

Pupil Voice in Devon

2009-2010 Conferences



Introduction

Across the county four 'Pupil Voice' conferences were arranged between Summer 2009 and Summer 2010. These events came about in response to 'best practice' proposal made by Devon Headteachers and were funded by Devon LA through the Forum for Learning and Achievement.

The aim of these events was to collect the views of Devon children and young people on aspects of their education to inform future developments at a local and county level. It is also hoped that these larger conferences will establish a culture of ongoing meaningful consultation with young people at a school and learning community level in the coming years.

The four conferences were facilitated by Dave Sharratt, Principal of Braunton Community College. A similar format was replicated at all four venues with pupils from Key Stage two to five allocated to mixed aged groups of between eight and ten. Adults were asked to seat themselves at a table to support the smooth running of the group but were explicitly asked not to influence the opinions in the group. It was noticeable that at all of the conferences the adult input decreased as the morning progressed, with many withdrawing from their table completely after the midsession break.

Pupils were asked to agree a chair to oversee the discussion and a scribe to record the ideas of the group. Each activity was introduced by Mr Sharratt and a clear timescale set for completion. A range of recording options were provided such as post it notes, A4 paper and large flip chart sheets and pens. Pupils were encouraged to think independently, in small groups and then decide on their best ideas to put forward on behalf of their table. During the session a roving microphone was used to allow the pupils to share a selection of ideas with their wider peer group. The recorded views of the groups were collected and have been synthesised into the report that follows. It is pertinent to note that the views expressed by the children and young people at the four conferences were highly correlated therefore the statements that included in this report can be taken as being put forward on multiple occasions by groups at different venues.



Activity One

What things can teachers easily do to help improve pupils' learning?

1. Lesson content

- More activities, e.g. role play, raps, Hindu wedding
- More use of pupils' speaking to prepare for writing activities
- More variety in mathematics instead of doing the same activity
- More practical lessons not just book work
- Alter lesson content to match learning style and give students a choice of activities
- Teach students independent learning skills.
- Making learning relevant to life, e.g. finance, APR and interview skills
- Brain Gym
- Recognise what is learnt already and don't repeat.
- Expand syllabus into other subjects to make sure students know how they can use what they've learnt in the outside world.

2. Teaching approaches

- To have more different methods of teaching to suit the learners.
- Some time in lessons for pupils to teach or do presentations
- More stimulating preparation, e.g. read a mystery book before writing a mystery story
- Have cross-curricular lessons
- Opportunities for pupils to talk to other pupils, 1:1, and ask questions
- Think about student groupings; smaller classes, narrower ability ranges, group by learning style, VAK. Group work more controlled.
- Teachers should think like a child and see how they would like to learn
- More short projects with individual responsibilities
- Not too much teacher input – basic idea then get on with task
- Child-friendly language
- Everyone has a chance to be in a group with people of similar ability
- Older students teach in primary schools
- Paired work, not with your friends but with people in different stages
- Students teach each other
- One to one tutoring for more time with individuals
- Gifted and Talented groups

3. Behaviour management

- More rewards for motivation for good learning. Don't just reward those who misbehave – fairness.
- Less teacher attention on poor behaviour
- Be more consistent when dealing with behaviour but do not label or pre-judge pupils (just because they were naughty yesterday doesn't mean they will be today). Adults not to take sides.

