

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

March 2007



**The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:**

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local education authorities (LEAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of Jobcentre plus.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

**© Crown Copyright 2007: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Inspection evidence about the extent of children's and young people's participation</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>School councils and how they enable pupil participation in democratic processes and decision-making</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Pupil's involvement in the school community</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	
Update on progress regarding 11-25 year olds	

## Introduction

- 1 In 2005-6, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned Estyn to survey and report on the extent to which young people aged 11-25 had opportunities to participate in making decisions about issues that affected their lives. This year, as part of the 2006-7 annual remit from the Welsh Assembly Government, Estyn inspectors have focused on the same aspect in relation to learners between the ages of 3 and 11. In the appendix, the conclusions presented in the previous report on 11-25 year olds are updated.
- 2 This report aims to identify and evaluate the position in relation to the participation of young learners, mainly in the context of schools. It looks at how providers make use of school councils and the extent to which pupil participation is embedded into the life of the school and the wider community. Short case studies are used to exemplify good practice.
- 3 In looking at the extent to which young people participate in making decisions about issues that affect their lives, the report considers aspects of activity over which schools and local authorities have direct control or where they have the capacity to influence partners, such as parents and the local community.
- 4 As part of the survey, inspectors visited 15 schools across Wales, covering the full range of urban, rural, Welsh and English medium provision. They also spoke to staff from a number of local education authorities (LEAs). They held interviews with head teachers, class teachers, teaching assistants and pupils. In addition, inspectors scrutinised evidence from primary school inspections undertaken in the academic year 2005-06. They also scrutinised evidence from LEA inspections.
- 5 For the purpose of this report “participation” is defined as follows:

Participation is the right of learners to be involved in making decisions or planning or reviewing an action that might affect them. It is about encouraging children and young people to participate in decisions about services and provision that affect their lives and more generally the life and work of their schools and communities. In other words: “Having a voice, having a choice”. These are the words of a young person from Monmouthshire who won a competition, organised by the Welsh Assembly Government, to write a definition of “participation”.

## Background

- 6 The Welsh Assembly Government outlines its commitment to the participation of children and young people in the following three key documents:
  - Children and Young people: A Framework for Partnership;
  - Extending Entitlement: Supporting Young People in Wales; and
  - Children and Young People: Rights to Action.
- 7 More recently, the Welsh Assembly Government has published draft guidance on the Children Act which also notes the importance of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which identifies children and young people's rights to participation.
- 8 Section 176 of the Education Act 2002 places a duty on local education authorities and governing bodies to consult with pupils when making decisions that affect them. The Schools Councils (Wales) Regulations 2005 outline that the governing body of a school must establish a school council, so that pupils can discuss matters relating to their school, education and other matters of concern.
- 9 The establishment of the Participation Consortium and school council website [www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk](http://www.schoolcouncilswales.org.uk) all reflect the Welsh Assembly Government priority to involve and consult young people more on the services they receive, both in and out of school.
- 10 Pupil participation is central to any kind of education. Basically, if pupils do not participate in lessons, they do not become involved in study and activity, and, as a result, they do not learn. Any school where pupils are not engaged or where learning is disrupted by poor behaviour will be a school where pupils' participation is weak. Good teaching involves interacting with and listening to learners. Where learners are passive, they are not involved or participating. This means that teaching, and also often standards, are poor.
- 11 Schools have always played an important role in providing children and young people with a good range of experiences to promote participation and decision-making. The obligation to establish a school council has developed and formalised this aspect of school life.
- 12 The following description is from the schools council website:

“The school council is made up of a group of students who have been appointed to represent the student body. Through the council, they have opportunities for participation in their own affairs and contribute to the school community. The school council enables them to learn through a democratic decision-making process about their role as a citizen.”

