



ECARDA

Determining the Future

A primary school's vision

Working with Ecarda, this paper was put together, with the guidance of the Headteacher, by different members of a school community in 2005 who wished to articulate what their school would look like in 5 years time. They did this so that their annual plan could reflect steps on the journey to realizing that vision. It is written in the style of an account of events in the school on one day five years hence. It had a transformational effect on the consequent direction of the school. Names have been altered in this published version.

Peter Lacey
June 2005



You can plan your journey only when you have a pretty good idea of your destination.

When a leader makes a decision it moves the organisation from one point to another. The question is whether or not that changed position is moving the organisation in the desired direction.

A good leader has a clear sense of destination (often called a vision) and will make today's decisions based on the extent to which they move the organisation towards that destination. These are the steps on the pathway.

A weak leader will look to the past and make today's decisions based on the extent to which they keep as close to that known past as possible.

All the writing that follows took place in June 2005. It projects into the future and is written as an account of events at the school on one day in June 2010

Life in the Day of a primary school family

March 2010

THE VISION

The Cast

Sophie	Year 3 pupil who recently joined the school
Barry	Year 6 pupil
Dr Moony	Headteacher
Mrs Devlin	Deputy Headteacher and Staff Learning Co-ordinator (SLC)
Mrs Charles	Family Learning Co-ordinator (FLC)
Miss Abbott	Children's Learning (CLC)
Mrs Barber	Additional Needs Co-ordinator (ANC)
Mrs King	Supervisor
Mrs Langley	HLTA
Mrs Jones	Cook
Mrs Smith	Sophie's foster mother

Introduction

Barnett Junior School is now part of the Clearwold Federation of Primary Schools (CFPS).

Since 1996 primary school headteachers across Clearwold had met regularly to respond to local and national initiatives, to plan, to share ideas and to support each other. Until 2005 relationships across the schools were cordial but not deep. For example, there was no cluster development plan, no sharing of staff and little sharing of other resources. Each school procured its own goods and services. Competition around issues of admissions and attainment meant that some pupils with needs and problems were moved between schools. There was an unspoken culture of shifting rather than solving problems.

2005 was a significant year. The LEA published its plan to remove surplus places in the primary sector. Initially the plans included closures, junior-infant mergers, and some amalgamations of schools. At a stroke, the cordiality of inter-school relationships was suspended, replaced by the drive to ensure individual institutional survival. The LEA modified its plans but what had been said in those desperate times had been said.

With the threat of school closures removed and mergers still for consideration, headteachers reflected on the position over the summer break. Individually they came to the same conclusion. What was really important was to build the best possible provision ACROSS THE CLUSTER.

The workforce remodelling agenda along with the extended schools agenda were seen as powerful tools to build a cluster-wide collaborative. The cluster heads agreed to an initial two-day workshop to engage in “futures thinking” and to recapture control over planning their own destiny.

Even now, in 2010, headteachers will tell you this was one of the most significant events in their career. It set the scene for one of the most radical transformations of primary school provision in the Country, and was subsequently reported in a number of educational journals. During 2007 it was the subject of one regional, two national and one international conferences.

You will have read the detail - countless times! But here are the key outcomes of that initial two-day event

1. They agreed to collaborate and co-operate.
2. They agreed a broad vision (the plot) of how schools might work in 2010 but left individual schools to write the detail (the script).
3. They agreed to operate as a Federation that would:
 - a) retain headteachers in each school but form a single executive board headed by a chief executive
 - b) pool a proportion of budgets for the purpose of procuring goods and services
 - c) share staff with particular expertise
 - d) co-ordinate the admission of 'hard to place pupils' including those excluded from schools within the cluster
 - e) co-ordinate efforts on three major fronts of progress, namely
 - (i) children learning
 - (ii) staff learning
 - (iii) family learning

The two-day workshop of headteachers was quickly followed by a full day conference with all governing bodies. Here the constitution of the Clearwold Federation was drafted and all governing bodies signed up to the Federation.

The Federation Board, with its Chief executive included the headteacher and chair of governors from each constituent school.

