

StudentVoice

at the centre of learning
and school life

2021



Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
Gumann na Scoileanna Pobail agus Cuimsitheacha

*an ACCS publication
in cooperation with*



NCCA

An Cionnaille Náisiúnta
Cúrsaí agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

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the youthful
vigour of
Student
Voice



The Class of 2021 John the Baptist Community School, Hospital, Co Limerick

near them roar



Paul Fiorentini was Principal of Carndonagh Community School and former President of the ACCS

The ACCS CPD Programme is designed to support and to empower Boards of Management and their school communities. The well-established tradition of sharing best practice in our schools leads to individual and collective learning both inside school and across schools and to the development of learning networks between schools.

Since 2018 ACCS has been driving a dynamic project on Student Voice and is delighted to collaborate with the NCCA on this important initiative. Over fifty of our Community and Comprehensive schools have engaged in the project and there is very strong evidence from our schools of the impact of Student Voice.

If we look at the last 100 years in terms of the evolution of democracy and equality, we can chart progress in the areas of gender, race, additional needs and sexual identity. Now is the time for children and young people to be heard and to overturn the maxim ‘that children should be seen and not heard’. This is merely an enactment of the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child which recognizes their right to “Express their opinions and be listened to.”

It was vital during the pandemic that the voice of students be heard as they were the cohort directly impacted by all Covid and education related decisions. During Covid-19 students entered the arena as stakeholders. They have represented their constituency competently and have informed the debate. Some of the ‘cobwebs’ in education are likely to be blown away by the youthful vigour of Student Voice.

In the world of education Student Voice has found expression in the consultation around Junior Cycle subject specifications and this voice was coherent. This has opened up the conversation to include student views on exams and assessment as well as teaching and learning styles and methodologies.

ACCS congratulates all our schools who are leading Student Voice initiatives. This Journal is a timely chronicle of work done and work ongoing in this evolving and very exciting space.

Paul Fiorentini



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment



Arlene Forster, Chief Executive, NCCA

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is delighted to collaborate with the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) on the project ‘Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life’. Consultation and partnership are cornerstones of NCCA’s work. This, in turn, places ‘voices’ at the very heart of how we develop curriculum and assessment advice. Student Voice is central to this.

‘Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life’ emerged from a successful Erasmus Plus project involving NCCA and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). This project, ‘The Bridge to Learning’, explored how Student Voice could be meaningfully invoked in learning, teaching, assessment and reporting in the Junior Cycle classroom thereby focusing on key emphases in the Framework for Junior Cycle. A rich dimension of the project involved schools in Ireland working with schools in Scotland, Hungary, Slovenia and the Netherlands, exploring approaches to Student Voice in the different jurisdictions.

Since the completion of the European project in 2019, NCCA has collaborated with stakeholders to disseminate the important learning and rich insights gained. Most importantly, this work has enabled the continued promotion and development of ways of supporting student agency and participation in their learning. It is in this context that NCCA welcomed the opportunity to work closely with ACCS. Early 2020 saw the arrival of the Coronavirus to Ireland bringing many challenges for schools. Despite these and the significant work that was required of school communities in response, Community and Comprehensive schools have continued to engage with each other and with the ACCS and NCCA in developing their thinking and their practice around Student Voice. I want to acknowledge this ongoing commitment and work by the participating schools.

Inclusion has been a defining feature of ‘Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life’ whereby every student in the participating classrooms is recognised as a competent and capable young person with valid and valuable views and perspectives.

their sense of ide



This is supported by the newly published National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2021). Central to this framework is the Lundy Model for Child Participation, which I am pleased to see so prominent in the approach to Student Voice set out in the ACCS project. This model reminds us that Student Voice is based on the idea that all young people are experts in their own lives with much to tell and share with us to help make decisions about matters that affect them. Education and their school experience is one such important matter.

It is clearly evident from the project that when students experience their voice being heard and acted upon in the classroom, this fosters their sense of identity and belonging, and develops positive attitudes towards participating meaningfully in the life of the school as a whole. It also supports the development of a culture of Student Voice that permeates and informs the endeavours of the whole school community. This is to be welcomed and I applaud the success of the schools involved.

Lundy's Model puts young people's right to be consulted at the centre. NCCA takes this right very seriously and we continue to place Student Voice at the centre of our consultations and deliberations on curriculum and assessment from early childhood through to senior cycle. In this way, our work is very much informed by the voice of children and young people.

I welcome this exciting and innovative project and the publication of this journal as key milestones in further affirming the importance of Student Voice in the education system here in Ireland, and I look forward to seeing the voice of young people enhanced and promoted even further within and across schools through this collaboration with the ACCS.

Arlene Forster
Chief Executive, NCCA

Acknowledgements

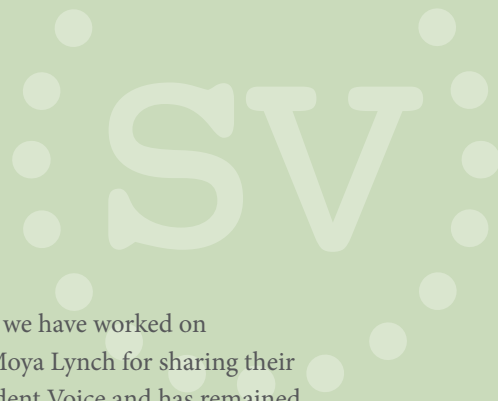
We are grateful to the many people who have contributed to the writing of this journal.

The journal has its origins in a project which commenced in 2018 and has grown from strength to strength even, and especially during, Covid times, when some may have found their voices muffled. The project set out to recognise, celebrate and to showcase achievements in promoting and establishing robust Student Voice practices in Community and Comprehensive schools.

The journal reflects discussions and ongoing collaborations with our schools and is greatly enhanced by the opinions and authentic voices of the students themselves. We are grateful to the schools for sharing their stories and journeys about how they have established Student Voice in the classroom and across the school community.

This project has provided us with many opportunities to partner with multiple agencies across the system and we acknowledge and thank the individuals who worked with us to contribute their learning and experience which now serves to enrich the finished product. We are especially grateful to the different organisations across the system that work with our schools on a regular basis and provide exciting initiatives which allow Student Voice to be amplified across school communities. We include a sample of their stories in this journal.

We wish to thank the project's 'critical friends,' Norman Emerson, Ger Halbert and Dr Domnall Fleming, for their insights, support and guidance in assisting and guiding this work. Norman generously shared insights and experiences from the NCCA's Erasmus Plus collaboration with JCT, which focused on the work of a number of schools from Cork and Monaghan ETBs.



We acknowledge those schools for pioneering much of what we have worked on subsequently, with special thanks to Pól Ó Síodhcháin and Moya Lynch for sharing their schools' perspectives. Domnall is a staunch advocate for Student Voice and has remained a steadfast supporter of the project, from the opening national seminars through to the present. Similarly, Ger Halbert's contribution has been immense in sifting through submissions to the journal and conducting interviews which were vital to ensuring different voices were represented. For sharing their wisdom, knowledge and sense of humour, we express our huge gratitude to them.

We wish to thank Professor Laura Lundy for being with us at our Education Conference on 12th May 2021 to launch the journal. We are indebted to Professor Lundy for giving us such a valuable framework in the Lundy Model through which we can interrogate our work "colouring in the quadrants" as we progress in our endeavours in promoting the central position of authentic Student Voice in our schools.

To colleagues in ACCS Head Office who supported us in meeting deadlines, collating and designing materials, facilitating online meetings and webinars, and generally keeping us on track, we express our gratitude and thanks. We are also grateful to the management and leadership of both ACCS and NCCA for recognising the importance of our work and for supporting our efforts.

We are pleased to report that the publication of this journal is a milestone on our collaboration but is certainly not the final destination. Inspired by the stories and testimonies of those who have contributed, we look forward to developing our collaboration even more and to working with our schools in the future as we continue the important work of enhancing and refining Student Voice practices in our schools.

Áine O'Sullivan

*Assistant General Secretary
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Aine O'Sullivan, Assistant General Secretary, ACCS

Introduction

In 2018, the ACCS and NCCA initiated a joint project on the theme of 'Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life' in Community and Comprehensive Schools. This project seeks to explore how the voices of students can be amplified in matters that affect them in their experience of schooling, both inside and outside the classroom. The project aims to build on other developments in Student Voice¹ that have emerged at this time, both in the Irish context and internationally. These developments include the publication of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), which places the learner as the central consideration in planning for learning, teaching, assessment and reporting. Other developments include Wellbeing in Junior Cycle and young people's needs and interests being an important consideration for schools in the design of their Wellbeing programme. Internationally, there is an emerging discourse recognising Student Voice as a fundamental right rooted in ideas of democratisation, participation and civic formation.

The subsequent evolution of this project has seen students, teachers, school leaders, policy makers, researchers and education system leaders focus on how Student Voice can be realised meaningfully and powerfully in classrooms and schools. A culture of innovation and collaboration has characterised the engagement of schools in this project, with teachers looking critically at their own professional

identity, and school communities reconceptualising themselves to place Student Voice at the core of the characteristic spirit by which they exist. The impact of Covid-19 on schools and on students since the Spring of 2020 has, of course, been profound. Yet despite the obvious negative effects, it has also, by necessity, generated further thinking and reflection on the purpose and nature of schooling, and in so doing, has redirected the focus of much 'Student Voice' thinking.

This article is intended to provide an overview of the project to date. In doing so, it will reflect on the rationale and context for the project and trace its development and implementation over the last two years, including the key contributions of some 'critical friends'. It will consider the impact of the project on participating school communities and on the collaborative structures that the ACCS seeks to nurture among its schools. It will reflect on how the pandemic has affected its progress and how engaging with students in schools have been helpful to responding to student needs. Finally, it will set out a vision for the future development of the project and highlight key priorities in its next stages. It is hoped that the article, together with the journal as a whole, will contribute usefully to an ongoing discourse about the role and nature of Student Voice in schools, while celebrating achievements and progress made to date.



Gerard O'Sullivan, Education Officer, NCCA

1

Rationale and Context for the project

Why Student Voice?

The forerunner and impetus for this project was an EU-funded Erasmus Plus project called 'Student Voice – The Bridge to Learning'. This project involved a collaboration between teachers and policy makers from various jurisdictions including Ireland, Slovenia, Scotland, the Netherlands and Hungary. The Irish contribution to the project was a collaboration between NCCA and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) Support Service. Each partner explored the theme of Student Voice in their own context and shared their experiences and findings with others, both at periodic meetings and in a shared website, www.voiceofstudents.eu. This project received a very positive formal evaluation upon its completion in 2019.

The context for the Irish dimension of the Erasmus Plus project was Junior Cycle reform. The Irish partners focused on the primacy accorded to formative assessment in the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). This emphasis on assessment is evident, in the foreword to the Framework, where the Minister for Education and Skills, Jan O'Sullivan TD states that 'teacher student feedback and professional collaboration envisaged between teachers has huge potential to enrich both the quality of students' learning and teachers' own professional engagement'. (Framework for Junior Cycle, p.2).

Indeed, the document returns repeatedly to the value of conversations between teachers and students as central to student learning. Teacher student dialogue is embedded in a new dual assessment approach, where both formative and summative approaches are intended to be interlinked and complementary.

The focus on supporting increased professional collaboration between teachers and advancing formative assessment approaches was the particular angle adopted by the Irish participants in the Erasmus project. Specifically, it was considered that Student Voice in the formative assessment domain would be the key focus for exploration. This exploration was conducted through engagement with a network of schools from both Cork and Cavan-Monaghan Education and Training Boards, with resultant learning being shared with the European partners. Crucially, the focus was not, in the first instance, on 'representative' Student Voice, often characterised by Student Councils or similar forums where students advocate for their peers on administrative or procedural issues that affect them in schools. Instead the focus was on relationships at the heart of their experience of schooling - the nature and extent to which students' voices were listened to about how they learn and how they are taught.



'Hope' by Grace Hynes, Kinsale CS

Rationale for Erasmus Plus Project 'Student Voice - The Bridge to Learning'

It is instructive to reflect on how the project articulated a rationale for its approach. Participants, at the time observed, that the project was about how 'to win the hearts and minds of teachers'. There were some concerns at the outset that a greater focus on Student Voice might be perceived as leading to a possible diminution of teacher voice, or to changing the nature of the teacher-student relationship that might prove unsettling or disruptive. With this in mind, a rationale was constructed setting out the convictions on which the project would be based. The central pillar was Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the child 'who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'. Moreover, this injunction stated that 'the child shall, in particular, be provided the opportunity to be heard. This raised questions for the project participants about who the appropriate audience would be for the Student Voice, and how Student Voice would be facilitated in a manner that ensured that it would not only be heard but would also have influence.