## Main findings

- 13 The national policy requirement to establish a school council in all primary and junior schools has made school managers more aware of how important it is for pupils and young people to participate in making decisions about their lives and work at school.
- 14 School councils are a very effective means of involving children and young people in the life of the school. They give pupils responsibility and make them feel valued. The statutory regulations regarding school councils have made a significant difference to schools' attitudes to councils. Initially some school staff were fearful of what the council might mean for teachers in terms of workload and decision-making within the school. However, staff are beginning to realise the benefit of involving pupils more in school life.
- 15 In good schools, the school council helps to develop:
  - pupils' speaking, listening and personal and social skills:
  - positive attitudes to citizenship and democracy; and
  - good levels of confidence and self esteem.
- 16 Many schools have involved children and young people in decision-making for some time and their school councils are well established. These schools are confident in running a council and see it as part of a whole-school participation agenda. Other schools are in the early stages of establishing and developing a school council and as yet, staff and pupils have little or no understanding of their role or function.
- 17 Through the school council, pupils develop their personal and social skills and positive, more informed attitudes to citizenship and democracy. They also become more aware of their role as citizens by learning more about newer aspects of the curriculum such as sustainable development and global citizenship.
- 18 In most schools, the school council is the main means used for democratic participation but, in the best practice, the school council is only one method of encouraging participation.
- 19 However, some schools councils work in isolation from the day-to-day work of the school. In schools where this happens, there is no link between the work of the school council and other aspects of school life.
- 20 A significant minority of schools give responsibility for pupil participation to one member of staff and this means that other staff do not take as much ownership of the processes of involving pupils in making decisions.
- 21 Inspection evidence shows that primary schools in Wales are successful in providing pupils with more opportunities to make decisions.

- 22 Seventy-five percent of primary schools are good at preparing learners to take a full part in the life and work of the school and the community, through the subjects they study and also through their participation in extra-curricular activities. In the best practice, schools have an ethos which makes children and young people feel secure and encouraged. Their viewpoints are valued and they are listened to.
- 23 In 96% of primary schools, leaders and managers are beginning to involve pupils, parents, governors and other stakeholders in judging how well they are doing.
- 24 Where primary schools help pupils to develop their skills of decision-making and planning, it is a good preparation for transition to secondary school.
- 25 Inspection reports show that pupils have more opportunities to become involved in making decisions. These include having a say in devising new school rules, decisions about school uniform and even, in some cases, attendance at governors' meetings and inclusion in interview panels when schools are appointing new staff.
- 26 In the most effective practice, strong leadership ensures that activities to do with participation are fully embedded into the culture of the school and are not seen as a one-off event, such as a single "activity day".
- 27 Many schools and non-maintained early years' settings are already adapting their curriculum to include more active learning in preparation for the introduction of the Foundation Phase.
- 28 For the under 5s, personal and social development remain the strongest learning area both in schools and non-maintained settings. Very young children are encouraged to make decisions and choices in their learning.
- 29 Many local education authorities (LEAs) are committed to improving the participation of learners and offer good support and training on supporting pupil participation to school staff. However, a few LEAs do not offer enough leadership in this.
- 30 LEAs and schools do not have systems in place to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts in terms of encouraging greater participation. They do not monitor and evaluate the work of school councils enough.

## **Recommendations**

### **Schools should:**

- R1 make the participation of all learners central to the aims and vision of the school;
- R2 make sure that all involved understand the widest meaning of “participation”;
- R3 ensure that the headteacher involves all staff in promoting greater participation amongst learners;
- R4 make sure that all staff understand that everyone is responsible for planning for implementing participation in the school and that participation is an everyday process rather than a one-off event that only happens from time to time;
- R5 develop the work of the school council further and offer more whole-school activities to ensure that all children and young people are participating and making decisions;
- R6 offer all staff training to enhance their skills in providing opportunities for pupil participation and decision-making; and
- R7 ensure that younger children’s voices (under 7 years) are heard and that account is taken of their opinions.

### **Local authorities should:**

- R8 provide continued support for developing wider and more effective participation;  
and
- R9 provide training for key members of staff and newly qualified teachers to ensure schools are able to integrate participation into the whole school.

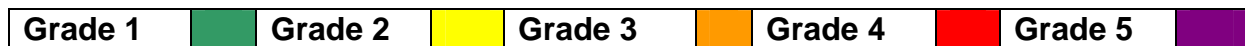
### **The Welsh Assembly Government should:**

- R10 continue to provide support to school councils and develop advice for schools and local authorities on how to develop the wider aspects of participation; and
- R11 encourage teacher trainers to include pupil participation as part of their training.

