



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

# Listening to learners



**Special**

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**Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills**

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# Introduction

## Why consult with pupils?

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There are many and varied reasons for consulting with young people.

The United Kingdom is a signatory to the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

- Article 12 states that ‘the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child’.
- Article 23 states that a disabled child has the right to special care, education and training designed to help them achieve the greatest possible self-reliance to lead a full and active life.
- Articles 28–31 state that a child has the right to education, leisure, recreation and cultural activities on the basis of equal opportunity and the right to practise their own religion and language.

The implications for schools are that:

- All pupils have a right to be heard.
- It is important for all pupils to have an opportunity to have their views considered when decisions are taken that affect them.
- The right of consultation should extend over a wide range of issues in the school setting.
- Consultation should promote equality of opportunity and lead to an improved educational experience.

Welsh Assembly Government policies and practices increasingly reflect the views of all young people about provision and services. This is as a direct response to the recognition that young people have the right to express their views and have valuable contributions to make about the issues and decisions that directly affect them.

In order to effectively consult pupils with communication (and learning) support needs, it is important that all agencies involved in their education undertake an integrated approach to consultation. Pupils’ views should be sought and taken into consideration when decisions about their educational experience are made. The implications of their views in one setting should be communicated to other relevant organisations such as LEAs, health agencies, voluntary organisations and other involved groups.

In a school context, the statutory status of PSE and the requirement for all maintained primary (excluding infant and nursery), secondary and special schools to establish school councils are further reasons for embracing pupil consultation. Information about setting up and running a school council is available on the School Councils Wales website: [www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk](http://www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk).

Teacher-initiated and supported pupil consultation and the encouragement of pupils to consult with their peers are approaches which could be developed to gain valuable insights into pupil perceptions on a variety of issues. Schools that regularly consult with pupils are very positive about the processes and outcomes of pupil

consultation. As schools become more adept at consulting with their pupils, the process will become embedded into the learning experience of all young people. Some of the benefits of consultation and pupil participation are:

- feedback from pupils adds to the school's development plan
- pupils become more involved and engaged in their learning experience.

The importance of 'listening to learners' as part of the school self-evaluation process is emphasised in the Estyn Common Inspection Framework. Learners have a right to express a view on how well their needs are being met as well as a clear entitlement to influence the services that affect them.

Chapter 3 of the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for Wales* (2002) states that children and young people should, where possible, participate in all the decision making processes that occur in education, including:

- the setting of learning targets and contributing to Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- discussion about choice of schools
- contributing to the assessment of their needs and to the annual review and transition processes.

In all aspects, pupils should feel confident that their views will be listened to and valued.

Putting this advice into practice, the views of disabled children and young people on the services they used were recently published in *Are you listening?* (2002) Welsh Assembly Government, NCH Cymru and Barnardo's Cymru as part of the consultation on the National Service Framework.



## Using the consultation toolkit

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This consultation toolkit is designed for school managers, teachers, support staff and governors to use within their school setting in order to encourage pupils to share their views in relation to their experiences within the school.

The consultation methods may be used to gain the views of the pupils on a wide range of topics or issues a school may wish to explore. For example:

**Whole school issues;** such as the school mission statement, home-school contracts and arrangements, school rules, uniform, school catering, school transport, environmental issues, and any other issues affecting their whole school experience.

**Pastoral issues;** such as the structure of annual review meetings, induction and transition arrangements, playground or social issues and arrangements for parents/carers evenings.

**Approaches to learning;** gaining feedback on pupils' preferred methods of learning, likes/dislikes or barriers to learning, the learning environment, their preferred learning styles, opinions on the curriculum and methods of assessment.

Pupils are generally very positive about being consulted about issues that affect their school experience. They like:

- Feeling respected and listened to.
- Having a sense of greater control over their educational experience.
- Feeling enthusiastic and happy in and about their learning and their school because they feel more involved.

However, pupils with specific needs will not necessarily respond readily to being consulted. Consultation needs to be a regular activity embedded in everyday practice which develops over time as part of a whole school approach. Initially many pupils may tend to agree with adult (or peer) suggestions. They need to gain experience and have opportunities to disagree. Pupils with more complex needs will be dependent on others to interpret their meaning. This may have a training implication to ensure the deployment of reliable advocates.