As a Federation the CFPS set its five-year strategy with the Children Act at its heart. Targets in each of the five outcome areas were set by the Federation with individual schools defining their own areas of distinctiveness.

What follows is a description of life in one of those schools in March 2010.

Barry

Barry arrived at school just before 8am and went straight to the dining room for his breakfast of fruit juice, cereal and toast. He sat with some of his classmates and invited Sophie, who was new to the school, to join them. Sophie lived close to Barry and his dad had asked Barry to help her settle into the school.

They talked about the day ahead. Sophie was worried that she might not have completed her homework. Barry suggested she went over to Mrs Charles who was having breakfast at another table and have a chat about it.

As a Year 6 pupil, Barry's day looked quite different to a year 6 pupil five years ago. All Barry's work was now on his personal files that were stored on the school's database. His wireless hand-held IT device allowed him to write onto his files and share text, pictures and video-clips. These were accessible not only by Barry but also by staff across the Federation and by Barry's parents. Attached to each item in each file were comments by staff, mentors and coaches that identified next steps for progress.

Barry switched on his hand-held IT device (HID) to look at his day ahead. The database logged Barry's presence at school. 08:50 to 9:30 was the same as ever – a tutor period with the form teacher, Mrs Abbott, along with the teaching assistants who were now trained as mentors. Because it was Wednesday, Barry knew that the educational psychologist would be present and available. Tutor groups were made up of Year 3 to Year 6 pupils and were an opportunity to talk about progress and resolve any problems or difficulties. It was common practice for parents to join these groups.

Sophie was in Barry's tutor group and he made a note to check she was OK. Barry had found that discussions with other members of his tutor group were just as useful as those with the 'adult professionals.'

Barry checked through his schedule for the day. The morning was still focused on the key skills – Literacy, numeracy and IT, but now other subjects were woven in. Period one was the continuation of a project to write a play set in Ancient Greece. The play was to be used as the basis for making a 15 minute film that was to be entered in the Clearwold Schools Film Festival. This was a six-week project running concurrently across all the schools that had been launched with the showing of last year's winning entry.

A number of lessons followed the launch focused on techniques for play writing and researching the life-style and customs of Ancient Greece. Barry's group decided to write a play about a family whose sons were saved by their slave when they came under attack during a walk to a neighbouring village. Earlier thoughts on a hunting scene had been ruled out as the group considered the practicalities of props for filming! As the project developed the group signed-up for workshops that were on offer across all the schools at the end of each taught day. A professional drama group had been hired to teach basic acting skills; a local college had been hired to coach pupils in filming techniques.

Technicians from across the schools got together to teach film editing. An increasing number of parents were now attending these workshops and assisting the project groups.

Barry's dad had agreed to meet with the group at lunchtime to discuss the design of costumes. Barry made a note to remind the group of the meeting and sent it to them on his e-mail.

Period 2 was a special maths project. Barry and three of his classmates joined with similar groups in the other schools on a video-linked lesson for those working at Level 6 and beyond in mathematics. The teacher was a free-lance teacher contracted by the Federation to work across all the schools on an accelerated maths course. A number of past pupils on this course had scored A and A* passes at GCSE maths by the end of year 8 and were now following AS and A2 courses during Key Stage 4 . Barry enjoyed the challenge of this work and checked his file to see what the teacher had said about his last homework on solving problems using proportional reasoning. He had e-mailed the teacher yesterday after he got stuck in one of the problems set and had received back a typical "hint" rather than the solution. Barry hoped he had interpreted the hint correctly.

Sophie

Sophie was enjoying her new school. Until now Sophie's life had been in turmoil and she had been in a number of short-term care placements in Yorkshire. Interrupted schooling had interrupted Sophie's learning and she had difficulty reading and writing. The day that Sophie's Foster Parents, Mr & Mrs Smith heard that Sophie was to stay with them they received a letter from the CFPS along with a brochure of all that was on offer across the schools. They had a choice of a place for Sophie at two of the schools and were invited to visit the schools and make a choice. Mrs Smith knew that the schools worked as a single Federation sharing teachers and resources and making after-school activities open to all. Mrs Smith chose Barnett for two reasons. Firstly, she had read about the school's successful track record in researching and providing support for children in with additional needs. Secondly, she had been to lunch at the school on several occasions and had joined the afternoon course, delivered by the school cook, Mrs Jones, on healthy eating on a budget. She had actually just signed up for Level 2 NVQ course on catering. Without children of her own, Mrs Smith was taking her foster-caring ambition seriously!

