



"HAVING YOUR SAY"
>> GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOL COUNCILS



NICCY has three main tasks. These are to make sure children know about their rights, researching those rights and problems, and taking action to help when children's rights are being ignored or underplayed.

If you have a complaint about the way a child is being treated, or if you require further advice on how to engage with children, please contact us:

By phone: **028 9031 1616**
By e-mail: info@niccy.org
By the internet: www.niccy.org

Or by writing to:
NICCY,
Millennium House,
17-25 Great Victoria Street,
Belfast BT2 7BA

You can also contact us by Minicom on 028 9031 6393, or by using the Relay Services to contact NICCY's telephone number (028 9031 1616).

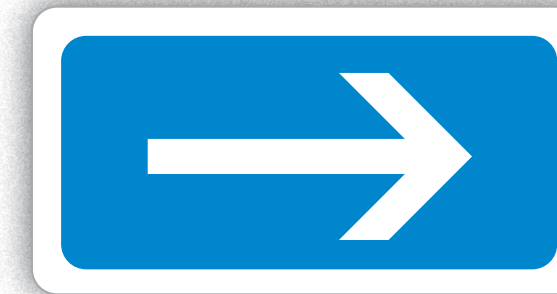
Please contact the Communications and Participation team at NICCY if you require alternative formats of this material.

Endorsed by



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'The participation of children in school life should be promoted as part of the process of learning...'
(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Council 2001)



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>> BACKGROUND

What is Democra-School?

Democra-School is a way to promote, support and enhance pupils having a say in school. The contents of the guidance have been developed by NICCY in partnership with schools, pupils and using legislation and guidelines from local, national and international programmes.

Helping children and young people have a say is part of NICCY's role to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people. It is also an important part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the convention says that young people should have a voice on issues that affect their lives.

Under various parts of the law that set up the office of the Commissioner, NICCY must make sure that it involves and listens to views of children and young people.

NICCY hosted a conference called Democra-School on 23rd March 2006. More than 220 delegates were there, including 140 pupils, principals/senior teachers and key stakeholders.

The aims of the conference were to **develop a sense of democracy among children and young people, to promote school councils and share best practice.** The day was used to share experiences, collect existing good practice and ideas for future development from pupils, teachers and key stakeholders.

We held the event because children and young people spend a vast amount of the years that shape their future at school and because NICCY's strategic plan is to raise awareness and promote children and young people's participation.

The day was targeted at post-primary school, primary school and special school pupils and teachers. The event was practical, interactive in nature and focused on the young people who were involved.

Outcomes:

The guidance in this pack is based on the exchange of information and identifying good practice that was gathered from 12 different workshops on the day. It was also put together using laws applying to Northern Ireland, how school councils operate in other parts of the UK, and experiences and information from countries such as Canada, Australia and other parts of the world. The UNCRC was also used as a benchmark for the work.

Each separate insert represents a key issue that pupils / teachers and other stakeholders have recognised in the development of school councils as being vital to ensure a positive, meaningful and worthwhile experience for all involved.

Each insert identifies a particular guidance point, and then explains why it is important. It then goes on to suggest how to implement the guidance and includes a simple check list to help develop best practice.

By its nature this is not a definitive guide, neither is it meant to be totally rigid - each school is different and has different needs. Some may already have a school council, others may be beginning to develop one.

If your school already has a council you can use this guidance as an evaluation tool; that is a way to check how well things are going. Other schools may have just started the process or be thinking about creating a school council. In this case, NICCY believes the guidance can help them along the journey to have the best school council possible.

This guidance can help schools at every step on the developmental journey from creation to evaluation.

Throughout the document there is signposting to additional information and resources which schools are encouraged to investigate.

At the Democra-School conference in March 2006, the then Minister for Education, Angela Smith MP, stated in a videoed interview, carried out by a member of the NICCY Youth Panel, that she would welcome using the findings from the conference to support the development of a school council policy.

NICCY looks forward to this development.

