

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Pupil Participation in Decision Making.

Recommendation 13.

Schools should ensure that there are formal mechanisms in place to allow all pupils to regularly share their views with teachers and other pupils, and to participate in decision making on matters which affect them directly. These mechanisms should allow for consultation and active participation on a range of issues, including the setting of priorities for the school development plan.

Recommendation 14.

Schools should ensure that opportunities are provided for senior pupils at both primary and secondary levels to take responsibility for buddying and / or mentoring junior pupils.

1. Background.

The Discipline Task Group recognised the importance of the involvement and participation of children and young people in the decisions which affect their lives. This is set in the context of the Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - to which the UK Government is a signatory, and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 where the welfare of the child is paramount. Some genuine progress has been seen in the reduction of challenging behaviour when pupils enjoy a positive experience in school which meets their needs, treats them with respect and involves them in decision making.

However, effective participation by children and young people in decision making requires them to have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Schools must ensure that their pupils are provided with the necessary information and guidance to do this.

Principles of successful Pupil Participation.

- A culture of collaboration where everyone's ideas are heard and respected.
- The sharing of power and responsibility.

- Bottom up influencing of decisions.
- An openness to the possibility of change.

2. Mechanisms for ensuring Pupil Participation.

2.1 Pupil Council / School Council. (or similar forum)

The recent Standards in Scotland's Schools Act ruled that schools should find out what pupils think by setting up consultation bodies such as Pupil Councils. It is generally agreed that these will only work if they are set up and run with conviction and not in a spirit of tokenism.

A Pupil Council / School Council or similar forum is a group of pupils, teachers and possibly other staff who meet regularly to:

- Involve pupils more in the life of the school.
- Contribute to class and whole school decision making.
- Listen to what pupils have to say.
- Look at ideas for improvement.
- Decide what needs to be done to make the school a better place.
- Decide how it can be done.

In most instances, children will be elected to represent their peers and the council may even have a devolved budget to put ideas into action. The pupils, through their elected representatives, can become involved in virtually any issue affecting school life from the School Development Plan to playground facilities, litter and after school clubs. A very common example of pupil participation through a Pupil / School Council in decision making relates to the **promotion of positive behaviour**, where children and young people are fully involved in drawing up expectations, rules, rewards and sanctions. In some schools in Scotland, it is the children and young people who are responsible for managing and coordinating the organisation and allocation of the positive rewards as part of the positive behaviour policy. Elections to Pupil Council / School Councils can be as simple or as complex as the school wants them to be, from a show of hands in the classroom to a mini version of a general election. The important thing is that they are fair and democratic.

2.2 Buddying Scheme.

This is a scheme where older pupils support younger pupils in a range of different issues, including bullying, homework, forming friendships and

coping with transitions. These schemes can offer a listening ear and non threatening support for all children and young people and provide them with a sense of security. A buddying scheme can be set up in both secondary and primary. Buddying Schemes are based on the fact that young people, when experiencing some concern or worry, most often seek out other young people. This may happen anyway in an informal manner in any school but a Buddying Scheme gives it a structured and supervised approach.

For schemes like this, senior pupils have to be trained. This does not of course make them professional counsellors in any way. They are simply young people who offer supervised support to other young people to help them think about and reflect on concerns they may be experiencing. The basis of any buddying scheme is the understanding that those involved have similar characteristics with those being helped, for example, age or life experience.

Training could include :

Ground rules

Responsibilities

Duties.

Attitudes.

Questioning Skills.

Listening Skills.

Confidentiality.

Child Protection Issues.

The aim of training would be to promote a sensitive approach to listening which encourages others to express and explore their frustrations.

Examples of what a buddy can do :

- Help younger or new pupils make the transition to a new school.
- Work alongside a younger pupil for one hour a week.
- Help children who are in trouble or are being bullied.
- Help children who are lonely and don't seem to have friends.
- Encourage other pupils to follow the school code of conduct.
- Represent the views of pupils.
- Make suggestions to improve the life of the school.
- Help in a paired reading scheme.

2.3 Circle Time.

The philosophy behind Circle Time or Quality Circles reflects mutual respect and a capacity for children to be given opportunities to talk, share concerns and participate in decision making. Of paramount importance to Circle Time is emotional safety which is produced by firm ground rules designed to encourage respect for all participants. The Circle Time model can be applied to secondary schools in exactly the same way as it is implemented in primary schools.

Circle Time helps create a positive ethos by providing :

- A space for listening and a space for being listened to
- A time and a place for reviewing and reflecting on what has been learned.
- A feeling of community and responsibility.

The exchange of views and ideas can cover a range of different topics, including learning and teaching, personal / social relationships and bullying. Circle Time can support the personal and social development of children and young people and it can be an opportunity for them to be heard by other children and adults in a secure and supportive atmosphere. Circle Time builds the esteem of each participant and encourages pupils to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. It therefore has impact in many areas of school life including:

- Individual Motivation and achievement.
- Enhancing positive relationships.
- Personal and social development.
- Producing calm behaviour and self discipline.

How can the school use Circle Time ?

- Weekly circle time class meetings (half an hour to an hour)
- Brief daily Circle Time class rituals.
- Principles of Circle Time applied to meetings of pupil council.
- For meetings of other members of staff.
- For schools to establish their Code of Conduct, Dress Code etc.
- Can be used in PSD lessons.

- 2.4 Paired Reading Schemes.
- 2.5 Pupils present at the formal Parent Interviews (Progress Report Meetings)
- 2.6 Prefect System.
- 2.7 Responsibility for fund raising.
- 2.8 Designing and selection of dress code.
- 2.9 Coordinating the invitation of guest speakers and visitors to the school.
- 2.10 Consultation over the planning of trips.
- 2.11 Pupils on School Boards. (16 to 18)
- 2.12 Consultation with all pupils in attendance at the school over the priorities and content of the School Development Plan. (Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000)

Schools which are committed to listening to the views of pupils through the creation of a positive ethos, rather than being top down institutions of discipline and social control appear to achieve more success in establishing positive pupil participation and behaviour. (Better Behaviour _ Better Learning June 19 2001)

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