

Letting the pupils lead

Presenting policies and plans in child-friendly language, running relevant and results-driven school councils and encouraging youngsters to lead classroom learning can persuade pupils to participate in school leadership.

Increased pupil involvement can make a real difference to the way schools are run, according to contributors to a talk2learn discussion led by Dr. Reena Keeble, a headteacher and NCSL Leadership Network Regional Leader in London.

There was widespread support for Dr Keeble's introduction of a 'School Book to Make Things Better', her school's development plan deliberately written in 'child-speak'; many contributors thought this idea should be extended to action plans and governor reports.

Participants also agreed that school councils should do more to encourage pupils to contribute good ideas.

Jean Reynolds, a primary deputy head in London, helped set up her school council two years ago:

"Children see that their ideas and concerns are acted upon...there are occasionally suggestions put forward which are outside of our control but this is clearly explained.

"The chef came to a meeting armed with menus after the school council conducted a survey of what the children would like to eat instead of chips. We now have fantastic school lunches, freshly cooked."

One contributor said her secondary school's council was initially seen as a 'token gesture' and soon lost impetus.

"But a rethink has already seen great progress; there has been an impact on teaching and learning preferences and allocation of money-raising to chosen charities."



Wendy Armstrong, a member of her school's SMT in Northumberland, said all schools in her local network encouraged staff and pupils to exchange lessons and ideas. The school councils meet annually to discuss major concerns or learning opportunities with comments sent to individual schools for action.

Louise Solden, an extended schools coordinator in Leeds, said her school allowed 72 students to take over learning in the classroom for one day as part of a peace and conflict resolution programme.

"Students are more likely to listen to their peers than adults, especially when discussing topics such as stereotypes, race, labelling and prejudice."

"It took six months to set up but all the school considered it to be a good step forward."

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