



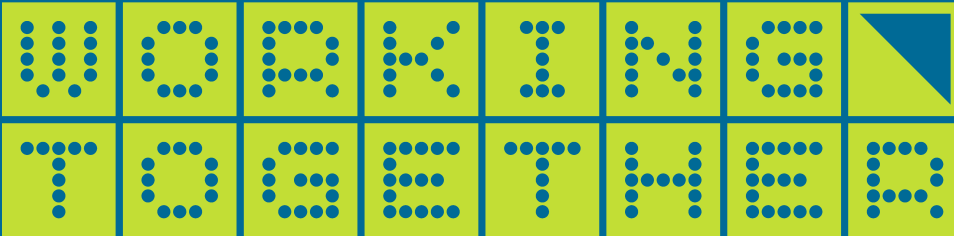
Curriculum & Standards

Headteachers, Chairs of Governors, LEAs, Parents, Pupils, Teachers

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Giving **children and young people** a say



## Foreword from Stephen Twigg, Minister for Schools



We make decisions that impact on children and young people every day. I believe that giving children and young people a say in decisions that affect them will impact positively on standards, behaviour and inclusion. Young people respond well to the challenge of responsibility as those involved in producing this guidance have shown. Experience of successful schools shows that decisive progress in educational standards occurs where every child matters; careful attention is paid to their individual learning styles, motivations, and needs; there is rigorous use of pupil target setting linked to high quality assessment; lessons are well paced and enjoyable; and pupils are supported by partnership with others well beyond the classroom.



I strongly support the principle of ensuring that our children and young people participate more effectively in democratic processes. We are embarking on an ambitious programme to embed participation in all our activities with the focus on the customer.

We want to encourage a cultural shift to ensure that children and young people can play their full role in the processes which are the bed-rock of our democratic life. We have introduced citizenship education in the school curriculum, which encourages discussion and debate and the active participation of children and young people. OFSTED's new school inspection framework now includes a section on consulting pupils and reporting their views about their involvement in the life of the school. We have changed the law so that school governing bodies can now appoint pupils as associate members allowing them to attend meetings and serve on committees.

This guidance is designed to provide a platform for encouraging best practice on pupil involvement. It reflects comments and suggestions received during the consultation launched in 2003. I am grateful to all the young people and adults who contributed directly to drafting the guidance and to all those who sent in comments.

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## Foreword from the Young People's Advisory Group<sup>1</sup>

“We have a right to be heard too.”

We as children and young people know what we want. The only way we can change things is to make sure that people who make decisions know what we think and what we want. If we don't get involved we are likely to get only what other people want.

“It doesn't matter how young you are, we all have a role to play.”

Of course children and young people are from different backgrounds and therefore see things in a different way to each other. Knowing what other people's views are leads to making better decisions. We want to be given a chance, whatever our age and background, to be heard and to have our views taken seriously. We all lose if children and young people do not put forward their views.

“I have learnt more about children having their say, listening to other people's views, and realised I can put forward my views.”

“My experience of helping to draft this guidance has helped me understand how to get involved in changing things, people wanted to hear what you had to say.”

When you put forward your views, it is good to know that other people are willing to change things because of what you think and say. Being involved makes you understand all the different things that people who make decisions have to think about. It also shows you how to go about doing it.

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<sup>1</sup> The Young People's Advisory Group worked alongside, and in equal status to, the Adult Advisory Group to help the DFES to write 'Working together: Giving children and young people a say'



## Introduction

This guidance – *Working Together: Giving children and young people a say* – encourages the involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes. It provides advice for local education authorities (LEAs), governing bodies and schools on the principles and practice to support work on consultation with pupils when taking decisions which affect them. LEAs and schools are required to have regard to it under section 176 of the Education Act 2002. But it is for LEAs, teachers and governors to decide how best to involve children and young people. The principles set out in this guidance are aimed at securing greater involvement of pupils in the general life of the school and of the wider community, not just on consultation exercises.

