

Stormy Seas and Deep Waters: Upheaval, Renewal and Community Engagement in a Small, Island School

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SINCLAIR - Building Enduring Partnerships

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This case study of a school on a small island in the English Channel examined the antecedents and aftermath of a controversial, external review that prompted the wholesale resignation of school staff and major restructuring of school governance and policies. The single school on the island, Vraic School, was the center of significant controversy over school quality, community involvement and availability of on-island secondary education. This study examined what led to the commissioning of the external review and how resultant changes unfolded in the subsequent two years. Data was collected via in-person, video and e-mail interviews, school observations, community event observations and analysis of publicly available documents. Data was coded by theme (both predetermined and in vivo). The study found that the school held an important place of trust in the community that needed rebuilding in the wake of the controversy. Some community members had sought change because they felt disconnected from the school and that their concerns were rebuffed by staff. Other community members felt alienated by recent changes. The study also found that the newly-installed Head of Vraic School was explicit in his plans to earn stakeholder trust, nurture connections with the community at large and build confidence in the school. This case study may provide insight into the role of schools in other rural, remote and island places and the complexities of school reform in small communities.