## In summary

Consulting with pupils with learning/other support needs is challenging. It is important to:

- Make a commitment to consult with pupils as a matter of routine, to be aware of their views and keep 'taking the temperature' of their feelings.
- Understand the value of consulting with pupils even though the process may seem daunting and the results variable.
- Be aware that consultation may be a way of beginning to coordinate information systems from the different agencies involved in the educational experience of the pupil.
- Develop and use a common inter-agency permission and reporting format as a system to record key information about the young person's views and preferences.
- Develop techniques of visual and verbal communication, such as using photos and videos, symbols and signs, in preference to written words.



## The toolkit activities

The toolkit contains examples of practical methods of consultation which have been used successfully with pupils with additional educational needs. The activities can be used to identify the experiences and views of young people in special settings in relation to their:

- enjoyment of their learning experiences
- engagement in activities and wider learning
- perceived relevance of the activities
- progress and achievements.

There are important principles to consider when consulting with pupils with additional educational needs.

**Have clear objectives for the consultation;** if feasible, discuss the consultation with pupils and generate an initial topic list which can be converted into explicit questions or activities.

**Carefully plan the consultation process;** where, when and how are important considerations. The consultation activities should be adapted to meet the specific communication/learning needs of the pupils, for example:

- Ensure the pupil is comfortable with the communicator.
- Keep the questioning simple.
- Use pupil-friendly words, images and actions.
- Aim to minimise any bias or leading questions.
- Always pilot the consultation materials with a small number of pupils before using more widely.

**Prepare communicator instructions and recording logs;** as responses may be completed with the same pupil over a period of time or at different times with different pupils, a set of clear and concise communicator guidance notes and recording logs are needed.

There are **three** stages to any consultation process:

- 1:** Administering the consultation task.
- 2:** Collating and analysing the responses gained.
- 3:** Reporting on the results to the pupils, staff and the other key agencies involved in their education experience. It is important that any consultation process offers an explanation of any resultant action.



## Setting the scene

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When consulting with pupils, it is important to make sure that the conditions during which the consultation will take place are as suitable as possible.

- Arrange to carry out the consultation process in a setting that is familiar and comfortable for the pupil.
- Allow the preferred communicator to conduct the consultation or have a person present that the pupil knows and trusts.
- Check the setting for any objects which may distract or disturb the consultation process.
- Be aware of any health issues, sensory impairments, etc.
- Be aware of any communication aids the pupil will use.
- Avoid distractions such as rustling of papers.
- If taking notes check with the pupil by saying, "I need to write some things down in case I forget. Is that OK?"
- Due to concentration difficulties, the consultation may be carried out over a series of 'short burst' sessions.
- Set aside a suitable length of time for talking with and listening to pupils with more complex communication support needs.

## General tips

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- Speak clearly making your voice sound as interesting as possible by using changes of emphasis.
- Use short, direct sentences and ask one question at a time.
- Try not to talk too fast or in an exaggerated or patronising tone.
- Use familiar vocabulary and jargon-free language.
- Use visual aids such as pictures, objects, photos and symbols to aid communication. Hold up or point to relevant pictures whilst talking; pupils may be able to respond in the same way if shown how to indicate their preference.
- Allow sufficient time for pupils to respond.
- Don't assume the pupil has understood everything that you have said. Build some checks into the consultation method.

## Adapting the toolkit

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The level of pupil engagement depends upon adapting the consultation methods suggested in the toolkit to meet individual pupils' communication/learning needs.

## Confidentiality

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The issues of confidentiality and consent are complex when consulting pupils with communication/learning support needs. Pupils should be asked for their consent to the process and permission sought to share relevant information gained through the consultation process. This in itself may prove very difficult.

Although agreed confidentiality procedures must be followed, it is often the case that pupils who have difficulty expressing themselves or making themselves understood are very keen for information regarding their feelings to be passed on. All staff should be aware that they must respect confidentiality but may on occasions have to pass on information especially in the case of any child protection issues which emerge during the consultation process.

Individual professional and ethical judgement may have to be exercised about where the boundaries of confidentiality lie. Otherwise, as with all children, pupils with communication/learning support needs must be confident that their views will be listened to and acted upon. It is the duty of the consultation communicator to decide to whom and how the message should be passed on, not just if it is to be passed on.