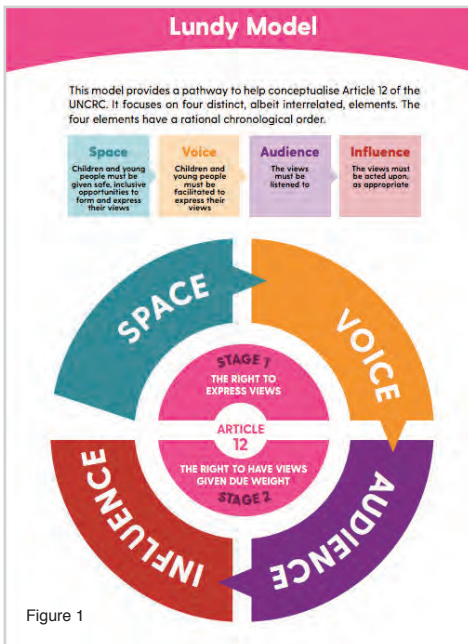
Other points of the rationale drew on the research. For instance, Alison Cook-Sather's reflection that the unique perspectives of students on their experience of learning, teaching and schooling warranted not just the attention of school leaders but an opportunity to 'actively shape' their education. (Alison Cook-Sather: *Sound, Presence, and Power: 'Student Voice' in Educational Research and Reform*. 2006). Equally meaningful was Andreas Schleicher's observation that 'schools are the first place where children experience society in all its facets and their experiences can have a profound influence on their attitudes and behaviour in life'. (OECD, 2017)

Building a Culture of Collaboration

In all Erasmus projects there is a commitment to disseminate and share the learning from the project through various networks or collaborations within each member jurisdiction, as well as internationally. In this context, the opportunity for NCCA to engage with ACCS presented itself. Given its role as a representative body for 96 schools across the country, it was considered appropriate that the culture of collaboration so strongly advocated in this Erasmus project could be cultivated among a community of schools that shared a common governance structure and set of values.

The Lundy Model of Participation

The ‘Lundy Model’ set out below in *Figure 1* is essentially a scaffold for ensuring that children and young people’s participation in decision making happens in an authentic way. This model is from the National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making². The Framework is designed to support government departments, agencies and organisations to improve their participation practices with children and young people in various settings including school.



As can be seen in the graphic above there are four elements that must be attended to if children’s right to participate in decision making is to be fully realised:

SPACE: *Children and young people must be given safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their views*

VOICE: *They must be facilitated to express their views*

AUDIENCE: *Their views must be listened to*

INFLUENCE: *The views must be acted upon as appropriate*

This model is valued by and promoted by three advocates of Student Voice in Irish education engaged by the ACCS project as critical friends.

2 Critical Friends

A key feature of the project has been the role of ‘critical friends.’ This term denotes those who have a record in advocating for greater Student Voice in education and/or have researched the theme. This next section of the journal provides an overview of the experiences and academic research put forward by ‘critical friends’ that underpin this project.

Dr. Domnall Fleming

UCC School of Education

Dr. Domnall Fleming is a member of the School of Education in University College Cork. Previously a senior inspector with the Department of Education, Domnall completed a PhD on Student Voice. Domnall brought a number of important perspectives to the group’s work (see article by Domnall elsewhere in this journal). Chief among them is his contention that Student Voice in schools has two central pillars:

- Student Voice in pedagogy – in the classroom both as dialogic teaching and consultation, and active and participative engagement in co-constructing learning in the classroom – what Domnall characterises as ‘good teaching’;
- Student Voice from a rights-based perspective, as prefigurative democracy, and promoting active citizenship. This is evident in whole-school perspectives, such as, for example, student councils.

Domnall’s view is that students’ right to be listened to is advanced and strengthened in schools when students see that their voice is heard in an authentic fashion in the daily interaction of the classroom. In the context of the classroom, Domnall positions Student Voice in the context of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). He places particular emphasis on teacher-student interaction and the value of feedback from teachers to students about their learning. Domnall emphasises the value of dialogic teaching that seeks to place Student Voices at the centre of learning, teaching, assessment and reporting. Students become active agents and participants in the co-construction of their learning.

Critical Friends

This can happen as a result of dialogue, consultation and challenge facilitated by the teacher in the classroom.

Meaningful Student Voice in the classroom where students experience democracy in action can be an important first step to building a whole school culture of listening to and involving students in matters that affect them. Interestingly, Domnall's thinking about Student Voice began with the concept of voice as a right, from a democratic, active-citizenship constructionist perspective. It was through listening to students' voices and teachers' reactions during his research that re-positioned his thinking, where he placed Student Voice at the centre of a social constructivist classroom.

Domnall's work with the group has encouraged critical reflection on the nature and extent of voice in schools through engagement with particular audit tools. This mode of reflection proved popular with participants as it allowed schools to benchmark their practices against a set of criteria or standards, with incremental layers indicating progression in terms of 'authentic' Student Voice.

These models tend to conform to an approach where there are a number of incremental steps for listening to and engaging with young people. The value of such models is that they provide a useful taxonomy of different levels of power associated with Voice. One such model is from Shier (2001). In this model:

1. *Children are listened to*
2. *Children are supported in expressing their views*
3. *Children's views are taken into account*
4. *Children are involved in decision-making processes*
5. *Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.*

Our Voices Our Schools, a resource for schools to support listening to and involving young people in decision making about matters that affect them in school has adopted the following model³:

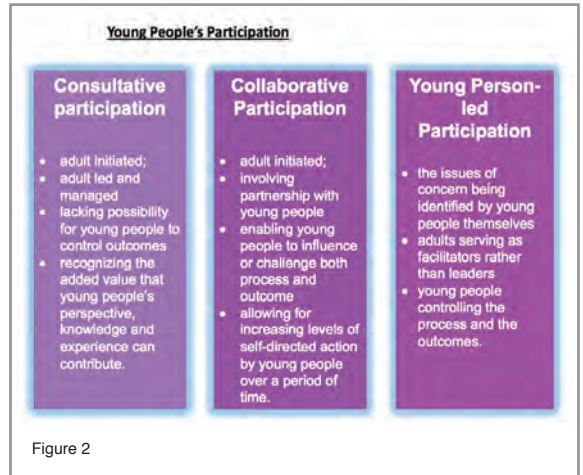
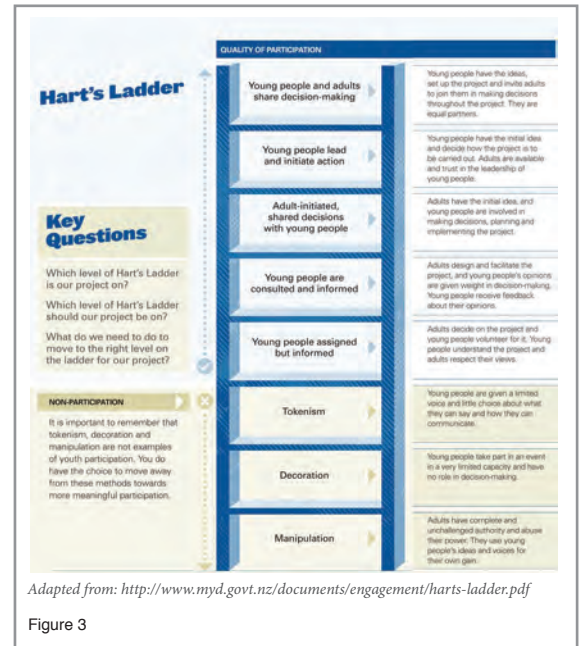


Figure 2

A third model has provided much valuable debate and discussion in the ACCS project schools and is based on the work of Roger Hart:



Adapted from: <http://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/engagement/harts-ladder.pdf>

Figure 3

One of Domnall's key contributions to the project has been to stimulate thinking and reflection using such models.

Norman Emerson NCCA

Norman Emerson was Director of Curriculum and Assessment of NCCA at the instigation of this project. Norman is currently working with the Council of Europe in developing assessment policy and practice in various jurisdictions in Eastern Europe. Given that the Erasmus project was a key influence on the project, Norman also took on the role of critical friend to the ACCS project.

Norman's role in the NCCA was significant in terms of supporting the ideals envisioned in Junior Cycle reform, particularly in relation to assessment, both formative and summative. In Junior Cycle, the importance of listening to students, formative feedback, conversations about learning, goal setting, student reflection and students having a voice in reporting and the Junior Profile of Achievement all rely on a vibrant Student Voice culture in the classroom.

Changes to assessment in Junior Cycle were accompanied by the introduction of learning outcomes-based subjects and short course specifications, which are designed to enhance teacher autonomy in shaping learning experiences to meet the specific needs of learners in their local contexts. Catering for students' needs and interests can happen most effectively where teachers engage with students in designing learning experiences, including discussing learning intentions and success criteria in lesson design and completing classroom based assessments. In surveying Junior Cycle reform in a broad sense, it is evident that there are abundant opportunities for dialogic teaching to invoke Student Voice, both in terms of classroom practice and pedagogy and also in assessment and reporting.

These opportunities formed the basis for the engagement with the Erasmus project in which Norman and colleagues from NCCA and JCT collaborated with European colleagues. The focus

was primarily on supporting Student Voice in the formative assessment space and in promoting a culture of dialogue and feedback in classroom practice. Its stated aims were to:

- *Develop different models of working in partnership with students, giving them voice and develop their skills and attitudes to become responsible and democratic citizens*
- *Create and implement ideas for pedagogical practices that support the active role of all students in their learning by building bridges between students and teachers*

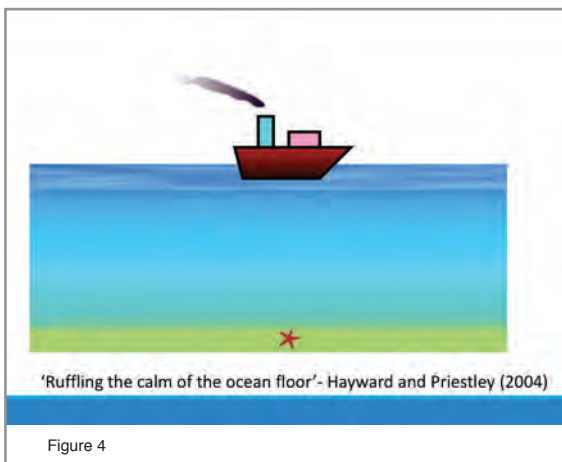
As with Domnall Fleming's role, Norman conveyed some key messages and conclusions that were gleaned from participating in the project. These included:

- *The value of exploring what works in fostering a culture of professional learning among teachers*
- *How teachers learn from each other - not waiting for expert to provide answers*
- *Empowering teachers to have sense of real ownership; bottom up with top down support*
- *Facilitating development to be shaped by teachers to suit their own context*
- *Assuring teachers that they have permission to make mistakes*
- *The need for a clear vision to be articulated and promoted by school leadership*
- *The need for development to be informed by research-researchers and teachers work together*
- *The value of collaboration across school networks*
- *The value of partnership working across agencies*

It is evident that the ACCS project conforms to many of the features identified above. A favoured mantra of Norman's was that the project needed '*to ruffle the calm of the ocean floor*', paraphrasing the title of a research piece by Louise Hayward and Mark Priestley⁴, two figures involved in recent curriculum change in Norman's native Scotland.

Critical Friends

This image employed by Norman has been a constant guiding metaphor for us in the ACCS project. It reminds us about the need to ensure that this project moves beyond a superficial or cosmetic engagement with the education system to something that is more profound, sustained and enduring. In other words, it does not just generate froth at the surface of the water but succeeds in ‘*ruffling the calm of the ocean floor*’.



It is noted that the approach of both Domnall and Norman acknowledged the importance of the approach to authentic student participation as developed by Prof Laura Lundy of Queen's University, Belfast.

Ger Halbert

NCCA

Ger Halbert, recently retired Education Officer with NCCA, was involved in the first NCCA/JCT Erasmus Plus project. Ger believes strongly in the importance of Student Voice from a rights-based perspective (as promoted in the Lundy Model) and in the context of student wellbeing. She is also a strong advocate for quality Social, Personal and Health Education and sees Student Voice as integral to this.



Since her retirement, Ger with her husband, John, also formerly of NCCA, collaborated with Comhairle na nÓg in the development of an online resource for schools called *Our Voices Our Schools*⁴. This resource aims to support schools in listening to and involving young people in decision making about matters that affect them in school.

Ger has been a valued critical friend to the ACCS project, with her attention focused on supporting schools to look critically at their practice and to measure such practice against some audit instruments that are included in *Our Voices Our Schools*⁵ in relation to student participation, agency and decision making.

Ger has played a key role in working with individual schools to help practitioners tease out the extent to which Student Voice is properly and meaningfully represented in their initiatives, using the Lundy Model as a lens through which to gauge this.

Ger has recently initiated the ACCS Student Voice Learning Group with colleagues in the ACCS schools which hopes to encourage discussion, debate and reflection on an article/podcast/video clip relating to Student Voice. This Learning Group aims to provide a forum both for professional development and collaboration with colleagues, while also maintaining momentum in the project.

It is evident, then, that the project has enlisted much expertise and wisdom in terms of academic researchers and practitioners, from second and third level, to provide direction for its work. The next section of this article will now look at how schools have responded to what they have heard.

Impact and Influence of the Project on ACCS Schools

The ACCS's vision is to lead and support Boards of Management to enable schools to provide equal access to a comprehensive, co-educational, community-based, multi-denominational education.

In doing so, we aim to contribute towards a just and caring society. The ACCS promotes a model of school for the future which supports educational innovation and best practice in caring and responsive environments. The autonomous nature of the Community and Comprehensive school structure lends an agility to these school communities in terms of their responses to demands and to changes in the system.

In its strategic plan 2017- 2020, the ACCS sets out its commitment to managing and influencing change in post primary education.

