

Pupil Participation - Case Studies of Good Practice identified by ETI.

1. Primary School

Formal structures for pupil participation begin in year four, with individual class councils in all classes from year four to seven feeding into the overall Pupil Council. All children in each class vote for three peers to hold the positions of chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary for a period of six weeks. Representation is balanced in terms of religious affiliation and gender and the teachers involve the children fully in the consideration of attaining this representative balance.

Within the year four class, in order to develop the children's early understanding of participatory processes, the teacher models the post holder roles and responsibilities and facilitates the debate style process for conducting class council business. By upper key stage two, the children are able to operate their class council meetings independently and confidently.

The class councils meet formally every Monday for twenty minutes to raise and consider no more than four items of business. Agendas and minutes are held in a class council folder which the class representatives take forward each Thursday to the Pupil Council meeting. A teacher, who fulfils the function of Pupil Council co-ordinator, facilitates the meetings by helping the children to manage their time effectively and to keep interactions pertinent and to the point. The children record their agendas and minutes in a pupil council folder within the C2K public folder and on the pastoral care notice board every week. Following Pupil Council meetings, the class council representatives report outcomes and decisions to the classes at the subsequent Monday meeting. Pupil Council representatives have presented their ideas to both the Parents' Council and Board of Governors and consequently, have successfully impacted change.

In addition, the children in year six operate the school's Eco Committee using the same structures and practices as the Pupil and Class Councils. This extends the opportunities for pupil participation further as only those children who do not hold Class or Pupil Council positions are able to be post holders. Their current areas of work in school include, for example, monitoring and reducing the use of electricity, reducing, reusing and recycling

school waste materials such as paper and organising the school's fruit shop for the promotion of healthy snacks. The school has been awarded the Green Eco Flag three times and on each occasion, the children have represented the school's work to the adjudicating authority.

The school's well-embedded structures highlight the importance the staff, parents and governors place on pupil participation being genuinely child-centred and on developing the children's understanding that they are positively empowered within a school ethos committed to openness and inclusion.

Extract from Inspection Report (2011)

There is an appropriate emphasis on building up the children's self-esteem by involving purposefully the children with their learning. The 'Class Council' and 'Pupil Council' system provide the children with a genuine consultative process whereby their views are presented on future improvements within the school and on changes within the pastoral policy. The Eco Committee organise the school's fruit shop from which the children can purchase a healthy snack at break time. The 'Green-fingers Club' and the 'Pupil Council' all contribute purposefully to school policy and the practices which encourage the children to adopt healthy lifestyles.

2. Special Schools

A collaborative project between a special school and an adjacent primary school was undertaken to develop the outside area of both sites (where outdoor space is at a premium) for the benefit of all the pupils and to maximise use through shared spaces. Consultation took place to harness pupil opinion on how best to use the available space and, as a result of this consultation, it was agreed that an arboretum trail would be created. Involvement of the pupils and members of the local community through surveys, discussion groups and involvement of the school councils meant that the pupils and the local community feel a sense of pride in, and ownership of, the outside spaces. A beautiful haven in an urban setting has been created where numerous, unique learning opportunities are on the schools' doorsteps.

Extract taken from ETI Survey Report (2012)

In a joint collaborative project, staff in the two schools have set themselves a huge challenge: to create an extensive Arboretum Trail which will bring the schools closer together in a series of design and practical activities over the next three years - pupil councils in the schools are the drivers, engineers and landscape artists in this super project and the outcomes predicted will provide a wide range of curricular and social experiences the children will not forget and which will ensure they leave school with a range of practical knowledge and skills. Early plans already have secured business links with external agencies and will even benefit the other three schools in the wider school campus.

