RED ROSE SCHOOL

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

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Sec 3 Chapter

23

Good relationships are the starting point

Pupil participation will involve pupil-to-pupil, teacher-to-pupil, teacher-to-teacher and whole school communication. Effective practice relies on trusting and enabling relationships.

In our positive school community, adults role-model positive relationships and pupils are treated with respect at all times, just as it is expected that they will show respect to others in turn.

Provide structured opportunities for participation

We need to continue to develop our pupil council and other opportunities for pupils to have their say.

Develop the personal skills of pupils

Seek to empower all individual pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and personal decisions, as well as providing inclusive opportunities for participation in school decision-making.

Build from pupils' strengths

Pupils of all ages and abilities can be sources of ideas and positive contributions to their peers, school and community. Pupils often have valuable insights into school life and their own needs and circumstances. Pupil feedback is a useful 'health check' for our school policies and practice. Where pupils face specific challenges or personal difficulties, they are often best placed to identify solutions if given the space and support to do so.

Pupil participation is learning

By being involved in school life and decision-making, pupils can develop their confidence, self-knowledge, emotional intelligence, problem-solving and social skills. School, environmental or community projects to promote learning for citizenship – encouraging pupils to reflect critically on their own opinions, respect 'difference' and understand their rights and responsibilities.

School staff may reflect on how they engage with and give children and young people choices every day, including as part of learning and teaching – participative practice is an attitude and an approach, rather than a single initiative. It works best where it moves forward on a whole school basis, taking account of staff views.

Pupil participation is preparation for transition

The skills that children and young people can grow through participation are those that will help them to get on in life as they make the transition to adulthood.

Whether from primary to secondary or school to employment, education or training, transition presents significant challenges and anxieties, especially for more vulnerable pupils. However, it can also present opportunities – for a fresh start, new interests and new relationships, as well as the chance to develop openness to change and the adaptability that can be vital to coping well in adult life.

Do We:

Involve pupils in supporting their younger peers to make successful transitions.

Reflect on what we do every day in school.

Do you …

- listen to pupils' concerns?
- help pupils to reflect on their personal goals?
- help pupils to arrive at solutions when they experience difficulties?
- support pupils to communicate what they want, need, feel or think to others?
- give pupils choices about their learning
- ask pupils how they feel about new developments in school?
- negotiate to enable pupils to take part in community-based projects or volunteering?
- support a group of pupils to lead a project?

This is familiar ground to many of our staff, and shows the range of ways in which we can encourage pupils to engage with personal decision-making, school or community life.

Both teaching and support staff in school play a significant role in promoting, supporting and nurturing pupil participation.

There are a range of opportunities in school for pupil participation – both structured or defined areas of work, and ways in which we conduct our everyday practice

We should engage pupils in their own learning and personal decision-making by:

- providing opportunities to learn and practice social, communication and negotiation skills
- using personal learning planning as a basis for dialogue with individual pupils, involving them in setting their own targets and appraising their own progress
- giving structured support to pupils to enable them to contribute their views to a school review or case conference, or to other decisions affecting their lives

We should involve pupils in peer support by:

- using circle time
- inviting pupils to act as play leaders or playground monitors
- establishing buddying, befriending, peer counselling or mentoring schemes
- supporting a circle of friends approach
- encouraging pupils to communicate their thoughts and feelings and to solve their difficulties through restorative approaches (including peer mediation or conflict resolution)
- drawing on peer support to aid transition for new pupils
- developing peer tutoring (e.g. paired reading), or peer education approaches

We should encourage pupils to play an active part in school and community life by:

- using suggestion boxes and notice boards to gather, share and report on progress in meeting pupils' aspirations for their school
- talking and listening on an everyday basis – building in time to systematically record and reflect on the pupil concerns that are picked up by staff through informal contact
- using school assembly to reward or reflect on what pupils have achieved through participation
- conducting consultation with pupils or supporting them to consult with their peers
- engaging pupils in developing the school website or newsletter
- supporting pupil-led projects
- establishing or supporting environmental or enterprise projects
- setting up a pupil council or supporting community decision-making structures and opportunities
- involving pupils on the school discipline committee or in reviewing discipline or anti-bullying policies
- supporting pupils to volunteer in the community
- using social action or community development approaches
- collaborating with other organisations to enable pupils to participate in authority, national or international citizenship projects

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF PUPIL PARTICIPATION

How we think about participation

- We see that pupil participation is as much about doing things differently as it is about doing new things – we recognise the importance of small shifts in how we communicate with pupils.
- We support pupil participation in schools from the top down, and we give the space for bottom-up innovation by encouraging the creativity of bothpupils and staff.
- We recognise the importance of how we engage with and give pupils choices every day, including as part of learning and teaching.

