



Summary

A reflection on the challenges faced when moving to a new purpose-built school

Lhanbryde Primary School is situated in the village of Lhanbryde, near Elgin in Moray, between the cities of Inverness and Aberdeen. The school was built in the sixties to house primary children, but more recent additions had included a nursery and support base for children with special educational needs.

A new open-plan school

Major structural problems coupled with the general bad condition of the building resulted in the announcement that a new building would replace the existing school. This news met with a mixed reaction of course the building needed to be replaced, but the news that the design was to be open plan caused initial concern to some parents, some staff and some pupils.

This is how we faced the challenges involved in the preparation for the relocation of our school community to our new purpose built school.

Team preparations

In previous sessions, staff, pupils and parents had worked together on various activities designed to create a team approach to school ethos. A major review of our school aims was a direct result of this and obviously the possibility of a new school was always part of our thinking. It was a simple step therefore to

continue with the partnerships created in the previous sessions, to include all staff, parents and pupils in the preparation for the new school itself.

It would be fair to say that the initial reaction to the open plan design of our new school caused major concern in the community. The concept of an "open school" was understood by all; we had been practising this for some time, but the lack of walls was threatening to staff and pupils and at one time front page news in the local paper. It was clear that there were major tasks to be tackled with all our interested parties and these did feel at one point somewhat overwhelming.

Background work

Initially the major task became supporting our community towards understanding why our new building was to be of open plan design. For those with experience of such a building, the advantages such as flexibility, space, shared opportunities were obvious, but the decision to identify the main fears relating to the design was a positive decision. Teaching and non teaching staff were encouraged to take part in a series of structured visits to other schools of similar design, to be job matched with someone doing a similar job. The focus of these visits varied depending on the stage of development reached, but began with simple 'idea

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collecting' (furniture, resources, space) and progressed to elements of learning and teaching such as shared planning, co-operative teaching, team teaching and day planning.

Parental involvement

Having begun a series of supportive activities for staff, it became clear that our parents also required to be provided with opportunities to see successful schools at work and so a series of visits was organised for them. Our staff accompanied them where possible. This experience was invaluable for our school, as fears relating to the open plan design were able to be openly expressed prior to and during these structured visits. We appreciated very much the Head Teachers, promoted staff, teaching and non teaching staff who were so patient in helping us see successful situations within their schools.

We also were most grateful for the help of a School Board from an open plan school who came to a Parents' Evening at our school to answer specific questions about being parents of children attending an open plan school.

Excitement, support and challenge

Thus the full weight of all our resources for staff development (time, money, supply cover) was directed towards promoting an ethos of excitement, support and challenge for our staff, pupils and parents, as we prepared everyone for the move.

Increasing the focus

In the year immediately prior to the move and whilst the new building was being erected alongside, the emphasis on our staff development became more focused on specific issues. As a school, our school planning for this school session had as our major priority the move to our new school. Once again, all our development time was given to this, but we were now being faced with major decisions about furniture and equipment on a scale we had never experienced before.

Community participation

It was obvious to the promoted staff team that we needed to find ways of encouraging the involvement of everyone in the selection of furniture and the spending of this allocation of money. Our community needed to feel ownership of

the new project. Thus the Thursday half hour was established, and for the price of some home bakes, all members of teaching and non-teaching staff were encouraged to give up 30 minutes of their own time at the end of the school day on a weekly basis. This meant several part-time members returned to school having finished work at lunch time. This type of commitment was very much appreciated. This meeting was followed with an assembly, usually the following day, so that the children were also involved.

The result, every colour, every piece of furniture and every resource was chosen by a team of people. Now that we have

longer needed, didn't know if they needed now or didn't know if they had ever needed. This task began six months prior to the move and ensured that the final few days were not a hectic panic. Our weekly promoted staff meetings took on a very practical nature, actually being held in this 'sorting room' and beginning always with a big sort-out.

Meanwhile all kinds of auditing procedures were being undertaken by senior teachers – text books, library books, small equipment – we had decided on a 'best value' spend of our furniture and equipment budget, so auditing of state of repair and numbers of items was crucial.

