Primary School and the Lochside and Fort William Roman Catholic Primary Schools and the campus will incorporate a new Caol Community Centre building. Built on the current Caol Primary site, the work will

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involve the demolition of the existing community centre and school buildings.

Room 13 will have a central place at the heart of both the school and the community aspects of the new community campus- a real commitment from Highland Council to the importance of art and artists in education and the community. This official recognition is an objective tribute to the quality of Room 13 and what it stands for. The serendipitous journey of Room 13 from a short-term artist-in-residence experience to its central role in the new community campus is a powerful story of what art can bring to education.

You can find out more about Room 13 International at <http://room13international.org/> and about Room 13 in Caol at <http://room13international.org/room13studio/room13-coal-scotland/>.

You can read more about Room 13 in:

Souness, Danielle and Fairley, Rob (2005) 'Room 13' in Atkinson, Dennis and Dash, Paul (eds) *Social and Critical Practices in Art Education* (Stoke on Trent Trentham)

Gibb, Claire. (2012) Room 13: The Movement and International Network, *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 31(3), 237-244

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**St Bernadette's Primary School, Larbert: great teaching and great design**

The small town of Larbert in central Scotland is a perfect example, in miniature, of how much Scotland has changed over the past thirty years. Much of the physical legacy of our industrial past, which dominated large parts of west central Scotland until the late 20th century, has gone. Gone are the fiery foundries and sooty chimneys of Larbert's heavy industry and gone are their derelict empty skeletons, the collapsed roofs and rusting plant of the post-industrial townscape of the 1980s. Gone too are the hospital communities, built to a massive industrial scale in the high Victorian era to house the insane and those thought to be 'mentally sub-normal': 'the Scottish National Institution for the Education of Imbecile Children', later known as the Royal Scottish National Hospital (RSNH) and the Stirling District Lunatic Asylum, later known as Bellsdyke Hospital. For more than a century these residential hospital communities enclosed Larbert on the North and West. What a change there has been. Just up from Larbert cross lies the 860 bed Forth Valley Royal Hospital, one of Scotland's biggest ever NHS building projects, financed through public-private partnership, its bright colours and open aspect a contrast to the soot-blackened Victorian sandstone buildings of RSNH that previously occupied the site. It was the first time in a good while I had had occasion to drive that way and I was amazed at the transformation as I drove along the Bellsdyke Road. Where the old Bellsdyke Hospital used to be there are new houses and flats, light industry, supermarkets, trading estates. Adjacent to the M876 and M9, close to the Larbert railway station with its regular services to Edinburgh and Glasgow, this is prime commuter territory, reflected in Larbert's rising house prices and expanding school rolls.

I was in Larbert to visit St Bernadette's Primary School. As a secondary school headteacher, I had often felt envious of what I saw as the closer, more consensual

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atmosphere of the typical Scottish primary school, with its emphasis on including and valuing every child, its strong sense of community, its close links with parents and the local area - features which are often much harder to develop in the more fragmented and diverse community of the secondary school. When I was putting together my short list of 'case studies' for this book, I had personal experience of plenty of good examples of primary schools in the Edinburgh area, but I felt I was weak in my knowledge of other parts of Scotland. I asked Professor Christine Forde of Glasgow University to suggest a school where I could find all the good qualities of the Scottish primary school in practice. Christine has been involved with the Scottish Qualification for Headship from the very beginning, training and developing and working alongside many of those now in headteacher posts across west and central Scotland. She pointed me towards St Bernadette's.

Over the past generation, many parts of the old industrial Scotland have faced declining populations and Councils have been forced to make hard choices on school mergers and closures. A different problem was posed to Falkirk Council by the mushrooming commuter belt around Larbert - too many children for the existing overcrowded primary schools. The answer was two beautiful new schools - Kinnaird and St Bernadette's. Falkirk Council had developed considerable experience in the planning and delivery of new school buildings over the previous ten years. It was the first Council to take advantage of the funding made available through the Private Finance Initiative in the mid-1990s, building five new secondary schools. In the mid-2000s, the Council used Public Private Partnership funding to complete the rebuilding of all nine of its secondary schools. Substantial investment has also been made in the refurbishment and rebuilding of a substantial proportion of the primary and special school estate.

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The benefits of that experience are very evident in the new St Bernadette's building, and in the planning process that brought it about. You might imagine that building a new school would be a popular move, but not, initially at least, with some of the local residents. Falkirk Council had made the decision some years earlier that the budget would be found for new primary schools in Maddiston, North Larbert (Kinnaird Primary) and a denominational school also in North Larbert. Kinnaird opened in 2007, but finding an agreed site for the denominational (RC) school proved much more difficult. From the beginning, some local residents fought against the proposal to build the school on the most obvious site, a rectangular grassed area in the heart of Antonshill. In 2010, the Falkirk Herald reported that

*"Neighbours ... argue for a halt to plans for a primary school being built on their doorstep. Antonshill Residents Association wants open space in Edward Avenue kept for football and dog walking- but Falkirk Council's education department has it earmarked for a new denominational school and nursery for over 200 pupils."*

It took politicians more than six years to steer a course through budget planning, public meetings, draft proposals, site investigations, competing views - the daily bread and butter of local politics - to get to the point where the money was available and the site was, at last, agreed. The building that resulted was definitely worth the wait. Don't just take my word for it. The building was runner-up in the Stirling Society of Architects Awards 'best building of 2012' and 2013 Scottish finalist in the Civic Trust Awards, which aim to 'recognise excellence in the built environment'.