## Inspection evidence about the extent of children's and young people's participation

- 31 'Listening to learners' in focus groups, classes and in one-to-one discussions has generated a considerable amount of inspection evidence that shows that good primary schools in Wales are successful in providing pupils with opportunities to make decisions and choices that affect their lives.
- 32 Good teaching and good schools are about:
- giving the learner choices and helping the learner to participate in making choices;
  - opening doors to learning;
  - enabling pupils to take ownership of their learning;
  - developing independent lifelong learners;
  - helping learners to become confident and responsible citizens; and
  - enabling learners to meet the changes and challenges in their personal lives with determination and enthusiasm.
- 33 Schools are becoming more aware that participation provides children and young people with more opportunity to develop personal and social skills. These in turn support their development as active citizens within their community. Through involvement in decision-making, children and young people exercise responsibility.
- 34 The graphs below give the percentages of grades awarded for each of the aspects of Key Questions 1, 3 and 6 in primary school inspection reports of 2005-6, that are relevant to the subject of this report.
- 35 For each key question a grade 1-5 is awarded to the following scale of grade descriptions:
- Grade 1: Good with outstanding features**  
**Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings**  
**Grade 3: Good features outweigh shortcomings**  
**Grade 4: Some good features, but shortcomings in important areas**  
**Grade 5: Many important shortcomings**

**Key:**



**Standards:** Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

**1.13 How well are learners developing the capacity to work independently, including the skills necessary to maintain life-long learning?**



- 36 The graph above shows that 70% of schools have good features, including outstanding features in 15%, in the way they encourage pupils to plan and organise their own work, tackle problems, acquire learning skills and make decisions.

**1.14 How well are pupils progressing in their personal, moral, social and wider development?**



- 37 This graph shows the extent to which schools are successful in encouraging learners to work well with others, to interact socially, take responsibility for their own actions and develop confidence and personal values. In over 70% of schools, pupils are making good or outstanding progress in these aspects.

**1.16 How effectively are pupils prepared for participation in the workplace and the community?**



- 38 Seventy-five percent of schools are preparing learners very well to take a full part in the life and work of the school and the community, through the subjects they study and also through their participation in extra-curricular activities. Many pupils benefit from schemes such as Dragon Sport and the Healthy School initiative where specialists visit the school and encourage team and group activities. Such initiatives involve pupils in making choices, in working and playing together, listening to and considering the views of their peers.

**Curriculum:** Key Question 3: How well do learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners?

**3.5 Do learning experiences promote pupils' personal development?**



- 39 This graph shows how well schools are encouraging pupils' personal development and their understanding of their community. It also shows how well pupils relate to others and take responsibility for their own actions.

- 40 Many schools are helping young people to develop their role as citizens in the local community by encouraging their involvement in decision-making. They help prepare them for this by holding class debates, mock elections and in some cases involve them in attending local authority committee meetings. Young people are also becoming more aware of their role as citizens through new inputs into the curriculum, in particular by learning much more about global issues and sustainable development.
- 41 More and more primary schools take pupils to outdoor activity centres, where pupils undertake activities which help them understand their strengths and limitations, through working in a different environment. They learn to work more cooperatively and sensitively as members of teams.

**Support:** Key Question 4: How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?

**4.1 Does the school plan and manage care and support arrangements and services effectively, including meeting with the school council to establish pupils' views?**



- 42 This graph shows that only 10% of primary schools have some shortcomings in this aspect of provision. Schools are providing good support to enable learners to play an even fuller part in the life of the school. An important aspect of this is the role of the school council. Most inspection reports judge school councils to be very good. Children and young people feel they are listened to when they are involved in schools councils. Many schools had systems in place to seek the views of learners prior to the new regulations. Nevertheless, these have now been formalised by establishing a school council. This graph also shows that schools have improved the way they care for and support pupils, allowing them to feel secure to express their views in a variety of situations.