The strategic plan finds expression in the programme of CPD as designed by the ACCS. In Spring 2018, it was agreed by the ACCS Executive to invest in a programme of events which would acknowledge and promote the rightful place of Student Voice at the centre of learning and school life. This programme of one day events, scheduled at six monthly intervals over a three to five-year timeframe presented a meaningful opportunity for ACCS to deepen its engagement with the NCCA.

The content of the programme 'Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life' is based on the four well established pillars in Community and Comprehensive Schools: The Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), the LAOS 2016 framework, Inclusive Education, and the six step SSE process. In developing an understanding of the importance

of Student Voice in school, we also explore international research. Underpinning all of this work is Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

One of the aims of this project is to develop different models of working in partnership with students in the classroom and in the wider school space. This aim seeks to accommodate the two main spaces in schools where Student Voice may be located/ positioned: representational space AND learner space in the classroom. For many of our schools the two are inextricably linked, support each other and are impossible to untangle.

Central to our approach in this project is a series of one day workshops. This series of one day events facilitated opportunities for participants to explore their own understanding of Student Voice. The workshops enabled the sharing of practices and strategies used to promote Student Voice in school settings. Participants are supported in identifying areas to develop and are given space and time to discuss approaches and strategies which might be useful in taking the next steps. The approach acknowledges that each of the participating schools had already started on a journey in enabling Student Voice and each school is in a unique place along that journey.

Research based on the work of Lundy, Hart, Fleming, and others supports the programme materials and there is a careful balance between theory and practical activities to enhance engagement and enjoyment for all participants.

Impact and Influence of the Project on ACCS Schools

The programme has been designed to engage adult learners in a reflective process which complements their work as school leaders and calls on them to complete action research in their own schools. The focus is on bringing about small changes and differences in the way we do things in our schools so that students feel that they have a greater say and feel more involved and committed to learning and school life. In this way we are seeking to enhance Student Voice in a meaningful way at school level. The programme supports teacher collaboration fostering rich and deep conversations among teacher practitioners. Workshops are designed to challenge not just understanding but values and beliefs about what constitutes authentic Student Voice work in school communities.

It does not come as a surprise that teacher leaders championing this work in schools believe strongly that the school leader is central to the work becoming sustainable and influential in a school wide way. In the first year of the programme, teachers also reported a frustration about their ability to engage colleagues back in school in the work.

While schools engaged in activities and research inside and outside the classroom, a great deal of discussion centred on activities outside the classroom and across whole school such as the Student Council and student-led activities promoting different initiatives. In discussions about Hart's Ladder of participation, schools expressed a concern about tokenism in respect of the work they were carrying out in school under the banner of Student Voice and expressed a desire to develop initiatives more fully.

Participants acknowledged that often, the representative space with its established structures can be a safer place in which to promote Student Voice. Schools are comfortable in this space even

when the activity might be regarded as tokenistic. Building on opportunities presented in Junior Cycle, many participants decided to refocus their own work in the classroom through the lens of Student Voice but found it challenging to see how this work might develop school wide.

However, guided in discussions and reflection by the project's critical friends, and reassured by key messages about the successful collaboration between participants in Erasmus Plus project, ACCS teachers progressed their thinking and planning. A notable message that struck a chord with the group was that engaging in such work is inevitably 'messy' and complex. However, adopting a mindset that accepts that mistakes are made but can provide for rich learning, the project was taken forward. It was agreed that schools would continue to develop one aspect of their practice and would map this work onto the Looking at Our School 2016 framework choosing the most appropriate domain using the six step SSE process.



During the first 18 months of the programme, (2018-2019) individual schools shared elements of their own practice with a view to supporting participants' learning. The following schools presented at the one-day conferences.



Student Voice: Vanguard Schools

1. **BALLYBAY COMMUNITY COLLEGE:**
(Erasmus project: Student Voice - The Bridge to Learning) Presentation by School Principal, Moya Lynch (CMETB) who traced the changes and positive developments in approaches to how Student Voice was supported in the Junior Cycle classroom in her school. The Erasmus Plus project was a forerunner to the ACCS one. Participants in that project express certain frustrations and challenges about building their learner voice practices in the classroom, particularly those starting out on this journey. Moya's engagement with the ACCS schools early in our journey was a useful one which identified lessons learned and effective strategies that could be implemented by any school involved in building a culture of authentic Student Voice. Moya described the discernable impact on the positive relationships between students and teachers while working on the project and highlighted the prerequisites to enable Student Voice to flourish in school. These included creating a safe atmosphere in the classroom and developing effective pedagogies to engage students and teachers in conversations about formative feedback which would allow the student to plan to build on their strengths and to address their challenges.
 2. **MILLSTREET COMMUNITY SCHOOL:**
Video of a student focus group discussion where six Transition Year students explored the Transition Year Programme in their school and how it impacted on their learning and their engagement with school. The Student Voice was clearly evident in the curriculum materials and in the range of activities available to the students in the TY programme.
 3. **HOLY FAMILY COMMUNITY SCHOOL:**
Presentation about a school wide initiative introduced in 2019 which has impacted the place of Student Voice in the school community. The initiative is based on a carefully structured plan for tutor time which is facilitated once a week for all classes. The materials and content of the plan are based on the wellbeing indicators. (JC Wellbeing) Already the school is seeing an impact on relationships within the school community and evidence that the tutor time is enhancing students' experiences and engagement with school life across all year groups.
 4. **OLD BAWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL:**
Focus group discussion between staff and students which explored key questions relating to Student Voice in their school. The conversation highlighted the importance of positive relationships and the link between these and effective learning and teaching.
 5. **JOHN THE BAPTIST COMMUNITY SCHOOL:**
A guided conversation to identify/ agree strategies to enhance students' engagement with feedback in the classroom and how this engagement could influence learning and teaching across the school. Best practice is evident in this school's commitment to evaluating and improving the learners' experiences and outcomes in their classrooms.
- By December 2019, and following the first three one day events, schools were looking forward to the ACCS Education Conference in May 2020 which would facilitate a showcase event highlighting their work on promoting Student Voice in schools.

The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

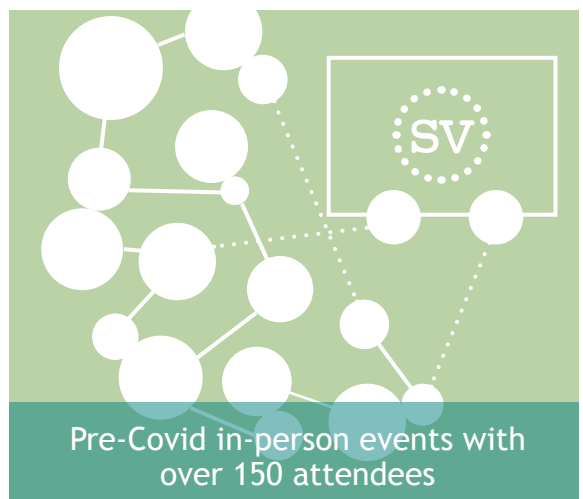
On 12th March 2020, the experience of schooling changed dramatically as Covid-19 became our new reality. As noted in the introduction the impact of Covid-19 on schools and on students since the Spring of 2020 has been profound. Yet despite the obvious negative effects, it has also, by necessity, generated further thinking and reflection on the purpose and nature of schooling, and in so doing, has redirected the focus of much thinking about Student Voice.

Of course, there was no manual for managing schools and leading school communities during a pandemic and so, as the schools set about their work, ACCS reviewed its own approach to CPD provision to support these schools. Priorities changed overnight in schools as principals and deputy principals moved to ensure that connections with their students were maintained and student wellbeing was supported. Indeed, while maintaining quality learning experiences was key, there was a new recognition that supporting the wellbeing of staff and students was central if learning was to take place effectively. As schools across the country grappled with a new digital landscape, schools revealed themselves as solution-focussed communities where stakeholders navigated the new landscape professionally with kindness and compassion.

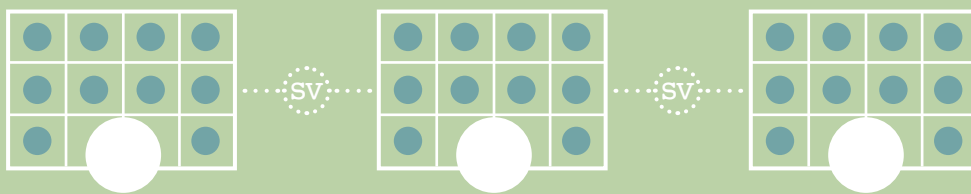
ACCS in turn, changed its provision of CPD and migrated much of the programme online overnight. The choice to use the ZOOM platform originally was made because it allowed us to connect with our schools particularly well. It enabled us to communicate with school Boards simultaneously, to facilitate formal and informal interactions with our members and to deliver a comprehensive programme of CPD and support to our schools. As the programme of CPD has evolved in this space and we have become more adept with the technology,

we have developed more agile ways of connecting with our schools. As our competence and confidence grew around this new way of working, we introduced more opportunities for feedback and interactions while online with delegates. Schools in lockdown with buildings closed and work being carried out remotely became our focus. Our opportunity for a one-day face to face ACCS Education Conference in May 2020 was lost as we grappled with this new reality.

In June 2020 ACCS invited the schools involved in the Student Voice project to participate in a webinar which was designed to capture the schooling experience of the students during the first lockdown. The webinar was structured around activities designed to give voice to the participants and to be as participant friendly as possible. This included the use of breakout rooms where school members could chat amongst themselves about the questions being discussed in the main event. A presentation, facilitated by Ger Halbert, considered how the Lundy Model of Participation based on the four quadrants, Voice, Space, Audience and Influence could be used as a way to ensure meaningful, authentic Student Voice initiatives in our schools.



During events students identified the topics that were important to them



Three post-Covid Webinars with nearly 400 attendees

The initiative aimed to capture the voices of young people in plans being devised by schools for reopening after lockdown in September. In recognition that young people are experts in their own experience of schooling, we asked the young people to reflect on their personal, social, and educational experience of the lockdown. We explored what mattered to them, what challenged them, frustrated them, stressed them, made them laugh, supported them, connected them with school, with their teachers and key personnel and linked them with their friends.

Schools were requested not to prepare materials in advance of the webinar although they were given an outline of the webinar plan and the general areas which would be discussed during the webinar. It was hoped that a more spontaneous approach might garner a more authentic response and we were also very conscious that this event was scheduled during the students' time: the school holidays.

The students were very articulate, and it was evident that many participants were in representative positions in their own schools and were heavily invested in their school community. They spoke honestly about their experience of remote learning, the need for all stakeholders to upskill rapidly, the impact of remote schooling on their mental health and about what approaches worked best for them. They also addressed concerns about equity, inclusion and meeting the needs of all learners during the pandemic.

Students reported that they felt overwhelmed by expectations and the amount of work being set especially in the early weeks after schools had closed so abruptly in March 2020. They attributed this to a general lack of experience in this new way of working. They understood that parameters for everybody had changed overnight and that the feelings which they were experiencing were being mirrored in many cases in many of their teachers who were struggling also with the lack of structure and this new way of working.

In January 2021, ACCS hosted another webinar with the schools which focussed on the second lockdown and the impact of the changed environment in schools in September. Throughout this event, students' concerns surfaced and returned time and again in comments and chat about the uncertainty around Leaving Certificate 2021 arrangements and the stress experienced by many students at the high number of unknown variables and their feelings of little or no efficacy in a situation directly affecting them.

The schools have reported that they find these webinars a useful way to connect with each other and a means of enabling discussion and commentary between young people in second level education on issues which matter to them. The ACCS and the NCCA will continue to facilitate such webinars over the coming months with a view to individual schools and regions taking over the role of facilitation in due course.

The Vision for the Future Development of the Project

In February 2021, ACCS issued invitations to Community and Comprehensive schools to work more closely with the team leading the project. The schools have examined their work through the lens of the Looking at Our School 2016 framework in December 2019. They continue to support and promote student agency in learning with particular emphasis of Student Voice ‘friendly’ pedagogies. In addition, some schools are developing structures to enable student representation in decision making.

Sixteen schools came forward and an online network was established on MS Teams to support a community of practice which would meet on a regular basis over the next few months. Meetings

are scheduled as a support for the schools and as a means of developing this work further. The forum supports the meetings and the network of schools and is a reflective space where ideas and initiatives can be shared and discussed by members of the online community. There is no doubt that this work presents valuable opportunities for CPD, building leadership capacity, sharing practical resources, and developing an authentic community of practice which seeks to promote Student Voice in our schools. Most importantly, the online space is one where collaboration and discussion bring a new energy and real opportunities for learning and creativity for participants.



50+ schools represented

Conclusion

This article has sought to provide a chronicle of the NCCA/ACCS collaboration which has developed and been adapted during the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. It is hoped that the overview charted here demonstrates the commitment and the resilience of the schools who embarked on the journey and stayed the course despite the unprecedented challenges that emerged. It is the conviction of the authors that this project represents a valuable opportunity to bolster the place of Student Voice in our schools and across the system. The pandemic has raised important questions about the purpose and nature of schooling, curriculum and assessment, which we contend cannot be addressed adequately without the voices of students being heard as critical stakeholders. Without the young person’s voice, the conversation

about the learner experiences and young person’s needs is surely diminished. Many of our schools have established practices which ensure that the student has a place in the decision-making process and many more are in the process of establishing those practices. In so doing, these schools are fostering a culture where young people will cultivate positive dispositions about such universal values as participation, leadership, civic action, social justice, global citizenship and even democracy itself, which will endure into their adult lives. ACCS and NCCA look forward to continuing their collaboration towards supporting and strengthening the structures which scaffold practices and processes in our schools to achieve these ends and in this way to effectively position ‘Student Voice at the Centre of Learning and School Life’.