## Consultation in practice

There are two main methods which can be used to consult with pupils with communication support needs:

- **Observation and recording**
- **Listening and discussion**

Each method provides a series of activities which can be adapted to meet the individual communication profile of the pupil(s) involved in the consultation.

### Signpost

An example of a communication profile can be found in *Listening to Children with Communication Support Needs* on the SENSE Scotland website: [www.sensescotland.org.uk](http://www.sensescotland.org.uk)

## Observation and recording

### Observation

Observation is one of the most useful methods to use when consulting with pupils with communication support needs. Observation can be passive or active.

**Passive observation** involves shadowing pupils whilst they experience the events of a typical day, or particular aspects you are attempting to gain their views on. This is a non-intrusive method and is a good way to gather evidence as part of a wider active consultation process.

**Active observation** involves structuring a pupil's day to include specific situations. For example, the pupil may be observed:

- doing something they like/dislike
- doing something completely new
- working with people they know/do not know
- working in different rooms or areas of a base room.

The pupil's responses to such situations can be recorded.

### Recording

For accurate and reportable results, a mix of active and passive observations need to be recorded. Observers interpret their own results and compare these with the results of other observers, to give a moderated response. In some cases, a clear consensus may emerge but equally unanimous agreement may not be possible. The results will however provide feedback about the experiences of the pupil which can be used for future planning.

## Sample activities

### Watching and learning

(adapted from the EEL Project, Early Years Team, Cardiff LEA)

Staff at a primary school for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD) place great store on standing back and observing the pupils in their classes. By setting out the classroom in a particular arrangement and then giving the pupils a specific task, they gain information about the activities that engage the pupils. The staff subsequently adapt the set up of the classroom to best meet the aptitudes, needs and interests of the pupils.

They use a 'Pupil Involvement Scale' to observe and record levels of pupil engagement.



# Consultation in practice

Pupil involvement level					
Observation	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<b>Concentration</b> The pupil's attention is directed towards the activity; difficult to distract.	No activity	Frequently interrupted activity	Mainly continuous activity	Continuous activity with intense moments	Sustained intense activity
<b>Energy</b> The pupil invests lots of effort, is eager and stimulated.					
<b>Complexity and creativity</b> is shown when the pupil is freely involved in more than routine behaviour.					
<b>Facial expression and posture</b> Look for 'active' eyes and engaged posture.					
<b>Persistence</b> The longer the engagement in relative terms, the more successful the activity.					
<b>Precision</b> Engaged pupils will show attention to detail.					
<b>Reaction time</b> Pupils who are involved and alert will react quickly to the activity.					
<b>Language</b> Pupils ask to repeat the activity or will say that they enjoyed it.					
<b>Satisfaction</b> Pupils display pride and pleasure with their achievements.					

## Building a pupil profile table

Pupil profile tables can be used to provide an ongoing method of recording pupils' likes and dislikes once they have been involved in a consultation or observation process. Pupils may enjoy discussing and completing the table with their preferred communicator. The collated results reveal if the activities engage pupils effectively. If this exercise is repeated over a period of time, it will give an indication if the pupils like the activity itself or are influenced by other factors, such as the time of day at which it is timetabled. Staff will be able to identify patterns and decide whether or not to change the classroom routines.

<b>Activity table</b>				
Name _____			Date _____	
Completed by _____				
<b>Today I did</b>				
<b>Activity or event</b>	<b>Really enjoyed</b>	<b>OK</b>	<b>Didn't like</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Books				
Catch				
Crayons				
<b>Drink/Break</b>				
Playtime				
Jigsaw				
<b>Lunch</b>				
Music				
Painting				
Shape sorting				
<b>Snack</b>				
Sound story				
Toys				

Once pupils are familiar with this method of feeding back about their preferences it could be further developed as below.

<b>Activity table</b>				
Name _____			Date _____	
Completed by _____				
<b>Today I did</b>				
Activity or event	Really enjoyed	OK	Didn't like	Comment
Working on my own				
Working with my friend				
Working in a group				
Talking to my friends about my work				
Talking with my teacher about my work				
Using the computer				
Looking at books				
Listening to music				
Listening to the teacher				
Drawing pictures				
Play acting				
Making things				
Watching a television programme				

## Using visual symbols

Some pupils may find visual symbols helpful in recording their preferred activities and making choices.

