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**Sustainable Management and the School**

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**Abstract**

This paper considers sustainable management in the English secondary school and explores the practice of accountability and governance at school level. It is argued that social accounts are a valuable method of self-evaluation and learning about sustainability, focussing attention upon values and the school's internal and external communities. Current government policy initiatives are critically assessed. Little coherence can be found at national level about the role of the school in developing sustainability. This however may be an opportunity: through social accounting, the school can find a meaning for sustainability within its own reflective practices and patterns of community accountability.

**1 Introduction**

‘There are three key roles for education in any society. First, education plays a constitutive role in that it tells us what we know about the world. Second, that when education is used to maintain existing power differentials and to keep people in ‘their place’ it is an oppressive force. Third, given that education enables us to form a view of the world, and to change that world as a result, it has a transformative role.’ (Thomson and Bebbington 2004: 611)

This paper examines the school as the site for emergent practice and innovation around the meaning of sustainability. The discussion explores the significant role of social accounts as a tool for self-evaluation and school management and as a means

of mutual learning. In the light of government policy and debates in public management, the paper considers how sustainability may be developed and accountability enhanced at school level.

The context for the discussion is one in which educational provision has been subject to a process of 'modernisation' comprising contradictory elements of centralism (of the curriculum, and with prescribed performance indicators) and decentralisation (of budgets and of delegation of powers from local authority to school). These tensions mirror the contradictions of public service modernisation as a whole. In the United Kingdom in the early twenty-first century, the pursuit of 'Third-Way' policy models (Giddens 1998; 2000) has ostensibly sought a balance between state and market and has produced a conflicting pattern of approaches, simultaneously open to the critiques of Left and Right and vulnerable to the charge that it harbours its own subtle authoritarianism: "...the Third Way implies that it understands the next phase of human development and thus can and should control that development" (Geyer, 2003: 251). Our critical perspective in the following discussion is influenced by a concern with sustainability through democratic accountability and sees within social accounts the possibility of transformative practice (Dryzek, 1995).

In the current ideological context, the school (specifically, in this paper, the secondary school in England and Wales) is unique, and a challenging focus for enquiry: it is simultaneously a public organization, linking directly to local and central government and staffed by public sector employees, and it is also a not-for-profit organization with an externally allocated budget. Under current governance arrangements, it may be constituted as a separate trust. If it is an academy, it may effectively be private-sector led. This ambiguity in relation to sectoral boundaries illuminates further our key concerns with sustainability, management and social accounting.

We will begin with a detailed discussion of current UK government policy approaches toward sustainability and the school, focussing in particular on the concept and practice of accountability. Within this discussion, we will explore the role of communities and begin to identify the central importance of values in making sense, through the social accounting process, of sustainability in the school. The discussion then turns to the practice and rationale of social accounts as a means of both illuminating values and providing a basis for practical action. Finally, the nature of governance at school level is considered, and conclusions are drawn for how

sustainability may be addressed through local initiatives based firmly within the ethos of the school.

## 2 'Strategic, Challenging and Accountable'?

We now consider elements of the government policy approach to sustainability and the school, particularly as it impacts upon management and accountability. Before doing this, it is necessary to explore aspects of accountability and relationships in the school. To some extent these debates reflect debates within public management as a whole, not least the tension between centralization and localism (Stewart 2003). The management of education does not exist in isolation from these wider policy and political arguments.

### 2.1 *Accountability*

Accountability in a school context can be understood in terms of conflicting trends toward centralization (of the curriculum) and delegation (of finance and management), both of which are part of the contradictory elements of a modernised public management (Massey and Pyper 2005). Further, there has been a centrally-driven expansion of managerialism at local school leadership level, compounding the complexity of accountability.

According to Gray (2001), accountability is the identification of responsibility together with the provision of information about that responsibility to relevant stakeholders (Gray *et al.* 1996). Gray (2001) sees the social accounting process as a method of providing such accountability, with one of four possible objectives: 'to discharge accountability to stakeholders, to control stakeholders, to move towards sustainability reporting, to be an exercise in self justification' (Gray 2001: 11).