Sophie clicked onto her day-planner. Period 1 was a special reading and writing clinic. Mrs Barber (Additional Needs Co-ordinator – ANC) had met with Sophie and Mrs Smith when Sophie started the school and a special programme had been designed to help Sophie catch up. Sophie enjoyed these sessions which were taught by Mrs Langley. She was taught in a group of six children, three of whom came across from a neighbouring school. Sophie was making good progress and Mrs Smith was encouraged when she heard her read each evening at home.

Sophie looked through the rest of her day planner. After break it was maths which she did with the rest of her class. Her foster mum was coming in at lunchtime to talk with Mrs King about supervising organised games during the lunch period. Sophie liked the idea of her new foster mum being at school and she hoped Mrs King would let her help out.

After lunch Sophie noticed that she had a French lesson. A teacher from another school came in to teach this and they video-linked up with a school in Nantes for conversation. Sophie enjoyed this as everyone in her class was starting from scratch and she didn't feel left behind. In fact, she had already linked with an e-friend in Nantes and found they could understand each other.

The last lesson of the day was music and Sophie knew that they would be practising for the CFPS June singing fest. It was the athletics club after school that excited Sophie. In her PE lessons she had surprised herself at how good she was at running. Mrs Charles, her form teacher, had noticed this and recommended that Sophie got some expert training at the after-school athletics club that was held at a school down the road. Sophie's performance had improved rapidly and she was selected for the 200m race in the summer athletics competition.

Mrs Charles

Mrs Charles, as well as being a Year3 teacher, held one of the three key responsibility areas in the school, known as “family learning.” With her similarly appointed colleagues in the other Federation schools it was Mrs Charles’ job to make sure that a full programme of family learning supported and complemented the programme of children’s learning. Mrs Charles worked closely with Miss Abbott who had responsibility for children’s learning, the deputy head who had responsibility for staff learning and Mrs Barber, the Additional Needs Co-ordinator. Under the leadership of the headteacher these post holders not only steered the school in the direction towards the 2010 vision, but also ensured the flotilla of schools within the Federation kept a continuous improvement course.

With colleagues in other schools Mrs Charles had developed healthy living programmes that had a marked effect across the Clearwold community. An early pilot at William Barcroft of family lunches was now in place across the Federation. The Chief Executive had contracted with the Primary Care Trust to provide health services and education across all the schools. Building on the success of Sure Start initiatives, families now had access to health advice on school premises. A National Health Service dental practice had proved very popular. Mrs Charles clicked onto her day planner whilst having breakfast. She was interrupted by Sophie who was worried about her homework and she took the opportunity to check on how well Sophie was settling in. She called up Sophie’s file on her HID and noticed how Sophie was doing well in her athletics. She also noticed that Sophie’s foster mum was meeting with Mrs King at lunchtime to talk about helping out at lunchtime. She made a note to catch up with Mrs Smith to talk about another NVQ course she could take in recreational learning.

Back on her day planner, Mrs Charles noted her 9:00 meeting with Mrs Taylor (governor), Mrs King (supervisor) and Mrs Jones (cook). The meeting was at a neighbouring school and the agenda was planning a joint school supper for staff, parents/carers and Year 4 pupils. The intention was to launch an initiative called “family homework.” The intention was to explain how families were welcome to after-school activities, both as tutors and learners. Mrs Charles noticed that FLCs (family learning co-ordinators) had been given time off teaching (and away from school) in lieu of the time they would spend on this project.

After talking to Sophie and checking her day planner, Mrs Charles reflected on her career over the past five years. How things had changed. She had applied for the post of family learning co-ordinator (FLC) with trepidation. This was new territory but she was convinced that working with families was the way to improve life-chances for children. Her earlier experience with early years had brought her into contact with the Sure Start Children’s Centre initiative and she had seen mums and dads and carers grow in confidence (and qualifications) as they became increasingly involved with their children’s development. The new CFPS had attracted her, particularly with its promise to children, staff and families that their own continuous learning was seen as an entitlement.