Critical Friends

The following individuals made key contributions to the development of Student Voice.



The Student Voice volume has been raised

By Dr. Domnall Fleming

I firmly believe that students have a right to have a meaningful say in what happens to them, and in what matters to them, in our schools and classrooms. This rights-based position arising from the UNCRC Article 12 I feel is non-negotiable. The arguments are clear. Laura Lundy's work provides us with a very useful lens to explore the robustness of claims for authentic Student Voice work in schools. Student Voice must be meaningful to the students and should ultimately arise from them and be led by them, with appropriate support and facilitation from teachers and school leaders. It involves dialogue and consultation with, and the engagement and participation, of students, but with the full understanding that when decisions are made students are clear that they have had a say, and that they have been listened to and heard, and the reasons for decision are communicated to them in a clear and appropriate way.

It is worth considering where we have come from with Student Voice in the Irish system. The Education Act (1998) referenced the 'involvement' of students in the 'affairs' of the school and the possible establishment of a student council. From this 'Student Councils: A Voice for Students' (DES 2002), a guidelines document emerged accompanied by a very effective Student Council Support Service. Whole-School Evaluation from 2004 gave a further impetus to students having a say in external school evaluations but primarily through the student council and a student questionnaire. School Self-Evaluation (2012) and Looking at Our School (LAOS) (2016) have both further motivated and

embedded aspects of the concept within our schools and classrooms. Very effective practice in schools is presented by LAOS as recognising students as stakeholders in the school with an active role in decision-making and policy development. It sees opportunities for students to lead school initiatives and to engage in review and improvement of teaching, learning and assessment practices. While this positioning within LAOS is clearly a significant step in embedding of Student Voice in schools, we must however beware of a singular evaluation and school improvement motivation for Student Voice. It should be more than this.

Student Voice is clearly complex and multi-faceted. We must also consider that its authenticity can and is often challenged by the pressures of school performance and accountability – do we use the voices of our students to pursue these goals or to satisfy these pressures within a school improvement agenda? Similarly, the power and authority hierarchies in schools can place students in a continuing subordinate role in spite of claims of authenticity in Student Voice work. If however, our central motivation for Student Voice includes personalised learning, inclusion and retention, prefigurative democracy and active citizenship, then school improvement is inevitable and will be ongoing.

The badge of tokenism has often been placed on the student council construct and yet there is hope that the Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill (2019) will breathe further life into the student

council as a representative Student Voice construct in our schools. While the bill amends Section 27 of the Education Act 1998 to change the focus of the student council from one of ‘promoting the interest of the school’ to ‘promoting the interests of the students of the school’, the expected requirement for mandatory student councils in post-primary schools seems to have been lost.

Significant curricular changes have further encouraged Student Voice in pedagogy. Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework states that children ‘have opinions that are worth listening to, and have the right to be involved in making decisions about matters which affect them. In this way, they have a right to experience democracy’ (Aistear, 2009 p. 8). However, it was the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) that placed the student in an agentic position through its emphasis on formative assessment in the classroom through sharing learning intentions, negotiating success criteria, and through dialogic feedback conversations on the progression of learning. The effective development and further enactment of these pedagogical approaches arguably provide the most effective further springboard for enhancing Student Voice in the classroom. This should also set the agenda for such a positioning of Student Voice practice within a reformed senior cycle curriculum.

The growth and visibility of Student Voice has also been further enhanced by a range of initiatives across the education system since 2015. This current Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) practice initiative and journal has complemented support for Student Voice work in schools by Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), and a range of projects that have been facilitated by the Education Centre Network and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI).

The now newly named Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, formerly the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) has, through ongoing support for Comhairle na nÓg and Dail na nÓg, and through the development and publication of policy and national strategy on the participation of young people, had a significant influence on the advancement of Student Voice. Their excellent resource *Our Voices Our Schools* (DCYA 2019) has significantly supported schools in engaging with Student Voice work.

So where do we go from here? We need to ask what motivates leaders at all levels in schools to engage with and to facilitate Student Voice? The development of a culture of Student Voice that aligns with learner experiences, teachers’ professional and collaborative practice, and school self-evaluation, should become a central plank of transformational leadership at all levels in a school community, in the classroom and at whole-school level. Its benefits for inclusion, engagement, agency, participation, retention and learning are indisputable.

Student Voice is not a strategy but a culture and a moral purpose. It should be nurtured and facilitated at all levels of school leadership: by teacher leaders; middle leaders; senior leaders, and by the Board of Management. We do however, need to be careful as we ride this current wave of engagement with Student Voice to ensure clarity of motivation. To have a say in what matters at school is a student’s right. What follows are the benefits in the context of school improvement for all learners. Student Voice must not however be motivated principally by evaluation and accountability. A person-centred participatory school culture, as envisioned by Michael Fielding (Fielding 2002), should not be remarkable, it should be invisible, embedded and impactful.



Postcard from Tajikistan *Reflections on Student Voice in Ireland* by Norman Emerson

I moved from Ireland in 2019 from my post as Director in NCCA to take up a position as Key Expert on Educational Assessment with the European Union. I am currently based in Dushanbe, Tajikistan which is approximately 7,317 kilometres from Dublin! Tajikistan is a former Soviet Republic which gained independence in 1991. The country borders Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and China and is one of the poorest countries in the world.

I have now been away from Ireland for 18 months and that is probably a sufficient length of time to enable me to offer some considered reflections on my experiences of Student Voice developments in Ireland. One of the key features of ACCS and Erasmus Student Voice projects was the attempt to focus not just on the ‘what’ of Student Voice, but also on the ‘how’ of the implementation process. From the beginning, the aim was to develop Student Voice projects through a shift from top-down policy implementation to an approach which had a strong dimension of collaboration at policy, school and classroom level. The projects attempted to place schools at the centre of the learning journey and empower teachers to take the Student Voice project forward in a way that was appropriate for their local context. The vision centred on the development of Student Voice for all students - not just for a select few on representative student councils. The projects also aimed at supporting professional learning opportunities for all staff, while encouraging a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration in schools.

The rationale for this school-based approach to implementation is based on evidence from research

(Hayward, 2004) which indicates that teacher ownership of the process is much more likely to result in a sustained change in practice. Despite the plethora of education reforms across the globe in the last 30 years, there has been little real evidence of centrally driven reforms being sustained over time.

“Hurricane winds sweep across the sea tossing up twenty foot waves; a fathom below the surface turbulent waters swirl while on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm” (Cuban, 1994, p. 2). Cuban argues that, despite all the “sea tossing” of various policy papers, conferences and activities associated with education reform, there is little or no evidence of sustained impact on classroom practice - ‘the ocean floor’. The approach taken in the Student Voice projects was an attempt to ‘ruffle the calm’ of classroom practice by giving genuine ownership of the development process to teachers.

In this context, the development of the projects was primarily the responsibility of the teachers involved who were encouraged to be reflective practitioners, use experiential methodologies, model learning interactions and work in collaboration with their students and other teachers. Whilst the development of Student Voice rested largely with the teachers, the role of the school leadership was seen to be critical, as was the opportunity for teachers to collaborate and reflect on their professional learning across school networks. Teachers having time to collaborate was seen to be extremely important. This reflects observations made by Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) that critical reflection will not take place if there is neither time nor encouragement for it.

Norman Emerson, left, Key Expert on Educational Assessment for European Union, Quality Education Support Programme

Critical Friends

Tajikistan & Ireland

This approach is based on the belief that Student Voice developments are best taken forward in the classroom. In this context, this approach ran counter to the traditional approach to Student Voice in Ireland which had been focused primarily on representative groups of students. However, over time schools involved in the projects came to recognise that only focusing on a select group of students through representative councils missed the opportunity to allow all students to reflect on and have a voice in their own learning.

Teachers also saw how this approach reflected important messages contained in the Framework for Junior Cycle where the responsibility of the student to take greater ownership of their own learning is emphasised. Student Voice came to be viewed not as a 'bolt-on' to classroom practice but a central element of learning and teaching. Teachers, therefore, came to see Student Voice developments as being 'hand in glove' with the vision for learning, teaching and assessment that had been set out in the Framework for Junior Cycle where teachers were encouraged to:

'Assess students' learning by observing and listening as students carry out tasks and by considering how they respond to questions. Teachers will use the learning intentions and success criteria as the basis for providing feedback to help students plan their next steps in learning. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on how they are progressing in their own learning and provide feedback to their teachers. In developing the capacity for self-management and self-awareness, students will approach their learning more confidently and will be better prepared to meet the challenges of life beyond school.' (Framework for Junior Cycle, p. 36)

Teachers quickly saw how by adopting strategies and approaches in their Student Voice project they were also embracing learning and teaching approaches which were at the core of the Framework for Junior Cycle.

I am often asked what similarities there are between implementation of policy in Ireland and in Tajikistan. Both countries share many similar education policy aspirations including the development of 21st century competencies, formative assessment and interestingly Student Voice! However, the challenge of transforming policy aspiration into practice in Tajikistan comes with many cultural challenges and as one of the poorest countries in the world it is also grappling to provide the resources to implement the wide-ranging changes that are required. The process of change in Tajikistan is supported by collaboration across international donor partners including the European Union, World Bank, USAID and UNICEF who work in partnership with the Ministry of Education in the country. The value of collaboration across partners at national and local level is seen to be vital for successful implementation of educational policy. In this context, it mirrors the process of collaboration which underpinned Student Voice projects in Ireland.

The Student Voice project in Ireland addressed the particular challenges associated with successful policy implementation by seeking to build collaborative networks across and within groups of the partners involved, recognising that teachers, policy-makers and researchers can all learn from one another. For example, NCCA worked with JCT, the Inspectorate, ACCS, university researchers, teachers and school leaders and others to develop a community of practice where no one partner was seen to be in the 'high seat'. I believe, therefore, that a significant success of the Student Voice projects was how they successfully built relationships among teachers, students and policymakers based on openness, trust and support where all participants have genuine ownership and were authentically engaged in the change process. Ultimately, the proof of the success of the projects will be whether such Student Voice practice is still maintained in Irish schools 5 years from now – that will be the real evidence of whether the 'calm of the ocean floor' has truly been ruffled!



In Conversation

Ger Halbert, one of our Critical Friends, delivers a series of interviews with key personnel from our project schools.



Ashbourne Community School

Profile: Founded in 1994, we are a large mixed Community School in an urban setting in Co. Meath with 16 feeder schools from local urban and rural settings.

Principal: Ciarán Stewart **Size:** 1,050 students

School Leaders in Student Voice: Everyone

How long has the school been working on Student Voice?

Student Voice has been at the core of our school ethos since the beginning. However, it is only in recent years that a label has been put on something we take as part of the natural growth of our school community.

What is the aim of your SV project and what is involved?

The aims of our project are to:

- strengthen Guth na nDaltaí by encouraging more students to get involved and to participate.
- convey to students that this is a vehicle to voice/ discuss their opinions and to work collaboratively with all stakeholders in the school community.
- convey to students that their voice can be heard and can influence policy making in the school.

• increase awareness among students of how SV permeates all aspects of school life.

Has student participation been Consultative, Collaborative or Young person-led?

SV operates at all three levels, but all are in their infancy. Different year groups and different members of the student body are at different places.

Why did you get involved in this project? All at ACS are fully committed to creating a wholesome learning environment. We are a large school and there is a risk that the voice of many different students may not be heard so it was important to create a platform as a whole school vehicle to channel their voices. In recent years with the new Junior Cycle Framework, Wellbeing and the pastoral care

provided in our school, we saw Student Voice as being central. We value the active involvement of students in their learning and see their voices as an important element of learning. Finally, it is important for us that students with additional needs are actively involved in shaping their Support Plans.

What difference has this project made for students, for teachers, others?

Our project is in its 3rd year. The project has created a universal acceptance of the value of SV and its importance to the learner. It has led to chat and collegial discourse about Student Voice. There has been planning, discussion, experimentation and review to ensure that the changes are lasting and meaningful.

What are you most proud about in this project? The creation of Guth na nDaltaí, a forum for Student Voice which aims to unite all student voice groups in A.C.S. helping different student committees to collaborate and work collectively, while also increasing student representation in the school in a formal way. Run exclusively by students, their caption is 'For the students by the students'. The meeting minutes are sent to Senior Management and a report is sent to the Board of Management. More recently,

students have attended BOM meetings and presented their reports in person.

One piece of advice I'd give another school would be:

Take your Time. The students involved have many interests and demands on their time. They need time to grow into their roles in Guth na nDaltaí and to learn to 'voice' their opinions. It is challenging to try and hear all voices and to establish the safe environment for that to happen. Consider grounding your project

in LAOS and using school development planning as an impetus for SV.

Our next steps are to:

- Design and implement an evaluation of Guth na nDaltaí using surveys and focus groups.
- Consider how to build students' awareness and interest throughout the school in the Student Voice project?
- Build the commitment and support of senior and middle management to the Student Voice project.

What our students say:

'Student Voice is heard in our school through a number of groups and committees designed to help make change, such as the Green School Committee, the Student Council, the Amber Flag Committee, etc.'