**Leadership and management:** Key Question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?

**6.3 Do leaders and managers seek out and take account of the views of pupils, staff and other interested parties?**



- 43 In 96% of primary schools, leaders and managers are beginning to involve pupils, parents, governors and others in judging how well they are doing. The best providers ask for, listen to and consider carefully the views of learners and take suitable action to tackle any shortcomings identified when carrying out their self-evaluation processes and planning for improvement.
- 44 Participation is evident in all schools but in good schools, staff engage and communicate with children and young people on a whole-school basis. The requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

and the requirement for KS2 schools to establish a school council has raised the profile of participation.

- 45 In the most effective practice, strong leadership ensures that participation happens regularly by involving young people as much as possible in day-to-day issues. In these schools the school council is only one method of participation.
- 46 Inspections shows that strong leadership and management are at the heart of a good school and that a key issue in developing a culture in which young people feel involved is the leadership and drive of the head teacher. The vision of the head teacher needs to include all staff and pupils in order for participation to work well.
- 47 Inspection reports show that providers are providing more opportunities for children and young people to become involved in making decisions. These include having a say in devising new school rules, decisions about school uniform and even, in some cases, attendance at governors' meetings and inclusion in interview panels when schools are appointing new staff.
- 48 Head teachers and teachers are sometimes unsure of the meaning of "participation", as used in the policy context, but, when asked how pupils are involved in their own learning and extra curricular activities, they can give numerous examples such as:
  - setting targets for improvement;
  - engaging in self-assessments and group discussions;
  - taking part in debates and presentations; and
  - circle time.

### **The Foundation Phase**

- 49 The Foundation curriculum is helping very young children to develop the skills that will equip them later to acquire knowledge. Learners who are experiencing the Foundation Phase acquire the following characteristics:
  - ✓ confidence to contribute to class debates and to make decisions about themselves;
  - ✓ confidence in outdoor activities;
  - ✓ the ability to express themselves through a range of media;
  - ✓ mastery of the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing and IT/ICT, particularly the first two;
  - ✓ the ability to plan and review their work;
  - ✓ the ability to use thinking skills and a considered approach to solving problems;

- ✓ the autonomy to use their time effectively and work on independent projects/activities; and
  - ✓ the capacity to work well as a team member and to lead activities when required.
- 50 For the under 5s, personal and social development remains the strongest learning area in both schools and non-maintained settings. Significant numbers of inspection reports comment on low levels of language and personal and social skills on entry. However inspections judge that good progress is made in these aspects and pupils achieve greater confidence and self-esteem during the time spent in the school or setting.
- 51 With the introduction of the Foundation Phase, learning becomes more child-centred. Children are encouraged to think more for themselves, to respond to ideas and questions enthusiastically and creatively and to experiment with new learning experiences indoors and outdoors. A well-planned Foundation Phase curriculum gives children these opportunities and builds successfully on current good practice where children:
- express opinions;
  - take responsibility;
  - solve problems;
  - make decisions;
  - make choices; and
  - respond to suggestions.
- 52 Many schools and non-maintained settings are already adapting their curriculum to include more active learning in preparation for the wholesale introduction of the Foundation Phase. Teachers and adults are giving young children more and better choices. Children are initiating some of their own activities and choosing when and how to complete some tasks. Inspection evidence confirms that this way of working is having an impact on children's independence, confidence and positive attitudes to participating in learning.
- 53 Through active learning and a respect for children's ability to be self-motivating and directing, teachers and adults are giving young children choices and children are initiating some of their own activities in negotiation with adults.

## **School councils and how they enable pupil participation in democratic processes and decision-making**

- 54 School councils are a very effective means of involving children and young people in the life of the school. They give pupils responsibility and make them feel valued. The statutory regulations regarding school councils have made a significant difference to schools' attitudes to councils. Initially some school staff were fearful of what the council might mean for teachers in terms of workload and decision-making within the school. However, staff are beginning to realise the benefit of involving pupils more in school life.
- 55 In good schools the school council develops:
- pupils' speaking, listening and personal and social skills;
  - positive attitudes to citizenship and democracy; and
  - good levels of confidence and self esteem.
- 56 Many schools have involved children and young people in making decisions for some time and their school councils are well established. These schools are confident in running a council and see it as part of a whole school participation agenda. However, some schools are in the early stages of establishing and developing a school council. In these schools staff and pupils have little or no understanding of their role or function in the school.
- 57 The school council is the main method by which pupils participate in a democratic process leading to making decisions about the way a school is organised. The extent to which pupils are involved in making these decisions has increased because of school councils. All pupils interviewed in the course of this survey were enthusiastic about their school council. They spoke enthusiastically about a number of actions and improvements that have come about as the result of their meetings. They were aware of their responsibilities and took them seriously.
- 58 In general the activities and recommendations from school councils have led to the following improvements in schools inspected recently:
- better playground equipment and safety rules for playing outdoors;
  - the introduction of a buddy system to help younger pupils feel secure;
  - better outdoor facilities;
  - higher standards of meals and improved organisation of lunchtime; and
  - cleaner and better-serviced toilets.