There are both practical and conceptual dangers in treating accountability as either overly-voluntaristic or overly-deterministic. Overly deterministic systems theories promote a highly formal interpretation of accountability: formal accountability is developed through power and control, with hierarchical mechanisms developing into the 'instrumental individualism that hierarchical accountability produces' (Roberts 1991: 361). However, within an organizational context such as that of the school, the development from functional accountability to that of reflexive and critical accounts of

individual roles shifts our attention and enables an uncovering of underlying relationships of accountability (Lehman 1999). This supports the view that

‘there are a variety of other possible experiences of accountability alive and flourishing, and that if one explores the conditions which encourage and allow these alternative forms then they tend towards those which Habermas delineates as the basis for a rationally grounded consensus’ (Roberts 1991: 361).

Roberts and Scapens (1985) propose that

‘the practice of accounting can be seen to involve the communication of a **set of values**, of ideals of expected behaviour, of what is approved and disapproved. The practice of accounting involves communicating notions of what should happen, and it is only on the basis of these notions that sense is made of what has happened.’ (Roberts and Scapens 1985: 448, our emphasis)

Gray *et al.* (2006) (see also Unerman and O’Dwyer 2006) stress that the work of NGOs, whilst needing to be accountable, must be based in the right form of accountability, distinct from the formal accountability imposed by hierarchical managerialist models which reinforce current power bases and result in meaningless and possibly dangerous reporting (Tinker and Gray 2002). The form of accountability needs to be right for the organization: a basis for developing meaningful dialogue (Lehman 2006). This dialogue could be initiated through

‘dialogic-informed engagements extend beyond notions of communication. They refer to iterative mutual learning processes designed to promote transformative action. In particular we wish to explore the potential for dialogic processes to inform accountability relationships between stakeholders and entities, noting that accountability is an espoused goal of SEA (Gray *et al.*, 1996)’ (Bebbington 2007: 357).

We argue that social accounts in the school setting are a form of putting ‘real’ accountability into practice. The definition of accountability upon which the social account is predicated is one rooted in values, meaning and reciprocal relationships. On this basis, we propose that the idea of sustainability in the school can be understood and implemented.

## *2.2 The Government Policy Approach*

Schools, like other parts of the public sector, have been subject to the overall change from public administration to new forms of public management (Dunleavy and Hood

1994). Boyd (1999) identifies 'three interconnected imperatives' facing those charged with running education – 'productivity,' accountability', and 'community' (Gamage 1998). These imperatives propel schools in the incompatible directions of centralisation and delegation referred to above, evident since the series of legislative changes during the Conservative years (Pierson 1998). These divergent trends arise from the inconsistent elements of a new public management, itself now giving way to a further period of uncertainty and change. The emerging shape of 'meta' school governance is that of a configuration of trusts (individual or area) and academies, with formal links to external organizations (including private sector companies and universities) and enhanced collaboration. The reduced role of the local authority will decline further.

'Micro' governance at the secondary school level is subject to change too. Its future pattern is difficult to predict (Bush and Gamage 2001), but it is likely that confederative arrangements for governance of schools will grow.

'Schools are harnessing the power of big businesses like PC World and Balfour Beatty, bringing in the sporting muscle of Basketball England and drawing on the artistic vision of Chichester Festival Theatre to raise standards by joining up with external partners to form Trusts' (DCSF 2009b)

The question of who wields most influence under such arrangements will be crucial in developing sustainability.

We suggest that the dialogic processes (Bebbington 2007) of reflection (Schön 1991) and critical self-evaluation which inform accountability relationships within the 'whole school' setting permit an interrogation of the key issues in sustainability. Before proceeding further, it is useful to offer a definition of sustainability to inform our analysis. Referring to the various interpretations that sustainability and sustainable development may have, Hopwood *et al.* (2005: 49) distil the common thread that the concept '...crucially embraces the key issues for humanity of how to ensure lives worth living and our relation with the planet and our relations with each other.'

Within the current policy initiatives offered by the Department for Children Schools and Families, two shortcomings are immediately apparent. First, there is no clear conception of accountability within their thinking about sustainability. Secondly, the

importance of the school itself in addressing sustainability appears to be undervalued<sup>1</sup>. These limitations are apparent, for instance, within the Sustainable Development Action plan for 2008-2010 prepared by the DCSF (2008c). This demonstrates how government seeks to fulfil its 'obligations to deliver Government policy in relation to children and their families in a way that is in harmony with sustainable development.' (DCSF 2008c: 3). The policy suggests, within its discussion of accountability, that there is a need to strengthen governance structures (DCSF 2008c: 18) yet the role of the school is not central within this. The plan sets the priority as sustainable development within the DCSF itself and refers to performance management and impact assessment in building the Department's commitment to sustainable development.