Starting points for participation

- We start out with what matters to children and young people – this is what will motivate them to be involved.
- We set the climate for pupil participation in school by transmitting values that are positive, respectful and encouraging to all pupils and all staff.

How we develop participation

- We collaborate with children and young people in solving problems, recognising their own capacities to work things out.
- We try to strike a balance between structure and flexibility – giving pupils a level of structure that they can manage and develop within, but being flexible enough for new directions and pupils' own ideas.
- We define pupils by their strengths, not their weaknesses, and appraise their achievements in their own terms rather than by comparison with others.

How we reward achievement

- We consider how to recognise the achievements and learning that pupils gain through participation – we can do this by using an alternative framework for accreditation, adding to the pupil's record of achievement or through inclusion within personal learning planning.

SCHOOL BENEFITS AND PUPIL LEARNING OUTCOMES

There are a range of benefits including:

- enhanced pupil-staff communication
- greater awareness of pupil concerns
- improved school ethos
- an increased sense of connection to the school community for pupils
- increased self-reliance within the pupil community
- pupils achieving and learning by participating
- more opportunities for young people to reflect

Participation and citizenship are about learning skills and aptitudes, but also values. Examples might include respect for others and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the community as a whole. By considering ways in which pupil participation can be enhanced and opportunities widened, all schools can share in these benefits.

Pupil participation challenges pupils to explore and express their views, generate ideas, solve problems, communicate and negotiate, through which they can learn and develop on three levels:

- their identity, confidence and self-awareness
- their relationships and connections with peers and the school community
- their autonomy, self-motivation and leadership skills

The table at Annex A illustrates how learning and development can happen on each of these dimensions as pupils engage. The framework that it provides can be used to set objectives with individual pupils or groups, and to aid shared reflection on achievement.

It is possible to see how experiences can be structured in a progressive way using this framework, to help pupils to practice and develop their skills and work towards a leadership role. However, pupils may also engage in different types of activities at different times, according to factors such as their level of interest in the issue and the time that is available to support them.

FORMAL MEETINGS

Formal meetings with individual pupils will be required for a range of reasons. The pupil may be involved in making personal choices about his or her learning or future plans. For some pupils, individual meetings focus on more challenging issues, for example following an exclusion or incident in school, or because of difficulties at school or at home.

School staff may also be involved in giving support to pupils who attend multiagency meetings outside school, such as Children's Hearings, case conferences or looked after children's (LAC) reviews.

When supporting pupils to participate in meetings where difficult ground will be covered, it is important to consider that:

- young people can feel that they are 'in trouble', under the spotlight, or that they or their families are being judged
- they may have to listen to discussion that is painfully difficult, for example in relation to their behaviour or family circumstances
- they may have to hear or tell their 'story' in many meetings
- the presence of a number of professional adults can be intimidating, especially where 'private things' are discussed in front of relative strangers
- family dynamics can shape how the meeting develops and what the young person is prepared to say

We know that all of these factors can lead to young people disengaging, being unable to concentrate or losing their temper. However, there are ways in which we can structure formal meetings to enhance the pupil's contribution, and give them the best chance of being able to manage the situation positively.

FROM 'PROBLEM' TO 'PROBLEM SOLVING': the first principles of a positive approach to meetings

We recognise that everyone carries a wealth of resources which can be used to move forward – including parents, professionals, children and young people
Reflect on how the meeting can be managed to bring these into the open

A positive approach treats 'the problem' as the problem – not the parent, child or professional
Reflect on how the young person can be helped to feel that change is possible

There are usually exceptions to 'the problem' – problem-solving approaches draw from what seems to be working already
Find out what the young person thinks is working

Although formal meetings may become a familiar experience for teachers, they are unusual experiences for children. It can be helpful to hold this in mind, even where the pupil has attended many meetings. Empathy, sensitivity and respect are building blocks of good practice.

