

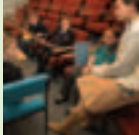


positive about pupil participation



one
scotland
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

positive about pupil participation



about practice for **POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

Positive About Pupil Participation

The process to develop this issue of Practice for Positive Relationships was led by Joan Mowat, seconded to the Scottish Executive from her role as Depute Head of Vale of Leven Academy, West Dunbartonshire.

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Practice for Positive Relationships is a series of brief introductions to good practice, exploring what teachers, school communities and education authorities are doing to promote positive behaviour in Scottish schools.

There is a wealth of good practice in Scottish schools, and this series enables practitioners to share their experience and learning with the education community, with each issue featuring a particular area of school life. The Scottish Executive has worked with colleagues from education authorities, teacher unions and schools to develop the series.

Want more information?

Visit the Better Behaviour – Better Learning website at www.betterbehavioursotland.gov.uk

If you have your own practice experiences to share, contact the Executive's Positive Behaviour Team.

You can find details of your local contact on the Better Behaviour Scotland website (above).

how to navigate this issue

DO YOU WANT TO...



Reflect on opportunities for pupil participation within school?



Consider your approach to pupil participation?



Gauge the starting point for a young person, or reflect with pupils on what they have learned by participating?



Support a young person who is attending a formal meeting?
(e.g. a school review or Children's Hearing)



Set up, support or improve the functioning of your pupil council?



Involve pupils in providing support to others in school?
(e.g. by buddying or mentoring)





KEY MESSAGES

on pupil participation in school life and decision-making

KEY MESSAGES

Good relationships are the starting point

Pupil participation can involve pupil-to-pupil, practitioner-to-pupil, practitioner-to-practitioner and whole school communication. Effective practice relies on trusting and enabling relationships in school.

In positive school communities, adults role-model positive relationships and pupils are treated with respect at all times, just as it is expected that they will show respect to others in turn.

Provide structured opportunities for participation

Schools have made great progress in developing pupil councils and other opportunities for pupils to have their say.

Develop the personal skills of pupils

Successful approaches seek to empower all individual pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and personal decisions, as well as providing inclusive opportunities for participation in school decision-making.

Build from pupils' strengths

Pupils of all ages and abilities can be sources of ideas and positive contributions to their peers, school and community.

Pupils often have valuable insights into school life and their own needs and circumstances. Pupil feedback is a useful 'health check' for school policies and practice. Where pupils face specific challenges or personal difficulties, they are often best placed to identify solutions if given the space and support to do so.



KEY MESSAGES

Pupil participation is learning

By being involved in school life and decision-making, pupils can develop their confidence, self-knowledge, emotional intelligence, problem-solving and social skills. Many schools have successfully used school, environmental or community projects to promote learning for citizenship – encouraging pupils to reflect critically on their own opinions, respect ‘difference’ and understand their rights and responsibilities.

School staff may reflect on how they engage with and give children and young people choices every day, including as part of learning and teaching – participative practice is an attitude and an approach, rather than a single initiative. It works best where it moves forward on a whole school basis, taking account of staff views.

Pupil participation is preparation for transition

The skills that children and young people can grow through participation are those that will help them to get on in life as they make the transition to adulthood.

Whether from early years settings to primary school, primary to secondary, or school to employment, education or training, transition presents significant challenges and anxieties, especially for more vulnerable pupils. However, it can also present opportunities – for a fresh start, new interests and new relationships, as well as the chance to develop openness to change and the adaptability that can be vital to coping well in adult life. Many Scottish schools have involved pupils in supporting their younger peers to make successful transitions.

introducing POSITIVE ABOUT PUPIL PARTICIPATION

Reflect on what you do every day in school.

Do you ...

- listen to pupils' concerns?
- help pupils to reflect on their personal goals?
- help pupils to arrive at solutions when they experience difficulties?
- support pupils to communicate what they want, need, feel or think to others?
- give pupils choices about their learning
- ask pupils how they feel about new developments in school?
- negotiate to enable pupils to take part in community-based projects or volunteering?
- support a group of pupils to lead a project?

This is familiar ground to many school staff, and shows the range of ways in which we can encourage pupils to engage with personal decision-making, school or community life.

Both teaching and support staff in school play a significant role in promoting, supporting and nurturing pupil participation.



PUPIL PARTICIPATION



There is a range of opportunities in school for pupil participation – both structured or defined areas of work, and ways in which we conduct our everyday practice

In examples of good practice, Scottish schools engage pupils in their own learning and personal decision-making by:

Canonmills and Cairnpark schools (Edinburgh) give structured preparation to pupils before their school reviews, to help them to get their views across in a way that works for them.