The 'School Report Card' consultation document, issued in October 2008, is concerned above all with the reporting of school performance to the range of its 'stakeholders'. Although concerned with accountability, this is defined in a narrow and formal sense. The Report Card would apply to all mainstream primary and secondary schools, including academies.

'We believe that there is an opportunity to make the school accountability system more coherent, better co-ordinated, more streamlined and better able to recognise the full range of each school's achievements'.(DCSF/OFSTED 2008: 3)

The card '...will set out the range of outcomes for which schools will be held to account...' (DCSF/OFSTED 2008: 5)

It is intended that the card will include parental and pupil views as well as tangible outcomes like exam results. It is also proposed that the Report Card will replace the short-lived School Profile (itself introduced under the Education Act 2005 to replace the ineffective annual report/annual meeting). Alongside this, OFSTED and DCSF are also consulting on the indicators to be used from 2009 to assess school performance against the five Every Child Matters (Treasury 2003) outcomes: health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. Within this, where lies sustainability? The emphasis is clearly upon assessment of performance and a notion of accountability defined as holding to account. This does not include any sustainability indicators, even though the Every Child Matters agenda (to which the school report card consultation refers) does embrace sustainability. For all those concerned with sustainability, this is a wasted opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup> The sustainable impact of schools can be large. For example, Hounslow Council in the UK estimates that schools produce approximately half of the council's carbon emissions (Gibson 2009).

Published alongside the Report Card consultation document is another key paper for consultation: '21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools: A World-Class Education for Every Child' (DCSF 2008a). Both documents derive from and seek to build on the ambitious overall Children's Plan published a year earlier (DCSF 2007). This second consultation paper refers to schools being based 'at the centre of local communities' (DCSF 2008a: 28), a wider role involving a 'contribution to sustainable and cohesive communities for the 21st century'. (DCSF 2008a: 28). Recreational activities and the extended learning agenda 'can contribute to local community objectives such as supporting community cohesion and sustainable development' (DCSF 2008a: 28).

'Contributing to stronger, more sustainable communities is not just about the services schools can provide to the local community, but also about their ethos and values and providing teaching and learning that will equip today's young people for life in an increasingly interconnected world. The contribution schools can make in building stronger relationships and understanding across communities, both locally and internationally, is recognised in their new formal duty to promote community cohesion alongside the duty to promote wellbeing. Meanwhile, sustainable schools set an example of careful management and global awareness so that children and their families are educated and enabled to live in a world with limited resources and a changing climate'. (DCSF 2008a: 30)

Indeed, one of the specific 'Consultation Questions' in the document is: 'What additional support is needed to enable schools to extend their role in developing sustainable and cohesive communities?' (DCSF 2008a: 30)

The explicit reference to 'ethos and values' points to a key element of sustainability at school level, an element we argue is an essential component of the social account. Beyond the limited reference to 'careful management', however, there is little indication that the formidable challenge of sustainable management has been appreciated. We suggest that the social accounting process may be a valuable tool in the implementation of an ambitious sustainability policy both within the local community (as alluded to by the 21<sup>st</sup> century document) and also within the school itself. The responses to both consultation documents will influence the major White Paper due to be published in 2009.

Catchpole (2004) suggests that to some extent existing OFSTED inspections have already begun to move closer to the central concerns of social accounting with, for instance, self-evaluation, stakeholder views, improvement and development and the wider social and community context of the school. This is reinforced by current

developments which place a greater emphasis on promoting wellbeing and inspection of community cohesion within the OFSTED regime (OFSTED 2008).

The remit of DCLG consultations is confined to England and Wales. Policy documentation from Scotland has however identified some pertinent issues for consideration on an overall UK basis. Grant and Borradaile (2007) have assessed the place of Sustainable Development Education (SDE) within Scottish schools, charting significant elements including the influential 'eco schools' initiative and the inclusion of SDE within the topic areas for pre-inspection school reports. It may be useful to assess the impact of sustainability initiatives within part of the UK not subject to the English national curriculum, where school governance is significantly different from arrangements in England, and where sustainability is an explicit policy priority of the devolved government. Russell and Thompson, however, have analysed the use of Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) across a range of service areas in Scotland and argue that there is a lack of any "...overarching sustainable development concept underpinning the specific measures, targets or thresholds" (Russell and Thompson 2008: 370). This alerts us to the need to provide a conceptual framework within which to make sustainability in education meaningful. Otherwise, it is merely a matter of generating more indicators of performance, detached from their normative basis.