### About this guidance

The guidance is intended for those involved in providing education services within LEAs and schools as they plan to open up opportunities for children and young people to become more active participants in their education, including involvement in planning and the evaluation of their own learning. The guidance offers advice on how LEAs and schools might:

- organise and offer children and young people opportunities to develop their skills as active citizens; and
- organise a variety of approaches of involving children and young people.







It supports personalised learning through opportunities that already exist in Citizenship education, Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and in other wider school activities, for example the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) and the Connexions service. OFSTED also now gives pupils opportunities to give views about their education as part of the inspection process. It also supports Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which concerns giving children the right to put forward their views and ensuring that those views are taken seriously.

There is no single right way of involving children and young people in decision-making processes. However, the key principles set out in this guidance have been overwhelmingly supported during public consultation as necessary building blocks to involving children and young people. They will help each LEA and school when considering the range of activities to put in place to encourage children and young people to engage in decision-making processes.



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### Additional Copies

An electronic version of this document is available to download from [www.dfes.gov.uk/participationguidance](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/participationguidance). Hard copies are available from DfES publications (0845 6022260) by quoting reference, DfES/0134/2004.



## What do we mean by pupil participation?

- 1.1** This guidance is issued by the Secretary of State under Section 176 of the Education Act 2002<sup>2</sup>. The Law requires Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and schools to have regard to its content when taking decisions which affect pupils. The guidance supports pupils' entitlement to personal and social development<sup>3</sup>; the Statutory Order for Citizenship at Key Stages 3 and 4<sup>4</sup>; the national framework for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) at all Key Stages and Citizenship at Key Stages 1 and 2; Connexions service; and the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) principles. By pupil participation we mean adults working with children and young people to develop ways of ensuring that their views are heard and valued and encouraging them to:
- become more active participants in their education, including planning and evaluation of their own learning;
  - participate in creating, building and improving services to make them more responsive to their needs and those of the wider community;
  - make a difference in their schools, neighbourhoods and communities;
  - contribute to a cohesive community;
  - learn from an early age to balance their rights as individuals with their responsibilities as citizens; and
  - develop, through the way they are involved, the knowledge, understanding and skills they will need in adult life.
- 1.2** This means, in practice, opening up opportunities for decision-making with children and young people as partners engaging in dialogue, conflict resolution, negotiation and compromise – all important life skills. Children's and young people's personal development and our democracy will benefit from their learning about sharing power, as well as taking and sharing responsibility.
- 1.3** In this guidance 'decision-making' refers to both the processes and range of decisions taken by LEAs and school governing bodies in delivering services. The guidance is not aimed at diminishing the ability of decision-makers to apply established policies in cases related to individual pupils. It is, however, asking them to take account of children's and young people's views when setting and revising policies. The main objective is to ensure that the process of arriving at final decisions by LEAs, governors and teachers, include ways of involving children and young people in considering the options and taking account of their views. All children and young people should be involved in as wide a range of decision-making process as possible, subject to rules on confidentiality and data protection.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 176, Education Act 2002

<sup>3</sup> Section 78, Education Act 2002

<sup>4</sup> Citizenship: The National Curriculum for England – Key Stages 3-4





## What are the benefits?



### 2.1 Actively involving children and young people when making decisions:

- sends a powerful message that children and young people of all ages are citizens too and should be listened to;
- supports the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 12<sup>5</sup>;
- recognises children and young people as major stakeholders in society with important contributions to make to the design and delivery of services they receive, including education;
- is a great opportunity for children and young people to experience how rights go hand in hand with responsibilities; and
- helps every child to fulfil their potential as set out in *Every Child Matters*.

*Every Child Matters Green Paper* set out proposals for putting children's interest at the heart of everything done across government. This guidance contributes towards achieving one of the outcomes which matters most to children and young people:

– **enjoying and achieving** – getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood.