- providing opportunities to learn and practice social, communication and negotiation skills
- using personal learning planning as a basis for dialogue with individual pupils, involving them in setting their own targets and appraising their own progress
- giving structured support to pupils to enable them to contribute their views to a school review or case conference, or to other decisions affecting their lives

They involve pupils in peer support by:

- using circle time
- inviting pupils to act as play leaders or playground monitors
- establishing buddying, befriending, peer counselling or mentoring schemes
- supporting a circle of friends approach
- encouraging pupils to communicate their thoughts and feelings and to solve their difficulties through restorative approaches (including peer mediation or conflict resolution)
- drawing on peer support to aid transition for new pupils
- developing peer tutoring (e.g. paired reading), or peer education approaches



“She’s come so much out of her shell. I think getting the chance to help other kids has helped her to see her own qualities.”

PARENT

ENCOURAGE

In examples of good people, Scottish schools encourage pupils to play an active part in school and community life by:

Newcastle Primary and Community School (Fife) held a 'friendship day' to build positive relationships in school. This included an anti-bullying talk and questionnaire, personal safety sessions and team games. Pupils designed their own advice leaflet on bullying and friendship, and themes were followed through in circle time, drama and playground games, covering different parts of the school day.

- using suggestion boxes and notice boards to gather, share and report on progress in meeting pupils' aspirations for their school
- talking and listening on an everyday basis – building in time to systematically record and reflect on the pupil concerns that are picked up by staff through informal contact
- using school assembly to reward or reflect on what pupils have achieved through participation
- conducting consultation with pupils or supporting them to consult with their peers
- engaging pupils in developing the school website or newsletter
- supporting pupil-led projects
- establishing or supporting environmental or enterprise projects
- setting up a pupil council or supporting community decision-making structures and opportunities
- involving pupils on the school discipline committee or in reviewing discipline or anti-bullying policies
- supporting pupils to volunteer in the community
- using social action or community development approaches
- collaborating with other organisations to enable pupils to participate in authority, national or international citizenship projects



First principles of pupil participation

I've stopped thinking of pupil participation as an 'extra'. It's built into the way our school works.

TEACHER

How we think about participation

- We see that pupil participation is as much about doing things differently as it is about doing new things – we recognise the importance of small shifts in how we communicate with pupils.
- We support pupil participation in schools from the top down, and we give the space for bottom-up innovation by encouraging the creativity of both pupils and staff.
- We recognise the importance of how we engage with and give pupils choices every day, including as part of learning and teaching.

Starting points for participation

- We start out with what matters to children and young people – this is what will motivate them to be involved.
- We set the climate for pupil participation in school by transmitting values that are positive, respectful and encouraging to all pupils and all staff.

How we develop participation

- We collaborate with children and young people in solving problems, recognising their own capacities to work things out.
- We try to strike a balance between structure and flexibility – giving pupils a level of structure that they can manage and develop within, but being flexible enough for new directions and pupils' own ideas.
- We define pupils by their strengths, not their weaknesses, and appraise their achievements in their own terms rather than by comparison with others.

How we reward achievement

- We consider how to recognise the achievements and learning that pupils gain through participation – we can do this by using an alternative framework for accreditation, adding to the pupil's record of achievement or through inclusion within personal learning planning.



School benefits and pupil learning outcomes

Scottish schools that have developed good practice in involving pupils report a range of benefits including:

- enhanced pupil-staff communication
- greater awareness of pupil concerns
- improved school ethos
- an increased sense of connection to the school community for pupils
- increased self-reliance within the pupil community
- pupils achieving and learning by participating
- more opportunities for young people to reflect

Participation and citizenship are about learning skills and aptitudes, but also values. Examples might include respect for others and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the community as a whole. By considering ways in which pupil participation can be enhanced and opportunities widened, all schools can share in these benefits.

“It’s difficult to measure – but the school just feels better.”

HEADTEACHER

“We seem to talk more and better together, all of the staff and pupils.”

SUPPORT ASSISTANT

“I’ve learned more about individual pupils, who they really are and how they see things.”

DEPUTE HEAD





Pupil participation challenges pupils to explore and express their views, generate ideas, solve problems, communicate and negotiate, through which they can learn and develop on three levels:

- their identity, confidence and self-awareness
- their relationships and connections with peers and the school community
- their autonomy, self-motivation and leadership skills

The table shown on the next page illustrates how learning and development can happen on each of these dimensions as pupils engage. The framework that it provides can be used to set objectives with individual pupils or groups, and to aid shared reflection on achievement.

It is possible to see how experiences can be structured in a progressive way using this framework, to help pupils to practice and develop their skills and work towards a leadership role. However, pupils may also engage in different types of activities at different times, according to factors such as their level of interest in the issue and the time that is available to support them.



learning to participate and participating to learn

ILLUSTRATION APPROACHES

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES

“I am”
 “I can”

I work with an adult on a personal learning plan
 I work with an adult to reflect on my learning
 I give my views in a formal meeting (e.g. school review)
 I have a buddy or mentor
 I give my views in a one-off consultation exercise

Identity, confidence and self-awareness
 I can identify what is important to me
 I can reflect on my feelings and wishes
 I can set goals for myself

Challenges 1: Individuals don't feel valued by others or have experience of being respected? How does your school provide positive feedback and praise to all pupils?