So far, we have considered differing ways of defining accountability in education and have suggested that the notion of accountability to be found within current government policy initiatives is narrow and limiting. We have also suggested that current major policy documents have understated the importance of sustainable management within schools policy, and have undervalued the role of the school itself in advancing sustainability. We now consider these issues at school level.

### 3 Sustainability in the School: Learning and Doing

'The Government would like every school to be a sustainable school by 2020'  
(DCSF 2008b: 2)

While the sustainability agenda in education may have resonance at an international level, its meaning within the UK has not always been evident and national progress has so far been uneven.

‘There is a great deal of good practice within the countries surveyed but there is also a need to appreciate and signpost the embryonic and fragile nature of the position of sustainable development education (SDE) in most countries. Much of what is classed as SDE is being carried out by innovative staff working in isolation with very little formalisation within curricula.’ (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2005: 49)

There is also a significant difference between awareness of sustainability in the broadest sense, and the active use of education as a means for achieving it (Learning and Teaching Scotland 2005: 1). Placing sustainability firmly within the curriculum is a further challenge. In the secondary school, sustainability links directly to the expectation of care and safety for children embodied within the Every Child Matters (Treasury, 2003) framework. Government guidance provides a detailed definition:

#### **What is a sustainable school?**

A sustainable school prepares young people for a lifetime of sustainable living, through its teaching, fabric and its day-to-day practices. It is guided by a commitment to care:

- Care for oneself (our health and well-being);
- Care for each other (across cultures, distances and generations); and
- Care for the environment (both locally and globally).

#### **A commitment to care**

Schools are already caring places, but a sustainable school extends this commitment into new areas. It cares about the energy and water it consumes, the waste it produces, the food it serves, the traffic it attracts, and the difficulties faced by people living in its community and in other parts of the world.

#### **An integrated approach**

A sustainable school takes an integrated approach to its improvement. It explores sustainable development through its teaching provision and learning (**curriculum**); in its values and ways of working (**campus**); and in its engagement of local people and partners (**community**) (DCSF 2008b: 3 emphasis in the original)

In basing its analysis upon the different school stakeholders, social accounting gives the organization a way of knowing if ‘...it is achieving its objectives, if it is living up to its values and if those objectives and values are relevant and appropriate.’ (Pearce 2001: 9). The social account measures the impact of the school within its local community, reporting upon school performance against a range of measures defined at the outset within which we would emphasise a prominent role for sustainability. The social account includes the collection of relevant data – defined according to what is needed locally – and places emphasis upon its dissemination to a range of stakeholders: parents, students, educators, managers, governors and the community. It faces internally and externally in equal measure.

### 3.1 *The Practice of Social Accounting: Launceston College*

Overall, the social accounting process is flexible, but normally involves three steps: first, the collection and analysis of data; secondly, an independent review<sup>2</sup> of the results; and, finally, a means of disseminating the results internally and externally. Alongside the concrete outcomes it may produce, it is important to emphasise that the activity of accounting itself contributes to learning and self-awareness: taking part in the process serves to illuminate the values of the school.

There are few examples demonstrating the practice of social accounting within schools. However, the experience at Launceston College in Cornwall demonstrates how social accounts can help to develop a whole school approach towards improved sustainability, providing a practical example of how social accounting can be used in secondary education. Launceston is a comprehensive school and specialist Technology College with approximately 1400 pupils aged 11-18. A longitudinal approach towards social accounting provided the benefits of greater community links, curriculum development and addressing sustainable development within the school. The development of sustainability at Launceston has been a learning process, and on the basis of the account the school formulated their environmental policy with a key objective being “the environmental impact of the college” for future accounting cycles (Gibbon *et al.* 2008: 357-358).

Significantly, its values – “a community college that values achievement, provides opportunity and promotes responsibility” (Launceston College, 2006: 1) - are explicitly stated within the accounts. The school opted to develop social accounts through its experience of self-evaluation, an awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, and the specific specialist interest of one of its governors, a former school inspector. The emphasis on the whole child - central to the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda (Treasury, 2003) - was also important in deciding to go ahead. Its 2006 social accounts may be summarised as follows:

*Scope:* the remit was to investigate ‘perceptions and impact’ around a core objective that ‘...the pupils make a positive contribution to the community.’ (Launceston College, 2006: 4)

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<sup>2</sup> The review process uses an external panel and is often called the ‘social audit’, the purpose being the development of productive learning and self help (Power 2000).