There is no Room 13 in St Bernadette's; my impression on my visit was that drama and music are stronger features in the children's experience than visual art. What is not in



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doubt is the quality of the facilities. The school opened in August 2012 and I visited as it neared the end of its first full year in early June 2013. The school sits in behind the main road, in Antonshill, a quiet residential area. First impressions are very positive - the grounds are spacious, with a well-tended grassed area, an all-weather playing surface, a wildlife area, a mini-orchard and a very distinctive building -parallel geometric shapes, glass and bright colour. I had arranged to meet Cathy Quinn, the headteacher of the school. Cathy had already made her mark in Falkirk as headteacher of the Sacred Heart Primary School in Grangemouth, where she told me she had been very happy. She had obviously done a good job there, as when Falkirk Council wanted applicants for every headteacher's dream job - to take over a new purpose-built school, with a chance to be involved in choosing the staff she wanted - she applied and got the job. Cathy has a relaxed, confident way with her, smiles a lot and obviously gets on well with the children, the staff and parents. She wears her professional knowledge lightly, but once she starts talking about the school, its community and her ambitions for her pupils, there's a lot of expertise underpinning her passion. I quickly understood why the Council had selected her to lead what is for them a flagship project.

Cathy took me on a tour of the building. The quality of the internal design matches the external appearance. The building is flooded with natural light - a high open space with lots of glass connects all the classroom areas and acts as a hub for the school - it's a hall, an atrium, a corridor and a teaching space all in one. The classrooms themselves are spacious and well ventilated, with excellent natural light and direct access to the 'outdoor' classroom of the school grounds - adventure trail, astro-turf sports area, wildlife garden, mini-orchard, sand pit, grassed play area. Its green credentials are strong - if it was a car, it would not be paying much road tax! Solar panels on the roof reduce the water heating bill, mechanical ventilation is reduced through passive design features, a grey water system using rainwater to

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flush the toilets reduces water charges, solar control glass reduces overheating.....

It is one of Falkirk Council's most energy efficient buildings.

Flexibility to allow varied use has been a key design principle. More classrooms can be added should the need arise. Existing classrooms can be used in different ways, as folding walls offer different possible configurations, while there are shared and 'quiet room' teaching areas and areas for independent work within the large and well- equipped library. Pupils can learn about issues such as sustainability, built-in flexibility and the use of passive energy-efficient technology and materials from the design of the building itself. They are certainly keen on sustainability - Mrs Cully and the all-age Eco group led the school community to the Green Flag award in its first year. In common with all new schools, disabled access, traffic management, lighting, security and high-level building standards ensure that the school environment is accessible and safe. Beyond these excellent core teaching facilities, the school has a sizeable sports hall, which when combined with the dining area (there is a moveable partition) can become a performance space, seating up to 400. Many of the facilities, including this space and the all-weather sports pitch, are available to the community, with a separate entry, sports changing facilities and a community meeting room.

Falkirk Council has certainly created a fine building, but it is the people in it who make it work as a school. Here too I was very impressed. The school's motto for its first year, developed in consultation with pupils and parents, set out the vision - open, positive, optimistic:

*This is our beginning. We will live. We will learn. We will grow.*

Cathy started work as headteacher well before the school opened. This was an important phase when she was able to engage with potential parents and the

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community, to calm concerns and to begin to build the relationships that would matter once the school was open. Interestingly, an online blog allowed anxieties to be shared and dialogue to begin - after the school opened, this continued to be a regular channel of communication. She told me that, right from the start, she had been involved in choosing her staff. As an experienced and successful headteacher already, she knew the kinds of skills and values that she wanted in her teaching staff - good teachers, yes, but good teachers with the right values and with something extra to offer - drama, sport, music and so on. She wanted a good mix of experience and youthful enthusiasm. Cathy was also involved in making decisions on equipment and layout in the new building, decisions that fitted with how she wanted to set the school up from the start. She had been seconded in 2009 from her previous post as headteacher in Grangemouth to lead the development of 'curriculum for excellence' across all Falkirk primary schools. Working across different schools, both primary and secondary, and working with the national development team, she had refined her ideas on children's learning. In particular, she wanted to take advantage of the principles of the new curriculum to create space for a more open creative learning experience, including every child and building their confidence. It is an approach she is taking forward with her staff.

The learning week is structured to create opportunities to learn in different ways. All children have time in drama, music, physical education, outdoor learning. Children learn in the age-limited class groups we would expect (age 5 in Primary 1 and so on), but also in multi-age groups (around 14 in each group) bringing all the ages from 5-11 together around the same learning theme or challenge. Formal learning schemes, such as Big Writing (a scheme to raise writing standards which is popular across Scottish primary schools) are used where appropriate, but Cathy is keen to ensure that the learning environment is not narrowed down into a set of

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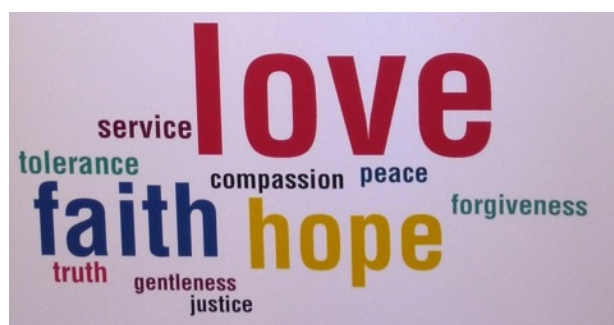
prescribed experiences. On the other hand, she is very clear about the standards she wants to see children attain in their learning skills. On recruitment, each new teacher was given responsibility for a particular curricular area, such as reading, in keeping with their skills and interests. They have researched and acquired up-to-date resources and bring the best of practice into staff discussions. She also includes interdisciplinary learning activities in the curriculum, where children combine skills of language, art, maths and technology. She believes that this kind of learning activity promotes skills of critical questioning, research, synthesis and analysis.