“I belong”

I take part in groupwork
 I take part in an enterprise or environmental project

Identity, confidence and self-awareness
 I can share a project with others, whilst staying true to my own views
 I can share my views and ideas in a group setting
 I am happy to hold an opinion that is different from others

Challenge 4: Individuals have difficulty expressing their feelings appropriately? What opportunities are regularly provided to practice self-expression?

“I give to”

I am a buddy or mentor
 I am a playground monitor or play leader
 I sit on a pupil council or youth forum
 I am a peer mediator, educator or researcher
 I volunteer in the community

Identity, confidence and self-awareness
 I can connect my life experiences to the wider world
 I can empathise with the needs of others
 I can put others before myself
 I am confident in my judgement of people and situations

Challenge 7: Individuals have difficulty understanding the feelings of others? What games and tasks can be introduced to develop empathy?
Challenge 8: Individuals are highly competitive? Can specific challenges be introduced to develop teamwork? Would paired working help? Can pupils gain skills by mentoring or buddying others?



Relationships and connections with peers and the school community

I can form a trusting relationship with an adult or peer
I can express my views to another person
I can work constructively with another person

Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership

I can participate when I am given support
I see the value of making choices for myself

Challenge 2: Individuals have difficulty trusting others? How does your school support victims of bullying or other harm? How does your school ensure that vulnerable pupils have a consistent and supportive relationship with at least one adult?

Challenge 3: Individuals do not see the value of engaging with decision-making? How does your school foster self-worth in vulnerable pupils?
Do pupils have positive experiences of being listened to respectfully?
Can they see for themselves that participating gets results?

Relationships and connections with peers and the school community

I can co-operate and collaborate with others
I can disagree respectfully
I can take turns
I feel that I belong to the school/local community

Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership

I can consider and make choices about how to achieve my aims
I can persevere
I can be responsible for my own part in making something happen

Challenge 5: Group sessions don't function fairly without adult intervention? Are pupils practising in circle time or through other groupwork techniques?

Challenge 6: Individuals tend to get despondent when they cross the first hurdle? How do staff foster the self-motivation of pupils? Do pupils in the group have mentors?

Relationships and connections with peers and the school community

I can be supportive and caring to others
I can help other people whilst knowing my own boundaries
I can negotiate with others in reaching decisions
I am a role model within the school community

Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership

I am comfortable when others look to me for direction
I take responsibility for myself and my commitments
I can apply my learning to new situations
I can use a range of approaches to solve problems
I can consider different routes to my long-term goals

Challenge 9: Individuals struggle to keep within their boundaries when supporting peers? What training, support and ground rules are provided?

Challenge 10: Fall-outs between individuals affect the group dynamic? How does your school approach conflict resolution? Are restorative approaches practised?

Challenge 11: Individuals take setbacks to heart? What processes are in place to encourage pupils to reflect on what they *have* learned and achieved?

FORMAL MEETINGS



with individuals

Formal meetings with individual pupils may be required for a range of reasons. The pupil may be involved in making personal choices about his or her learning or future plans. For some pupils, individual meetings focus on more challenging issues, for example following an exclusion or incident in school, or because of difficulties at school or at home. Pupils with additional support needs may be involved in meetings to assess and monitor those needs and co-ordinate support. School staff may also be involved in giving support to pupils who attend multi-agency meetings outside school, such as Children's Hearings, case conferences or looked after children's (LAC) reviews.

When supporting pupils to participate in meetings where difficult ground will be covered, it is important to consider that:

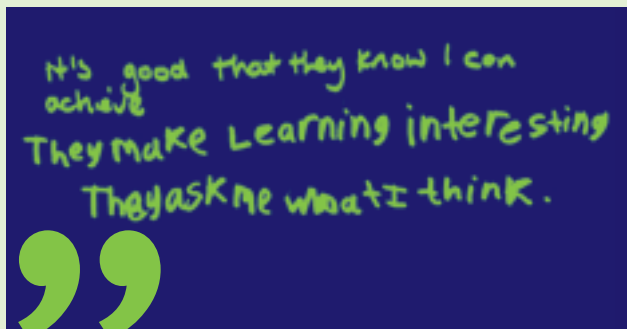
- young people can feel that they are 'in trouble', under the spotlight, or that they or their families are being judged
- they may have to listen to discussion that is painfully difficult, for example in relation to their behaviour or family circumstances
- they may have to hear or tell their 'story' in many meetings
- the presence of a number of professional adults can be intimidating, especially where 'private things' are discussed in front of relative strangers
- family dynamics can shape how the meeting develops and what the young person is prepared to say

Experienced practitioners know that all of these factors can lead to young people disengaging, being unable to concentrate or losing their temper. However, there are ways in which schools can structure formal meetings to enhance young people's contribution, and give them the best chance of being able to manage the situation positively.