'It's our experience in school, so I feel what we think can be done to improve it is vital to morale, happiness and the overall success of our learning'

'To improve school life we need to make the students aware of all the ways their voices can be heard.'

'When correctly done Student Voice can change the school life for the better for both students and teachers. If there is a better atmosphere in the school and students feel as if they are not just listened to but understood, they will be more motivated to work hard'

'Work on Student Voice in my opinion is mandatory as at the end of the day school is about the education of students both academically and socially and if students are struggling or having any problems with any aspect of school life there needs to be an appropriate authority/school body for that student(s) to go to.'

'Student Voice is heard through the student council, Guth na nDaltaí and other SV committees. It is also heard in classrooms and in any discussions directly between students and teachers'

'Student Voice is so important because students are greatly affected by decisions made in the school, so there's no point complaining about it and not changing anything; if we let our ideas and feelings be heard, then people know what to fix and change'



Carndonagh Community School

Profile: A mixed school, founded in 1977, we are a large rural DEIS school on the Inishowen peninsula in Co. Donegal. In aspiring to achieve our Mission Statement, we recognise the responsibilities of the school community to respect the entitlement of all to a learning, teaching, and working environment where the dignity of each person is recognised.

Principal: John McGuinness **Size:** 1,117 students

School Leaders in Student Voice: Majella Doherty, Student Voice Coordinator and Liz Kelly, Deputy Principal

Student Voice in Carndonagh Community School: There has always been a culture of Student Voice activity within the school. We have had an active Student Council for the past 15 years and students have always been able to see the impact they have made through the Student Council. In the last 3 years Student Voice has been promoted on a wider level.

The aim of our SV project and what is involved: Our aim is to give our students an authentic voice. We want our students to feel that as stakeholders, their voice is respected and listened to and for our students to see the impact their voice is having on all aspects of school life.

We aim to capture the Student Voice from as large and representative a group as possible and to also capture the voices of those who are sometimes seldom heard. We are doing this with the use of surveys, focus groups and regular feedback and also by having our students on key teams within the school.

Has student participation been Consultative, Collaborative or Young person-led? We are in transition from the consultative to the collaborative stage. For example, we have students involved on the Wellbeing Team and acting as Mentors to Junior Students. We are planning to have students involved in the Teaching and Learning Team from September.

We also have examples of young person led participation, for example, our LGBTQI+ support group.

Why did you get involved in the project? We have been involved with the Student Council for a number of years and this was a natural progression for us both. We recognise that the students are key stakeholders with unique insights about teaching and learning and the school experience. We believe that students' insights have a key role to play in the future of their education. *"The Student Voice appreciates student choice and identifies issues and areas of importance to students that staff and management may not have been aware of".* (Stephen)

What difference has the process made?

For students: Our students can see that we value and respect their opinions and that they have a right to be heard. This encourages them to become more active and involved not only in the school but also in their local community. *"The Student Voice gives students the fundamental right of allowing their opinions to be heard, valued and respected and acted upon".* (Caoimhe)

For teachers: SV helps to create a more positive atmosphere and learning environment in the classroom and improves the relationship and mutual respect between the pupil and teacher. *"Being involved in the Student Voice*

has allowed me to value the teacher student relationship in the school and realise that in a progressive environment your voice will be heard and acted upon". (Katelyn)

For others: Student Voice encourages students to promote their voice in their own communities and to become involved in organisations like Donegal Youth Council. It promotes active citizenship. It also contributes to increased parental engagement with the school community.

Were there any surprises along the way? The opinions of our students were really well informed and very workable. Their insights provided a unique perspective and led to improvements in the school experience for all students.

What are you most proud of? The students feel empowered to speak out about issues that are of real importance to them, and they have become confident young people in the process.

One piece of advice for another school starting down the same route: Reporting back to and giving feedback to the students is key and should be done at every opportunity to enable the student to realise the impact they are having. If you really want to get a true reflection of Student Voice, use a system like a lottery to select students to give as wide and truly a representative a view as possible. Go for it, once you have you will not turn back.



Douglas Community School

Profile: An all-boys Community School established in 1974 and set in the village of Douglas, a suburb of Cork city.

Principal: Patrick Barry **Size:** 550 students

School Leaders in Student Voice: Rosanne O'Callaghan, Allan O'Loughlin and Jackie Cotter

How long has the school been working on Student Voice?

Our school has been working on our Student Voice project since September 2020.

The aim of our SV project and what is involved:

The primary aim of our SV project is to actively involve our students in planning next steps in their learning. This will involve our students participating in an 'end of topic' review including inviting students to decide which topics to study next. We hope to develop a practice of Student Voice in and about their learning. This involves enabling students to offer constructive feedback about their learning thereby enhancing learning and teaching in the classroom.

Consultative participation, Collaborative participation or Young person-led?

Our students are involved at collaborative participation level in this project. Students and their teachers are reflecting on the feedback at the 'end of topic' review and planning next steps in their learning together.

Why did you get involved in this project?

We got involved in Student Voice having studied Student Voice in CPD and through the LAOS document. We believe that Student Voice and students' active participation in the classroom and in all aspects of school life is vital for a

successful learning and teaching environment.

What difference has this project made for students, for teachers, others?

As we are at the early stages of this process it may be too soon to see differences. However, it is clear that in classes where this project is taking place there is more collaboration by students and teachers and students have a sense of ownership of their learning.

Were there any surprises along the way?

We were surprised about how educated and mature the students' views were. It was also surprising to see how the quietest students can often have very strong opinions to share.

What are you most proud about in this project?

We were delighted to see that, with even a little encouragement, students have embraced the project and are willing to share their opinions and suggestions in a constructive way.

Was there any significant turning point in this project?

I would encourage other schools to try what we have been doing because by giving students a little control in the class it has developed a better environment in the class as we all work together to achieve the goal(s) set by the students themselves.

Next steps: We are planning to incorporate Student Voice in the development and review of school policies.

One piece of advice I'd give another school starting down a similar road would be:

Take the first step.

What our students say:

'I feel this is necessary as it is the students' education so they should have some say in how teachers go about teaching it.'

'Students learn differently. It is important if the teacher is using a teaching method that doesn't suit a student, the student would be able to stand up and ask the teacher if they can use another teaching method for eg. watching videos on topics or taking notes in class etc. This is why I feel students should have a voice in the classroom and not only just the teacher as we also spend so much time in the classroom it is important for students to feel safe, happy and feel like they can voice their opinion if they feel they need to.'





Pobalscoil Neasáin

Profile: Founded in 1980 we are a co-educational school in an urban setting in Co Dublin. 'Meas, Díograis, agus Dea-chroí' is our school motto. These core values of meas - respect, díograis - commitment and enthusiasm, and dea-chroí - good heart, are the core values that underpin our ethos here in PSN.

Principal: Pat McKenna **Size:** 777 students

School Leaders in Student Voice: Bríd Ní Annracháin, Deputy Principal, Keith Howley and Anna Hughes

How long has the school been working on Student Voice? About two years. We have always had a lot of student representation in PSN but learner voice is something we really want to develop further.

In not more than three sentences, tell me about your SV project and what is involved:

The main aim of our project is to involve everyone: all teachers and students, in talking about learning and school life. We wanted to create a 'safe' space where all students would feel they could express their views and teachers would be confident in encouraging discussion and dialogue. The answer to how this could be done came from an unplanned discussion with a class about how they felt about their return to school. Using the students' insights, I created a simple PowerPoint, emailed it to all teachers and asked them to share it with which ever class they were teaching during a specified class period - the 'Check-in' was born.

Has student participation been Consultative, Collaborative or Young person-led?

The student involvement is collaborative. The Check-ins are very structured and teacher-led but designed to get student feedback which is then acted upon. Initially, the Check-ins were focused on Covid and because students felt they had had a say, they really got on board with the idea of the Check-in. We keep the Check-ins current and responsive to what is happening

now, e.g., Covid and online learning. We use the feedback from the students and teachers on each Check-in to inform what is needed in the next one.

Why did you get involved in this project? *I got involved because I did not want Student Voice to be about a small group of teachers working with the most vocal students – the ones that are always heard and represented. We wanted it to be schoolwide, with all students having the opportunity to reflect, discuss and contribute. We also wanted all teachers to be involved and to experience the reciprocal benefits of asking for and hearing student/learner voice - in a space where both teachers and students felt safe.*

What difference has this project made for students, for teachers, others? *My experience with carrying out the Check-ins was extremely positive. The students were always really engaged with them and it was clear that they appreciated their opinions being heard and valued. I felt confident in facilitating the Check-ins as the PowerPoints provided were very well structured. They provided appropriate, clear and up to date information and statistics and also posed open questions for the students to reflect on, explore and voice their opinions and/or concerns. (L.F. Teacher)*

The Check-ins were very powerful, and the power was in the simplicity of the prompts within the slides.

I was able to do the Check-ins easily and successfully with a 1st year resource enriched class. Even the quietest children were happy to engage, and they told me that the Check-ins were something they really looked forward to. The Check-in seemed to ease their anxiety hugely. (E.P. Substitute Teacher)

The Check-ins were really great because they gave every student in the class and the school an opportunity to voice their concerns about their wellbeing and safety. (K.F. 6th year Student)

I think the Check-ins have helped my very anxious daughter. She feels that the school really cares about how she feels - because they are asking her and that they are making sure that she understands what is happening around her. Well done PSN. (Parent)

What are you most proud about in this project? We are very proud of the fact that we have achieved our two main aims – to create a safe space and to get all students and all teachers involved in reflection and dialogue. Everyone has been willing to engage with the Check-ins, to feed back to management and the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive.

Was there any significant turning point in this project? Covid-19 was the turning point. It spurred us into doing something radical that we would not have had the courage to do otherwise. Covid and school safety

affected everyone in the school and so there was a great feeling of solidarity with everyone on board doing the Check-ins using the same material at the same time. Teachers got to see how anxious students were and students saw that we genuinely wanted to know how they felt, and how we could help. That mutual understanding helped us to manage the opening of school and develop online learning approaches.

I would encourage other schools to try what we have been doing because it is a very simple and unthreatening model to follow. Check-ins can be used to facilitate a discussion about anything! Teachers who are very comfortable with Student Voice in their classrooms can really stretch and expand on the material in the PowerPoints.

Teachers who are less confident can rely on the structure of the PowerPoint to steer and control the conversation. It's a very controlled and structured way of giving teachers exposure to having this type of dialogue with students. 'Student Voice' can be scary – student 'Check-ins' are much less so!

Brid Ní Annracháin



St. Peter's Community School

Profile: We are a mixed school, founded in 1988 and situated in Passage West outside Cork in the lower harbour area of the city.

Principal: Derek Dunne **Size:** 360 students

School Leaders in Student Voice: Siobhán Murphy, Coordinator and Blánid Quane, Deputy Principal

How long has the school been working on Student Voice?
Three years.

What is the aim of your SV project and what is involved?
Our aim is to establish what effects (if any) online classes have had on each student in second year. A survey will allow students an opportunity to reflect on subjects which require enhanced revision and will provide teachers with a learner's insight.

Has student participation been Consultative, Collaborative or Young person-led?
Collaborative participation - the survey results will form the basis for subsequent actions we will undertake in collaboration with our students.

Why did you get involved in this project? We wanted to continue with our focus on Student Voice on learning. This focus is on how student learning has been impacted by the move to online learning over the past months.

What difference has this project made for students, for teachers, others? It continues to place students at the centre of their learning. Together, teachers and students can be accepting of the findings and devise a shared plan to address issues, rather than just teachers deciding how to 'fix' possible issues.

What are you most proud about in this project? Students from 1st to 6th recognise that they have a valuable contribution to make regarding their learning and they acknowledge that the teachers in St. Peter's consciously facilitate this. The impact of this on students is hugely positive. It ranges from feeling "privileged" and "comfortable to ask again" to "taking responsibility for" their learning and "really helping" their learning. Students are now active advisors rather than previously, passive participants.

Was there any significant turning point in this project?
The turning point was at the SV staff information session in

November 2019. The atmosphere in the meeting changed as teachers reflected on SV in the classroom. Instantly, there was an acknowledgement that SV was "not another new initiative" but an advancement and acknowledgement of current practices. The sharing of ideas was the foundation for implementing Student Voice daily in the classrooms of St. Peter's.

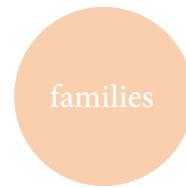
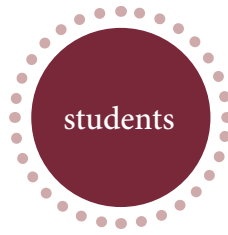
One piece of advice I'd give another school starting down a similar road would be: Begin with a manageable task with a small group of interested teachers and one group of students. At the end, get the teachers and students involved in reflecting on their engagement with the task. Both groups should see the value in what they have to offer. This experience should show the symbiosis which Student Voice offers.





Stakeholders

The following organisations have been key contributors to the Student Voice Project. Their involvement enriches the Student Voice experience at school and sector level.



A New Framework for the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-Making

By Linda O’Sullivan, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

In 2015, the Government published the first ever *National Strategy for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making* for the years 2015-2020. This Strategy is guided and influenced by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) and is primarily aimed at children and young people under the age of 18, but also embraces the voice of young people in the transition to adulthood. Early education, schools, and the wider formal and non-formal education systems are a key priority area of the Strategy.