Cathy has begun to forge the kinds of partnerships which support wider opportunities outside the classroom. The 'grounds for learning' team have been involved in the Forest Friday experience for nursery children. Guest speakers from the local community come into assemblies. Events such as Remembrance Day, Children in Need or the School Fayre create opportunities for school and community to come together. Communication with neighbouring schools, Stenhousemuir and Kinnaird, is good. Curricular links are being developed with both St Mungo's and Larbert High Schools. Pupils also learn by taking responsibility. The multi-stage groups do this very well. On the day I visited, a number of pupils were developing a 3-year plan for improving the school grounds guided by the amiable Mr Cloherty. He has a real talent in Music and Drama - one of the reasons for the success of the first school show, *Annie*. Other groups were developing their 'citizenship' skills, while taking forward school aims in areas such as 'enterprise' (with a 'fair trade' bias) or health promotion, or in working towards the 'rights respecting school' or 'eco-school' awards. Weekly afternoon assemblies bring the whole school together, letting everyone know what is going on, celebrating successes, children and staff learning with and from each other. Learning is seen as something people do together, collaborative and co-operative, not something that individuals do in isolation or something that is transmitted from

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an always omniscient teacher to an always ignorant pupil. School learning assistants, parent volunteers, community guests, children, teachers - all can teach and all can learn. Such an approach cannot be captured in a set of policies or procedures, tightly managed inputs and outputs. It requires a shared culture based around good communication and shared values. The values aspect of denominational education is overt but the aim is not to teach these values as a rigid core, but that they should inform the life of the school, should be evident in the way that the school community works. The 'gospel' values of the local RC schools are clearly listed on a banner in the school entrance foyer.



St Bernadette's made fantastic progress in its first year. Placing requests have already swelled the school roll which is now almost full. The enthusiastic parents I met are very pleased with what they have seen and how they have been involved. The children I saw on my visit were happily engaged in their learning: polite, respectful, full of fun and energy and enthusiasm. St Bernadette's is, in truth, no different from many Scottish primary schools. Cathy Quinn is an exceptionally skilled headteacher, but one of many. It is no co-incidence that so many of the things I had observed at Prestonpans were also here in Larbert. This is how the many good Scottish primary schools of the 21st Century work - collaborative, caring, inclusive, community-oriented. I came out of the school into a burst of bright summer sunshine and thought back to those grim Victorian buildings of Larbert's past. It would have

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been hard to feel anything but optimistic about Scotland's future, standing in the sunshine beside that bright new building, with the happy sounds of the children of St Bernadette's ringing in my ears.

You can find out more about St Bernadette's at <http://stbernadettesprimary.primaryblogger.co.uk/>

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**Perth and Kinross - schools as community hubs:**

Perth and Kinross is another local council which has made some creative decisions about its school 'estate', developing schools fit for the 21st Century. I first visited one of the new school sites, North Inch Community Campus, in the Muirton area of Perth, in 2012. If Perth is the 'fair city', then Muirton has, at least in the past, been considered its 'least fair' suburb, with significant social and economic problems over the years. The Council has put considerable effort recently into regeneration of the housing in the area, in partnership with local housing associations, alongside its substantial new investment in local schools. I was there in 2012 to interview the 'campus leader', Audrey May, when gathering evidence for a report I was writing on a national educational leadership programme. I had arrived a little early and was greatly impressed as I sat in the foyer at 4pm, watching a steady stream of human traffic - mothers and toddlers, youth orchestra members, sports coaching staff and silver surfers arrive at reception, then head off to different parts of the campus. It made me think of the opening of the Strathearn campus in Crieff some three years earlier.

I had been invited back to Crieff for the official opening ceremony since I was a previous headteacher of Crieff High School and have always kept a sentimental interest in how the school is doing, though it's now almost 20 years since I left. When I took over there in the early 90s, the building, like many from the 60s, was already showing signs of wear and the five story tower block where the main classrooms were located always seemed out of place against the rolling hills of the Earn Valley. One of the projects we tried to progress during my time there involved upgrading the school library by joining school and town libraries together. On another front, before and during my time at the school, a well-

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organised and politically connected community group had been lobbying and fundraising, with an ambition to build a leisure centre, with Games Hall and swimming pool, for community use. At that time it was just too difficult to get all the parties working together on either of these projects. It takes hard work and good relationships to get people round the table, talking to each other, looking at budgets and options realistically, accepting the necessary compromises involved. Somewhere along the line, all the different interests and needs have to be balanced against each other if progress is to be made. An enabling local authority can often bring the parties together to get to the best decision. That is what Perth and Kinross Council has done. Eventually, a good while after I had left the school, the Strathearn Recreation Centre project was brought to fruition, on the school site. Later, at the opening of the brand new the Strathearn Community Campus, I was delighted to find a splendid community school hub, incorporating the Recreation Centre and a wonderful new library shared between school and community. These two, Strathearn and North Inch, are just two of Perth and Kinross Council's Community Campus projects, projects which have brought outstanding new facilities to several of the small towns in the area. I wanted to feature the community campus developments as one of my examples. I wanted to know how they had come about. Improvements like this only happen if there are people with vision and drive working behind the scenes to make them happen. I contacted Peter McAvoy, Head of Secondary Education Services at the Council, and he and Jackie Halawi, one of the Council's lead officers in Community Education, agreed to answer my questions.