Reflect on how the young person is feeling

Examples of Good Practice:

Teachers' Good preparation before a formal meeting:
- Invest time in building relationships with pupils who are experiencing difficulty.
- Discuss with the young person which member of staff could prepare and support him or her best.
- Recognise that the experience of the meeting will reflect the quality of the preparation and ongoing relationships and support that come first.
- Maximise the choices and control given to each individual young person over how the meeting will be conducted.
- Recognise how important some factors are to young people, such as respect, fairness and feeling listened to. These are important even if the meeting is exploring difficult issues or the outcome is not what the young person wants.
- Offer some follow-up support to the young person, to check that he or she understands what has happened and to offer emotional support if needed.
- Help the young person to express and critically reflect on his or her own priorities for the meeting. Picking the right time is crucial and some young people may like to work up a list of points during the lead up to the meeting.
- Encourage the young person to imagine the meeting, and consider what might be most difficult. Young people need help with their feelings, as well as practical preparation.
- Talk to the young person about how he or she will communicate at the meeting.

Some young people may appreciate being given a range of choices, for example:
- Give the young person a choice of where to sit. The young person might prefer to arrive first, receiving others into the space, rather than walking into a busy room.
- Prepare a visual 'agenda' or plan of the meeting to display.

Help pupils to be informed when they go to formal meetings by explaining the five 'W's'

Why?...

Why the meeting is happening – does the pupil agree that it is needed? If the meeting is compulsory, can the pupil see where there might be a benefit?

Who?...

Who will be there – does the pupil know the people and their roles? If strangers are coming, why is this happening? Is there an opportunity for the pupil to meet them first? What is the right balance between a shared approach to pupil support and protecting the young person's privacy?

When?...

When it will take place and for how long – can the pupil manage the length of the meeting without a break? Would attending part of the meeting be more realistic?

Where?...

Where it will be – would a visit to the venue help? Does the pupil have a preferred venue and is this practical? What is the right balance of formality and informality?

What?...

What will be achieved by meeting – does the pupil have realistic hopes and expectations? What would he or she see as a good outcome? It is difficult for young people to absorb information when emotions are running high. Informing a pupil might not be a one-off event – information may need to be reiterated at different points in the process by someone the pupil trusts.

Discussions

Here are some discussion points which can be used to structure dialogue between the pupil and the staff member supporting him or her, in preparation for a formal meeting

- What is most important to you?
- What would you like to happen? When you imagine an ideal situation, what do you see?
- If that isn't possible, what would be the next best thing? (give examples based on the 'ideal', helping the pupil to break the 'journey' into stages)
- Are there times when 'the issue' is not a problem? What do you see?
- Who do you get on well with? If I asked this person to tell me some good things about you, what would they say?
- What do you think will happen at the meeting? What will people talk about?
- How do you think you will feel?
- What will you do if you feel that you are losing your temper/getting upset?
- What would you like others to do to help you?
- How will you show me that you want 'time out'?
- How could we make the meeting work better?
- What is the best way of making sure that you get your views across and are listened to?
- Can you think of a time when you got your point of view across well?
- How did this happen? What can we learn from this?

PUPIL COUNCILS

Pupil councils can provide a helpful focus for two-way dialogue between the Staff team and pupils in school, and a mechanism for taking the temperature of pupil opinion. However their use poses a range of challenges.

Group meetings can be frustrating and confusing situations for pupils, as they are at times for adults. A successful outcome relies on a shared understanding of how the meeting will be conducted.

- Is the meeting a one-off or a regular event? Will it be long or short?
- Does the meeting need a chairperson? What is the role of the chair and who will take it on?
- Do pupils need to know what will be discussed in advance, or can issues be brought forward as they arise?
- How is the order of the meeting decided? Which items will get the most attention and who decides what is most important?
- How will pupils indicate that they want to speak?
- How will decisions be made? Will everyone agree from the outset?
- Will discussion result in consensus, or will a vote be taken?
- How will the discussion be recorded? Whose job is this?

Meetings do not have to follow 'adult' conventions to be successful. Consider circle time, group work games and other discussion exercises, all of which enable issues to be considered and participants to have a fair opportunity to express their views. The way that meetings are conducted should suit the pupils' needs first and foremost.