3. Post-Primary

Two neighbouring post-primary schools, one in the controlled sector and one in the maintained sector, have developed excellent pastoral and curricular links and offer joint post-14 provision. Whether it is in the extra-curricular life of the schools, the academic life or even in the way that the pupils interact with the local community, pupils are encouraged to engage and become involved. The schools seek to offer genuine leadership responsibilities to pupils in the form of elections to school council, joint school council, senior leadership team and prefects. Within the joint school council, there is a mechanism to feed back to senior leadership and thus inform future choices that concern them. The pupils work on real projects: e.g. campaigning for a road crossing between the schools and engaging in voluntary work in local nursing homes, primary schools and charities. The fact that these opportunities are 'live' and not contrived helps the pupils feel that they are making a real difference in the community. The pupils also lead and/or take part regularly in school assemblies.

In one of the two schools, form teachers are given responsibility for the pastoral needs for the pupils in each form class. They have good opportunities to get to know their form class through fortnightly 'pastoral lessons' where they discuss issues relevant to that particular year group. Form teachers can 'feed' into the content of those lessons, taking back suggestions from their classes, ensuring that the pupil needs are addressed. All teachers of all subjects are encouraged to have the pupils evaluate the learning and the teaching across the curriculum, and these conversations have led to significant changes in course

content and delivery. Pupils can see that their views and needs are important and acted upon.

In addition, the head of pastoral care meets with the local education and library board's education welfare officer and educational psychologist on a regular basis, and the school's youth worker. The content of these meetings focuses on the needs of pupils at risk of marginalisation and how the school can best help each pupil achieve his/her potential and contribute in a meaningful way to society.

The pupils benefit from an extensive range of joint formal and informal educational, social and cultural experiences. At key stage 4, and at post-16, the schools have extended their curricular offer to include a wide range of applied and vocational courses which meet the pupils' abilities, interests and career aspirations, thereby underpinning the pupil-centred ethos of the schools. The range of courses offered is informed by well-conceived consultation with the pupils and with local employers.

Through pupil participation, the senior leadership teams of both schools are well-informed about, and responsive to, the needs of the pupils and the local community. The pupils, parents and wider community benefit from the positive community relations and the good levels of participation in a variety of shared educational and sporting activities.

Extract from Inspection Report (2012)

The school gives appropriate priority to developing the pupils' leadership skills and in involving them in decision-making. Through the collaboration with the local maintained school, and in particular, the joint senior student council, the pupils are able to initiate changes which provide wider community benefit, such as the plans to establish a pedestrian crossing between the two schools. The pupils from both schools work well together and demonstrate high levels of mutual understanding and respect.

Specific Case Study - Investors in Pupils

Effective and meaningful pupil participation and pupil voice is at the heart of the 'Investors in Pupils' award and, in 2014, a local Grammar school was the first in Ireland to receive the award. The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out an inspection of the school in February 2014 and recognised that the involvement of the pupils across all key stages in the leadership of the school and in the decision-making processes was a key strength of the provision. Key features of the highly effective practice include:

- pupils are consulted regularly on school policy and practice. Their opinions are valued highly by the staff and have informed the priorities for action in the school development plan;
- numerous ideas put forward by the pupils are supported practically and financially by staff, with clear communication with the pupils as to how their ideas are being progressed (and reasons are given as to why other ideas are not);
- the pupils are given responsibility for bringing their ideas to life. As a result, they are involved fully in the action planning, target-setting, implementation and evaluation of the development work;
- peer mentors are involved in the delivery of the taught personal development programme which is flexible and responsive to the emerging needs and interests of the pupils;
- pupils have had significant involvement in the planning of the pupil induction programmes and in the creation of the positive behaviour policy and reward system at key stage 3;
- well-structured, effective school councils allow for valuable engagement with the pupils and have led change in the school, including changes to the curriculum;
- the student leadership group is given many opportunities to develop skills and dispositions which prepare them well for the next stage of their learning, for life, and for employment. These skills and dispositions include critical and reflective thinking, a strong sense of personal and social responsibility, interviewing skills, entrepreneurship, resilience and communication skills.