

Schools Scrutiny Performance Panel

Briefing on the Pupil Voice and Pupil Participation

Bethan Thomas, Participation and Children's Rights Worker for Schools will attend the meeting today to provide a presentation and answer questions about the pupil voice in Swansea.

See below some further background information/reading on pupil participation across Wales.

ESTYN: Pupil participation: a best practice guide (Dec 2016)

[Link to full report](#)

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, governors, headteachers, senior leaders and staff in schools, local authorities and the regional consortia. It may also be of interest to those working with faith schools through diocesan authorities. It is intended to support schools in improving the extent and impact of pupil participation in their own school.

The Pupil Participation definition that is widely used is:

“Participation means that it is my right to be involved in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect me. Having a voice, having a choice”

The basis for pupil participation is found in article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC: UNICEF UK, 1990). In article 12 of the UNCRC, it sets out the rights of children and young people to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account on any matter that affects them.

“Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously” (UNICEF UK, 1990)

Wales is the first country in the United Kingdom to embed the principles of the UNCRC into legislation. The Welsh Government adopted the UNCRC as the basis for policy-making for children and young people in Wales in 2004 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004). Through the introduction of legislation with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, all Welsh Ministers must have due regard to the rights and obligations within the UNCRC in their day-to-day work.

In January 2004, the Welsh Government published 'Children and young people: Rights to Action' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004b). In this report, the Welsh Government defines children and young people as 'rights bearers'.

“Children and young people should be seen as young citizens, with rights and opinions to be taken into account now. They are not a species apart, to be alternately demonised and sentimentalised, nor trainee adults who do not yet have a full place in society”. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004, p. 4)

All maintained schools in Wales (other than a maintained nursery school and maintained infant school) are required to have a school council (National Assembly for Wales,

2005). The purpose of a school council is to make sure that pupil voice is well represented as a school develops and implements new policies and identifies priorities for improvement. School councils provide pupils with opportunities to discuss matters relating to their school, and to make representations to the governing body and the headteacher. A school council can also propose and take forward initiatives and projects on behalf of their peers, and be involved in strategic planning and processes such as the school development plan, governing body meetings and staff appointments. The school council must be elected democratically and meet at least six times a year.

In 2007, the Welsh Government launched the National Children and Young People Participation Standards for Wales. The seven standards are intended to promote the participation of children and young people in making decisions that will directly affect them.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 guidance 'Shared Purpose: Shared Future' makes specific references to the National Participation Standards for Children and Young People, whilst Annex B of the guidance for Public Service Boards sets out the expectation of adopting the National Participation Standards in working with partners, to enable children and young people to have a voice. Local authorities have been under a duty to enable the participation of children and young people since the Children and Families (Wales) Measure was passed in 2010 and statutory guidance has been in place since 2012.

Swansea has [National Standards for Participation](#).

Meaningful and purposeful pupil participation is intended to be a strong feature of the new curriculum.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 requires local authorities to promote and facilitate participation by children and young people in decisions that might affect them (Welsh Government, 2010). It requires local authorities to: *"make such arrangements as they consider suitable to promote and facilitate participation by children in decisions of the authority which might affect them, and to publish and keep up to date information about its arrangements."* (Welsh Government, 2010)

Local authorities fulfil these responsibilities through a named youth participation officer and one or more youth forums that represent the voice of young people at a local level.

Pupil participation: a best practice guide (Dec 2016) - Main findings

1. Pupil participation is strong in schools that have the following characteristics:

- Pupil participation and building positive relationships are an integral part of the school's **vision and ethos**. Leaders and managers have a clear strategy for promoting participation and for fostering good relationships. They support and encourage open and honest participation. Leaders create an ethos where pupils respect the rights of others and understand the importance of diversity and equality.
- There are clear **roles and structures** in place across the school to capture the views of all pupils on a wide range of issues relating to school improvement. Staff take the views of pupils seriously and act on them. Pupils, staff and governors

understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to participation. Leaders can demonstrate the impact of participation on school improvement planning.

- Pupils have a breadth of **opportunities to participate** within and beyond the school to contribute to debate and influence decisions across a wide range of issues that affect them. These opportunities encourage pupils to develop the skills needed to become active citizens.
- Pupils and staff access good quality **training and continuous professional development** that is well targeted to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to have pupils' voice heard in discussions and in decision-making.

2. Where pupil participation is strong, pupils make a valuable contribution to school improvement by influencing decisions on wellbeing, learning experiences, and the quality of teaching, and by helping to identify the school's future priorities. Many schools report that pupil participation contributes to an improved school environment and ethos, and to better relationships between all in the school community.

3. There are also benefits for pupils in greater participation, including improved health and wellbeing, improved engagement and behaviour, and improvements in learning, achievements and school performance. Through their greater involvement in decision-making, pupils develop valuable personal and social skills, such as listening, communication, negotiation, prioritising, and working with others. They also gain a better understanding of the rights of other members of the school community and of the consequences of actions that affect others. Pupils are better prepared to become ethical, informed and active citizens of Wales and of the world, and attitudes towards active citizenship become more positive.

4. Nearly all schools inspected between September 2013 and July 2016 comply fully with the School Council Regulations. In almost all schools, the school council makes a worthwhile contribution towards improving the school learning environment. In these schools, pupils' views are taken into account and influence decisions on school life.

5. Estyn gathers pupils' views through a questionnaire issued before inspecting all schools, pupil referral units and non-maintained settings. Most learners feel that staff respect them and help them to understand and respect others. Most learners are encouraged to do things for themselves and to take responsibility. Many learners also feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect and that their school listens to their views and makes changes they suggest.