Delegating tasks

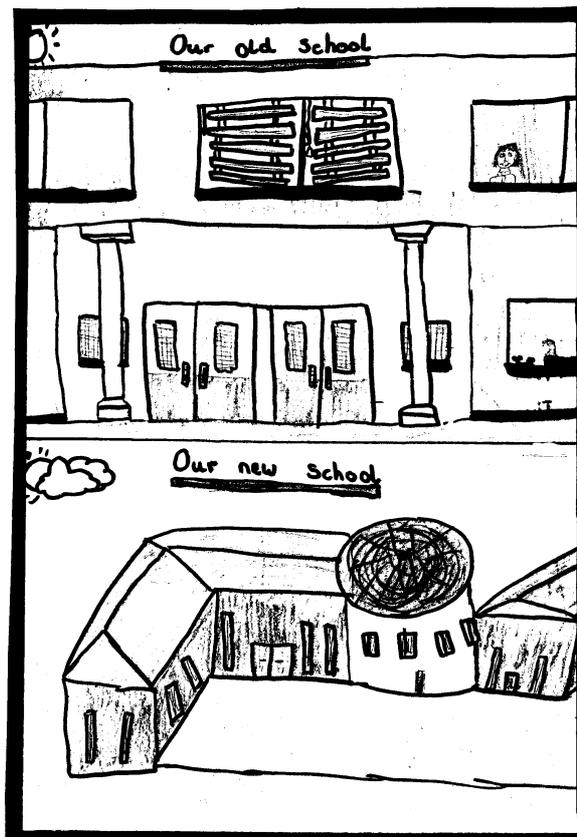
By encouraging our Senior Teachers to take on responsibility for fairly major tasks, we were able to share out across a wider promoted staff team the mammoth task. Our Senior Teachers have to this day opted to remain part of our Promoted Staff Team and this has positively enhanced everything we do.

Budgeting

What was problematic for us, we found, was the care we had always taken to make best value judgements when spending school budgets. The feeling of 'extravagance' when spending huge sums of money was difficult to shake off and it took ages to spend the first £50,000. Needless to say, the next sum became easier and by the end of the budget... We did take great care to relate all spending to our development plan, to our various audits and to all advice and experience gained throughout the preparation for the move. We did hope to make the move with a small sum left to meet the wish – list that we'd put together and that is the stage we have now reached, a small sum to spend on items which to us are pure luxury!

What did help us was the number of examples of good practice which we already had in place in relation to budgetary decision making and recording of these. As we had good experience of setting/allocating monies to maintenance/development/contingency headed budgets, we simply transferred this practice to the much larger sum allocated to furniture and equipment.

The fact that we had already begun the process of centralising our resources and ordering from a central store meant that the pain barrier often associated with this



moved into the new building, this is something which gives us particular pleasure. On receiving a compliment about how well something matches, we are all able to respond that we chose everything and matched everything up. (Finding red filing cabinets did pose a major problem, but find them we did!).

Tackling practicalities

In the term immediately prior to the move we did accept and agree with each other that teachers on the whole, did tend to collect items over the years that perhaps had outlived their usefulness! This was handled as a kind of amnesty and a room was set aside as a 'sorting out' room. Everyone was encouraged to deliver to this venue anything that they no

had well and truly been passed previously.

Value for money

The contacts made with companies were interesting, and we were fully a month into the project when we asked for a discount. There was no holding us back thereafter and we ensured tremendous value for money across all our spending, with one of our promoted staff being offered a job by a well known supplier!

Good support

By far the most valuable contact we made throughout the project was our new Director of Education. Mr Gavin arrived in Moray in July 1995 and became straight away involved in supporting our school community in the move to our new school. Mr. Gavin in turn introduced us to a staff development pack written by his previous authority and to other members of the writing team. In particular, Mrs McColl, Head Teacher of Garowhill Primary, Paisley was a tremendous source of advice and help, both to me and to our staff, pupils and parents. Her practical approach and her understanding of the challenges we faced, based on her vast and varied experience helped us to plan ahead in a way which might never have occurred to us.

Our architect, our property inspectors, our site manager all wished to involve us in decisions, we are grateful to them all for understanding the importance of ownership. Our facilities officer, in his weekly workshops, advised, listened and helped us to control the ever increasing decisions to be taken. His support was invaluable.

We do have now, of course, a full strategy in place for preparing to move to a new school, and should any other school across Scotland find itself in this position we should be absolutely delighted to help. We'll hopefully not need it again!

Growing together

But apart from the huge number of practical arrangements we had to plan, implement and review, there was alongside this a growing sense of togetherness and of ownership of the complete project – truly a positive ethos.

Throughout our staff development activities, individual members of staff were encouraged and supported to articulate exactly how they felt their job would change so that we could address, and work towards overcoming any difficulties. These ranged from the fear of noise and

disturbance to others (both from their own teaching and from those classes around them) to more complex planning issues to make best use of shared noisy and quiet space. This was a tremendously 'open' time handled as sensitively as we could, but still managing to build upon the strengths and difficulties that individuals perceived themselves to have, and that we, the promoted staff team felt that our school team possessed. It has to be said that our school staff have shown themselves to have infinitely more strengths than difficulties. Any difficulties we have faced have been patiently and honestly faced in a way which demonstrates their commitment to all we do.

Film stars

Our children, throughout their involvement, were the stars of a professionally made video film, financed by our P.T.A.. This video captures the sense of anticipation, involvement, pride and achievement which our children have helped us attain.