Her own interview for FLC had been challenging. Both the school leadership team and members of the Federation executive had been involved. After she was appointed to the post on the first day,

the whole of the second day was spent on designing her personal professional learning plan (PPLP). Working closely with the deputy head, who had responsibility for staff learning, and a tutor from Graystone Hill College, Mrs Charles negotiated a two year training programme leading to a Master's degree in family learning – a new programme reflecting the requirements of the Children Act. This programme was part of a suite of work-based programmes that required teachers to design, deliver and evaluate family learning programmes that brought measurable improvements to outcomes for young people.

All this work was stored and shared electronically with her tutor and headteacher.

Lunchtimes were busy for Mrs Charles. Many parents now came into school to eat with their children and this had led to the parents forming friendship and interest groups which developed into learning groups. As well as healthy eating classes run by the cook, parents were encouraged to gain qualifications in their work supervising and arranging activities for children during lunch time. Afternoon classes in adult literacy and numeracy had proved a real success. Mrs Charles reflected on the number of parents who had been enticed into learning over the years. For some, it had a transformational effect on their lives and a noticeable affect on their children's attitudes and progress. Over twenty parents were now working in one or more capacities in school. They were using their work experience to gain further qualifications and some were well on the way towards gaining qualified teacher status. The culture of open-access, invitational and inclusive family learning had altered the way the school was viewed by the community. Causes of concern were dealt with by the parent body itself and there had been no formal complaints lodged for over four years. Parent governors, once difficult to recruit, were now regularly standing for election.

Miss Abbott

Miss Abbott arrived as breakfast was finishing – just in time for her coffee and toast. She had dropped off her sister’s baby at the cluster day-care centre and had got talking to two of her past students who were now doing part of their GNVQ Health & Social Care course there. Miss Abbott smiled as she saw the hall almost full with groups of pupils talking and referring to their HIDs. Miss Abbott had taken the post of Children’s Learning Co-ordinator (CLC) when management posts were replaced by Teaching & Learning Responsibilities (TLRs) in 2006. Designing programmes of work that matched individual aptitudes, abilities and needs was a principle she strongly believed in. Putting it into practice had been the biggest professional challenge in her life. What had made a difference was the investment made in her own learning during this time. The Federation had provided time and opportunity for the CLCs in all the schools to work together and to tap into locally based education research networks. Like Mrs Charles she had used this experience to gain a higher degree and she was now half way through her doctorate.

Miss Abbott’s particular expertise was in ICT. Beyond the design of a Federation-wide curriculum was the sorting of taught programmes that matched staff with children at their appropriate stage of progress. Miss Abbott saw the possibilities of ICT enabling this process and joined the ICT subgroup that included additional experts contracted by the Federation.

After a year’s development work the outcome was breathtaking. Every pupil and every member of staff had their own handheld IT device that had wireless access to the Federation’s central database. Each pupil (and parent/carer) could access their timetable that told them where they should be, which members of staff they were with, which programme of study they were following, who else was in that group and access to their work files that included records of assessment and comment from staff. Whilst most sessions were located in their own school and taught by school staff, some were located in other Federation schools and some were taught by staff from other schools. Pre-school, lunch-time and after-school sessions were included on pupil’s timetables. Each member of staff had their own time-tables that similarly identified locations, groups of pupils and programmes of work. Staff were able to access pupil timetables, pupil files and all the assessment information. Staff planning was written directly onto the database.

In the following year Mrs Charles worked with Miss Abbott and other teachers in the federation to put all the family learning programmes into a similarly constructed database. A deal with a large computer company allowed each parent to be given a HID that gave them access to their own learning programmes.