- 59 Through the school council and related activities, learners gain a sense of ownership and pride in their school and the community and feel that they have a real say in the way the school is organised. This is having a positive effect in some areas of deprivation and, in some cases, it has reduced levels of vandalism. It is also beginning to change the negative perception of school that existed previously in those communities.
- 60 Some schools have involved pupils in decisions about staffing. Members of the school council are involved in the appointments of both teaching and non-teaching staff. Head teachers and teachers seek the views of the pupils regarding the qualities they would wish to see in a new member of staff and these are built into a job description for the post. In addition some schools involve pupils in the interview process. The case study below illustrates this involvement.

**Case study 1: in a rural primary school in south east Wales**

Pupils contribute to the appointment of a new member of staff.

Pupils decide on the activity they would like candidates to undertake. They base this on what the job is: for example whether it is to teach music or to supervise lunchtime. Pupils do this with the support of the teachers and they are involved in setting the criteria for the appointment. Their decisions are based on what type of skills are required and also how each candidate relates to children. Members of the school council meet all the candidates. The teacher, together with members of the school council, then feed back to the appointments panel the recommendations of the school council. These then are taken account of when the panel makes the final decision.

- 61 As part of their involvement in Investors in People, one school council developed a set of school rules, including a system of rewards and sanctions. The involvement of learners had a positive impact in improving behaviour, because the pupils felt that they had helped establish the rules. In another example of good practice, a group of pupils from several other school councils successfully worked together to produce a joint behaviour policy. Other schools have also reviewed policies to make sure they are in pupil-friendly language, in response to school council meetings. The next case study shows how pupil participation can help to address problems of bullying.

**Case study 2: how a school council helps to address bullying**

In one school, pupils on the school council are actively involved in monitoring of bullying and general behaviour throughout the school. They talk about how to recognise potential bullying situations, basic methods of conflict resolution and how their attitude and behaviour can help. School council members also use circle time to make themselves available to other pupils to discuss any individual concerns. Importantly pupils are aware of their limitations as counsellors and know when to refer a matter to staff.

- 62 In most schools pupils develop interpersonal skills and learn to work together to solve problems. The case study below gives an example of co-operation to address a litter problem.

**Case study 3: how a primary school council led an initiative to clear the community of litter**

The school council raised concerns first within the school and then within the community regarding the litter on the path next to the school. They demonstrated an awareness of their responsibility in caring for their environment. The council involved the adjoining secondary school and the council departments in a litter-picking exercise. The area was cleared and notices put up to ensure it remained clear of litter. The pupils were proud of their achievements. Teachers commented on their increased confidence, their ability to work together and their improved self esteem.

- 63 Although there is no requirement to include KS1 pupils on school councils, many schools have representatives from Year 2 and some even from Year 1. Many primary schools have mechanisms, such as circle time, to seek the views of younger children. However, in some schools the younger pupils' views are not taken into account enough.
- 64 Through their involvement in school councils, more pupils and young people are becoming more involved in local authority policy planning. Good local authorities encourage pupils to attend conferences and review documentation.
- 65 In order to meet statutory requirements as far as school councils are concerned, many schools have appointed participation or school council officers. However, in some cases, many other staff feel a loss of ownership in the work, as the result of this. These post holders work hard and often run effective school councils but other staff are not involved and there is no link into curriculum activities.
- 66 One local authority commissioned an outside agency to work with primary schools to develop schools councils. Pupils were asked to look at local authority issues such as bullying as well as school-focused topics such as playtimes, but the schools themselves were not involved in the process enough.
- 67 Through school councils, primary schools are helping pupils develop skills that prepare them well for secondary school. Secondary schools find pupils are more confident and have increased skills to participate in their school council because pupils have already been involved in their primary school.
- 68 Pupils become more aware of the workings of local democracy, through their involvement in decision-making as members of a school council.
- 69 Some school councils work in isolation. In these schools there is no link between the work they do and the rest of the school. They focus on activities outside the classroom and there is no link to teaching and learning. Good schools ensure that all pupils and staff are involved. In some schools curriculum time is set aside and whole school gatherings used to keep pupils involved.