Both Peter and Jackie had been heavily involved at various stages of the process. It's been a long haul. The original 'vision' for the community campus model came about when, as in many Scottish local authorities, local politicians and council officials were discussing how to take advantage of the money that the Scottish Executive was making available in the late 1990s through the PPP scheme to help Councils rebuild



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their schools. Peter remembers a minibus of councillors and leading officers touring Aberfeldy, Crieff, Pitlochry, Kinross and Blairgowrie to look at the buildings and talk to the headteachers. Officials such as Maria Walker, then Head of Cultural and Community Services for the Council and Councillors such as Margo Lennie, longstanding Convenor of the Education Committee of the Council, worked together with others through long phases of planning, consultation and negotiation. When Strathearn, opened in 2009, it was eleven years on from the first discussions, followed over the next three years by Loch Leven (Kinross), North Inch (Perth) and Breadalbane (Aberfeldy), with smaller community campus sites at Blairgowrie (the first to be opened) and Glenearn. Although the political hue of the Council changed, there was continuity in the vision that drove the development. The central idea was to integrate leisure and learning in first class new buildings with local site managers (campus leaders) who could work with the local community without referring everything back to head office in Perth. Peter felt that, by taking more time, the Council had got the development right. They had learned how to negotiate the best contract from earlier PPP projects in other parts of Scotland. They had made sure the community was involved. The gestation period also got the different professional groups - social workers, community education staff, school teachers, countryside rangers, leisure staff - talking to each other, preparing for joint working, understanding how the new set-up would be different from the old. There were lots of public meetings in the early stages, testing the concept and listening to local concerns. 'User groups' contributed to the design.

Security was an issue that featured strongly, but not always from the same angle: in one community there was anxiety that the wrong kind of people would be able to get into the schools; in another community people were concerned that there were too many security cameras! There was anxiety over the 'open plan' unisex design of the

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toilet areas, whose cubicle doors, boys to one side girls to the other, fronted on to wash basin areas which were open to the corridors. In the North Inch campus, an early concern of local residents had been that the community campus was centred on Perth's only RC Secondary school, St John's Academy. Some local residents, it was said, might not feel comfortable going into a Catholic school. Audrey May, the 'campus leader' at North Inch campus, made it part of her job to get out there into the community, make connections, to open up the campus and bring the community in. Yes it was a Catholic school, but the campus was a resource for all the community. I had been very impressed with Audrey's 'get up and go' when I had met her in 2012. I therefore revisited the North Inch as part of this investigation into the Perth and Kinross campus model.

Audrey was appointed to become 'campus leader' in late 2009 from her previous post as Headteacher of St Andrew's, Kirkcaldy. Her first job was to oversee the final stages of the building project and to move the two schools, St John's Secondary and Primary, onto the joint campus. In March 2010, the secondary school moved in and in November 2011, nursery and primary joined. Audrey loves the campus model: every age from 3-18 on one site; one all-through Parent Council; one integrated campus management team. There is always so much going on: library, adult literacy, leisure classes, support for those whose first language is not English, community arts, musical rehearsals, sports clubs, family support... It's a vibrant and exciting campus with outstanding facilities. As Audrey walked me round the building, my jaw sagged further and further towards the floor. These are among the best facilities I have seen for any school in Scotland - the classrooms and practical rooms of the standard secondary have break-out spaces for individual and group study, there is a public street and café, two games halls, outstanding outdoor sporting facilities, a dance studio, a theatre/assembly space, a drama teaching area with its own lighting rig,

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curtains, stage and bleacher seating, a hairdressing studio, a lifeskills room, lecture theatre, the library with facilities and resources for everything from Advanced Higher projects to pre-nursery play, from careers to silver surfing and, of course, networking and ICT everywhere. The confident, articulate students we spoke to, as we made our way through a busy lunchtime throng in the street area, were a credit to the school. James O'Donnell, one of the S6 leadership team, was really looking forward to next year. His year group had moved from the old building to the new. 'It's not just the building,' he told me, 'There's iso much more we can do now that we have the primary and secondary on the same site'. In the nursery/primary section of the campus, I was equally impressed with the facilities. Here were flexible classroom spaces, with intermediate 'break out' spaces beside, an open plan nursery with 'soft start' and shared play spaces, a nurture room, a family room, a quiet room, safe, lively and well supervised play spaces.