Mrs Devlin

At the same time, Mrs Devlin, the deputy head, with responsibility for staff learning, developed a similar system for staff. This system allowed all staff to plan, navigate and chart their own learning journeys. Linked with a partner-university, staff at all levels gained credits for their learning that allowed them to be awarded in-service qualifications. The deputy head, as staff learning co-ordinator (SLC) had linked all staff with staff on the upper pay spine who acted as a team of mentors and coaches supporting staff on their learning journeys. The whole process was linked to staff performance management.

Mrs Devlin looked at her programme for the day. As well as two teaching sessions she had arranged two lesson observations and two professional development interviews. She noticed that she had agreed to meet a member of staff at lunchtime to help him complete the evidence form for his latest qualification. She made a note to print off his personal file with his latest assignment. Mrs Devlin had been anxious when the responsibilities were reviewed and re-aligned in 2006 but she now thoroughly enjoyed her job. Most deputy heads across the Federation had been given SLC posts. Heads had agreed that this was a significant and senior responsibility and would be the driving force in schools' transformation. The Federation link with the University had proved productive. All SLCs had received extensive training and were given the opportunity to gain higher degrees in professional staff development. On completion of their post-graduate certificate for professional staff development the university "employed them back" to supervise trainee staff, to support newly qualified teachers, to co-ordinate the deployment and work of coaches and mentors, and to monitor staff work programmes.

Mrs Devlin completed her masters degree in 2009 and had been invited to be a member of the university assessment board. Last term she was elected chair of the federation staff development committee – the first time the post had been filled by a member of staff other than a headteacher.

Mrs Devlin reflected on her own professional development and career in the last five years. The university had recently advertised a senior lecturer post in school staff development. Last night the head of education of the university had rung her up and asked if she was going to apply. She switched her HID over to the appointments section and scheduled a meeting with the Head at 4pm. The Head was her coach and mentor and had encouraged her on her own learning pathway. Mrs Devlin felt she needed some guidance on her next career move.

The Headteacher

The headteacher, Dr Moony, paused to think. Writing this “five year” report was a requirement made of all heads in the Federation. Because of the Federation’s innovative and successful track record the DFES had asked the Federation Chief Executive to present the record of the first five years to the Secretary of State. Typically the CE had asked Heads to write stories about people.

And now Dr Moony had to write the story about herself. And so it shifts to a first-person account.

At first I was taken back by the proposition of being a headteacher as a member of a wider Board under the direction of a Chief Executive. The November 2005 two-day workshop changed all that. The notion of having overall responsibility for children learning, family learning and staff learning reminded me of the meaning of the term “headteacher.”

An article called “Fitting the Pieces Together” written in 1991 by an LEA adviser had quoted Jacotot: “To teach is to cause to learn.” The logic suggested that the headteacher had the first responsibility to enable and ensure the learning of children, their families and staff alike.

Between 2003 and 2005, as headteacher, I felt I was becoming increasingly remote from this core task. Worries about staff recruitment, cost-effective procurement of goods and services, balancing the finances and meeting the bureaucratic requirements of the Local Education Authority (LEA), Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and Department of Education and Skills (DFES) were leading me to question my decision to become a head in the first place.

The Federation offered a way forward that allowed me to recapture my interest in and passion for learning whilst the Federation Board took care of all the “business end” of management.

At my school I have been freed to lead the management of learning. My own performance and learning is managed by the Chief Executive who encouraged me to develop my Masters degree into a doctorate.

I now enjoy the monthly Federation Board meetings. I have been voted down on more than one occasion but I have learned much from my headteacher and governor colleagues. The clear focus on “futures thinking” has meant we have all moved forwards at a faster rate than we ever thought possible. The power of the Federation to make things happen has engendered a “we can” culture that has ousted the old “we can’t because” culture. I feel that as a group of schools we are really in control of our own destiny.

I have just switched on my personal HID. I have been asked to agree the minutes of the last Federation Board meeting. In Period 1 I have scheduled myself to join in Mrs Langley’s literacy recovery session with Year 3 – I cannot suppress my research interest in Special Educational Needs

(SEN) and I am keen to see Sophie at work. In Period 2 I have a meeting with the Head of Education from the university to talk about Mrs Devlin's further career development. I have a flashing schedule appointment with Mrs Devlin at 4pm and I have a suspicion that she may be thinking about the recently advertised staff development post at the University!