“We really wanted to strengthen our relationships with the other professionals involved with our children, so that we support each other rather than work in counterproductive ways. We have that day-to-day knowledge of the child to bring, but by going to these meetings, Children’s Hearings, case conferences, looked after children’s reviews, we also get a rounded picture of what’s going on in the child’s life.”

PRINCIPAL TEACHER OF GUIDANCE



MEETINGS

“We began to prepare our pupils for the meetings they have. We have found that if they work on it beforehand, they can practise what they want to say, but there is also someone from school at the meeting who knows their view, who can prompt them or even speak for them if that’s what the child wants. It makes a huge difference. For some children it will always be a challenge for them to follow through their thoughts, but we are noticing big changes for most of them.”

HEADTEACHER, SPECIAL SCHOOL



FROM 'PROBLEM' TO 'PROBLEM SOLVING': the first principles of a positive approach to meetings

Positive schools recognise that everyone carries a wealth of resources which can be used to move forward – including parents, professionals, children and young people

Reflect on how the meeting can be managed to bring these into the open

A positive approach treats 'the problem' as the problem – not the parent, child or professional

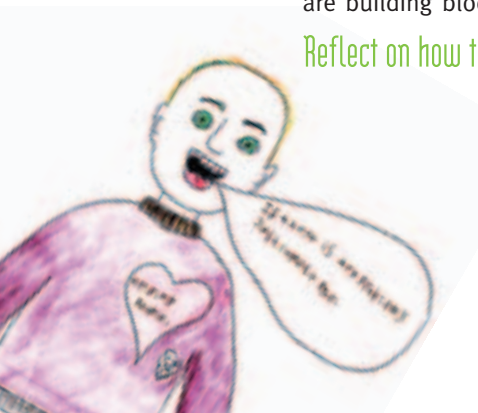
Reflect on how the young person can be helped to feel that change is possible

There are usually exceptions to 'the problem' – problem-solving approaches draw from what seems to be working already

Find out what the young person thinks is working

Although formal meetings may become a familiar experience for practitioners, they are unusual experiences for children. It can be helpful to hold this in mind, even where the pupil has attended many meetings. Empathy, sensitivity and respect are building blocks of good practice.

Reflect on how the young person is feeling





In examples of good practice, schools:

- Invest time in building relationships with pupils who are experiencing difficulty.
- Discuss with the young person which member of staff could prepare and support him or her best.
- Recognise that the experience of the meeting will reflect the quality of the preparation and ongoing relationships and support that come first.
- Maximise the choices and control given to each individual young person over how the meeting will be conducted.
- Recognise how important some factors are to young people, such as respect, fairness and feeling listened to. These are important even if the meeting is exploring difficult issues or the outcome is not what the young person wants.
- Offer some follow-up support to the young person, to check that he or she understands what has happened and to offer emotional support if needed.

In examples of good preparation before a formal meeting, practitioners:

- Help the young person to express and critically reflect on his or her own priorities for the meeting. Picking the right time is crucial and some young people may like to work up a list of points during the lead up to the meeting.
- Encourage the young person to imagine the meeting, and consider what might be most difficult. Young people need help with their feelings, as well as practical preparation.
- Talk to the young person about how he or she will communicate at the meeting. Some young people may appreciate being given a range of choices, for example:
 - preparing and practising
 - reading words that they have prepared
 - writing views down or having help to do so
 - speaking through a trusted adult
 - giving views to one adult rather than the whole group
 - communicating feelings through a poem or picture
- Give the young person a choice of where to sit. The young person might prefer to arrive first, receiving others into the space, rather than walking into a busy room.
- Prepare a visual 'agenda' or plan of the meeting to display.

Help pupils to be informed when they go to formal meetings by explaining the five 'W's'

Why?...

Why the meeting is happening – does the pupil agree that it is needed? If the meeting is compulsory, can the pupil see where there might be a benefit?

Who?...

Who will be there – does the pupil know the people and their roles? If strangers are coming, why is this happening? Is there an opportunity for the pupil to meet them first? What is the right balance between a shared approach to pupil support and protecting the young person's privacy?

When?...

When it will take place and for how long – can the pupil manage the length of the meeting without a break? Would attending part of the meeting be more realistic?

Where?...

Where it will be – would a visit to the venue help? Does the pupil have a preferred venue and is this practical? What is the right balance of formality and informality?

What?...

What will be achieved by meeting – does the pupil have realistic hopes and expectations? What would he or she see as a good outcome? It is difficult for young people to absorb information when emotions are running high. Informing a pupil might not be a one-off event – information may need to be reiterated at different points in the process by someone the pupil trusts.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Here are some discussion points which can be used to structure dialogue between the pupil and the staff member supporting him or her, in preparation for a formal meeting

- What is most important to you?
- What would you like to happen? When you imagine an ideal situation, what do you see?
- If that isn't possible, what would be the next best thing? (give examples based on the 'ideal', helping the pupil to break the 'journey' into stages)
- Are there times when 'the issue' is not a problem? What do you see?
- Who do you get on well with? If I asked this person to tell me some good things about you, what would they say?
- What do you think will happen at the meeting? What will people talk about?
- How do you think you will feel?
- What will you do if you feel that you are losing your temper/getting upset?
- What would you like others to do to help you?
- How will you show me that you want 'time out'?
- How could we make the meeting work better?
- What is the best way of making sure that you get your views across and are listened to?
- Can you think of a time when you got your point of view across well? How did this happen? What can we learn from this?