In planning the community campus initiative, the Council outlined 'benefits' which, in the jargon of the day have to be 'realised', the pay-off for their investment of time and money. A 'benefits realisation' report is prepared annually for the Council, ultimately addressing the question - 'has this investment been worth it?' Early signs, evidenced in increasing participation in activities, reduced vandalism and so on are encouraging. It is notoriously difficult to assess many of the intangible outcomes of education, but a lot of data is being gathered: annual surveys of school parents/pupils/staff, surveys of campus users, complaint and commendation records, footfall records, figures of school attendance, exam results and participation. The views of pupils in a recent survey speak volumes:

*No one is anonymous in this school.*

*I feel safe in this school.*

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*The school is friendly.*

*There's so much more to do here.*

Direct observation also has a role. On the ground in the North Inch campus, you can see the benefits of people who previously worked on separate sites, with a separate identity, coming together naturally, with a stronger sense of community, than before. You can see how putting sports and leisure staff in the same office as school staff naturally increases student participation in out-of-school activities. Countryside Rangers are in the campus working with Maths and Geography teachers. A member of the school team overhears one of the leisure team on the phone talking about forthcoming sports events and asks, 'can we get our pupils involved?' 'Of course,' and so a link is made, not specifically planned, but just the kind of thing that happens when you put people together in the same building. Support teachers in school and community support workers who know the same families from their different viewpoints, feel that they are part of each other's team, not a 'separate service'. Primary and secondary teachers and students are beginning to learn from each other. One recent assembly led by an S1 girl, sharing her experience as a 'young carer', was a powerful learning experience for everyone present. Will examination results improve? That is a harder question to answer. One thing is sure: the confident, articulate students of St John's campus, growing up in a rich, participative community environment, will be well placed to play their part as citizens of a future Scotland.

The job of campus leader is not an easy one. There are all the substantial technical challenges facing every other headteacher - timetable, staffing, curriculum, assessment, budget and so on - compounded in Audrey's case by the additional elements associated with nursery, primary and primary transition and with two

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interlocking 'communities' to serve - the immediate community of Muirton, the sprawling housing area in which the campus is nestled and the widespread 'catholic community' of Perth and Kinross, from which the school draws most of its pupils. She sees both these communities as equally important for the success of the campus and consequently the success of the students. There is a time-consuming public face to the job - the campus leader is also a key leader in the community and every community event is potentially a 'must attend'. Knowing people in the community and knowing about what happens *beyond* the campus - housing, health, drugs, employment - helps Audrey make better judgements about the activities *on* the campus.

All is not, and never will be, perfect in North Inch. There are the many bureaucratic frustrations of any big organisation. In establishing the campus model, the Council was aware that many local tensions might meet on the campus leader's desk, but was determined to empower the local community to resolve these locally. Each campus has thus evolved slightly differently, reflecting the local situation. Audrey is frustrated in the way that most ambitious people are frustrated - she sees the 20% she still wants to achieve and not the 80% that is already in place. Even though there is good joint-working between campus staff and local health services, she would have like more of the health service staff to be on site. Some of her staff, particularly in the secondary school, found the move to a more open, flexible way of working difficult, but even in the short time in the new campus, she sees that changing with Curriculum for Excellence. It has the potential to deliver a broader, more inclusive, more flexible education. Her optimism and 'can-do' approach are infectious. You can find evidence of it all through the campus. When I think of the Crieff High School of the early 1990s and compare it with the Community Campus, it makes me wish I was starting out on my career as a headteacher again. Perth and

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Kinross has given its campus leaders the human and physical resources to bring the school and community closer together, to maximise the facilities and the opportunities available to its young people. A lot of hard work has gone on behind the scenes but it has been worth it. It is a great model of 'investment in learning'.

You can find out more about the North Inch Community Campus at <http://www.pkc.gov.uk/northinch> and about the school at [www.st-johnsacademy.org.uk](http://www.st-johnsacademy.org.uk)

## Postcards from some of Scotland's inspiring schools

*This online resource complements the book by Daniel Murphy, 'Schooling Scotland: Education, equity and community', published in the Postcards from Scotland series by Argyll Press.*

### Auchenharvie Academy - a fine comprehensive school

Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston are often known collectively as the 'three towns'. Once separate, they expanded and ran one into the other as coal, iron and then munitions brought industrial prosperity and employment to the Ayrshire coast in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. At one time, the munitions and chemical complex at Ardeer employed over 10,000 people. With a combined population of over 30,000, the three towns conurbation is on a par with towns such as Dumfries or Motherwell. As with many parts of central Scotland, the three towns have suffered over the past generation from the virtual disappearance of the industrial base on which their growth and prosperity was based. The social and economic indicators of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, such as health, employment, housing and poverty, place substantial parts of the three towns among the most deprived 15% in Scotland. However, just as Alf and Ewan Young found in the communities they visited for their 'Postcard from Scotland', [The New Road](#), there is a positive tone in the three towns. People are getting together to build a better future. The Irvine Bay Regeneration Company, brings together North Ayrshire Council, Scottish Enterprise and local businesses and has been behind several positive recent business start-ups and environmental improvements, within a wider vision for how the area can grow and prosper. The three towns website (<http://www.the3towns.com/>) bears witness to a strong sense of civic pride and community. In Auchenharvie Academy, and other neighbouring schools, a reservoir of optimism is building which will feed a powerful stream of hope and aspiration into the community in the years ahead.