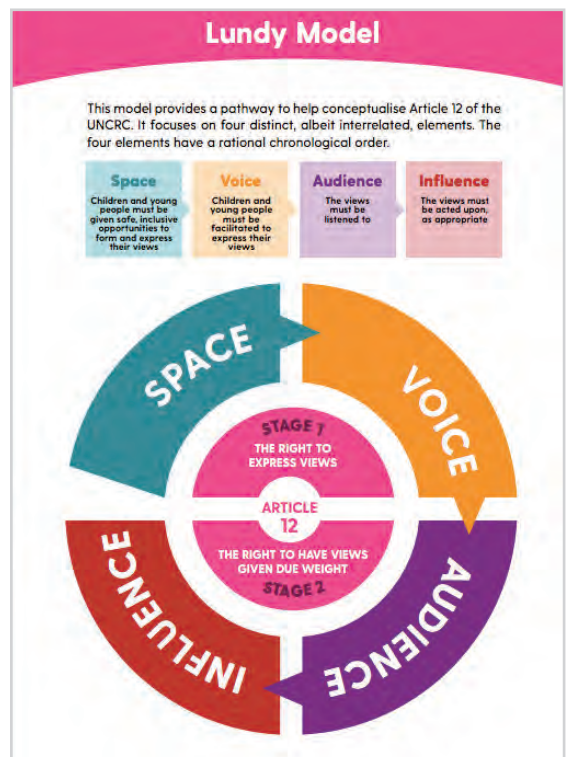
Kilkelly et al. (2015) highlight the value of involving children and young people in decision-making. In education, effective and meaningful participation has been shown to be beneficial to children and young people, and to schools. It can improve academic standards, reduce rates of early school-leaving, improve discipline and facilitate students in acquiring communication, planning and organisational skills.

A priority action of the Participation Strategy was to establish Hub na nÓg as a centre of excellence, to improve capacity across all sectors through the provision of training, support and advice for service providers and policy makers alike.

The National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making (2021)

Hub na nÓg, in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy, has developed a National Implementation Framework (the Framework) for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making. It aims

to support departments, agencies and organisations in a journey towards improving their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. The Framework is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), the National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making and by the Lundy Model (Lundy, 2007).



The participation of children and young people in decision-making is defined as “ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.” (*United Nations, 1989, General Comment No.12*)

The vision of the Framework is participation with purpose. Participation with purpose means that when children and young people are involved in decision-making, their views are listened to, taken seriously and given due weight with the intention of leading to an outcome or change.

Several elements are critical to participation with purpose; being realistic with children and young people, ensuring involvement of seldom heard children and young people in decision-making, following up and providing feedback to children and young people.

In a right-based approach, children are recognised as ‘citizens of today’, as opposed to ‘beings in becoming’ (*UNCRC, 1989*) with an evolving capacity to participate in decisions as they develop and grow. Adults have a key role and responsibility in supporting and enabling children’s right to a voice in decision-making.

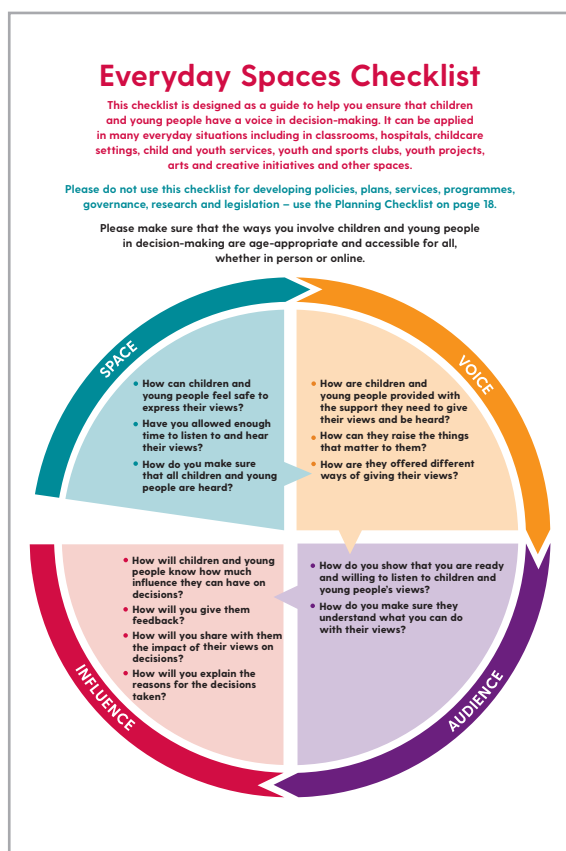
The Framework recognises that children and young people have unique expertise in their own lives, but the key expertise of adults in children’s lives is also recognised. Accordingly, adult decision-makers have a responsibility to listen to and give due weight to children’s views.

The Framework clarifies some common misconceptions around participation, which often leads to the restriction of children’s involvement in decision-making. Participation is not about ‘handing over power to children and young people’, rather it is about making decisions in ways that involve children as fully as possible. Neither is it about allowing children and young people to do things that are

harmful or unsafe to themselves or others.

Decision-making needs to balance children and young people’s best interests with their right to have their voices heard and taken into account.

The Framework provides planning and evaluation checklists for developing policies, plans, services, programmes at organisational, local or national level, as well as an everyday checklist for professionals, such as teachers, who work with children in day-to-day settings. The Framework was developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, with early learning and school aged childcare practitioners, primary school teachers, second-level teachers, social workers and family support workers, youth workers, paediatric nurses and Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers. Focus group participants provided invaluable input into the development of the Everyday Spaces Checklist, a practical tool to help teachers and other practitioners give children and young people a voice in decision-making in the majority of everyday situations and activities.



Giving children and young people the information, they need to form their opinions, and respecting and acknowledging their wishes, as well as discussing realistic, safe decisions with them is an effective way to ensure their views are given due weight. At the outset, clear expectations should be set in terms of what is possible, and afterwards, reasons why decisions are taken should be explained.

At school level, this framework for meaningful engagement in decision-making is certainly important at whole school level but is also important in decision-making at classroom and individual level for all matters that have an impact on the lives of children and young people.

Our Voices Our Schools

In 2019, the National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg, the national representation of youth councils in each Local Authority Area, identified the inclusion of young people in decision-making at school as a key priority of young people in Ireland. The young people worked with DCYA and Ger and John Halbert to develop a toolkit for schools; Our Voices Our Schools (Comhairle na nÓg 2019). The toolkit is a resource for teachers and students to support and enable the voice of young people in decision-making at individual, classroom and whole school level and is available on www.ourvoicesourschools.ie. Our

Voices Our Schools will be reviewed and updated in 2021 to reflect the Participation Framework.

References

Comhairle na nÓg. *Our Voices Our Schools* www.ourvoicesourschools.ie Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2015).

National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020, Dublin: Government Publications.

(A new Participation Strategy is committed to in the Programme for Government 2020)

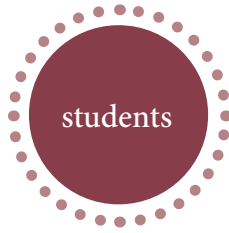
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Kilkelly, U., Martin, S., Swirak, K. and Field, S. (2015). *Policy and Literature Review of Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy.* Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

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BEACONS

Bringing Education Alive for our Communities On a National Scale

BEACONS stands for Bringing Education Alive for our Communities On a National Scale. It is an innovative model of conversation which brings together teachers, parents, students, and the wider school community to discuss what they feel is important in education in their community.

The genesis of BEACONS dates back to 2018 when Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director of the Teaching Council attended the Creative Education Symposium in the Burren College of Art. During one of the discussions, a split conker was placed in Tomás' hand to encourage reflection on the true beauty and potential of something that may lie dormant and

hidden forever unless the ground is prepared for it to flourish. Tomás connected his reflection with the education system and the power of simple, honest conversations that take place every day to unlock the full potential of our collective agency. Can we create a space to support these simple, honest conversations where we can all listen and share our stories?

Since then, seven BEACONS events have taken place in communities around Ireland with each bringing their own insight on education. More recently, the European Union has commissioned the OECD to explore over a two-year period how the BEACONS model can be further developed to scale.

What follows are teachers, parents and students describing how BEACONS works for them - the value it can deliver for the different stakeholders and the education system as a whole.



JACK KENNEDY

Jack Kennedy is a 6th year student in the CBS, Ennistymon, Co. Clare. He has a keen interest in Religion and Art. Jack took part in the first BEACONS event in Ennistymon, Co. Clare, and two further events in Ennis, specific to inclusive education, and a Sharing Learning Day in the Teaching Council Offices in Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

What Jack Said

The first time I heard about BEACONS, I was just finishing TY and I highly disliked school. I was called into the principal's office and she informed me about the 'BEACONS' event that wanted to try and change the school experience - first at a local level, then achieve change on a national level. This sounded appealing to me, but I didn't think much change could come from it, but there was something telling me to give it a chance. I did and I couldn't be more grateful I did.

The first BEACONS event I attended was in Ennistymon. I have been to various others since then, but I think the first event had the biggest impact on me. Before BEACONS, I had a pessimistic take on school, I disliked it with a passion. But afterwards my perspective was completely changed. The biggest thing that took me by surprise, not only in Ennistymon, but in every BEACONS event I've been to, is not only how open everyone is to change – young and old, student and principal, but the respect that everyone has for each other. BEACONS gives everyone a chance to speak and learn. The communication is quite transparent, everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard. After this first meeting, change began immediately in our school. The changes were only little ones, but they had a big impact.

I think my favourite change was the "dialogue café" that was set up. Essentially, it's an open space, once a month for teachers and students alike to converse with each other and enjoy a tea or coffee in a relaxed environment about what's going well, and what's not. This enabled us students to openly discuss problems we have, or suggestions to give to teachers that could make our school experience better. I liked it because it wasn't forced, everyone went because they wanted change. It helped us students to get to know our teachers on a personal level, understand their perspective, and see them as people, not robots! In the new school year, more changes took place. One example that everyone liked occurred on the first day back.

Instead of receiving a long assembly from our principal, she welcomed us back as usual, talked for a brief time and then gave us each a stick-it note and asked us to write down (anonymously) 3 things we liked about school, felt could be improved and what we wanted to see change. I was pleasantly surprised to see that these changes took place quickly after we had given them up. Overall, these little changes had a big impact on my experience of school and made it a more enjoyable one. I felt that I was cared for and the teachers were trying their best to help us in every way possible, even if it was just a smile in the morning. Overall, these little changes had a big impact on my experience on school, making it more personal and enjoyable. I look forward to seeing the change that BEACONS can and will bring to the education system.

If you are thinking of getting involved, I genuinely believe that BEACONS can only have a positive impact on any school that participates in it. It enables both students and staff to communicate on a personal level, breaking down the traditional boundary that exists in the student/staff relationship. I encourage school staff to get involved because it gives both parties an insight into each other's life on a school day. Any school that decides to participate in BEACONS must commit 100% to it as it takes a lot for a student to stand up and say what they want to say, but if they are met with indifference, this will discourage students to speak again and in turn create a more negative environment for that student. This in turn goes completely against what BEACONS was set up to achieve.

I highly encourage other students to get involved in BEACONS because change can genuinely happen from it! One of the principles of BEACONS is to empower the Student Voice and give them the opportunity to be heard by people who genuinely want to help. Which in turn enables action and change to happen in the school. It will bring a positive change to the student's school experience by seeing that teachers do care. It's an opportunity for students to see the change they want to see happen.



JOAN LYNE

Joan Lyne is a post primary teacher of Gaelige and English, currently teaching in Marino College Secondary School. Joan is the JCSP co-ordinator in her school, and she has recently completed an M.Ed. in Leadership and Management from TCD. Joan attended a BEACONS event hosted by Larkin Community College in Dublin, and the Sharing Learning Day in the Teaching Council Offices in Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

What Joan Said

BEACONS was an enlightening experience for me as a teacher. It highlighted the powerful impact of open, collaborative and inclusive conversations and how active listening and taking interest in these conversations can potentially lead to positive change in education on a community level and on a national scale.

I still feel incredibly fortunate that I was given the opportunity to attend one of the earliest BEACONS events alongside my principal in November 2019, held in Larkin Community College. At this initial event, principals, students, parents and teachers from both primary and secondary education all offered their views on how they see education today. While the purpose of the event initially seemed ambiguous, this gradually changed and gained more clarity during the second BEACONS event, and especially at the third and large-scale BEACONS event; The Sharing Learning Day, which was held at the Teaching Council (TC) building on the 13th of December, 2019. This was an exhilarating experience for me personally. It seemed to take on a power of its own as students, teachers, principals and parents spoke courageously and honestly about how current Teaching and Learning (T+L) experiences impact them and their wellbeing. Representatives from all the education providers were present and actively listened to everyone involved. In fact, all of us actively listened to one another, and truly engaged with each other with openness and acceptance. Having this unbiased space for meaningful conversations about T+L between all stakeholders involved in education allowed for a unique and powerful experience, as all stakeholders interacted with, and learned from, one another in a way that transcended hierarchical relations and boundaries.