AND IS IT WORKING?...
a trouble-shooter's guide

'The pupil council is just a talking shop'

▶ **Problem:**
The pupil council can lose credibility amongst pupils when they are unable to see outcomes.

▶ **Possible solutions:**
- Break the task down into small steps – what could pupils do today that would help them to move towards their objective?
- Use activities (practical tasks, solution-focused or decision-making exercises) as well as talk to move the work forward.
- Help pupils to weigh up issues in terms of the potential outcome and the likely effort required – do they want to go for a 'quick hit', or take on a hefty issue that will take time or be hard to shift? Can there be a balance of both?
- Allocate a small budget, and give guidance on its use, to give the pupil council a real focus.
- Consider how the pupil council's ideas might be taken forward in other areas of the curriculum or school, to speed up progress and give more pupil time to projects

learning to participate and participating to learn

	ILLUSTRATION APPROACHES	LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CHALLENGES
"I am" "I can"	I work with an adult on a personal learning plan I work with an adult to reflect on my learning I give my views in a formal meeting (e.g. school review) I have a buddy or mentor I give my views in a one-off consultation exercise	**Identity, confidence and self-awareness** I can identify what is important to me I can reflect on my feelings and wishes I can set goals for myself **Challenges 1:** Individuals don't feel valued by others or have experience of being respected? How does your school provide positive feedback and praise to all pupils?
"I belong"	I take part in groupwork I take part in an enterprise or environmental project	**Identity, confidence and self-awareness** I can share a project with others, whilst staying true to my own views I can share my views and ideas in a group setting I am happy to hold an opinion that is different from others **Challenge 4:** Individuals have difficulty expressing their feelings appropriately? What opportunities are regularly provided to practice self-expression?
"I give to"	I am a buddy or mentor I am a playground monitor or play leader I sit on a pupil council or youth forum I am a peer mediator, educator or researcher I volunteer in the community	**Identity, confidence and self-awareness** I can connect my life experiences to the wider world I can empathise with the needs of others I can put others before myself I am confident in my judgement of people and situations **Challenge 7:** Individuals have difficulty understanding the feelings of others? What games and tasks can be introduced to develop empathy? **Challenge 8:** Individuals are highly competitive? Can specific challenges be introduced to develop teamwork? Would paired working help? Can pupils gain skills by mentoring or buddying others?

Relationships and connections with peers and the school community	Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership
I can form a trusting relationship with an adult or peer I can express my views to another person I can work constructively with another person	I can participate when I am given support I see the value of making choices for myself
Challenge 2: Individuals have difficulty trusting others? How does your school support victims of bullying or other harm? How does your school ensure that vulnerable pupils have a consistent and supportive relationship with at least one adult?	**Challenge 3: Individuals do not see the value of engaging with decision-making?** How does your school foster self-worth in vulnerable pupils? Do pupils have positive experiences of being listened to respectfully? Can they see for themselves that participating gets results?
Relationships and connections with peers and the school community I can co-operate and collaborate with others I can disagree respectfully I can take turns I feel that I belong to the school/local community	Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership I can consider and make choices about how to achieve my aims I can persevere I can be responsible for my own part in making something happen
Challenge 5: Group sessions don't function fairly without adult intervention? Are pupils practising in circle time or through other groupwork techniques?	**Challenge 6: Individuals tend to get despondent when they cross the first hurdle?** How do staff foster the self-motivation of pupils? Do pupils in the group have mentors?
Relationships and connections with peers and the school community I can be supportive and caring to others I can help other people whilst knowing my own boundaries I can negotiate with others in reaching decisions I am a role model within the school community	Autonomy, self-motivation and leadership I am comfortable when others look to me for direction I take responsibility for myself and my commitments I can apply my learning to new situations I can use a range of approaches to solve problems I can consider different routes to my long-term goals
Challenge 9: Individuals struggle to keep within their boundaries when supporting peers? What training, support and ground rules are provided? **Challenge 10: Fall-outs between individuals affect the group dynamic?** How does your school approach conflict resolution? Are restorative approaches practised?	**Challenge 11: Individuals take setbacks to heart?** What processes are in place to encourage pupils to reflect on what they *have* learned and achieved?