Auchenharvie Academy, an imposing 1971 building, which has stood the test of time rather better than some other schools of that era, stands near Stevenston beach and some fine leisure facilities. It shares responsibility for the children of the three towns with

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Ardrossan Academy and St Matthew's RC Academy and draws its pupils from Stevenston and half of Saltcoats. My visit there was an inspiring and humbling experience. I found a group of staff and pupils with a positive can-do attitude who were proud of their school, proud of their community and proud of what they were achieving together. My introduction to the school was through Steven Quinn, a strong-minded and charismatic figure, who as recent headteacher of the school, had played a major role in creating a strong positive school ethos by liberating the positive energies of the staff and pupils.

I made contact with Steven on the recommendation of Bob Cook, former Director of Education in East Dunbartonsire and a man with an encyclopaedic knowledge of people and schools across Scotland. I had been looking for a West of Scotland school that was able to accommodate my visit and that would fit the profile. I was looking for a school that was not in a 'leafy suburb' but in an area with more than its fair share of Scotland's social problems. Bob is now, like me, working part-time in Moray House School of Education and had been very impressed by Steven when he invited him to speak about his work at Auchendarvie at a course he was running. I have a great affection for North Ayrshire. My wife Joan grew up there and when our family were young, we had many happy summer days visiting her parents, digging sandcastles on the beach at Seamill, exploring Irvine Beach Park, eating egg rolls at the Melbourne Cafe. I got to know the shore and the streets of the three towns very well in the 1980s as I ran (rather slowly!) in the Cunninghame Canter half marathon. When I heard what Bob had to say about Steven and Auchendarvie, I immediately contacted Carol Kirk, then Corporate Director of Education and Skills at North Ayrshire Council and was delighted to be given permission for the visit.

Steven had recently been taken in to 'head office' in North Ayrshire Council, to spread a bit of his magic across all the schools in the authority as Head of Service for schools. It was



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clear in my visit that the quality of what happens in Auchendarvie was not just down to one person, but Steven's vision for the school had chimed with both staff and pupils. He's a forceful and confident person, willing to take risks to make things happen. In his previous school, Cumnock Academy, Steven was Depute to another inspiring headteacher, Gordon Bell, whose support had been invaluable in his first year as headteacher. He told me that when he first arrived at Auchendarvie, he found a school with great potential. He wanted to change that. He wanted to realise that potential and to remove some of the roadblocks he saw in the way. Martin Wilson, Auchendarvie's new headteacher, shares that vision.

Some of the roadblocks, as Steven saw it, were to do with school systems. All schools in Scotland, as part of the national agreement on teachers' conditions of service, negotiate an annual agreement about how teachers spend the hours of their 35 hours per week contract which are worked out with the school day. Typically the school agreement will include, for example, preparation for and attendance at parent evenings, staff meetings and time for staff to pursue their own priorities including extra-curricular activities. He agreed with staff and unions that there would be no emphasis on counting hours or a three line whip on a certain amount of meetings. He allowed his staff to decide if it was important to turn up to meetings with the broad context of the national agreement. 'It's about trust,' he told me. Many Scottish schools, following Inspectorate guidance, have introduced management visits to classrooms, where teaching quality is reviewed. Steven abandoned these too. 'There are 21000 classroom visits a week by the pupils,' he told me, 'If you ask them they'll soon tell you if there is a problem.' Teachers visit each other's classrooms, abandoning what was seen as a top-down approach. This is learning by doing, rather than by having things done to you. But this is not an easy passage. Steven's approach is one of 'tough love'. The school is a place to care, yes; a place where you need to cultivate relationships of trust, yes; but above all it is a place to work and grow

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together. There are figures to show the impact of the changes: improvements in attendance and in examination performance, reductions in exclusions and problem behaviour. But it's the tangible positive ethos of the people, young and old, which is the biggest testament to the quality of education in Auchenharvie.

'Active learning', learning by taking responsibility, is a strong theme in how the school works with its pupils. They are asked to take on tasks in the school community, listened to when they have something to say. An important catalyst for this has been the school's annual participation in the 'leadership academies' run by Columba 1400, a Scottish charity which aims, in the words of its website, 'to help young people realise that they already have the inner greatness and confidence to transform their own lives and those around them'. The Columba 1400 residential experience, based in its centres in Skye and by Loch Lomond, cuts people off from their normal weekly routines, challenges them with outdoor activities and challenges them to reflect on who they are and what they want to achieve in their lives. It has worked for many young people since it was first established in 2000. Steven and his teachers wanted the personal inspiration generated by the experience to feed back into the school, to make a difference not just to those who went to Skye or Ardoch but to the whole school community.

A key turning point was when pupils took a red pen to the school's Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme - it wasn't working for them. Together, staff and pupils rewrote the curriculum to be more relevant, to recreate some of the transformative challenges of the residential programme - but in the school, for everyone. The new Skills Development programme, known simply as 'Skills', is at the core of the Auchenharvie curriculum from S1 right up the school. The school also runs its own 'aspirations weekend' for S5 and 'leadership academy' for S3, based in the Arran Outdoor Education Centre. One of the pupils I met told me how important that experience had been for her. On the first

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day, participants write, on a large block of wood, the burdens they are carrying with them in their life. It could be to do with issues in the family, problems in the community or in their own head. The physical burden of the block of wood is carried round the neck throughout the weekend as they face up to the various challenges that are set. On the final day, the burdens are burned - a symbol of the end of any other burdens that are holding them back. I can hear a cynical voice saying, "that's an old gimmick... but wait till you get back to the 'real world'." That cynic should have heard this girl talking about the effect of the experience in her life. No cynic could retain such a world-weary attitude when faced with a real young person - her enthusiasm, her optimism, her hopes and dreams. The young people whom I met who had been fortunate enough to be selected for the residential programmes were determined to bring what they had learned into the school, to play their part in helping to make the school into a positive community. There were many examples - helping organise a sports event for pupils in local primary schools, bringing back first prize from a national competition on the use of social media in advertising, leading conversations about the values of the school, presenting information at a parents' night, running a session for school staff on leadership skills as well as working with the senior leadership team in the school.