BEACONS fosters inclusive conversation regarding education and T+L practices, and a BEACONS process at school can be as large or as small as you'd like it to be. The space a BEACONS event offers can be liberating in so many ways. We all have stories to tell and have ears to listen. However, we can often feel unheard or unable to tell our stories as we may feel the time and space to share our thoughts openly are not provided within our schools. Often, this is how students feel, and this was highlighted by student voices themselves during the Sharing Learning

Day in the TC building. Students equally listened to the teachers' voices, providing them with a whole new understanding of our workload outside of the classroom itself. Parents admitted to having no real understanding of the wider role of the teachers and principals. They said they rarely see the inside of the school building after enrolling their child with the usual exceptions being Parent-Teacher meetings, graduations and/or if their child is in trouble due to bad behaviour. Poor communication more often than not leads to misunderstanding and can potentially create toxic environments, be it within or outside of the classroom. However, through the BEACONS process, all stakeholders can engage with one another in a way that encourages them to take a real and long-term interest in the concerns of others, which can lead to all participants actively responding to these concerns in a way that will make education more sustainable and solution focused. As Michael P. Nichols once said in *The Lost Art of Listening*, "There's a big difference between showing interest and really taking interest."

A BEACONS event can be held to discuss issues from behaviour policies, new and existing school initiatives, to T+L practices or curriculum changes. Regardless of the topic, simply connecting with the whole school community can unlock powerful conversations for you and make a positive difference for your school as a whole. The BEACONS process can provide the communal voice and the listening ear that is often needed in a school community. Expensive guest speakers delivering mindfulness sessions will have marginal impact if communication is unsatisfactory. Communicating and listening to each other to openly discuss current issues can provide our hearts and minds with fresh insight and can develop closer bonds between all involved, as was found at the BEACONS events I attended.

Covid-19 has brought forward the future of education faster than we anticipated. In my personal opinion, a BEACONS event involving the whole school community discussing the impact current educational practices has on all stakeholders has never been more important. Unfortunately, gathering together in a safe, friendly and physical space hasn't been possible and isn't possible just yet. However, we can look forward to our next school year with renewed hope which may bring with it opportunities to establish invaluable BEACONS events.



MARY O'MAHONY

Mary O'Mahony is an adult educator with a son in sixth year and a daughter in fourth year in secondary school. She delivers training to parents on behalf of the National Parents Council Primary and teaches English as a foreign language. Mary attended the first online BEACONS event, hosted by Laois Education Support Centre which was focused on interculturalism in the Portlaoise area.

What Mary Said

I attended the Portlaoise BEACONS event, "Building a Community of Belonging", as a parent and BEACONS steering group member and was blown away by the warm, open-hearted and accepting atmosphere that the organisers created by bringing so many voices together. There is an alchemy that happens when everyone is allowed in the room and everyone is given a chance to speak. I was reminded again how human connections are our greatest strength and BEACONS is all about the value that human connections have in educational policymaking. How can we educate our children effectively if we don't know them and their families? And how can we know them if we don't listen to them?

We have fantastic diversity in our school communities, but it can be challenging to reach everyone and create real integration. As well as being a many-year veteran of Parent Association committee work, I am also a teacher of English as a foreign language and I have students who are migrants and refugees, so I was especially excited by the idea that BEACONS could serve as a way to hear the voices of parents and students from other countries. Listening alone is an act of welcome and integration, but to hear those voices, you first have to give them a platform and the Portlaoise event turned out to be a very effective one.

I was curious to see how the event would work online and while we couldn't have the kind of tea, coffee and biscuits melee that used to be such a pleasant feature of events like this, I found that the format of breakout groups and whole group sharing created a different and yet wonderful intimacy that left me feeling energised about the BEACONS process all over again. We were given a topic to discuss and then randomly assigned to break out rooms with four or five other participants. It was actually quite fun to wait and see who I would meet next, and in fact I'm sure I met people who I wouldn't have managed to chat to at an in-person event where you're limited to talking to the person next to you. I met teachers, students and other people working in education and enjoyed lively discussions and heard new points of view.

Opportunities to connect with the other education stakeholders are rare, especially for parents. We all care deeply about children's education, but we spend most of our time in our particular pods, whether we're parents, students, teachers, staff, boards of management, or in the Teaching Council or Department of Education. Being able to meet and share our experiences on an equal footing is incredibly valuable for building trusting and respectful relationships between stakeholders. In a year when we have all been grappling with unprecedented challenges, it was a very welcome chance to just be together and connect in a simple, human-to-human way.

I would encourage any parent to attend a BEACONS event or even to bring the idea of hosting one to their school community, because you will come away with a greater sense of confidence in the professionalism and passion of the teaching profession and with a deeper sense of connection to your fellow parents.

Of course, the online format was a response to the Covid restrictions but from my point of view, being able to participate remotely made it a very parent-friendly event. I was able to fit it in around my work schedule and still feel very much a part of everything. In fact, I wouldn't have been able to attend an in-person event, so I think the online platform has real value to offer in terms of facilitating parent participation.

If you are a principal, and you're wondering how a BEACONS event might work in your school, I would say just take the next step and reach out to BEACONS. Every school is different, and every school community's BEACONS event will reflect who they are, as long as you open your doors to everyone.



The experiences of Jack, Joan and Mary are testament to what BEACONS can offer to teachers, parents, students, and the wider school community as a whole.

How can BEACONS work for school(s)?

One of the unique traits of BEACONS is the open agenda. The participants decide what is discussed. A skilled facilitator poses broad questions for consideration.

Teachers, parents, and students have the opportunity to speak and listen to each other, engaging with others that they may not usually have a chance to speak with. As BEACONS is participant led, the conversations become immediately relevant to those present and to the community in which they live. The exact format of a BEACONS process for your school would be up to you. The school community shapes the event from the very outset. At its core, it is about more and better conversations between teachers, parents, and students, along with the whole school community.

At its simplest level, BEACONS is a place to connect and share stories, to listen to each other and to share examples of good practice taking place in one or more schools in a community. On another level, BEACONS is a place where culture is shaped and mindsets inform each other, where local agency is unlocked. In all cases, collaboration, connection, and communication are highly valued.

The importance of human connection in education is sometimes forgotten, particularly in the hyperactive world in which so many of us live. The opportunities to pause, reflect and chat with those nearest to you may be limited, but their significance cannot be underestimated. Jack alludes to this when he describes how his experience of school changed for the better, with smallest of changes having the greatest of impact.

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

BEACONS in a Nutshell

BEACONS is a process of short conversations that help us understand each other better and take wiser decisions about what we do and how we do things.

Themes	Questions
1 Listening to each other	What is it that you would like others to understand better?
2 Sharing good stories	What examples can we share of good education? (And) What might we do so that these things happened more often?
3 Discussing priorities	What is most useful (or most interesting) for us to discuss more?
4 Taking action	(Based on our conversations) What can we do in our school? (And) What messages do we most want people to hear at a national level?

BEACONS
Bringing Education Alive for our Communities On a National Scale

Mary speaks of the ‘alchemy that happens when everyone is brought together during a BEACONS event. For some, it can be a brave step to bring a diversity of voices together for an open conversation, for others it is a must. Either way, as Mary points out, building relationships between those who are at the centre of our school communities can only build better relationships and stronger schools.

Finally, Joan recalls feeling ‘incredibly fortunate that [she] was given the opportunity to attend one of the earliest BEACONS events alongside [her] principal’ but the fortune was created by Joan herself, with her openness and her willingness to try out something new. For growth and development, we sometimes need to be little brave and creative.

Thanks to Joan and other teachers, parents and students with a similar will, those valuable everyday conversations around education can be captured and explored by all.



Left, 'Sharing our thoughts!' during a BEACONS event.

Below left; BEACONS at a glance.

Below, Joan Lyne, and students from Marino College Secondary School with Tomás Ó Ruairc at the BEACONS Sharing Learning Day in December 2019.



Notes

The Teaching Council launched the BEACONS process in May 2019 and have since supported seven events. The events to date include:

- Ennistymon, Co. Clare (2) (May 2019; November 2019)
- Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow (November 2019)
- North-East Inner-City Dublin (November 2019)
- Sharing Learning Day, Teaching Council Offices, Kildare (December 2019)
- Ennis, Co. Clare (with a focus on inclusion) (February 2020)
- Portlaoise, Co. Laois (with a focus on diversity and inclusion) (26 November 2020) (via Zoom)



If you are interested in exploring the BEACONS model of conversation further, see www.beaconstribes.ie for photos, videos and further reading. You can also email communications@teachingcouncil.ie

An tSraith Shóisearach do Mhúinteoirí

Junior CYCLE
for teachers

Student Voice in the Framework for Junior Cycle, 2015

Student Voice....

Framework for Junior Cycle

Principles of Junior Cycle	Key Skills	Statements of Learning	Teaching and Learning	Assessment and Reporting	Wellbeing	Other Areas of Learning
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Where is the culture of Student Voice evident in our school?

How do we ensure that all voices are heard?

How much choice do students have in their Junior Cycle programme?

How do students contribute to the development of the Wellbeing Programme?

Where is Student Voice in the Framework for Junior Cycle?

Do students feel they can participate in class?

How is Student Voice evident in our classrooms?

How can students be more actively involved in their learning?

How do we provide opportunities for student voice in assessment?

Is there a practice of self/peer feedback and assessment in place in my classroom?

Do students co-create success criteria?

How does the school reporting system celebrate student achievements?

How do we create a shared understanding of the Features of Quality with students?

How can we involve students meaningfully in reporting?

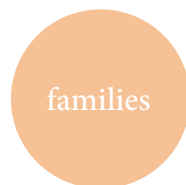
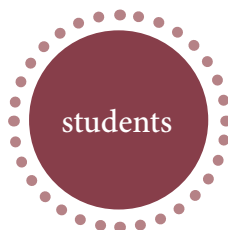
Is there space created for students to reflect on their learning?

...providing greater student ownership and involvement in the learning process is fundamental to improved learning outcomes (NCCA Reporting Guidelines, 2018)

...student voice in practice and research must involve a commitment to 'authentic listening' which is realised only through acknowledgement and response to the views expressed and suggestions made by student participants (Flynn, 2017)

...it is not simply greater voice that may be needed in educational change today, but rather greater skills in listening to our students (Shirley, 2015)

For more information:



By: Matthew Colgan, Secretary ISSU & Adam Lambe, Regional Officer, ISSU (Monaghan)

Amplifying and supporting Student Voice has been the core guiding principle of the Irish Second-Level Student's Union (ISSU) since its establishment in 2008. Our goal is to have a school system that actively supports and engages with students through the Student Council model. Since we were founded, the membership of ISSU has come from schools whose Student Councils vote to become an ISSU member. Currently we represent over 490 Student Councils across Ireland.

Our structure consists of 12 students on our National Student Executive (NSE) who represent our members on a daily basis. The Monitoring and Advisory committee is a group of five representatives who ensure that our elected representatives on the NSE are fulfilling their mandate. These two bodies are elected at our AGM called 'Annual Assembly' where every member Student Council has two voting representatives. On a regional level, we have 2 elected representatives who work on regional projects and feed into national discussions with the NSE.

With this comprehensive structure, we have the ability to keep in touch with our members and make

sure that we are representing them to the best of our ability. Going forward, we plan to encourage our members to elect 'School Representatives'. These students will act as a clear point of contact for all of our members with NSE. Our primary focus as a union is to represent all of our members at a regional and national level and to clearly communicate their concerns to decision-makers and other education stakeholders. We also work on many projects to create learning opportunities for students.

Such projects include our annual summer event, 'Skills Academy' where students gain valuable skills in activism and leadership. Currently, the ISSU is in the process of building key resources for our members. One such resource is the 'Student Council Handbook' which was completed this year and will be made available to all our members. We are also creating mental health educational resources. At the heart of all of our work is our fundamental model of a student led union. This expands to all of our projects, events and resources. We are an entirely student-led organization and so each of our projects is led by a student and will be worked on by students, sometimes with input from experts.

The ISSU has shown me how integral Student Voice is in education and how it can make such an impact on the lives of young people and students by engaging with education stakeholders and the students themselves.

Matthew Colgan, Secretary ISSU

The story of the ISSU is a story of bringing students to the forefront of education again and the success of our organisation is really a testament to how capable students are and the capacity we have especially in the autonomy of our organisation. Our union has come a very long way since its inception, we are now an exemplary student organisation that continues to push the boundaries on how Student Voice can impact education. Student unions across Europe learn from the ISSU in areas like organisation

management and effective communication through the Irish founded umbrella organisation OBESSU (Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions).

From the point of view of some of the elected officers in the ISSU, this organisation has had a fantastic impact on their view of students' voices and also their personal development.



As a regional officer in the ISSU, I have had so many opportunities to develop my leadership and project management skills. As well as this I have also had many doors opened for me because of this position and it has allowed me to uplift the Student Voice in my region and effect real change.

Adam Lambe, Regional Officer, Monaghan, ISSU

The Importance of Student Voice

By: Alicia O'Sullivan, Education Officer, Irish Second-Level Students' Union 2020/21

I always knew Student Voice was important, but it was not until I saw how significantly advantageous it is and how it can take something in a whole new direction, that I realised the difference between a conversation without it and with it. I knew it was something that needed to be strongly advocated for.

It all began when I was selected as the National Executive for Cork County Comhairle Na nÓg, where we worked on Student Voice for a two-year term, alongside two retired employees of the NCCA. This gave me the grounding and background to the mechanisms in which student voices can come in, and what it can contribute. Meanwhile back in Skibbereen, I was heading into 3rd Year and also a new school, as the three schools in Skibbereen had amalgamated into one, Skibbereen Community School. From my work on the National Executive, I went about setting up the Student Council with my

friend. We essentially had to start from scratch and do everything manually (I even made D.I.Y ballot boxes). This meant that by the time I left there was a functioning avenue for students to have their say in the running of their school.