*Stakeholders:* internal and external stakeholders were identified as pupils, parents, local residents, local primary schools, retailers, employers and school staff (Launceston College, 2006, 5)

*Environment:* although the school had no prior environmental policy, it was involved in projects (for instance, recycling) and it promoted care of the environment through Citizenship, and also through tutor groups, including a project week on sustainability with Year 7 students

*Sustainability Projects:* these included design of a bicycle store and recycling bins, making bricks using recyclable materials, a 'Citizenship Day', and tree planting in the school grounds

*Strengths and Weaknesses:* strengths included a renewed focus on social objectives and reinforcing the existing self-assessment process, linking to the range of stakeholders, and building relationships between students, staff, governors, and the community. Equally, social accounting involves challenges and possible weaknesses: developing a social account for the first time requires much support, and the process is demanding of staff and student time.

There is value in seeing the social account as a continuing process rather than a one-off exercise. Launceston produced a further report in 2008, exploring the 'positive impact' of the initial social accounts in areas including expansion of the pupil leadership and work experience programmes, enhanced communication and student involvement with the local community, development of the anti-bullying programme, and – as a learning process – a focus on environmental objectives in repeating the social accounting cycle (Launceston College, 2008).

The Launceston social accounts provide a specific example for other schools seeking a constructive reflective tool for development. Alongside such experience is the growing body of documentation from government as it begins to address the challenge of the sustainable school. The government has now, for instance, published an overall self-evaluation tool – 'S3' - which addresses some of the issues around sustainability, including aspects such as purchasing, school travel, waste reduction and use of school grounds (DCSF, 2008d). In the key area of the curriculum, S3 may enable schools to see what they have already achieved in terms of sustainability and (like the social

account) to identify the necessary next steps. In contrast to the numerous existing demands of external regulation, this is explicitly a voluntary tool for schools to use (DCSF, 2008d, 5). In public policy terms, this in itself is novel. Some of the questions for schools included begin to mirror the concerns of the social account – for instance, how far the views of the local community influence the work of the school on sustainable development (DCSF, 2008d: 18) – without the depth and detail of the social accounting process. The language throughout tends to be in terms of sustainable *development*. This might be seen as a relatively limited conception of sustainability, but in its curriculum impact there is the positive prospect of working across narrow subject boundaries:

‘Sustainable development is a cross-cutting dimension of the National Curriculum meaning that it can provide a meaningful context for engaging pupils in their learning. It is a particular feature of four statutory subjects – geography, science, citizenship and design & technology – but the idea of ‘making the world a better place’ has clear relevance across all subjects’.  
(DCSF, 2008d: 32)

Thus some of the strands of recent government policy and guidance may support, or even be included within, the comprehensive social account. The process may embrace quantitative measures where appropriate – for instance, in the school’s use of resources – but in essence is a qualitative measurement based within values and relationships (Gibbon, Fenwick and McMillan 2008). Social accounting is a means of illuminating and understanding the ethos of the school. It is a means of mutual learning around both knowledge and values, the antithesis of the fear and blame which may otherwise inhibit organizational learning in the public sector (Vince and Saleem 2004; Fenwick and McMillan 2005: 50).

We suggest, then, that the meaning of sustainability resides in the rich and complex patterns of interrelationships at school level. These involve a range of actors including lay people – such as parent and community governors - in a relationship of mutual learning, defined by a commitment to public service (Gibbon *et al.* 2008). Within this relationship, values – not procedures or structures – are the key. These values are the basis of the social account.

Values in education may not always be shared: schools may give an emphasis to private sector partnerships or may, for instance, choose to emphasise values of

mutuality and co-operativism. The latter may particularly be identified within current moves to establish foundation schools based upon a co-operative trust where the partners are likely to be educational, mutual and charitable organizations, a development supported by government (DCSF, 2009a). Educational values may be contested, but, where this is so, value differences (like any differences of policy, resource allocation or priorities) are to be addressed through the political process. Even where values are uncomfortable or problematic, they remain the basis for accountability and for relationships with the community. Furthermore, within these relationships may be found the true measure of accountability - defined as a means of accounting to each other for the nature of our actions (for the school or for the planet) rather than the narrow procedural notion of 'holding to account' to be found within government consultation documents.

