Addressing Poverty Through Pupil Voice In Schools

Contents

Healthy schools. Healthy minds. Bright futures

Introduction

Involving pupils in decision-making about school life helps pupils express themselves and shows their views are considered and taken seriously (UNICEF, 1989). Pupil voice and involvement in school life can also create meaningful change, improve academic outcomes, and grow a sense of empowerment and inclusion, which is essential for lifelong wellbeing (Urinboyev, Per Wickenberg and Ulf L, 2016; Popay et al., 2020).

School Councils were in place at 91% of the schools in the Poverty-Proofing© the School Day Bradford sample by Children North East.

However, pupil voice was identified as a priority area for action. Children North East identified areas within this context that need further work.

In **76%** of schools, pupils were **unclear about the role of the School Council** - *"I'm not sure what they do.' (pupil)*

In **69%** of schools, there is **no monitoring of who takes up opportunities,** such as the School Council or student leadership.

In **38%** of the schools, pupils were **unclear about how the School Councillors were selected**.

Use this document to consider how pupils' voices are captured in your school through an income inequality lens.

Next Steps

To gather feedback on the experiences of schools from a financial perspective you could use the "Cost of the School Day survey" for **parents** and **teachers** from Child Poverty Action Group and the "Cost of the School Day survey" for **children** from Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (2023).

You may also want to use the **Cost of the School Day Clock** (page 30) and **the stories from Ross, Humeira, and Jessica** (page 46) to support discussions with children around poverty and education from the Cost of The School Day – Toolkit (Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, 2023). Although **the Cost of the School Day voice network** is only available for schools in Scotland, they have great ideas for activities to help engage in conversations around poverty at the bottom of their page.

Questions To Ask Your School

Creating Meaningful Opportunities for Pupil Voice for All

What Citizens Say

> *'You write a letter then the teacher chooses.'* (pupil)
>
> *'It's always the smart kids who get chosen.'* (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils do not feel comfortable talking to teachers in front of their peers.	• Have **designated times or spaces** for pupils to have private conversations with teachers. Make sure pupils are aware of these. • Could you have a **worry box** where conversations can be followed up?
There are no systems for monitoring the number of additional responsibilities that are available in school and schools did not check if those taking on **positions reflected the school cohort.**	• **Monitor the pupils who have additional responsibilities** as part of a wider audit into the take-up of extracurricular opportunities. • This should include looking at the number of pupils from diverse backgrounds and children on Pupil Premium**.**
There is no support at home to help with applications for School Council, so pupils feel like they won't be able to put forward a good case to be chosen for roles.	• Ensure pupils can **nominate themselves or others with an anonymised voting system**. • Any applications are to be written within school time, so all pupils have access to the same resources.
Pupils are unsure **how applications for school roles are judged** and how this is done fairly.	• Make it clear to pupils **how the process will work before appointing roles.**

Case Study

Bradford Schools

Each year, 2 pupils (1 boy, 1 girl) from each year group are elected to the School Council, based on a **written manifesto (speeches on mini-white boards)** and a pupil vote. Anyone can put themselves forward. *'We all write on paper who we want.'* **(pupil)**

This is good practice as all pupils have an equal opportunity to get involved, without the expectation of support or resources at home.

Each year, 2 different pupils from every class make up the Student Council, which meets regularly, and **everyone has a chance to apply**. Pupils we spoke to were very proud to be on the School Council: *'We are like mini teachers.'.* **(pupil)**

Peer Support Opportunities

What Citizens Say

'No-one is left out because the buddies help everyone.' (pupil)

'It's good to have a choice as to what you do to help school. Not everyone wants to be on the School Council, I like being a buddy.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Opportunities are all **teacher-led or feedback into teachers.**	• Have a **range of peer-to-peer support opportunities available** for pupils. This will give them confidence and leadership skills.
The only way to have a voice or involvement with the school is through the **School Council.**	• Give pupils a **role in developing or designing peer support arrangements** that work best for their cohort. • Examples include **reading buddies, lunchtime or playground buddies, relationship ambassadors, and mentors.**
Peer opportunities have no **way for pupils to feed back their thoughts and feelings**.	• **Gather feedback from the pupils on the peer support** arrangements to ensure they are providing a way for pupils to connect, feel valued, and have a voice.

