



HAVING YOUR SAY



>> LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

The school council must be comprehensively and regularly evaluated and incorporated into a review of the school's activities.

Why

The school council must be comprehensively and regularly evaluated by themselves and as part of the School Development Plan to ensure and reaffirm that the council is being effective and doing well and, in so doing, give further confidence to move ahead.

An evaluation can:

- measure progress – is the council meeting its original aims and objectives, and achieving its goals?
- produce evidence that the council is working
- help create learning from past experience to further improve the running and effectiveness of the council
- reveal benefits of having the council that may not be recognised at first which, in turn, may open up new opportunities
- improve communication and / or methods of running meetings, making things more efficient and less burdensome

How

There are a number of questions that need to be asked before you start your evaluation:

1. Who is the audience that the evaluation is aimed at? In other words, who will be interested in reading the evaluation when it is done and who will help implement any recommendations?
2. In what format should the evaluation be delivered? The evaluation should be presented in a way that is useful to your audience to ensure crucial information can be easily found.
3. Is there any money available to carry out the evaluation? Will it be done in-house or by using an independent evaluator?
4. Which are the most appropriate tools for answering your evaluation questions? There are many ways to find out the information you need to know. These include:
 - Structured questionnaires
 - Interviews
 - Group interviews or focus groups
5. Some of the key issues to look at include:
 - Are council members respected and encouraged to be actively involved regardless of their age?
 - Are elections for council members considered seriously and conducted formally?
 - Are pupils encouraged to reflect on the difference between popularity and leadership in the election of the council?
 - Are pupils involved in the negotiation of school issues e.g. discipline, bullying?
 - Are pupils aware of key policies, documents and priorities within the school?
 - Are pupils involved in the implementation and evaluation of these policies, documents and priorities?
 - Is there good communication between pupils and teachers?
 - Does the council provide a forum for all pupils to discuss issues of concern?
 - Are the meetings well organised?
 - Are the meetings frequent so enabling the council to be effective?



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- Does the council meet with senior staff at least once a term?
- Do pupils have the opportunity to communicate directly with school governors?
- Is the workload of the council shared across its members?
- Does the council organise a variety of activities for pupils?
- Is the council involved in school assemblies?

6. What will you do with the information?

Firstly, share the findings with the school population and ask for their comments. It is vital that the information is used in a positive way, both practically as in making recommended changes and more strategically, perhaps by incorporating findings into the School Development Plan.

The School Development Plan is primarily a working document created by and used by the school to help plan and evaluate their own activities. A school council evaluation should feed into the Development Plan as part of the analysis of current trends, priorities and future opportunities from a pupil's point of view.

Checklist

Have you:	Tick
1. Agreed on the format of your evaluation	[]
2. Decided whether it will be carried out in-house or by using an independent evaluator	[]
3. Set boundaries / objectives for the evaluation	[]
4. Told all key stakeholders that the evaluation is taking place	[]
5. Agreed a timescale for the evaluation to take place	[]

- 6. Agreed whether the evaluation is going to be acknowledged and recommendations incorporated into the School Development Plan/review []
- 7. Included acknowledgements of the skills, values, knowledge and attitudes that pupils will learn from participation []

For further advice and direction of planning an evaluation of your school council, you may wish to visit the following websites:

School Councils UK:

www.schoolcouncils.org

Dept. of Education, New South Wales:

www.schools.nsw.edu.au

School Council of Ireland Online:

www.studentcouncil.ie

Ministry of Education, Ontario:

www.edu.gov.on.ca