#### 5 Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

2.2 LEAs and schools which have successfully involved children and young people have found the following benefits:

#### *Children and Young People*

- Develop new skills: debating, negotiating, group decision-making and influencing decision-makers.
- Understand how decisions are made and how to contribute to them.
- Recognise they are taken seriously, resulting in increased confidence, self-esteem and aspirations.
- Receive better services, more responsive to their needs.
- Become more motivated to get involved in their school and wider community.
- Contribute to better communities, for example reduced bullying where peer support approaches are adopted (Helen Cowie, 2001).<sup>6</sup>

“It is saying to the student body, you are the most important people in the school.” (Davies, 1998)<sup>7</sup>

#### *The School*

- Improved academic achievement through participative processes.
- Improved behaviour and attendance as alienation and disaffection diminish.
- A more inclusive environment.
- Enhanced curriculum provision, including Citizenship and PSHE.
- Contributes to meeting the NHSS.
- The creation of listening and democratic schools.

“Schools that model democratic practice are most effective in promoting civic knowledge and engagement.” (Torny-Purta et al, 2001)<sup>8</sup>

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6 Cowie, H. (2001) The Effectiveness of Peer Systems in challenging school bullying

7 Davies, L. (1998) *School Council and Pupil Exclusions*

8 Torny-Purta et al (2001) *Citizenship and Education in twenty eight countries: IEA: The International Association for the Evaluation of Education and Achievement*

### *The LEA and the wider community*

- Promote democratic principles when decisions are reached taking many opinions into account.
- Take pride in encouraging a culture of respect for children's views and interests.
- Children and young people act as citizens and contribute to community cohesion and social inclusion.
- Children and young people act as positive role models.
- Better preparation of young people for the world of work.
- Improve provision, uptake and cost effectiveness of services targeted at children and young people.





## Principles of children's and young people's participation

- 3.1** Involving children and young people in decision-making should be underpinned by the following principles:

*Clear and visible commitment to involving children and young people with a route map of how to make it happen*

- A public commitment to the principle and practice by Chief Education Officers, governing bodies and headteachers, understood by everyone.
- Setting out what will happen, for example in a strategic or community plan, reflecting the organisation's needs and budget.
- Setting out expectations, for example, LEAs might wish to consult children and young people about their perceptions of priorities for school improvement.

*Children's and young people's involvement is valued*

This will include:

- Respecting and trusting all children and young people.
- Making appropriate information available, timely and relevant.
- Managing expectations i.e. being clear about what is 'out-of-bounds', for practical, legal or political reasons.
- Providing clear and timely feedback on outcomes to all children and young people, not just those directly involved in the process.
- Celebrating achievements and highlighting where outcomes have made a difference.

### *Children and young people have equality of opportunity to be involved*

This should ensure that:

- No-one is excluded or prevented from getting involved on grounds of race, religion, culture, disability, age, ethnic origin, gender, language or the area in which they live.
- Considering their age, maturity and understanding when deciding how to involve them.
- Ways are found to involve those who may appear to lack confidence or motivation, or are less articulate.
- Special support is provided to help 'hard-to-reach' groups and those facing the greatest barriers e.g. some pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- The level of confidentiality and privacy that applies to the decision-making process is made clear to all participants.

### *Children's and young people's participation and involvement are continually evaluated and reviewed*

It is important to:

- Measure how well the practice is meeting the rationale and success criteria set out from the start.
- Involve children and young people in the evaluation process and review of lessons learned.

### *Quality standards*

- Abide by agreed quality standards and codes of conduct for working with children and young people.
- Handle child protection issues in line with established standards.
- Agree rules on confidentiality and data protection in line with the law.



**4.1** It is ultimately for LEAs and schools to decide how best to involve children and young people. They will need to ask children and young people to clarify their areas of interest. Children and young people are more likely to engage in issues of genuine interest to them. There is no single right way of involving children and young people in decision-making processes. Approaches can be combined or used separately. For example children and young people could be involved at different levels in considering issues by the wider community: class or school council level, wider youth forums, membership of an advisory group. The views expressed at each level could feed into the next stage in the process. But for this to work well, schools and the children and young people need to be clear about what they are being asked to contribute to with clear channels for feedback. It is also important that they can access any practical support that may be necessary. LEAs and schools can, and do, use a variety of ways, such as councils and youth forums, peer-led work, surveys, planned consultations etc.