'The essence of education...is the transmission of values, but values do not help us to pick our way through life unless they have become our own, a part, so to say of our mental make-up. This means that they are more than mere formulae or dogmatic assertions; that we think and feel with them, that they are the very instruments through which we look at, interpret, and experience the world. When we think: we think with our ideas. Our mind is not a blank, a **tabula rasa**. When we begin to think we can do so only because our mind is already filled with all sorts of ideas with which to think. All through our youth and adolescence, before the conscious and critical mind begins to act as a sort of censor and guardian at the threshold, ideas seep into our mind, vast hosts and multitudes of them. These years are, one might say, our Dark Ages during which we are nothing but inheritors; it is only in later years that we can gradually learn to sort out our inheritance.' (Schumacher 1973: 73)

### *3.2 The Practice of Social Accounting: A Non-Prescriptive Approach*

The framework provided by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) can usefully be considered along the example of Launceston. The WWF has produced its own development guide for good practice and 'learning for sustainability' (WWF 2004; 2005). The WWF 'non-prescriptive' approach emphasises whole-school working, the expansion of capacity amongst adult stakeholders within the school community to promote and support sustainability, and creating the conditions where education for sustainable development (ESD) may grow. The approach is explicitly non-directive, matching the specific needs of each school. This is central also to social accounting.

The WWF carried out practical work on sustainability with schools, using a development framework based on a 'behaviourally anchored rating scale' and using

the language of 50 schools developing their 'whole school approach' to education for sustainable development (WWF 2004, 2005). The findings of the WWF work are that schools preferred to think of the process as a journey, and mapping out this work helped them to overcome initiative fatigue (private communication from government commissioner 2008). They welcomed the WWF framework in thinking strategically and linking to the School Improvement Plan; overall 'footprinting' of schools was felt to be challenging, although within this CO2 footprinting could be engaged with more readily and could also involve students directly (see Teachernet 2009).

The WWF work suggests that the voluntary nature of such initiatives at school level is unlikely to change as it is consistent with the DCSF emphasis on schools becoming more autonomous. Yet the control of OFSTED and the emphasis on SATS and league tables 'dominate all else' and there remains the danger, in developing sustainability indicators for schools, that a 'tick box mentality prevails'. The overriding concern remains that 'no-one has grasped the idea of 'so what' ie what is the education system for and how are students being prepared' (private communication from government commissioner 2008). There is a balance to be drawn between using hierarchical accountability – direct government prescription - to place sustainability and environmental priorities firmly on the school agenda and the need for local initiatives to derive from relationships and accountabilities at school level.

We would suggest that such tensions are at the heart of the problem of how the sustainability agenda is to be managed at school level. The strength of a school-led non-prescriptive approach, as found within social accounts generally, or the work of the WWF specifically, is that it can be placed within the school ethos, based firmly within values and led within a normative framework. Yet the weight of other government policy initiatives to schools is firmly prescriptive and directive. This generates mere indicators, devoid of meaning for the school or for sustainability. This might come to resemble the limitations of SDIs assessed by Russell and Thompson (2008).

The social accounting process is also a means of organizational learning: in this case, learning about sustainability. As Holmqvist (2003) has noted, organizational learning is based on several assumptions, including the notion of individual and collective *experience*; the necessity of *change*; the expectation that learning is *shared*; and the realisation that effective learning is *organized* rather than being haphazard

We have argued that the social account is a practical means of supporting and advancing sustainability at school level. The impact of voluntary approaches links to our broad and normative conception of accountability, supporting overall learning and change in the long term. We now turn to some questions of governance at school level.

#### 4 Governance and Sustainability

If sustainability is to be addressed seriously in the school, the question arises of where responsible lies for its development and management. We have discussed above some of the problems of accountability, and some of the issues arising from central government documentation. We suggest that the responsibility lies firmly within the school. If this is so, the question is raised of the respective roles of the governing body and the school management leadership team.

Within the English system of school governance, a practical form of accountability, linked to the community, already resides within the micro-governance of the school. The school governing body possesses delegated responsibilities for a range of budgetary, employment and curriculum matters and includes governors nominated by the local authority, elected by parents or co-opted by existing members. The accountability relationships within school governance, based on a notion of voluntary public service, provide a link to the stakeholders who constitute the internal and external school community.