## **Pupils' involvement in the school community**

- 70 Despite many examples of good practice involving learners in the widest sense, many head teachers feel that participation simply means having a school council. However there are many other ways that pupils can be more actively involved in the school and its community.
- 71 Schools have responded well to Welsh Assembly Government priorities for life-long learning and regeneration and many have committees that focus on environmental and nutritional issues. These give children and young people opportunities to participate positively in making decisions that affect their lives.
- 72 Inspection evidence shows an increase in pupils' involvement in decisions to establish healthy tuck shops and lunches. Many are also actively involved in environmental improvements such as recycling, canal-restoration and creating an eco garden and allotment for senior citizens.
- 73 The vast majority of schools also involve pupils through:
- questionnaires, by asking them what they feel could be improved at school;
  - collective worship, concerts and drama;
  - circle time;
  - buddy systems;
  - team games;
  - charity work; and
  - acting as prefects or monitors.
- 74 These schools that see participation as much more than simply having a school council. They encourage every pupil to make a positive contribution to school life. Staff distribute questionnaires asking pupils about their opinions on such issues as school meals, uniforms, rules, extra-curricular activities. These are analysed by teachers and issues arising fed into school improvement plans and self-evaluation documentation. Pupils' views are valued and lead to improvements.
- 75 Schools judged to be good with outstanding features have widened the opportunities they provide for pupils to be involved in making decisions. One school used "Investors in Pupils" as a way to further develop participation work in the school. This means that pupils set individual targets, agree class targets, improve their understanding of their own role in the learning process and how this contributes to raising standards. Class and individual targets set by the pupil can relate to learning, behaviour, attendance, classroom management and induction. By involving young people in this way the school is showing that it values their involvement in whole-school issues. The next case study shows how pupils can take responsibility for negotiating class targets.

**Case study 4: how classes in a primary school negotiate for a new rewards scheme to improve attendance and achievement**

One class is working towards a cinema hour, as a reward for improved class attendance rates, whilst another is hoping for extra playtime, by improving punctuality. Achievements are also recognised through a whole school "Proud to be Present Scheme" and pupils are fully aware of how, when and why awards are given. By giving responsibility to learners to set up their own attendance targets in this way, the school is encouraging greater participation in an important aspect of school life.

- 76 Many pupils are involved in developing school or class websites. They work together in pairs or small groups to do the design work. This supports good levels of teamwork. They also help to organise school clubs and plan suitable activities. This also helps them to practise making decisions.
- 77 Pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own learning. Schools are providing more individual, peer and group assessment opportunities that give pupils responsibility for assessing their own progress. The next case study illustrates the involvement of pupils and parents in reviewing progress and addressing issues of concern.

**Case study 6: how a school involves pupils in parental consultations**

The school has four open evenings per year in addition to regular consultation evenings. At these meetings, pupils display their work and are encouraged to discuss their progress with an interested adult who may or may not be their parent. This is an effective way of involving the community and individual pupils in their own learning and reviewing their own progress.

The school is also involved in an authority-wide anti substance-misuse project which is delivered by the police and links to an all Wales programme. The activities in the programme rely heavily on pupil participation through paired, small group and whole class exercises. Parental involvement is also essential so that the community is included in discussion of ways of addressing complex social and personal problems.