### *Young People Councils*

- 4.2** Young people councils make important contributions to the greater involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes. There are different levels to this:
- **At the local level** – representatives on local youth forums working alongside elected councillors at meetings in council chambers as shadows, or in their own right, giving the views of their peers. This helps them to understand how the system works, and ensure that their priorities inform decisions about the wider community.
  - **At the school level** – elected representatives from all year groups, contribute to decisions about the running of the school and to help improve it.
  - **At the class level** – the whole class or elected members of the class consider issues for the class, year group or the whole school.
- 4.3** Research suggests that effective class/school councils have a positive impact on the general atmosphere in the school, pupils' behaviour, commitment to learning, and exclusions<sup>8</sup>. Such benefits come about if the council is not symbolic or manipulated<sup>9</sup>.

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8 Davies, L (October 1998) *School Councils and Pupil Exclusions*

9 Baginsky, M and Hannam, D (1999) *School Councils: The View of Students and Teachers*.



### Circle Time

- 4.4 Working within agreed ground rules, using prompts to speak about any issue, children and young people listen to each other without comment or judgement. They explore concerns, develop relationships, create a sense of belonging and experience reflection. This is most commonly used with young children, but can be equally effective with all young people.

### Working with Peers

- 4.5 Many schools work with children and young people to work with peers in their own, or other schools and the wider community for mutual learning, support and mediation. This can happen in many ways, for example:

- **Peer-support** – older pupils directly support younger pupils e.g. help with reading, or simply listening to support pastoral care provided by the school. This may involve a supportive one-to-one relationship between two pupils.

Research has found that adolescents with learning and behaviour problems who served as peer tutors in a behaviour programme, helping other pupils for on-task behaviour were effective at doing this as far as other pupils were concerned. They made academic and social gains in their own behaviours, feeding into their behaviour across the school as a whole (Polirstock, 1986)<sup>10</sup>.

- **Peer-mediation** – when young people are trained to mediate disagreements between peers, such as name-calling, bullying, fighting and quarrelling. The approach is usually one of group support which enables children and young people to understand the hurt that they have caused so that each person comes away from the mediation with a positive experience and the sense that the outcome is fair to both sides.

Mediation is one of a number of approaches that have proved to be helpful in addressing bullying.

“Mediation is a structured process in which a neutral third party assists voluntary participants to resolve their dispute.” (Stacey, 1996)<sup>11</sup>

10 Polirstock, S (1986) Training problematic adolescents as peer tutors: benefits for the tutor and the school at large in *Techniques* 2, pp204-210.

11 Stacey, H (1996) Mediation into Schools Does Go! An outline of the mediation process and how it can be used to promote positive relationships and effective conflict resolution in schools in *Pastoral Care in Education* Vol 14 No 2 June 1996 p7

### *Planned Consultations*

- 4.6 When children and young people raise particular issues or there are particular decisions to be made, it may be appropriate to plan a consultation process. This might involve surveys, questionnaires and consultation events.
- 4.7 Many schools already do many of these things successfully and imaginatively. These include:
- **South Camden Community School in Camden** – peer education project involves Bengalis, Somalians, Nigerians in tackling racist violence in school and taking their message to the wider community.
  - **Lawrence Sheriff School in Warwickshire** – involves pupils in the staff recruitment process. As an alternative to candidates teaching model lessons, elected members of the school council interview candidates and provide feedback to the Senior Management Team before they interview each candidate.
  - **Sharnbrook Upper School and Community College in Bedford** – uses pupils as researchers. They collect data about specific issues and present their analysis and recommendations to Senior Management Team for action. This gives pupils a greater voice and supports and extends the school council.
  - **Westdene Primary School in Brighton and Hove** – selected pupils in years 5 and 6 have undertaken a six-week training programme to become ‘Playground Buddies’ as an element of the school’s anti-bullying policy. Their role is to encourage children who are upset, worried or feeling vulnerable to ‘seek the support of adults on their helping hands network’.
- 4.8 Other examples and case studies on pupil participation can be found at [www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/participationguidance](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/participationguidance) to complement this guidance.