The actual operation of school governance may not always, in practice, be forward-looking and strategic, and its structures may tend toward narrow administration and the limiting pattern of formal accountabilities discussed above. Yet the prospect does exist for the governing body to lead on sustainability. The Launceston social accounts process was initiated by a member of the governing body. Spedding (2006) has formulated model guidelines for how school governance can be made more effective, including revised structures for the governing body, in particular adopting the streamlined model of a small overall governing executive (including, consistent with existing practice, parents, staff, community and local authority members), attempting to create organizational arrangements fit for the demanding and expanding roles of school governance. Moreover, Spedding's model seeks to deal with two issues relevant to our discussion which are more significant than structures: first, to address

the fiction that ‘no qualifications are necessary’ – the phrase used by the government to encourage interest in taking up the role of governor – by recognizing that the role is one requiring knowledge and skills and abilities; and, secondly, to link the question of governance structures to the central issue of accountability. The management of sustainability at school level thus needs to involve those involved in governance as well as those charged formally with school leadership.

## 5 Conclusions: Sustainable Management and the School

‘Education which fails to clarify our central convictions is mere training or indulgence. For it is our central convictions that are in disorder, and, as long as the present anti-metaphysical temper persists, the disorder will grow worse. Education, far from ranking as man’s greatest resource, will then be an agent of destruction, in accordance with the principle **corruptio optimi pessima.**’ (Schumacher 1973: 92)

In this paper we have considered sustainability in the school through a lens that has included overall issues of meta-governance, formal and informal accountabilities and their theoretical bases, and governance and accountability at the level of the school. We have suggested that the social accounting process successfully carried out in one comprehensive school, on a continuing basis over three years, in south-west England is an element in developing sustainability. It is not a template or a prescriptive methodology that can or should be centrally imposed: to do so would be to undermine its very rationale as an active tool for the reflective school.

“There is no one way to take on the sustainability agenda in schools; there is no one person whose job it is to lead the process; and there is no one person who can achieve this on their own...as this work progresses, a number of things become clear:

- The importance of building positive relationships with everyone in the school whose support is needed.
- The need to work with the entire school community... to build a new understanding of what sustainability means for the school.
- The benefits to school improvement and the wider school community of making links – whether between previously isolated bits of school policy and practice, or the range of statutory requirements and government initiatives” (DfES 2007: 5)

The question remains of whether school-led processes such as the social account serve as measures of ‘success’ for the school. There are, after all, numerous measures already. Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms (2002), for instance, have summarised the ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ processes by which school success is judged. Official

measures include the familiar OFSTED inspections and performance tables which Fitz-Gibbon and Tymms contrast to their own unofficial measures, including 'chances graphs' (which demonstrate the probabilities of achieving any grade, from any baseline point) and 'statistical process control charts' which encourage schools to avoid projections based on one year's data alone (2002: 148-149). The perceived problem with any unofficial measures initiated by the school is that even where they are more useful than centrally imposed indicators, the validity of the process may not be recognized by government. Official measures and performance indicators change rapidly. The 'lighter touch' of the recent OFSTED inspection regime is now reverting to its previous, more searching, emphasis. New 'families' of data are increasingly generated to allow schools to plan examination targets with ever-greater sophistication, just at the moment when public examination targets are being removed from the control of school governing bodies and reverting to civil servants in a remote location. This is another facet of the contradiction within public management between greater centralisation and greater decentralisation with which we began our discussion.

Research suggests that schools are aware of the increasing pressure on them to address the sustainability agenda (Bebbington 1997; Ball and Grubnic 2007) yet they also face compelling demands to address measures of standards and performance. There are currently calls for more longitudinal, in depth research to see how organizations, such as schools, develop and change (Bebbington 1997) whilst addressing our pressing need for sustainability.

Responsibilities in a large number of areas have now devolved to school level, beginning in the 1980s with local financial management and thereafter the gradual but relentless transfer of responsibilities to both the school management team and the governing body. This has left sustainability in a curious position. Current policy initiatives from central government do not exhibit the prescriptive requirements for sustainability that are specified for so many other areas including examination and teaching performance and measures of added value. This means that sustainability at school level can be addressed seriously and imaginatively, or not at all: a stimulus for transformation, or mere passivity. The place occupied by sustainability within government expectations remains a relative weakness of policy. Strength, however, lies in the school's ability, within its delegated powers, to develop its own meaning for sustainability, based on its own values and its own internal and external communities.

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