Examples of visual symbols include:

- Caricature smiley/sad faces; a simple and effective way of gaining information about pupils' likes and dislikes.
- Photos of happy and sad pupils.
- Makaton symbols.
- PECS symbols (picture exchange communication system).
- Traffic light symbols.
- Ticks and crosses. These may be used as pupils mature in their decision making.

It is important that the symbols chosen are appropriate to the pupil's level of development. Use abstract symbols only when you are sure that the pupil has reached the required level of understanding.

The following methods are used to help pupils to develop and customise their curriculum.

**Method 1** – Feedback about a specific learning activity, or learning environment

Using a smiley face (like) and a sad face (don't like) printed on an A4 laminated card, individuals (or groups of pupils) indicate what they think about an activity by holding up the card of their choice. They can do this at any stage of the activity. Alternatively pupils could point, look, touch or move towards the face of their choice. It is possible to use a third symbol signifying 'don't mind', if the preferred communicator feels the pupil(s) could distinguish this. The faces may be produced in different colours if the pupil is more responsive to coloured images.

**Method 2** – Feedback about a number of activities

Photographs or caricatures of pupils carrying out various tasks representing different curriculum experiences could be made. Pupils are then encouraged to stick smiley/sad faces on that activity. An extension of this activity would be to produce a photographic timetable, daily planner or timeline and ask the pupil to give their feedback as the session, day or week progresses. If this activity is repeated over a number of weeks, the preferred communicators will build up a picture of the pupils' preferences. This evidence can then be used in individual programme planning.

**Method 3** – As pupils gain confidence and maturity

As pupils gain confidence and maturity, they may progress to using traffic light symbols (red = don't like; yellow = don't mind; green = like) or ticks and crosses.



## Encouraging pupil involvement in curricular choice

In one school, a system has been developed whereby all pupils are consulted about their curriculum choices in design and technology.

Year 9 pupils are offered the choice of two projects, e.g. to design and make a car, or design and make a boat. Pupils are shown examples of items related to each choice in order to develop a better understanding of what the project will involve. In addition to the visual prompts, pupils are involved in a series of activities such as out of school trips to observe cars and boats in everyday use. Supported by teaching assistants, the pupils play 'the side of the room game' to make their initial choice. Pupils progress to use a simple 'I choose' sheet (see below) using a 'tick or cross sticker' given to them by their teacher.

<b>Car</b>	<b>Boat</b>
(teacher to insert appropriate photograph or graphic of a car)	(teacher to insert appropriate photograph or graphic of a boat)
Pupils tick their preferred choice	
<b>I choose a</b>	

The basic choice sheet provides pupils with a reminder of their choice as the project progresses. It is especially useful if the pupil has chosen the project that does not fit with the majority group choice. Smiley and sad face stickers are used by pupils to evaluate the project giving the teacher more feedback about their opinions.

Key Stage 4 pupils following entry level courses are able to evaluate their design and technology project at the end of the project cycle.

- All pupils are able to indicate whether they liked or disliked the project, using smiley and sad face stickers.
- Some pupils will record verbally why they liked or disliked the project, e.g. they liked the colour or size but didn't like the shape.
- A few pupils can be recorded verbally commenting on whether or not the project outcome has satisfied the project brief.

To give a more complete picture, 'in depth' recorded discussion sessions could take place either with individual pupils or with small groups.

## Developing an individualised system of communication

There are no simple solutions to methods of consulting with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), but equally no excuses for not attempting any form of consultation.

At a school for pupils with PMLD, responses are continually monitored and adapted to develop an individualised system of communication which can then be used for consultation. The pupils tend to work with their 'preferred communicator'. Pupils' likes and dislikes are first established through close observation. For some pupils closed questions may be used, e.g. would you like your music or favourite video? Both choices need to be available so that the pupil can answer by their preferred method of communication such as eye contact/eye pointing. If pupils are at an appropriate level of development, PECS symbols may be used or questions reinforced with simple signs (e.g. Makaton). Some pupils may be able to indicate yes/no, e.g. by facial expression/head movement.