Case Study

Bradford Schools

Peer support and buddying arrangements were available in some schools to support children with learning, friendships, or other issues (e.g. reading buddies, lunchtime or playground buddies, relationship ambassadors). **These roles were valued by children where they existed.**

Opportunities for Seeing Through Change

What Citizens Say

'They (the School Council) just give stuff out at assemblies.' (pupil)

'It would be really good if they asked us our thoughts.' (pupil)
'Our Reps need to tell us what has been discussed in the meetings.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils are unclear about the role of the School Council.	• **Clarify the role of the School Council with pupils and promote their work**. • This could be done as part of an assembly or regular classroom discussion.
Pupils don't feel confident in their role within the School Council.	• **Pupils train their replacements on the School Council** and show them how to do the role, building relationships, creating teamwork, and building their confidence.
The changes that the School Council make are **not visible to pupils, so they don't see them as important.**	• **Develop a feedback loop from the suggestions and changes made** by pupils within the School Council back into the classroom.
Pupils suggest changes to teachers through the School Council or other means, and if they **are not possible, students may feel their ideas are not heard**.	• Give the pupils **feedback on why changes are not possible and** show that they have been processed and their thoughts are valid.

Case Study

Bradford Schools

As the year comes to an end, **the children train up their replacements** on the Council and show them how to do the role, building relationships and creating teamwork between Y6 and Y5.

Creating Student Leadership Roles

What Citizens Say

'I really got into gardening and asked if we could have a club and now there's going to be a gardening club starting after half term which is great.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers	Guidance
Pupils may have an **interest, but it does not align with the work of the School Council**.	• Have a **range of opportunities** for pupils to engage in, for example, **head boy/girl, librarian, or play leaders.**
Pupils **may not know how to reflect their interests** to teachers and may not feel anything could come from sharing them.	• Have **pupils voice feedback to teachers at least once a year** to help them understand their needs and wants and shape the opportunities.
The pupils may not feel like the **School Council has enough time** to focus on the issue they are worried about.	• If there are pupils with interests beyond the School Council. • Alternative groups can be set up to meet their needs, e.g. the **Health and Wellbeing Council or Eco-Council.**

Case Study

Bradford Schools

There is an enthusiastic Eco-Council, chosen by staff annually, who are looking at ways in which the school can become more environmentally friendly. They have started to introduce paper recycling and bottle recycling:

'It's hard work but it's really rewarding as we're helping to save the planet, a little bit at a time.' (pupil)

There is a **school enterprise group** who make and sell cakes and biscuits each Wednesday after school, to raise funds to put back into the school:

'If you can't go one week you know that it will be on again, so you can go another time.' (pupil)

References

Child poverty action group in Scotland. Cost Of The School Day – Toolkit (2023) https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/resources/toolkits/toolkit-scotland

Cpag.org.uk. (2023). *Cost of the School Day Voice network*. [online] Available at: https://cpag.org.uk/what-we-do/project-work/cost-school-day/voice-network-and-youth-voice/young-people-take-action-school-costs#:~:text=Cost%20of%20the%20School%20Day%20Voice%20is%20a%20network%20of .

UNICEF. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989. Available at: https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/ .

Urinboyev, Per Wickenberg and Ulf L, R. (2016). Child Rights, Classroom and School Management: A Systematic Literature Review. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 24(3), pp.522–547. doi:https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02403002.

Popay, J., Whitehead, M., Ponsford, R., Egan, M. and Mead, R. (2020). Power, control, communities, and health inequalities I: theories, concepts and analytical frameworks. *Health Promotion International*, 36(5). doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa133.

If you have any feedback on this document or good practice that your school is doing, **we would love to hear from you.**

Please email **schools@mylivingwell.co.uk**.