## Role of the governing body



- 5.1** From an early age, pupils provide interesting insights into how their school is working for them, as recognised in OFSTED's *Inspecting Schools: Framework for Inspecting Schools*. Governing bodies, in discussion with the headteacher, staff and parents, could seek pupils' views and engage them in strategic decision-making. For example, the governing body, with the agreement of the headteacher and parents, could ask one or two governors to go into school to speak to pupils, and report back their views. Governors could also invite pupils to meetings and committees as observers (excluding confidential items) giving them the opportunity to see how a governing body works and what kinds of issues are discussed. From 1 September 2003 the governing body may also appoint pupils as 'associate members' allowing them to attend full governing body meetings and become members of governing body committees<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> See *Statutory Guidance on the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003* on the publications page of [www.governor.net.co.uk](http://www.governor.net.co.uk)



## Effective participation – a checklist

- 6.1** Pupils could be involved in a wide range of decisions, for example setting and reviewing policy, recruitment, budget, school environment, local planning etc. Addressing the following questions will help to ensure that both the process and outcomes are positive. This list is not exhaustive but only a start as there are likely to be other considerations linked to the circumstances of the LEA, school and the children and young people.

Consider:	For example:
<p><b>What are we consulting about?</b></p> <p><i>It is important to be clear about the objectives and the boundaries.</i></p> <p><i>Involve children and young people in important decisions.</i></p>	<p>New recreational facilities in the community? School meals policy? Curriculum provision? Teaching and learning? Target-setting? Behaviour policy? Uniforms? Staffing?</p> <p>Schools must provide the National Curriculum, but can decide how to timetable and teach. Pupils could also be involved in deciding <b>whether</b> to change the school uniform and <b>what</b> the new one should be.</p>
<p><b>Whom do we consult?</b></p> <p><i>The answer to the ‘what’ question above will inform this, so that children and young people who will be impacted by the service can contribute to its design.</i></p>	<p>All children and young people in the LEA? In a specific part of town? In specific types of schools? Specific groups or ages? Specific classes?</p> <p>Consider carefully how to ensure those with special needs are involved on an equal basis. The SEN toolkit (DfES 558/2001) provides detailed advice on this.</p> <p>A strategy is needed to involve those excluded from school.</p>
<p><b>At what stage?</b></p> <p><i>This will be informed by the ‘what’ and ‘whom’ questions above.</i></p> <p><i>Getting this right will impact on the level of children’s and young people’s commitment to the process and the amount of learning they get out of it.</i></p> <p><i>Bring them as close to the decision-maker as possible.</i></p>	<p>It may not be possible to involve children and young people at all stages of the decision-making process. However, as a general rule, it is best to involve them as early as possible. The earlier they get involved, the clearer their understanding of all the issues: required outcome, limitations on outcomes and their own involvement, time requirements and their rights and responsibilities in the process.</p>