The ICT needs of each pupil are assessed and when pupils have become familiar with an appropriate switch, 'one step' or single response methods of closed question consultation can be developed.









"All of the children use a combination of ways of communicating which together make up their own individual highly unique communication system. Listening and consulting with the pupil requires an understanding of how to interpret these complex elements usually by their preferred communicator."

### Signpost

*Routes for Learning* (2006) Welsh Assembly Government; a pack of assessment materials for pupils with PMLD. This can be supplemented by *Affective Communication Assessment* (1998) J. Coupe O 'Kane and J. Goldbart which enables staff to examine and interpret very early communication responses.

## Self-evaluation using a simple questionnaire

As part of a school self-evaluation exercise, a primary school gave its Year 5 and 6 pupils a short form to complete, following a discussion. Symbols were used to record agreement/disagreement with some simple statements.



Questionnaire		
I am a	boy	girl
I am in year	5	6
I enjoy being at school		
I like my school		
I feel happy in the playground		
I like school dinner		

Staff used the results of the feedback activities to inform their whole-school Self Evaluation Report. It is also important to feedback to the pupils involved in the consultation the collated results of the questionnaire, what changes are going to be made as a result of their responses, and the reasons why some changes can not be made.

The statements used could be amended to gain pupil views of a number of key issues. Alternative statements which could be used include:

- Everyone behaves well in class.
- Teachers help children with their work.
- I am happy in my class.
- The school is clean and tidy.

This type of approach lends itself very well to a survey or consultation exercise about the school rules, e.g.

We are all asked to be kind to each other  

It is important to:

- keep the statements simple
- keep the number of statements or questions to a realistic number
- repeat the exercise to be sure of consistent results
- take care that the layout of the form (i.e. in columns) is not taken to imply that views are always 'polarised' with no 'middle ground'.

# Listening and discussion

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## Listening

Listening is first and foremost a form of observation but it is much more than just 'auditory observation'. Listening to pupils is a powerful and interactive process.

Features of effective listening include:

- Encouraging and stimulating the pupil's communication efforts.
- Being open and receptive to different types of responses; behavioural and/or spoken.
- Identifying and overcoming any barriers to communication.

## Encouraging discussion

Some pupils will be able to communicate their own views once they have had the opportunity to explore their feelings about a specific topic. Planned formative discussion sessions must allow pupils time to express their views. As part of the confidence building process, individual pupils may need some/all of the following:

- plenty of advance warning and preparation time
- the involvement of their preferred communicator
- access to specialised/appropriate/relevant vocabulary possibly in sign, object, picture, photographic or symbol form
- an open, supportive atmosphere with the opportunity for repeating the process and discussion topics
- a distraction free environment
- a flexible time slot set aside for listening and discussing.

## Tips for communicators

- Wait for the pupil to respond before giving a neutral prompt. Repeating the question often meets with limited success; successive prompting may lead to inaccurate responses.
- Provide props such as symbols or photographs to support discussions (according to the pupils' level of development).
- Prepare a structure and timeline for the discussion session.

Research has shown the value of making statements rather than questions to trigger fuller responses. Cue cards can be used to help learners produce an uninterrupted narrative answer. Examples of cue cards include symbols for people, settings or feelings to allow the learners to say who they worked with, where they moved and how they felt without prompting/further questioning from the adult.

## Case Studies

### Circle Time

Circle Time provides structured opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills and to initiate the process of discussion.

Circle Time is one of the methods used to engender cooperation amongst pupils in school. It can contribute significantly to a positive whole school ethos and an emotionally literate environment.

It is a means of:

- giving a voice to those children who might otherwise feel reluctant to speak in a larger group
- raising pupil self-esteem and self-awareness
- creating opportunities to work towards solutions in a non-threatening situation.

A range of skills and values can be encouraged through the use of Circle Time.

### Association

A sentence completion activity to identify other pupils in class, in school and members of the family, for example:

- Shakira and Anna are in my class.
- Ibrahim and Zakeriya are my brothers.

### Belonging

This activity can be used to identify relationships and why families are important. It can expand pupils' sense of belonging to include groups other than their families.

- Riverbank is my school. I am in Violet Class. My teacher is Mrs Thomas.
- We are all in Mrs Jones' class. She is our teacher.