At 2pm have a meeting with Mrs Charles to congratulate her on the latest programme for parents on managing behaviour. These programmes are run each year and they have had a remarkable effect on the behaviour of children in school. The family learning programmes that focus on healthy eating, healthy living and children's emotional development and well-being have not only transformed the climate for learning but, I believe, have been a significant contributing factor to further gains in children's levels of personal achievement. Our targets now are for 100% Level 5 in all core subjects.

I notice that I have agreed to have lunch with a number of Year 6 children today. A discussion with between the children and Miss Abbott has resulted in a proposal that volunteers from year 6 should run an after-school session for Year 4 and 5 called a homework clinic. I have been asked to discuss with them how this may work in practice. I call up today's menu for lunch on my HID and select a tuna salad.

A flashing icon on my HID alerts me to an incoming e-mail. It is from the Chief Executive's personal assistant – could I please send in the first draft of my five year report. I call up this report from my files and post it off.

Annex

Early thoughts on job descriptions for the new key responsibility post-holders

Staff Learning Co-ordinator

To ensure that all staff are engaged in personal professional learning programmes appropriate to their current performance, career aspirations and school improvement needs.

1. To co-ordinate the work of teachers who are on the upper pay spine, to act as mentor and coaches for all other staff in the school.
 - 1a. To act as coach and mentor to those staff on upper pay spine.

2. To ensure that every member of staff has a Personal Professional Learning Plan (PPLP)
 - 2a. To link with a university or other outside body to ensure that PPLPs provide a learning progression and accreditation.

3. To ensure that PPLPs are informed by assessments of current performance.
 - 3a. To collate staff performance reports in order to identify training needs.
 - 3b. To identify staff with similar training needs for the purpose of establishing self help learning sets.

4. To ensure that PPLPs relate directly to activities identified in the SIP.
 - 4a. To ensure that areas for professional development are identified in the school Self Evaluation Form (SEF).

5. To ensure that PPLPs align with staff career aspirations.

6. To quality assure all programme sessions and events offered to staff.

7. To work with other senior post holders within the school to ensure that learning programmes for children, parents and staff are mutually complementary and that each adds value to the other.

8. To work with similar post holders in other schools for the purpose of mutual support and development and to capture opportunities for cross-school working.

Family Learning Co-ordinator

To ensure that families are fully involved in working with the school to improve the life chances of children.

1. To plan sessions and events that bring together staff, children and their parent before, during and after the normal school day.
2. To provide programmes for parents that relate directly to the well-being and achievement of their children.
 - 2a. Programmes should relate to healthy eating, healthy living, sexual health, emotional development and behaviour management.
3. To liaise with other agencies where appropriate to ensure the professional delivery of programmes for parents.
4. To work with universities and other agencies to seek accreditation for programmes for parents.
5. To support parents who may be looking to re-enter employment (or voluntary work) particularly in the field of services to children.
6. To quality assure all programme sessions and events offered to parents.
7. To work with other senior post holders within the school to ensure that learning programmes for children, parents and staff are mutually complementary and that each adds value to the other.
8. To work with similar post holders in other schools for the purpose of mutual support and development and to capture opportunities for cross-school working.

Children Learning Co-ordinator

To ensure that children achieve their personal best educational outcomes.

1. To put into place a broad and balanced curriculum that is accessible to all, supports the development of learning skills and allows areas of talent to be developed and extended.
2. Within this curriculum, to develop individualised learning programmes that ensure children are appropriately supported and challenged.
3. To timetable teaching and learning groups in a way that children progress at a rate appropriate to their abilities, aptitudes and needs.
4. To ensure that the assessment of individual pupil progress identifies children's insights, misconceptions and errors and clearly informs the next step on children's programmes of work.
5. To plan extra curricular activities that benefit children's widest educational development.
6. To assure the quality of teaching and the contribution made by any other adults in the classroom.
7. To work with other senior post holders within the school to ensure that learning programmes for children, parents and staff are mutually complementary and that each adds value to the other.
8. To work with similar post holders in other schools for the purpose of mutual support and development and to capture opportunities for cross-school working.