Teaching staff have also been involved in the residential academies, with one well-attended weekend academy for staff. For some, this was every bit as powerful as it had been for the pupils. They were pushed into reflecting on their teaching, their values. They saw the pupils, and the pupils saw them, in a different light, as whole people, not just 'functions'. I really took to Maureen, who has been teaching Home Economics in the school through three decades. She was fantastically enthusiastic about the Skills programme and the different types of classroom relationship that it developed. Linda, one of the Depute Heads who has been in the school since 1992, told how she had learned about herself and learned from the pupils. Stephen, who has oversight of the Skills

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programme, was passionate about the 'different kind of space in the week' which the programme created, where teacher and pupils could step off the exam oriented curriculum and pick up on current issues in their lives, in the community or internationally, exploring and enquiring together, learning with and from each other. During the Skills time, the core values of the school - respect, determination, belief, trust, honesty and responsibility- come to the fore.

One such issue, which came up in my conversations with people in the school, was the proposed merger of Auchendarvie and Ardrossan Academies. Only a couple of weeks before my visit, the council had decided not to go ahead with this merger which had been put forward as a possible solution to the problems with the building in Ardrossan, which badly needed replaced or substantially refurbished. The merger would have created one very large non-denominational school for the three towns area. I was very impressed by the thoughtful opinions of the students. Their reaction was not based on what was in it, or not, for them individually. They could see the sense of it in budget terms, but were also aware of the risks, of losing something valuable in the powerful sense of community that was developing within their own school. They were also aware of the impact on Stevenston if Auchendarvie was no longer there. Ocean-Leigh, one of the girls I spoke to, caught the mood very well. 'Auchendarvie is the hub of this community,' she said, 'If they took it away the town would just die.'

Working in Auchendarvie is no easy shift. Like many schools in similar areas of the country, they have more than their fair share of social problems, and the pressures that result in the lives of the teenagers they are working with. These issues, and the conflicts they sometimes give rise to, can explode unpredictably into the school day. I know from personal experience in many different schools in Central Scotland how the pressures created in families, by poverty or by the misuse of drugs or alcohol, can affect young

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people and the additional pressures this can place on their teachers. Plans for the day can go out of the window and at the end of a long day, all the paperwork gets thrown into a bag and taken home for another evening shift. At the end of my visit, I chatted for a while with Martin Wilson. Martin had fallen in love with Auchenharvie and its community. For all the ups and downs of school life, there is a very special kind of satisfaction in seeing youngsters spread their wings and take flight, in working in a school where young people with their teachers are building their community anew. I drove back up the road mightily impressed with what I had seen and heard.

You can find out more about Auchenharvie Academy at <http://www.auchenharvieacademy.com/> .

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**Scottish Borders - the teaching profession of the 21st Century**

The rolling hills and river valleys of the Scottish Borders create a very pleasing environment, now visited by tourists but in former times the site of constant feuding, a marshal tradition revisited in the annual 'Common Ridings' festivals. The many woollen mills, most now used for other purposes, remind visitors of a more recent industrial heritage and late Victorian prosperity, built around the fast-flowing water, Cheviot sheep and the new railway, running through from Edinburgh to Carlisle which opened up the fast developing markets of the UK and beyond to the businesses of the Borders. When British Rail ran the last train on the route in 1969, the fastest journey time by public transport from Hawick or Galashiels to Edinburgh virtually doubled overnight. Almost 50 years later, the line is due to reopen, at least as far as Tweedbank, following a major engineering project employing 1000 workers at its peak. While the massive woollen manufacturing of the past has long since disappeared, niche products and fashion design have retained textile expertise in the area. Broadband connectivity is improving, though still generally below UK averages. Throughout the economic challenges of recent years, the communities in the Borders have adapted, while retaining their own distinct identity: farming and forestry, textiles and tourism. The area has also found its own distinctive ways of responding to the educational challenges of remoteness highlighted in the report of the Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education (in 2013). One of the main challenges identified in that report is the need to recruit and retain high quality staff. Another is to ensure that they receive the support they need to keep up-to-date with the very significant changes taking place in school education.

Teachers registered to teach in Scotland have, since 2001, been required to record 35 hours of professional development activities each year. Under new regulations being

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brought in by the General Teaching Council of Scotland, this will feed into the new five yearly 'professional update' process (dubbed the "teachers' MOT") introduced in 2014. The benchmarks for this 'MOT' are the redesigned 'Standards' for the Scottish teaching profession issued in 2013. These make clear that all teachers must engage in 'continuous professional learning', but it's more than a 'tick box' exercise, a 'lowest common denominator'. Behind the standards lies an aspiration to develop and improve the skills and knowledge of Scottish teachers, for them to keep on learning throughout their careers and I've seen that hunger to continue learning in teachers in every part of Scotland. I have worked with, and was often impressed by, Scottish Borders teachers in my two stints teaching on the Scottish Qualification for Headship at the University of Edinburgh. I was also impressed by the quality of those who supported those teachers. Recently I had worked with Jacqueline Morley, a workforce and planning officer with Scottish Borders Council, who had responsibility for developing and supporting teacher's professional development and I wanted to visit Jacqueline and to catch a glimpse at first hand of how she was supporting teachers' development.