### Conversation skills

This activity can be used to teach pupils how to get attention in a socially acceptable way and engage in positive conversation with peers.

Child 1 taps another child on the shoulder and smiles. When the other child turns around, Child 1 asks his/her name/favourite colour/food/game, etc.

### Friendship skills

Discovering more about other pupils and their likes and dislikes compared to their own, for example:

- I like red, Bethan likes blue.
- I like Arsenal, Richard likes Chelsea.

### Recognising emotions

The use of cards/puppets/masks, for example:

- Teddy is sad/happy/angry/frightened today – how can you tell?

## Developing a school council in a special school setting

### **Background**

A special school for pupils aged 3–19 with SLD and PMLD had a school council some years ago which lost momentum. Following a Healthy Schools training event, the PSE coordinator relaunched the school council with the full support of the headteacher. The PSE coordinator, as the school council link teacher, receives support from a nursery nurse.

### **The process**

Following awareness raising with staff and pupils, all pupils in the secondary and tertiary departments (11–19-year-olds) were encouraged to volunteer as candidates for the school council. The school council link teacher organised a school election using pictographic ballot papers which pupils were able to mark to show their chosen candidate. Alternatively, some pupils were able to indicate their choice of candidate to their preferred communicator.

Nine young people, three girls and six boys were elected, one representative per class. The school council meets on a Friday once a month during curriculum time. The school council link teacher prepares a simple agenda based on pupil suggestions that are made during Circle Time. The school council has elected a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and treasurer. Candidates were asked to prepare a manifesto and gave presentations to their peers. Again a pictographic ballot paper was used. The secretary, one of the older pupils, keeps minutes. The school council link teacher models meeting skills and a team building afternoon was held with peer mentors from a neighbouring comprehensive school.

The school council has agreed rules for its meetings which are presented as limited text with supporting coloured signs/images. The school council members were also asked to prioritise the resources they would need. Clear laminated pictures of badges, caps, suggestion boxes, posters, files, etc. were provided and the young people voted for their priorities. Funding of £100 was secured by the pupils from the headteacher.

### **Resources**

Most of the pupil resources have been developed in-house. A useful resource is 'Access to Citizenship'; Ann Ferguson and Hazel Lawson; David Fulton (2003) which has a section on developing a school council with pupils with SLD.

### **Issues addressed**

- Environmental issues and links with Eco Schools.
- The learning environment.
- Equipment for the play yard.
- Health-related issues.

## Feedback

Circle Time is a well established aspect of school life. Using the minutes from the school council meeting, class representatives, with support, tell their peers either visually or verbally what was decided. Pupils are encouraged to listen to the key points raised and then they comment using whichever form of communication is appropriate and accessible to them.

Pupils are also given opportunities to discuss any issues that are concerning them regarding school life and what they would like to be discussed at the next school council meeting. Occasionally, topics are given to classes during Circle Time and they share ideas surrounding these areas. A similar approach might be used to consult pupils about their learning styles, the curriculum and the learning environment.

The headteacher receives feedback from the school council link teacher and from the school council members. The headteacher reports to the Governing Body and parents are kept informed through the school newsletter.

## Benefits

- Pupils develop and apply their communication skills.
- The self-esteem of pupils elected to the school council has been raised.
- Working in new groups and cooperating with other pupils contributes significantly to pupils' personal and social development.
- The school council has developed helpful links with young people from a neighbouring comprehensive school who have volunteered to act as peer mentors for the school council members.
- Two tertiary pupils have been invited to participate in monthly meetings of the Local Authority Youth Forum.

## Advice to other schools

- Gain the support of the headteacher.
- Keep pupils and colleagues informed and involved, e.g. add school council dates to the list of school meetings.
- Set realistic timescales.
- Involve local advocacy groups.
- Involve older/former pupils in training.

## Recording the consultation

It is important to record the outcomes of discussions which can be used as evidence for decision making about the pupils' educational experience or as a prompt for further discussion at a later date. The communicator should not record their own interpretation but note exactly what the pupil says, signs or indicates. Also, any information given as verbal or visual prompts should be included. The pupil must be involved and agree to the process of recording. A consultation record sheet such as the following example, adapted from the SENSE Scotland material, could be used.