- Encourage pupils to talk to disruptive pupils so that they can hear how we feel about their actions.
- Clearer reward schemes used for all, not only KS3

4. Teaching environment

- Outdoor classrooms. More trips, e.g. in Geography and History, so we can make our own opinions
- Posters with tips on around the classroom.
- Think about classroom layout
- Have an element of competition between individuals and groups and classes
- More to do at break. Have a chill out room.
- Music on when you learn
- Be able to eat within lessons
- More double lessons therefore more time to learn
- Students who feel shy about asking the teacher something should have a box they can put their question in.
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5. Use of resources

- Have 2 TAs in lessons. More helpers for children who need it.
- Pupils set homework targets for each other
- After school lessons for pupils who want to catch up or revise
- Continuity of teaching staff – need cover staff who know what they're talking about
- Students observing lessons and leading working groups and being student experts on training days
- More resources, better equipment
- More extra-curricular activities than just sport
- More visits to other schools
- children don't understand work, it's nice to have children who understand the work to explain and help people who struggle. Other children know how it feels.
- Support staff for high achievers not only for those who struggle
- Homework help

6. Teacher-pupil interaction

- Teachers listen to pupils' opinions more
- Just talk to the students, don't assume things
- Make targets achievable. More encouragement from adults, don't be content once targets are reached.
- Better explanation of what is expected of pupils. Teachers to inform students of reasons behind decision-making.
- Give us a special area/time so that we can share issues with an adult we trust
- Teachers guiding our class mates to respect our feelings
- Build relationships with teachers resulting in confidence

7. Teacher behaviour

- Better preparation by teachers for lessons.
- Make it fun and be enthusiastic to keep pupils interested. Ensure all teachers are motivated to teach. Teachers with a sense of humour.
- Older teachers are locked into one teaching style. Train them to do different things
- Less nagging in lessons and teachers should talk less. Teachers should spend less time yapping and then not giving us enough time to do the work.
- Teachers explain how they are feeling at the start of a lesson. Teachers do what they say they will do.
- Humour, when needed
- SEAL activities at the start of the lesson so that teachers feel calm.
- Mark books regularly and tell you how to improve

8. Feedback

- Let students grade teachers at the end of lessons
- Have a suggestion or worry box
- More feedback and talking about work once it's marked
- Being assessed in other ways, not just tests
- A comment book for all students on their learning
- Research why students don't learn easily
- Consistently give positive feedback to parents, not just bad things



Activity Two

What can schools/colleges do to give students more of a voice on how they learn?

1. Lesson feedback

- Yearly anonymous surveys in all subjects. Give every pupil the chance to feedback. Listen to students more not just school council. Equality across year groups for students for pupil voice. Some questions to be opened up for wider discussion through tutor groups.
- Evaluation sheets of lessons – pupils to staff. Grading teachers
- Opportunity to feedback to teachers at the end of the term or year, i.e. what went well and what didn't.
- A private book to pass individually on to teachers to express concerns and ideas in private.
- Anonymous monthly feedback

2. School council

- More school and year councils. School councils give more feedback and then take comments back to staff – two way process. Should be harder to get on to school council, i.e. people who really care. Have the principal attend school council meetings so it goes straight to the top.
- Create pupil “special groups” with responsibility for certain areas, e.g. teaching and learning
- Student leadership team/peer parliament. Peer parliament to have decision making powers not via teacher intervention to ensure student opinions determine student responsibilities.
- Voting system for ideas
- More “big ideas” meetings
- Include learning on the student council agenda, i.e. talk about what distracts you, what helps you learn.
- A student voice magazine/leaflets
- School council has more input on how curriculum money is spent
- More contact with year or college council
- Different focus groups for pupils, e.g. gardening, fundraising and playground
- More voting on matters in school so more opinions from more people.

3. Pastoral structure

- Time in tutorial regularly for pupil voice
- Suggestion boxes in all tutor groups.
- Vertical tutor groups – older ones mentor younger ones. Family groups – question about how we can change the school.
- Opportunity for 1:1 chats.
- Pupils deal with disruptive students and pupils, i.e. decide punishments
- Have drop-in centres to talk to other students who are trained to help
- Head Teacher question time assembly
- A school radio station that encourages students to talk about school
- Involve more students in student voice
- School council has more input on how curriculum money is spent

4. E-systems

- Have an email suggestion box and online forum for student ideas. Circle time for ideas. Have a whiteboard for year groups for teaching suggestions.
- E-mentoring system to be set up within and outside of school.
- Each student has own web page to help and support each other (Wikipedia).
- Web page for setting tasks. The computer marks it and the student evaluates it.