SOMEONE WHO LISTENS



PUPIL COUNCILS

AND OTHER FORMAL STRUCTURES

Pupil councils have become increasingly common as we have come to recognise the importance of hearing children's and young people's views, both within the education community and society as a whole. They can provide a helpful focus for two-way dialogue between the senior management team and pupils in school, and a mechanism for taking the temperature of pupil opinion. However their use poses a range of challenges to schools, practitioners and pupils.

Group meetings can be frustrating and confusing situations for pupils, as they are at times for adults. A successful outcome relies on a shared understanding of how the meeting will be conducted.

- Is the meeting a one-off or a regular event? Will it be long or short?
- Does the meeting need a chairperson? What is the role of the chair and who will take it on?
- Do pupils need to know what will be discussed in advance, or can issues be brought forward as they arise?
- How is the order of the meeting decided? Which items will get the most attention and who decides what is most important?
- How will pupils indicate that they want to speak?
- How will decisions be made? Will everyone agree from the outset? Will discussion result in consensus, or will a vote be taken?
- How will the discussion be recorded? Whose job is this?

Meetings do not have to follow 'adult' conventions to be successful. Consider circle time, group work games and other discussion exercises, all of which enable issues to be considered and participants to have a fair opportunity to express their views. The way that meetings are conducted should suit the pupils' needs first and foremost.



However, even when informal, meetings are complex emotional and social experiences, demanding that participants listen to each other, negotiate, manage disagreement and reach decisions. Pupils will often identify these ‘soft skills’ as the ones that they find most demanding and want to develop. This makes pupil councils fertile ground for developing emotional literacy and communication skills, but also brings the challenge of considering how best to support children and young people.

In examples of good practice, schools:

Prioritise communication and show flexibility

- By giving pupils opportunities to bring forward their own issues and ideas, in addition to responding to the consultation requests of adults in school
- By ensuring that pupil council activity is communicated back to the whole school community, especially where decisions will affect others
- By acknowledging what pupils have said, and explaining why decisions have been taken where it is not possible to deliver the changes that pupils want

Support and develop pupils

- By consistently sending out the message that all pupils have a valuable contribution to make – staff respect the different interests, abilities, communication styles and talents of pupils and draw on each individual’s strengths within the group
- By recognising the importance of ‘soft skills’ to the success of the pupil council, as well as the mechanics of how meetings work or how pupils are elected
- By providing a framework for meetings skills training – including induction for new members, which can be delivered by more experienced pupils

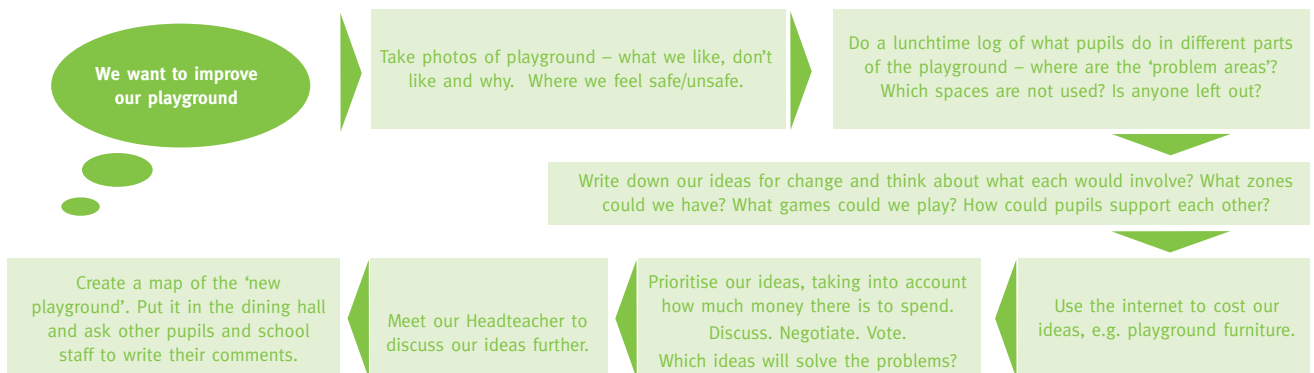
Consider these ideas in relation to other meetings in your school – what works well in one meeting may work in others, e.g. staff meetings, parent meetings and meetings with partner agencies.