Jacqueline works across the 'Education and Lifelong Learning' team in Borders, which includes schools, libraries, museums and community learning. Her early career was in media and teaching English as a foreign language. I had spoken to Jacqueline about the challenges of her work, given the geographical isolation of many Borders schools. The twisty roads can turn the 80 miles from Cockburnspath to Newcastleton or from Eyemouth to Broughton into a journey nearer to three hours than two. She had a varied career in different educational fields before realising that adult learning was her real passion: helping people to learn about their work, about themselves and about how self and work can come together better. In Scottish Borders, she developed partnerships with the local NHS, sharing facilities and programmes, with other local authorities and brought in expertise from further afield where required. Jacqueline has seen the benefits of mixing

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police and NHS staff with social work and school staff. They are often working with the same families, but also often isolated in their own work environments. In small towns like those in the Borders, the informal relationships that are developed through these kinds of programmes, helping the staff of different public services to get to know each other better, can make a massive difference. There is a wide variety of courses on offer to Borders teachers: coaching courses, courses for teachers to practise and develop their skills, courses for those who want to lead and manage. The courses fit together into pathways for career development and link in with local and national priorities for improvement.

I popped down to visit one of the after-school sessions, on a wet and windy autumn Friday, at the Langlee Centre in Galashiels. The course I visited was the first of a series of six for Principal Teachers, jointly run by Borders and Midlothian, aimed at supporting teachers with middle level responsibilities in schools. More than twenty Principal Teachers had driven in - some of the Midlothian teachers had a shorter journey to Galashiels than those coming from further parts of the Borders. I chatted to a few of them as we spooned coffee and poured water from the urn into our plastic cups: Fraser, who had played semi-professional football in the Scottish first division and now had responsibility for Health and Wellbeing in a large Borders secondary school; Scott, who had just become a Dad and was responsible for pastoral care in another secondary; Lori, Lynn, Kim and Pauline who had travelled down from Saltergate, Midlothian's school for children with Additional Support Needs; Becca from a small rural primary school. The opening session mixed them up, got them comfortable with each other and introduced some key ideas, setting them up for the remainder of the programme. They were definitely up for it - enthusiastic about learning how to do their job better so that they could do a better job for the children they worked with. Why else would they be here, late on a dark Friday afternoon, long after school had finished?



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I was particularly interested in this group as I can remember my own first days as a Principal Teacher in 1983. Back in those days (seems like a lifetime ago!) few Scottish local authorities provided training and support for jobs 'beyond the classroom'. You were appointed to a post with a job description and it was your job to get on with it. If, like me, you found yourself in a well run school with able colleagues, you could learn a great deal on the job. It was the same with appointments to headteacher, a very different job to that of teacher. There were many hardworking and gifted headteachers, but the increasing expectations of the job demanded more than the 'gifted amateur'. The Standard for Headship in Scotland (first published in the late 1990s) and the Scottish Qualification for Headship (a course designed to ensure that candidates reached the Standard) introduced a higher level of professional practice into Scotland, building on international research about school leadership. Many authorities in Scotland now fund leadership development programmes build around that model. In Scottish Borders, the Principal Teachers' group which I joined for the evening were using the new 'Standard for Middle Leadership' to help them develop the skills and insights they need for their challenging jobs. There have always been inspirational teachers in schools. There have always been inspirational headteachers and subject leaders in schools. But what we want now is an inspirational headteacher in *every* school. We want *every* teacher to be an inspirational teacher. The renewed professionalism of the Scottish teaching profession of the last fifteen years has brought us closer to that goal.

Some of the Professional Development for staff at Scottish Borders Council can be found at <https://asp.soprahosting.co.uk/cpd/scotborders/courseList.cgi> .

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### Conclusion

Thanks for joining me on the journey. The places I visited all had their unique forms of excellence, shaped by the broader cultural features of Scotland and its schooling system, but also particular to the people, the place, the concerns of their own school community. It was a real privilege to see that at work in these diverse settings. Many other schools in Scotland display similar unique qualities, special to those people and their enthusiasms; many teachers in other schools care every bit as much, work every bit as hard, as those I met on my tour. Scotland is not unique in this. Anyone who watched the TV series [Educating Yorkshire](#) was brought into the world of an English secondary school facing challenges similar to many of those in Scotland. However the Scottish system does have its own unique issues. If we want every school to be as good as the best, we need to continue to develop our national system, but we also need to support and nurture that unique enthusiasm that comes from within a school community. That means recognising that while national and local government can provide a strong framework and useful systems, too much top-down management can introduce rigidity and stifle creativity. There is energy, creativity and enthusiasm within every school community, every teacher, every pupil and parent. My journal gives a little bit of insight into the 'micro' level of Scottish schooling. In the accompanying book, [Schooling Scotland: Education, equity and community](#), I take these arguments further, arguing that if Scottish schooling is to deliver on its ambitions to get the best for and from every child, we need to rethink and rebalance the relationship of school and community. I encourage you to read it.