5. Relationships

- Adults need to listen more effectively.
- Have staff/pupil meetings. Cut down barriers between teachers and pupils
- Get to know students better. Improve student relationships and team building. Give students the confidence to make themselves heard.
- Teachers must not over-ride decisions. Decisions which affect students should be discussed first.
- Give pupils time to think – wait for their opinions
- Teachers should tell us about what happens with our suggestions.
- Have a room for lunch or break where you can talk to teachers
- A non-biased teacher for students to go to to talk about if they have a problem with another teacher
- Use pupils as observers in lessons so there is more of a partnership between teachers and students.
- Children should be more involved in everything since teachers know everything!

6. Community

- Learning good practice from primary schools
- Research why some students behave in a disruptive way – down to specifics in a particular lesson (?) so something could change.
- More meetings like this
- Occasional meetings with governors and Head Teacher to make sure views get across
- When governors are considering changes that affect the pupils, they should ask us what we think
- School councils to be involved in town councils



Activity Three

What bright ideas do you have that schools could do to make the move from primary to secondary school or from secondary to college better?

1. Pre transfer

- Some work could be started in primary and finished at secondary. Have transition topics
- Previous pupils to talk to primary pupils
- Have teachers from the secondary school teach in the primary school.
- Collect feedback from year 7s to give to year 6 students
- Mentors – pairing up. Former students at university coming back, or year 7 students talking to year 6. Peer mentor attached to tutor groups for first few weeks.
- Year 5 and 6 teachers should know more about what it is like in secondary school – visit.
- Linked activity days and social events during transition to allow getting to know people in a real situation
- Speed dating type activity between years 6 and 7.
- More time in primary school to discuss transition. More secondary teachers visiting primary
- Photos of your year 6 class mates to take away with you so you get to know them. Know who is in your tutor group before you join year 7.
- Make year 6 individual profiles to enable new teachers to get to know them.
- Have an experience of Key Stage 3 literacy and numeracy before year 7.
- Talk about the standards secondary school expect and practice learning and behaving at those standards.
- Secondary to do more with primaries to promote a positive image so people are excited about moving up rather than scared.
- Transition projects with new school in last term of year 6.
- Sample lessons from secondary teachers at primary school.
- Have appeals for places earlier to make it less stressful.
- Mini projects over the summer to keep you thinking, e.g. for people starting A levels.
- Days when year 11s sit in the common room to meet college students.
- More support for children who are not going to their local school.

2. Induction visits

- More induction days which are made more comfortable, i.e. less harassment.
- On the taster day, do some of the work you will be doing.
- More taster days, possibly a week
- Meet all the key staff on taster days.
- Open day with parents. Induction day for parents
- A true representation of your new school/college rather than a cleaned up, staged day that does not represent what a day there is really like.
- Have opportunity to visit departments of interest, e.g. Music, Art or PE.
- Introduce other children from other schools that they will meet at secondary school.
- Get told early who your tutor is going to be.

3. First day

- A day in school with no other pupils around, except year 8 mentors
- Have an introduction ceremony.
- An orienteering activity to help you get to know where key areas are.
- On first day more group activities to get to know each other.
- A day for year 7s only in school.

4. Early days after transfer

- Year 7s need to be treated normally, not fussed over
- Label rooms easily, e.g. symbols, colours, not just letters and numbers.
- Increase homework slowly in year 7, year 6 are not always used to doing it, or increase homework gradually in year 6. Introduce longer lessons in primary school towards the end of year 6.
- Make more spaces open at break and lunch time – designate a year 7 space
- Make secondary a bit like primary school and change gradually
- Have better maps to help find your way around
- Specialist TAs to look after new year 7s.
- Team building days/residential activity trips at the start of year 7.
- Teachers do a comedy act so pupils don't find them so scary, e.g. panto, comedy, variety act.
- Less homework for first 2 weeks of year 7.