AND IS IT WORKING? ...

a trouble-shooter's guide

'The pupil council is just a talking shop'

- ▶ **Problem:**
The pupil council can lose credibility amongst pupils when they are unable to see outcomes.
- ▶ **Possible solutions:**
 - Break the task down into small steps – what could pupils do today that would help them to move towards their objective?
 - Use activities (practical tasks, solution-focused or decision-making exercises) as well as talk to move the work forward.
 - Help pupils to weigh up issues in terms of the potential outcome and the likely effort required – do they want to go for a 'quick hit', or take on a hefty issue that will take time or be hard to shift? Can there be a balance of both?
 - Allocate a small budget, and give guidance on its use, to give the pupil council a real focus.
 - Consider how the pupil council's ideas might be taken forward in other areas of the curriculum or school, to speed up progress and give more pupil time to projects



IS IT WORKING? ...

'Nobody turns up!'

► **Problem:**

It can be frustrating for pupils when there are different levels of commitment and participation within the group.

► **Possible solutions:**

- Reconsider the purpose of the group – do all young people agree with its aims? Is it possible to re-visit this in a fun way to refresh the group?
- Is the level of commitment required for participation in the group too high? What other demands do young people have on their time and in their lives?
- Have pupils been asked their views on how they feel the group is going? It may be easier for pupils to express their views individually and anonymously, to really 'bottom out' any problems.
- What is the group dynamic? Are some pupils dominating? Do some pupils prefer to have less formality? Are there age differences? A gender bias? Do the pupils know each other? Team-building exercises may be a useful way to enable pupils to build relationships and share their ideas on how they can work together.
- Help pupils to reflect on what they have done and where they are going next, collectively and individually – tools such as diaries, storyboards, personal learning plans or portfolios and planners can help.
- Create clear roles for individuals within the group by drawing on their strengths. Provide support for some pupils to develop their role, perhaps by pairing pupils, developing a buddy system between pupils or appointing mentors from the staff team.
- Meetings skills training can help pupils to include others, listen, speak and chair more effectively.



'The pupil council doesn't speak for me'



Problem:

The pupil council is regarded as the key mechanism for consulting pupils in school, but it is a small group of peers whose views may not be representative.



Possible solutions:

- Support pupil council members to consult their peers, but be aware that they may find it challenging to hear views that they do not share. They could conduct their own surveys or polls, have a suggestion box or tour classes during registration.
- The pupil council could lead whole school assembly, to increase its profile.
- Have a pupil council noticeboard in school.
- Create opportunities to involve a wider layer of pupils in spin-offs, sub-groups and even whole school activities – pupils who do not want to sit on the council may be able to contribute in other ways.

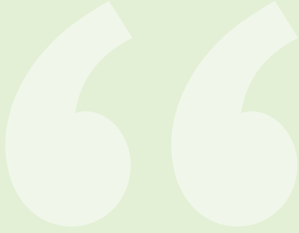


“We talked about the playground and about getting the wall painted and decided yes to it getting painted.”

PRIMARY 7 PUPIL

“You have to be quite good at thinking of ideas”

PRIMARY 6 PUPIL



Lawmuir Primary School (North Lanarkshire) Pupil Council meets fortnightly during lunchtime and has a representative from every class. The Council discusses issues brought by class representatives that have been raised in circle time and suggestions that have been put in the Post Box. Minutes of meetings are shared with all staff and discussed at circle time by class representatives, so that they can bring back comments from their classmates. The Pupil Council has led whole school assemblies to enhance its profile throughout the school year.

The Pupil Council invites speakers on local and school issues, for example a local councillor to discuss the bing near to the school and the catering services manager in relation to healthy tuck and lunches. The Parents' Association consulted the children about playground toys.

Pupils' views have been channelled into the school development plan from the Pupil Council, circle time, assembly and an audit of pupil opinion for P4 to P7 pupils (based on HMIE's pupil questionnaire), which is conducted on a cycle.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION WORKER IN SCHOOL



“If you're going to be in the pupil council you must have sensible ideas that a school can actually have.”

PRIMARY 5 PUPIL

| PEER SUPPORT

Many Scottish schools are developing peer support from 'playground friends' to senior pupil buddying of junior pupils. In some schools, pupil-led clubs and groups operate during breaks, and pupils have initiated projects between primary and secondary schools to ease transition for new pupils. Many pupils feel highly motivated to help others, prevent bullying and provide information and support for their peers.

In examples of good practice, schools:

Give thought to how they recruit peer supporters

- Some schools advertise the role and ask pupils to apply, providing a 'job description' and conducting interviews
- Others target particular pupils – the benefits of being a buddy can transform pupils who have difficulties in other aspects of their school or home lives
- Some have worked with pupils on a marketing approach to ensure the project has a popular image, before recruiting
- A whole school or whole class approach to training can contribute to personal and social development for all pupils, whilst encouraging a broader range of pupils to come forward for the role
- Recruiting from the most senior pupils in school can prevent consistency as there is 100% turnover as pupils leave – some schools work around this by recruiting two cohorts from different age groups, which eases pressure on the programme



Train effectively

- Make sure that there is time and space for training
- Use or encourage pupils to set ground rules, for example an agreement to maintain confidentiality within the group – training in peer support often asks pupils to reflect and draw on their own experiences to help them to empathise with others, and these may be sensitive
- Use team-building approaches to ensure that peer supporters support one another in their new role

“We had a group of established senior ‘buddies’ but as they moved on from school, we took the opportunity to take stock of our training programme. We decided to raise the status and profile of the buddy role by offering a residential training programme, which sent an important message about how we value our buddies.

