

WHAT IS PUPIL PARTICIPATION?

POST-PRIMARY VERSION

In 2007, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People's (NICCY) Democra-School guidance pack was developed with the co-operation and involvement of pupils, teachers, and key officials at board and department level. The Democra-School guidance pack contained practical advice on how to set-up, or improve, pupil participation within school. Every school in Northern Ireland received a copy of the pack.

In the absence of the Department of Education (DE) having a specific policy in place to make sure that children and young people are involved in having a say in decisions that affect their lives within the school environment, NICCY worked with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF) to:

- Ascertain pupils' awareness of participation mechanisms in their school;
- Explore what impact pupil participation has had on school life and changes that have taken place within the school as a result of it;
- Celebrate best practice and share learning; and
- Explore the use and knowledge of supporting materials for pupil participation, such as NICCY's Democra School Resource.

Following advice from pupils and teachers, this guidance has now been updated and renamed as **'Pupils' Voices: Making a Difference!'**. 'Pupils' Voices' is a way to promote, support and enhance pupils having a say in school.

PUPILS' VOICES: MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

Background

This guidance have been developed by NICCY in partnership with schools and pupils and using legislation and guidelines from local, national and international programmes.

There are many ways to ensure pupil participation within the school environment; school councils is just one example. NICCY would like all schools to have a mechanism for pupil participation in place, which allows pupils to have a real say in issues that affect them and to know that their opinions matter.

Helping children and young people have a say is part of NICCY's role to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people.

It is an important part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the Convention says that young people should have a voice on issues that affect their lives.

Under various parts of the law that set up the office of the Commissioner, NICCY must make sure that it involves and listens to views of children and young people.

In 2006, NICCY hosted a conference called Democra-School. More than 220 participants attended, including 140 pupils, principals / senior teachers and key stakeholders.

The day was used to share experiences, collect existing good practice and ideas for future development from pupils, teachers and key stakeholders.



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In June 2015, the Department of Education (DE) developed a departmental circular¹ on pupil participation in schools. This circular provided guidance for Principals and Boards of Governors on how to encourage pupil participation in decision making in schools, and to identify ways to ensure the pupils' voice is heard.

The circular included information and guidelines on best practice, to help schools identify the method and degree of participation that will best suit the needs of their pupils.

DE's policy for school improvement, 'Every School a Good School', wishes to see a greater focus on engagement within schools, particularly with pupils.

NICCY will, on an ongoing basis, engage with the Department of Education to seek further details on how it proposes to monitor future levels of pupil participation.

For further details on the Department of Education's information on pupil participation go to: www.deni.gov.uk/articles/school-councils-and-pupil-participation.

The Guidance

The guidance in this pack is based on the exchange of information and identifying good practice that was gathered through the Democra-School project and our recent work with NIYF. We have also used key pieces of policy and legislation, best practice examples, and the UNCRC as a benchmark for the work.

PUPILS' VOICES: MAKING A DIFFERENCE!

Each separate insert represents a key issue that pupils / teachers and other stakeholders have recognised as important in the development of pupil participation forums, and vital for ensuring a positive, meaningful and worthwhile experience for all involved.

Each insert identifies a particular guidance point, and explains why it is important. It then goes on to suggest how to implement the guidance and includes a simple checklist to help develop best practice.

By its nature this is not a definitive guide, neither is it meant to be totally rigid. Each school is different and has different needs. This guidance can help schools at every step on the developmental journey, from creation to evaluation, whether they are just starting out, or as a tool to check how well things are going for existing participative structures.

Throughout the document there is signposting to additional information, and resources which schools are encouraged to explore further.

You can find out more about NICCY and the Pupils' Voices programme at:

- www.niccy.org
- 028 9031 1616
- participation@niccy.org

Please contact the Communications team at NICCY if you require alternative formats of this material.

¹ A department circular is a written statement of departmental advice. It will often provide information, guidance, rules, and/or background information on legislative or procedural matters.