### Signpost

An example of a Consultation Record Sheet can be found in *Listening to Children with Communication Support Needs* and *Listening to Children* (2004) on the SENSE Scotland website: [www.sensescotland.org.uk](http://www.sensescotland.org.uk)

<b>Consultation record sheet</b>	
<b>Communicator's name</b>	
<b>Pupil's name</b>	
<b>Date and time</b>	
<b>Consultation venue</b>	
<b>Who was the preferred communicator and who else was present?</b>	
<b>Preparation for the discussion?</b> (circumstances, events, questions, etc.)	
<b>How did the pupil seem to be feeling?</b> (face, body, degree of tension/relaxation/distress/excitement, etc.)	
<b>What exactly did the pupil say/do?</b> <b>What did he/she gesture/sign?</b> <b>What pictures, objects, photographs or symbols did he/she indicate?</b> <b>What message(s) on VOCA were activated?</b> Try to keep a note of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what exactly the child said or did (highlight or underline these, or write them in capitals or a different colour of pen)</li> <li>• what you (or others) said or did by way of questioning and/or prompting.</li> </ul>	
<b>Interpretation</b> What you (or others) interpreted the child as meaning (be sure to include any ambiguities or queries).	
<b>Action required</b> What needs to happen next? Who takes responsibility for making it happen?	



## Sample activities

### Positive achievement system

A school for pupils with SLD has developed a positive achievement system with pupils in Years 5 and 6. They award 'achievement marks' for a range of activities. Through discussion, the pupils are able to visualise and articulate 'what good looks like'. For example:

- What does a good piece of work look like, what skills do I need to use to achieve this?

or

- What does good behaviour in a particular situation look like?

At the start of the academic year, staff award achievement marks. As soon as the pupils are ready they are encouraged to award their own marks and discuss this with their preferred communicator. Marks are given on a 1–10 scale, with 10 registering as fantastic. Marks are awarded for:

- attitude
- application
- success
- perseverance
- creativity
- kindness
- good behaviour.

Discussion is based on a positive format, for example:

- if a pupil scores 2, they are asked to consider what they did positively that prevented them from getting a 1
- if a pupil achieves a 6, they think about what a 7 would look like and what sort of things they could do to achieve this.

Additional marks or ½ marks can be awarded by other staff or pupils for acts of kindness.

Regular discussion about the award of scores leads to a valuable ongoing consultation process with each pupil. Record cards are kept, with the analysis of progress scores feeding into the pupils' annual review process. Rewards include a dip in the treasure box, verbal praise, a special mention certificate or a phone call home. Once embedded, the process provides staff with a direct method of consulting with their pupils on a day to day basis.

This activity could be extended and used for consulting older pupils about appropriate behaviour in different settings.

## Personal communication passports

Personal communication passports are an effective way of helping pupils with communication support needs to record and share information about their preferences and views. Passports are particularly useful when pupils are in transition from class to class, school to school, or care setting to school. They become a living record of the results of any consultation which has been carried out with pupils. The making of the passport gives pupils a feeling of control as information is gathered which can then be passed on to other agencies or their next school as part of the transition process. This is important as pupils with communication support needs are vulnerable when moving from one setting to another with new people and new routines.

To help a pupil with specific communication support needs, others should know:

- what communication system the pupil uses, and how to use this to communicate with them
- the sort of things the pupil likes to talk about, their views and interests.

The passport belongs to the pupils. It allows them to speak for themselves, and the feeling of ownership is likely to increase with the pupils' level of input. The passport can be added to over time to provide a 'history' of the pupils' views, preferences and responses to their school experience.

Passports are also a valuable way for new and temporary staff to gain an insight into the pupils' views and preferences.

A possible framework for a passport could be structured around some of the key questions below:

- This is what I do when I am happy, and to show I like something.
- Things that I like and make me happy are...
- This is how to ask me if I like something, or to let me choose, or check how I feel.
- My special people are (1) family and pets, (2) friends.
- These are the places I like and things I like to do.
- Things that can go wrong and spoil things for me are...
- This is what I do when I am not happy, or when I don't like something.
- If I am upset it is maybe because...
- I need to have my say, please ask me, I can tell you things in my way by...