Sustaining the action

Now we are almost at the end of the first school year in our new building. We are still reviewing our new school, our space,

our new opportunities, our storage, our hopes for the future. It would have been so easy to sit back and enjoy the compliments of the hundreds of visitors who have called. We had open house for our parents after school for the first month, and we have continued this through an open evening weekly. However, we could not simply assume that due to a beautiful modern building we would necessarily provide the very best opportunities for our children, parents and staff. We have continued to evaluate and build upon good practice so that our new exciting environment enhances everything we do and promotes the highest possible achievement for us all.

Our community share our pride, our parents offered their practical help with the move, our children took a full part in the decision making process and our staff were willing to work long beyond their 'paid' hours. We have come through difficult times, tinged with exhaustion. We have come through exciting times tinged with sadness. We have come through decisive times tinged with fear of changing expectations...

But in working together, our community has ensured that education in our corner

The Arrival

One day in June

I knew something was wrong

Diggers and bulldozers

Rolling along

The diggers were whirring

The bulldozers were stirring

The noise was tremendous

The noise was horrendous.

There was much movement

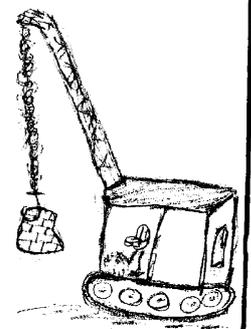
Behind the fencing

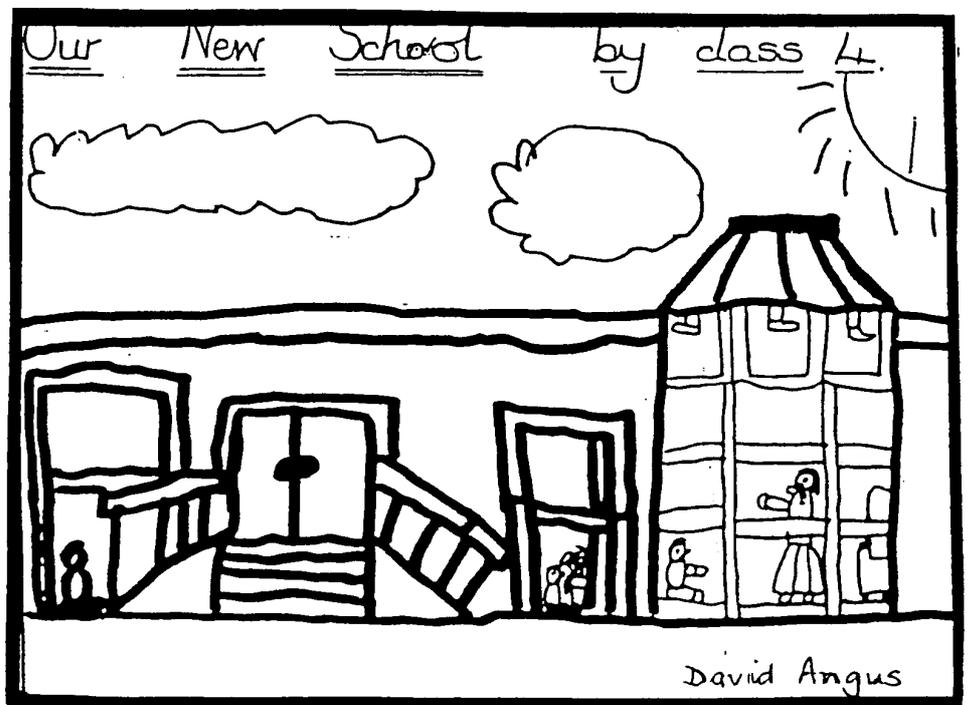
Just as if, a dragon resting

At the end of the day

Silence.

Rebecca





of Moray has been provided with an opportunity rarely available to schools. We hope that in Lhanbryde, we have grasped the huge potential of this once in a life time chance. After all, the building and the furniture cannot make a good school. The most valuable asset in our new school, came directly from our old school, – the people involved. We believed this at the beginning of the project and we have had this belief reinforced in so many ways.

Our parents, our children and our staff together have promoted an ethos of achievement. Our lovely new school is the icing on our cake.

Special thanks to the following who supported and helped:-

Boys and Girls of Lhanbryde Primary School
 Mums, Dads, Grannies, grandads and friends
 Staff, teaching and non-teaching, permanent and temporary
 The promoted staff team
 Mr Gavin – Director of Education – The Moray Council
 Mr I Jamieson – Facilities Officer – The Moray Council
 Mr Bingham – Property Inspector – The Moray Council
 Mr Gordon – Property Inspector – The Moray Council
 Mr Skene – Site Manager – Robertson's Elgin
 Parent Teacher Committee
 Mrs Elma McColl – Head Teacher, Garrowhill Primary, Paisley
 School Board Members – Greenwards Primary, Elgin
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