The training covers emotional literacy, talking and listening skills, boundaries and the chance to consider peer support scenarios before taking on the real life experience. We were able to base the training on the experience of previous S6 buddies who had given us good feedback on how the scheme could be further developed, before they left us.

After the residential, pastoral staff collaborated with our new buddies in delivering workshops to younger pupils on positive self-esteem, expectations and opportunities available in school. This was a good way to introduce younger pupils to the buddies, but also helped to build on our whole-school commitment to social and emotional wellbeing.”

PRINCIPAL TEACHER OF PASTORAL CARE



In examples of good practice, schools: get communication right

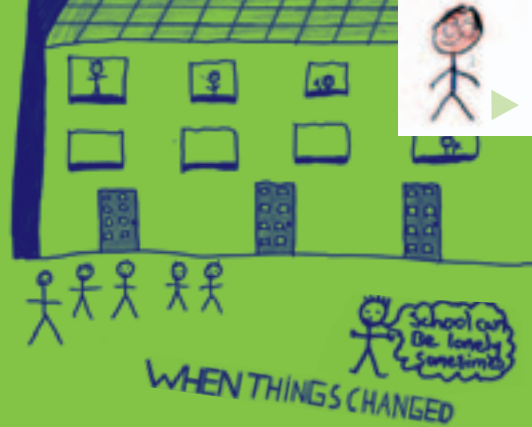
- Everyone in school, including non-teaching staff, has to understand the relationships between pupils, staff and buddies – awareness raising for all staff at the outset will help to ensure wider support for buddies in their role.
- Work to develop team commitment to the programme – programmes are often championed by a key member of staff, but a team approach may make them easier to sustain.
- Provide parent information in the school handbook, newsletters or a parent meeting, which can be led by buddies. Parents may have reservations about the programme – they may worry about their child being buddied or feel that their child is too young to take on the responsibility of being a buddy.
- Carefully consider what language to use in relation to peer support programmes or spaces used within school – communication on the value of buddying or peer support can give the approach an unhelpful connotation for those pupils being buddied, for example few pupils would wish to identify themselves as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘bullied’. Buddying and peer support can be used to develop positive aspects of school life.



I feel safe when my
buddy stays with me
in the playground
because nobody will
start a fight.

AND IS IT WORKING? ...

a trouble-shooter's guide



'I feel out of my depth'



Problem:

Once young people start talking to a buddy or mentor, it is difficult to constrain or predict what might be disclosed. Buddies can be tempted to overstep the mark by taking on too much or offering advice when this is inappropriate. They may simply feel overwhelmed by what they have heard.



Possible solutions:

- Try using a basic job description as a tool to guide pupils and bound their role – pupils can help to create this
- Ensure that buddies have a clear understanding of the limits to their role and have opportunities to practice explaining these to others. Buddies must be confident in identifying issues that are beyond the scope of their role and explaining why and who else will help.
- Scenario-based exercises are a useful way of helping buddies to consider how they respond to difficult situations, when to involve school staff and in clarifying the consequences of taking on too much
- Recognise that buddies may at times hear information that affects them and require emotional support themselves – ongoing staff support in relation to all aspects of the role is crucial to the success of a buddying programme
- Basic child protection awareness is included in some schools' training and may be helpful for buddies and peer supporters. Child protection awareness may help in clarifying and bounding the role of a buddy.

IS IT WORKING?

Learning for life: national

Children and young people are "Safe and Well"

- ✓ We listen
- ✓ We act to keep children safe

Child and

Leadership + vision

- + a school community for all children
- + positive ethos
- = Better behaviour
- = Better learning



Buddying and mentoring

A voice in my school

Included!

Safe!

Healthy!

Achieving!

Additional support for learning

I have a say



"Health promoting schools"

Make school experiences happy, healthy experiences

Achievement & attainment national priority

We work to make sure that children are... so that they can

- ✓ safe
- ✓ active
- ✓ included
- ✓ healthy
- ✓ nurtured
- ✓ respected and responsible
- ✓ achieving