To make the passport, staff need to consult with each individual pupil. Staff gain an insight into the pupil's preferences and views which can be used both for communication purposes, for feeding into the annual review process and for curriculum planning.

Passports are normally made up to be as flexible as possible, for example in a ring binder format which can be added to as the pupil progresses. Passports should also be as visual as possible to help motivate the pupil to add more information about their views and preferences as they move through their education experience.

Passports may also use:

- all symbols
- mixed symbols and text
- video and multimedia
- talking passports

or any mix of these communication and recording tools.

Passports are a valuable end product of the consultation process and are a 'living' record of pupils' views and preferences.

**We would like to thank staff from the following schools who gave freely of their ideas and experiences, and developed and piloted a number of the consultation strategies with their pupils.**

**Woodlands High School, Cardiff  
Riverbank School, Cardiff  
Tŷ Gwyn School, Cardiff  
Trinity Fields School, Caerphilly**

# Useful references, resources and websites

## References

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**Listening to Children** (2004)

Aitken, S & Millar, S, CALL Centre.

Available from <http://callcentre.education.ed.ac.uk>

**See what I mean** (2000)

Grove, Nicola. Guidelines to help staff understand what people with severe and profound learning disabilities are communicating, particularly in the context of decision making.

Available from [www.bild.org.uk](http://www.bild.org.uk)

**Reflections on interviewing children and young people as a method of inquiry in exploring their perspectives on integration/inclusion** (2001)

Lewis, A. Journal of Research in SEN (1,3, November 2001)

**Consulting Pupils: A Toolkit for Teachers** (2003)

McBeath, J, Demetriou, H, Ruddock, J and Myers K 920030

Pearson Publishing ISBN 1 85749 8461

**Involvement of Children with little/no verbal communication** (2007)

Watson, D, Tarleton, B, Feiler, A. (Report on the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation Project, University of Bristol/Norah Fry Research Centre)

## Resources

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### Welsh Assembly Government

#### Extending entitlement

[http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/extending\\_entitlement/?lang=en](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/extending_entitlement/?lang=en)

#### SEN Code of Practice

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dells/publications/846291/248355/?lang=en>

#### Children and Young People

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/childreneyoungpeople/publications/policyguidance/?lang=en>

#### Inclusion and Pupils Support: National Assembly for Wales Circular 47/2006

[http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy\\_strategy\\_and\\_planning/schools/339214-wag/?lang=en](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/schools/339214-wag/?lang=en)

#### Funky Dragon

[www.funkydragon.org](http://www.funkydragon.org)

### Estyn

#### Young People's Participation in Decision Making 2005–2006

#### Participation of children and young people (3–11 year olds) in local decision-making issues that affect their lives (2007)

Available on [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

### Other Agencies

#### Council for Education in World Citizenship Cymru – Primary and secondary packs on pupil consultation and school councils

Contact: Education Officer 029 2022 8549 ([www.cewc-cymru.org.uk](http://www.cewc-cymru.org.uk))

#### The School Council: A Children's Guide (1999) Save the Children

ISBN 1 84187014

#### Participation – Spice it up! (2001) Dynamix/Save the Children

([www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk))

#### School Council toolkits ([www.schoolcouncils.org](http://www.schoolcouncils.org))

#### Understanding and developing children's participation (2004)

([www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk))

#### Young Voices – How to involve children and young people in your work

(2005) National Children's Office, Children's Rights Alliance and National Youth Council of Ireland (<http://www.nco.ie/publications/54/>)

## Useful Websites

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The following websites also have links to other sites and resources.

**[www.childrenfirst.wales.gov.uk](http://www.childrenfirst.wales.gov.uk)**

**[www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk)**

**[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)** (Listen Up! materials)

**[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)**

**[www.schoolscouncilwales.org.uk](http://www.schoolscouncilwales.org.uk)**

**[www.the-childrens-society.org.uk](http://www.the-childrens-society.org.uk)**

**[www.globalgang.org.uk](http://www.globalgang.org.uk)**

**[www.inclusive.co.uk](http://www.inclusive.co.uk)** – ICT resources/access devices

**[www.cricksoft.com](http://www.cricksoft.com)** – ICT resources/access devices

**[www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk)** (Working with Participation series)

**[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)**

**[www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/youthvoice/)**