- 78 The attention schools give to how pupils learn has improved pupils' ability to solve problems and work with others. Good schools have staff who think carefully about how learners can be more involved in classroom activities. Strategies such as Building Learning Power, Learning to Learn, Thinking Skills and Assessment for Learning challenge pupils to develop their understanding to work things out for themselves. These initiatives encourage learners to think critically about what they are doing and why they are doing it. They also give them opportunities to learn in a greater variety of ways than before. Learners are becoming critical thinkers who give and ask for reasons. The process of reviewing their work, analysing strengths and weakness and setting targets helps them to be more involved in all aspects of their work.
- 79 In most schools, pupils take part in charity work. Through this they demonstrate empathy for others and work collaboratively. They choose the charity themselves, by voting. All pupils in these schools participate in activities involving making such items

as cards to be sold to raise money for worthy causes. This work helps to develop their planning and decision-making skills. The voting is an important aspect as it teaches them about democracy.

- 80 Some local education authorities encourage schools to make pupil participation central to their ethos. They provide staff training, guidance documents, resource materials and pupil training. Schools in these LEAs feel they are well prepared and feel that this support is central to their success in improving pupil involvement.
- 81 Where LEAs do not emphasis the importance of participation, schools feel unsure about how to improve and encourage greater pupil involvement. They require support, training and would welcome sharing of good practice. Schools in these LEAs are working in isolation.

## Appendix

### Update on progress regarding 11-25 year olds

There have been very few changes to the conclusions drawn in the previous Estyn report. Estyn's report on the participation of young people in decision-making 11-25, 2005-06 can be found at Estyn's website [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk).

Many young people continue to feel that they are listened to in schools. Mainly, this is through getting involved with school councils. In the best cases, young people are involved in whole school developments to increase participation. These young people take part in the development of innovative teaching and learning procedures, behaviour management and making the provision better.

Many learners feel that they are listened to in FE colleges. Mainly, this is through the student council. There are always clear routes for students to make complaints in FE colleges, and often there is a student on the governing body.

The few local authorities who did not have a countywide system in place to listen to young people, have now made progress in developing structures and recruiting young people. However, there are a minority of authorities yet to put a structure in place to enable them to effectively listen to learners.

In the main, staff and managers are highly committed to consultation and use a range of methods to listen to the views of young people. For example, the Careers Company inspected this year used questionnaires, surveys and focus groups to better respond to clients.

However, many local authorities and partnerships, such as those within the Children and Young people's Framework Partnerships, find it difficult to develop innovative strategies to listen to young people. Across Wales, young people travel up to an hour and a half to take part in youth forum meetings, often these meetings fail to ignite young people's interest in democracy and decision-making. On these occasions young people are not always sure how to make their contribution to the decision-making process. Staff and providers do not use communications technology effectively to ease the burden on young people or attract more young people to take part.

Overall, providers, including partnerships, youth service, schools and national voluntary youth organisations, see participation as additional to their core work with young people. In both informal and formal settings, young people are not always supported to take an active decision-making role in their core learning activities. The recent surge in guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government and other organisations relating to participation is not always helpful. Often it means that teachers and practitioners across sectors focus on developing new and burdensome activities for participation rather than including the views of learners in their core work of educating young people.

Only a few providers have made changes to the way they work in order to listen more effectively to young people. One Young People's Partnership has changed the way they organise their meetings so that they can include the views of learners on each agenda. They hold the partnership meeting in a different school or FE college each time. The partnership invites the school or college council from that provider to the meeting, and follow up any queries or actions within three weeks. However, overall, providers do not plan and make changes at a senior level to include learners in decision-making.

Often, hard to reach groups of young people are not involved in decision-making. These groups include travellers, homeless young people and disabled young people.

Young people who take part in youth councils and forums often work hard. However, staff do not challenge these young people enough to extend their skills and abilities or raise their aspirations. Therefore young people's understanding of democracy, decision-making and empowerment remains at a low level.

The needs of Welsh speakers are not always taken in to consideration by staff when they organise local authority wide meetings of young people. Minutes and agendas are only in English and there are no opportunities for these young people to use their language of choice during meetings. Young people report that they need to ask staff for Welsh medium resources, or make a stand in order to have equal opportunity.

Partnership arrangements for coordinating youth support services are making it easier for young people to express their views, but the numbers involved are low. Through these opportunities, a very few young people use high levels of social skills to gain influence at local and national levels.

There is little or no decision-making by learners in certain settings. These often include local authority youth clubs, activities managed by voluntary youth groups and a few secondary schools.