Inclusion & equality: national

We share a vision Scotland's Vision for Children



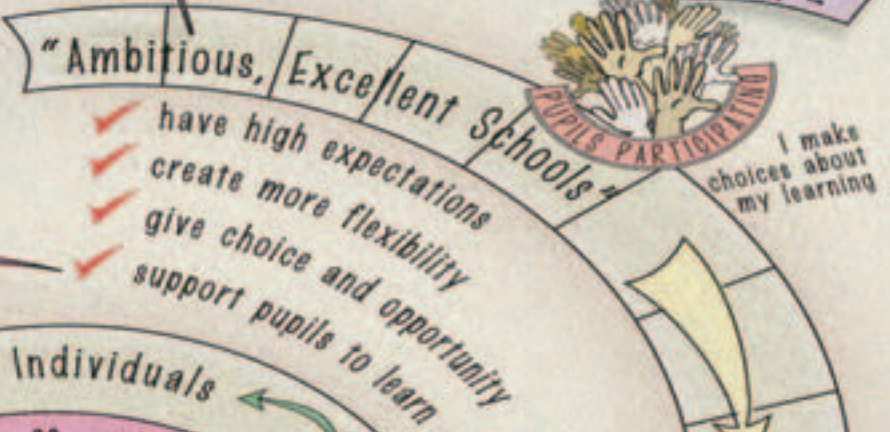
empowerment & wellbeing

national priority 5

- They learn help-seeking and life skills
- They are helped through transitions
- They are supported

Children are "Happy, Safe
Achieving their Potential"

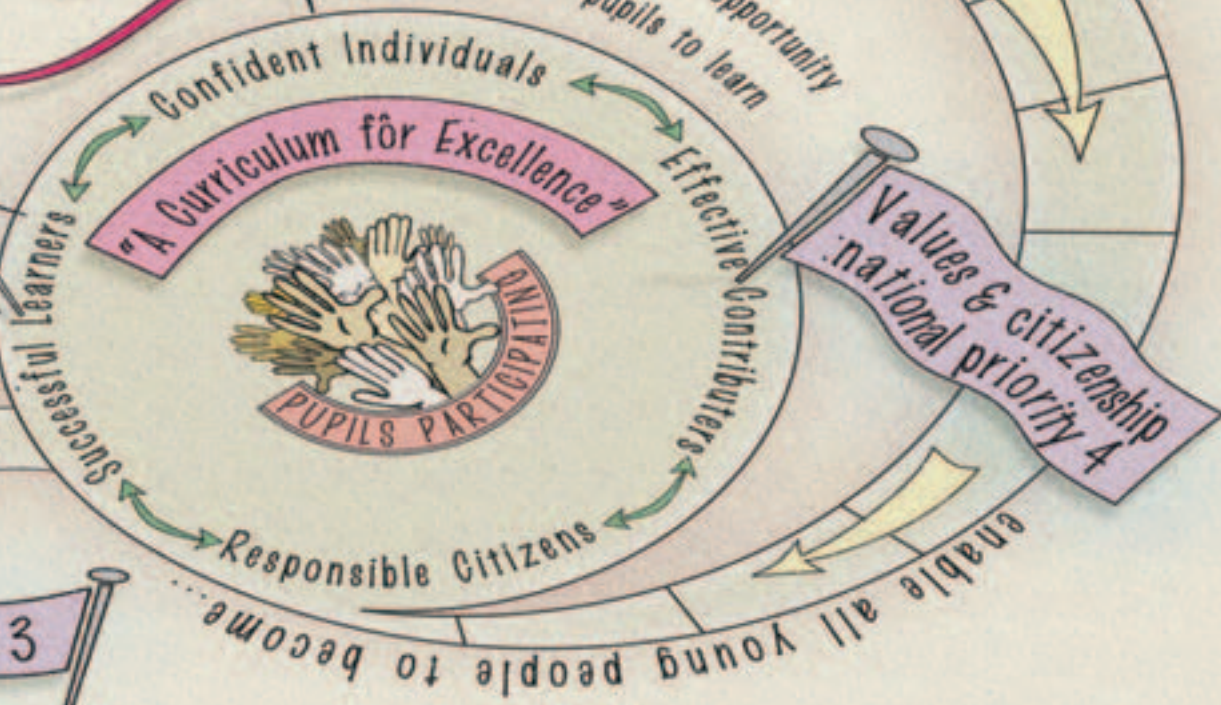
Framework for learning
national priority 2



national priority 1

become.

national priority 3



In Doune Nursery (Stirling), consultation with children and parents about curriculum planning is embedded in practice. This would include consultation about what topics would provide the contexts for the children's learning, and how and when these would be developed. There are regular meetings with children to find out how they felt about the activities available, and to give them an opportunity to evaluate their learning.

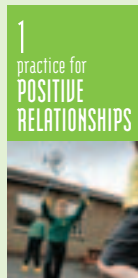
“We had a number of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and wanted to develop participation in ways that would allow all pupils to contribute. So we took a whole school approach with a number of strands.

We used some classroom strategies such as circle-time, and actively taught problem-solving skills. We extended this with bubble-time, where discussions between pupils are used to solve problems, drawing in an adult mentor where needed.

In the playground, we involved pupils in raising money to buy games. At lunchtime we developed the idea of ‘buddying-families’ where each table now has a family name and badge designed by pupils. We also have a peer awards scheme, eco-committee and active pupil council.

Our whole school commitment has meant that we have developed from being a school with a need to find ways of supporting SEBD pupils, to one where children are engaged in learning and school life, and are prepared to take on responsibility.”

PRIMARY HEAD TEACHER



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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