5. E-opportunities

- Instructional DVD from students at next school. Transition booklet made up by students
- Electronic links to primary schools, e.g. blogs or Twitter. Email questions as they arise
- Have a virtual tour of the school available to year 6 students online.



Activity Four

How can schools in Devon provide learners with good quality, multi-cultural experiences?

1. Visitors

- Have photos and actual things from different countries – have people in school who have actually been to those countries.
- Have people who were born in other countries visit to talk to the school.
- Have cultural champions.
- Value new pupils from other cultures when they join our school.
- Visits from ex-students who have travelled widely.

2. Regular activities

- Have penpals or email pals.
- Have a culture day/week in school, e.g. costume, food, music, etc. Have a world party. Passport week.
- Foreign teaching assistants to help translate.
- Have an after school club where you research different nationalities and religions.
- Develop charity links, e.g. Amigos.
- Foreign language clubs, e.g. Japanese, in order to allow new learner which cannot be taught in lessons.
- A day a year for multi-cultural activities to dress up and do learning activities.
- Lunch club for any students or people from other cultures or countries.
- Don't just sing Christian songs in assembly, sing songs from other cultures.

3. Lesson content

- Video conferencing with other countries or cities in the UK. Skype conferences.
- Joint projects with other countries.
- Connect subjects with other cultures, such as Art and RE.
- Replay/re-enact historical wars.
- Learn about positive role models from other cultures and religions. Be aware the media can twist things.
- Spend focused learning time in different cultures and religions.
- Have wider language options, not just French and German.
- Use the televisions around the world to broadcast sporting and cultural events from other places.
- Have multi-cultural food technology.

4. Learning outside the classroom

- School visits to other countries. Exchange with schools somewhere else in the UK, like Birmingham.
- Use links to twin towns that already exist.
- Visit mosques, synagogues, etc.
- Sponsor children from other countries.
- Try to make visit costs more accessible, perhaps linked to charity work. Means testing for trip visits. Nomination for a reward to pay for trip.
- Have a whole school swap.
- More visits to more diverse communities.
- Have a multi-lingual school website.
- Opportunities for other cultures to have the Devon experience.
- Celebrate Fairtrade fortnight and meet the producers.



Conclusion

The young people from Key stages 2-5 who contributed to the conferences were all asked to evaluate their experience in terms of positive, minus and interesting factors (PMI). Overwhelmingly the pupils were enthusiastic about the conference format with many stated how much they appreciated being asked their opinion about education. For many participants the experience of meeting pupils from other schools and sharing ideas was reported as very enjoyable and an opportunity to hear new ideas to take back to their own school. Ne pupil commented that they now felt that they could make a difference back in their own school.

Some pupils expressed scepticism about how the information would be used and whether it would really be incorporated into future planning by influential adults. Older pupils felt that there was too great an emphasis on key stage 2-4 and not enough attention given to key stage 5 and above. Generally there were very few negative points recorded by pupils other than those related to insufficient pastries!

Many of the ideas put forward as examples of pupil voice in action in some schools were rated as interesting by other pupils. In addition to this pupils repeatedly recorded how interesting it was to work with pupils of different ages and hear what they had to say. In some cases younger pupils recorded that they had found the secondary pupils' experiences reassuring as they themselves approached transition. Generally pupils were surprised at how similar pupils from other school were to them in their views and opinions

An impressive aspect of all four conferences was the attitude and behaviour of the young people involved. Their willingness to share their ideas and work with a high degree of autonomy and independence is a credit to them and their schools.

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Dave Sharratt (Principal-Braunton School)

Thanks to Debbie Pritchard, Vic Ebdon , Judith Johnson and Bea Blair Smith, all from Devon LA, for the excellent support we received to stage these highly successful conferences.