Consider:	For example:
<p><b>How much power do children and young people have?</b></p> <p><i>Set out clearly their role in the decision-making process. Be open about the limits to ideas and recommendations e.g. how their role relates to that of others involved in the process.</i></p>	<p>It is crucial to be clear about the level of control to give to children and young people to see the process to the end. Some decisions may require greater involvement of adults than others. So identify the powers being shared as well as those being completely delegated. Make it clear how each stage of the decision-making process relates to the next.</p>
<p><b>Are there any equal opportunities issues which need to be considered?</b></p> <p><i>Consider the diversity of those being involved and ensure it is representative.</i></p>	<p>Are we talking to children and young people with SEN? Are boys and girls fairly represented? What about pupils in rural areas? Are we only talking to articulate youngsters and not enough to the less vocal, or less motivated? What more can we do to provide opportunity for all?</p>
<p><b>Which method, or combination of methods, is most appropriate?</b></p> <p><i>Select the method carefully to involve hard-to-reach groups and the very young. Involve children and young people in choosing the method where appropriate.</i></p>	<p>Youth councils/forums? School councils? Web-based intranet surveys? Videos? Questionnaires? Peer-support systems? Voting? Informal workshops? Role play?</p> <p>The method used will be partially determined by the answer to 'How much power do children and young people have?'</p> <p>Make ways of participating relevant to the group of children and young people.</p>
<p><b>Who will manage and conduct the process?</b></p> <p><i>Involving children and young people in managing the process will command their trust. Use existing mechanisms, e.g. youth advisory bodies, to do this.</i></p>	<p>Is it appropriate and necessary for an adult alone, or working with some children and young people to be responsible for the process?</p>
<p><b>What resources do we have to do this?</b></p> <p><i>Think about budgets and training.</i></p>	<p>Consider the financial, material and staff resources you need. Which resources already exist within the LEA or school? What more is needed?</p>
<p><b>Do children and young people understand the decision-making process?</b></p> <p><i>If children and young people are to influence decisions, they need to understand how they are made.</i></p>	<p>Do the children and young people know who is involved in the process? Who has the final say? Who else is being consulted? What procedures have to be followed?</p>



Consider:	For example:
<p><b>Are there any challenges and risks?</b>  <i>Consider the organisation's needs.</i></p>	<p>Consider what might go wrong to either delay or stop the process. Establish fall-back plans. Ensure that children and young people are aware of the challenges and risks.</p>
<p><b>When?</b>  <i>Flexibility is the watchword.</i>  <i>Convenience for children and young people is important.</i>  <i>Use what works best for you.</i></p>	<p>If planning a one-off consultation, think about timing and if it can be combined with anything else e.g. local surveys, adult consultations or mock elections during local elections. Consultation need not happen during school hours or when children and young people are likely to be engaged in social events.</p>
<p><b>What about feedback</b>  <i>Feedback needs to be timely to avoid children and young people becoming disillusioned.</i></p>	<p>Children and young people naturally want to know how their views have been taken into account, and if not, why not. So identify what has changed as a direct result of the process and inform them. This needs to be presented in an easy-to-understand format.</p>
<p><b>Where do we meet?</b>  <i>Consider arranging meetings on children's and young people's own territory, or more comfortable settings for them.</i>  <i>Convenience helps the smooth running of the process.</i></p>	<p>Accessibility and transportation in terms of distance and mobility/special needs are critical. If meetings are required, consider accompanying children and young people to venues, especially those not likely to be familiar with the area.</p>
<p><b>Is it fun and interesting for children and young people?</b>  <i>Keep a balance between having fun and serious work.</i></p>	<p>Ensure work is attractive so that children and young people can enjoy doing it. If children and young people feel they are not being challenged by the process they are likely to lose trust in its importance.</p>
<p><b>What rewards for children and young people?</b>  <i>Do not assume that because 'it is good for children and young people', there is no need to tell them what the rewards are.</i></p>	<p>Why should they be involved, what's in it for them? For example, sitting on the advisory committee for the local council contributes to aspects of citizenship education and can be recorded in pupils' Progress Files, or as part of the course work for the GCSE (Short course) for Citizenship studies.</p>
<p><b>Are we sharing good practice with other schools and LEAs?</b>  <i>Learn from other people's mistakes and successes.</i></p>	<p>There is some excellent work taking place. It is useful to visit other schools to share good practice. Some examples of these can be found at:  <a href="http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/participationguidance">www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/participationguidance</a></p>





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All the schools shown as case studies and examples in this guidance and supporting website.

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