At this time, I was also working on Relationships and Sexual Education with my local Comhairle. Following the announcement of RSE Reform by the Minister for Education, Richard Bruton it was the perfect time to take our research and campaign further. We met with Jim Daly, Minister for Mental Health to present our findings and get advice on where to go next. We then wrote to the NCCA and met with them in Dublin. I then spoke at the RSE Symposium, hosted by the NCCA. This was the first time I had spoken in a high-level event and being one of the only young people in the room there was certainly a lot of pressure but in fact, Student Voice

played a key role in the Review undertaken by the NCCA and will be fully reflected in the new RSE curriculum. All of this for me led to my place as Education Officer at ISSU. In my new role, my main focus is on RSE and Senior Cycle Reform about which we have just recently launched a 60+ page report. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has placed a huge issue on the lap of the entire Union but our work goes on.

Leaving Certificate 2021

The inclusion of the Student Voice is not only justified by the impact on the students themselves but the significance it has in the conversation as a whole. For example, in relation to Leaving Cert 2021, social media was rife with #CancelTheLeavingCert and #GiveusChoice. Students used what their generation has to a tee, social media. It has had a huge impact because social media is the quickest, closest and loudest place to get your point across. However, giving out on social media is not enough. Students needed a strong voice in the room and people to work hard so that their voices were heard. The twelve National Student Executive, the 37 Regional Officers, the 200 students who showed up to the Leaving Cert symposium and the over 10,000 students who answered the survey were all a part of that.

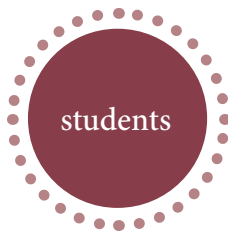


Being strategic and resourceful is how change happens. ISSU President, Reuben Murray and I took all of this substantial data and voiced it at the table. I think it is important to note that students, and ISSU as a stakeholder, will always stick out like a sore thumb. It is not about age, but two young volunteers in a room of thirty-odd people who have had professional careers in education is a whole different ball game. It has been our biggest advantage and disadvantage all at the same time. Every time I logged onto a call with the Department of Education and waited to be left in, I felt the weight of 60,000 voices on my shoulders and I will never forget that feeling. I do not think anyone will ever realise the blood, sweat and tears that ISSU put into advocating for students. It was a historic moment for Student Voice. It took Student Voice to the next level and placed more weight on students' needs than ever before.

Unfortunately, a lot of second-level students have not found their voice by the time they leave secondary school. This leaves a lot of them not knowing what they are good at, where their weaknesses lie and unable to speak for what they believe in. This has led to an education system that does not reflect students' abilities, talents or passions. Students need to be given a space to make mistakes, to listen to others, to think for themselves pragmatically. With the right supports, teachers and schools can nourish and produce a group of well-equipped young people ready to take on the challenges of the world, rather than stray away from it.

I am proud of our students and what we can achieve. I am proud of my colleagues at ISSU for their hard work and dedication. It is important that we continue to give young people a space to speak and more importantly, that we are listening to them when they do.

Alicia O'Sullivan, Education Officer, ISSU



By Barry Peake, Learning & Practice Officer, YSI

Young Social Innovators (YSI) has been a key mechanism for youth participation and the promotion of Student Voice in Ireland since its foundation in 2001.

YSI's co-founders had a passionate belief in young people's potential to be powerful catalysts for change. They believed that, when given the opportunity, young people could bring new thinking and new ideas to existing and emerging social issues.

Students have unique insights into the issues directly impacting them and Young Social Innovators offers a channel for them to explore, take action and speak out on the issues they care about.

Unique to YSI is its Framework for Social Innovation Learning and Practice. Developed over many years, it has been used by thousands of educators to guide and support young people to create and implement social innovation projects on issues such as mental health, sexual consent, gender equality, community regeneration, diversity and inclusion, sustainable living, the environment and more.

At Young Social Innovators, the student experience is just as important as the outcome of the project itself. Students are given the opportunity to explore, discuss and voice their opinions on the issues impacting them: to think critically and creatively; to collaborate in a team and with others in their

community; to advocate on behalf of others and present their ideas; and importantly, to realise their own capacity to effect change in the world around them.

Bringing Lundy's Model to Life

Young Social Innovators brings Lundy's model of participation to life for young people in a variety of ways:

- *It provides a safe and inclusive space for young people to form their views;*
- *Our resources and methodologies ensure their voice is informed;*
- *There are multiple opportunities for young people to express their views to an audience, not least during the YSI Speak Out Tour, where each team presents their ideas to representatives from the public, private, and community and voluntary sectors; and*
- *YSI teams have real and meaningful influence. From school to national policy, YSI teams have been successful in driving change at all levels. YSI teams regularly meet and brief political representatives on the issues they are addressing and have been successful in the establishment of a National Missing Persons' Day in Ireland. Community facilities now exist in villages and towns throughout Ireland where they didn't before and education and community initiatives continue to make impact long after the students themselves have moved on.*

ACCS Schools Leading the Way

YSI has built strong relationships with Community and Comprehensive schools throughout Ireland. This year we have nearly 800 young people from 28 ACCS schools participating in our programmes. Over the years, young people from ACCS schools have developed many innovative and impactful responses to issues affecting their communities.



Spotlight on...

RAMSGRANGE COMMUNITY SCHOOL, Co. Wexford won the Make Our World Safer Challenge Award in 2020 for their project promoting sea safety among local fishermen. Living in a community where two lives had recently been lost at sea, the students were passionate about advocating for the wearing of Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs). Local awareness and fundraising events organised and hosted by the students helped to promote their message and raise funds to support fishermen to cover the maintenance costs of the PLBs.

Ballincollig Community School in Co. Cork is now leading the way in creating opportunities for student engagement in social innovation at all stages in their school life having adopted YSI's programme at Junior Cycle and facilitating its widespread uptake.

Cashel Community School, in Co. Tipperary received the Young Social Innovators of the Year Gold Award in 2020 for their project entitled 'Step Up for Accessibility'. Keen to promote inclusion and protect the rights of people with disabilities, the students developed an innovative prototype alarm sensor to combat the misuse of disabled parking spaces in their town. Collaborating with the HSE, the Cashel Gold Star Initiative, their local Council and others, the team also hopes to work with the Garda National Traffic Bureau and to lobby for the introduction of penalty points for those who wrongly park in designated disabled parking bays.



Spotlight on...

In 2019, BEARA COMMUNITY SCHOOL in Co. Cork won the Young Social Innovators of the Year Silver Award for their initiative to combat digital addiction. Through a project they entitled ‘Virtually Connected, Socially Disconnected,’ they aim to reduce the amount of time people at all ages spend on digital devices. A Digital Detox Week in their school challenged students and teachers alike to live for a week without technology. The students also created a Digital Wellness Charter for schools and workplaces as well as an information pack and booklet for parents on the subject.

Young Social Innovators is dedicated to facilitating youth participation on the issues impacting them and when closed abruptly in March 2020 due to Covid-19, YSI was keen to find a way to connect young people with what was happening around them. Research carried out amongst teenagers in partnership with Amárach Research shone a light on how young people were feeling and dispelled much of what was being reported at the time in relation to young people’s adherence (or lack thereof) to public health restrictions. YSI continues to understand and share insights from our youth population through its partnership with Amárach Research and our annually published GenZ Index.

Determined to give young people the opportunity to help their communities deal with issues emerging as a result of Covid-19, YSI developed and issued an ‘Open Call to Teenagers’ facilitating and supporting them to come up with and share ideas that would help people stay connected, safe, healthy, informed, educated and human during this unique and unsettling time. All of the ideas submitted were shared on a digital platform and those with the highest potential for impact were invited to present to a panel of leaders from across business, NGO and government.

YSI is proud to be a channel through which so many young people, from every corner of Ireland, use their voice and participate in civic, social, community and political life.

We know it’s good for young people; encouraging Student Voice and youth participation develops important skills and fosters creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and resilience. We know it’s good for communities; young people collaborating and creating networks of support builds social capital and creates vibrant communities. Perhaps most importantly, it is good for society as a whole; given recent changes at a more macro-political level, with an increase in nativist populism, continued political polarisation, an increase in intolerance, and unforeseen levels of misinformation, we need a generation of well informed and critically aware young people who can use their voices and actively participate in civic life in order to work towards a more equal, just, diverse, tolerant, and sustainable future for all our citizens.

YOUNG SOCIAL INNOVATORS

Find Out More

If you are interested in finding out more about YSI please contact us.

Telephone: 01 6458030
Email: educate@youngsocialinnovators.ie



YSI POWER OF PERIODS

Striving to Break the Stigma of Periods throughout Ireland!

Rosses Community School, Dungloe

Period Poverty and Stigma: Period Stigma and Period Poverty are real and current issues and will continue to be unless addressed across our society. A recent study found that one in ten girls has had experience of period poverty during the Covid Crisis, which shows that the situation is not improving but possibly becoming more of a problem.

We feel that period stigma is a worldwide problem and stems from an old-fashioned idea that women were unclean when they were menstruating. In some cultures, women are singled out and isolated while menstruating. These century-old attitudes are the root cause of the stigma around periods and needs to be challenged through open and honest conversations in our society.

Why We Chose this: Our team chose this topic after looking at and discussing a lot of different

social issues. We decided the topic of period stigma was important and once we began our research and discussions, we decided to incorporate period poverty into the project. Most of our team members are female so naturally there was an instant interest and desire to pursue the topic, but we also found that the males in our group were very supportive and jumped on board with the idea too.

Our Big Idea: Our big idea was to build sanitary product dispensers for our school bathrooms. Our school already provided free sanitary items to students but through consultation with them we realised that the majority were unaware of this. By having the dispensers in the toilets, items are readily available to all students. We also wanted to reduce the stigma around periods by beginning a real conversation in our school and local community.

A recent study found that one in ten girls has had experience of period poverty during the Covid Crisis, which shows that the situation is not improving but possibly becoming more of a problem.

Who we worked with and how we worked with them (Student Voice in Action):

Initially we consulted with our own student body through surveys around their experiences of periods and their needs for products that we are going to place in our handmade Sanitary dispensers. Through this important feedback on period stigma and poverty, we reached a clearer consensus on what products to include in our dispensers.

One of our local county councilors has been very invested in our project and with his help we have been able to work alongside him to put forward the motion to Donegal County Council for free sanitary items in all Donegal County Council buildings. This has been passed at our municipal district level and will soon be heard at the county wide meeting.

We were invited to join a National conversation on the Period Poverty Bill before the Senate at present from Labour Senator, Rebecca Moynihan (Dublin South Central).

Finally, we will be working with teachers and management from our local national schools to deliver age-appropriate information on the stigma surrounding periods and to help break down the embarrassment younger students may feel about their periods.

Working as a team (Our Voices – Space):

Teamwork and communication was very important and a vital aspect of what worked well in our project. Everyone talked openly about what they would like to contribute to the tasks at hand and this led to assigning key students different roles, such as secretary, chairperson, researcher, communication, artist, photographer and social media manager. Some wanted to email TDs. Other students took on the role of making posters for our campaign. A short

video was made with all students taking part and this was edited by another student. The main challenge we had to overcome was that of doing the project remotely. We overcame this with regular zoom meetings and dedication to our project.

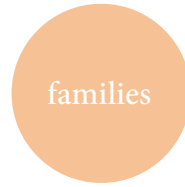
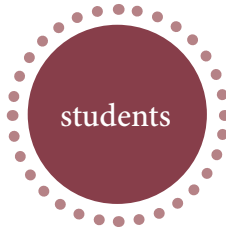
The difference we've made (Our Voices – Influence & Audience)

Due to our efforts and work, we have helped towards abolishing the stigma and the belief that periods are not something to be discussed and that they are something to be ashamed of. We have strived to remove these stereotypes and empower women and transgender and non-binary people of all ages. We are also striving to remove the label that deem sanitary products as luxury items, when in fact they should be available to anyone who needs them for an affordable price and are free to those who do not have the financial privilege. We also strive to have children educated on periods as to avoid being uneducated at a later age, possibly discouraging stigma and embarrassment about the subject. We have also assisted in educating male individuals that periods are a natural part of a person's life and that they are nothing to be embarrassed about, whether it be discussing it among colleagues, friends or anyone.

Our plans for the future

Our plans for the future will focus on designing tokens that will be used in the dispensers. We think a prototype of a supermarket trolley token would be effective. We plan to do a podcast with members of the Ladies Donegal County team, who are happy to have an open conversation to highlight the need for education around this topic.





Student Voice and Global Citizenship Education:

A WorldWide Global Schools (WWGS) Perspective

By: Aishling McGrath, WWGS Director

Today, our post-primary schools bring together a more diverse set of students than ever. As such, they offer an unparalleled opportunity for students to engage in discussion, experience other perspectives and develop their own perspectives on global issues, such as sustainability, financial, racial and climate justice.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of fostering Student Voice, empowering students to express their opinions and perspectives in and out of the classroom and giving students the tools to take an active part in their own learning. At WorldWide Global Schools (WWGS), this is particularly important in the context of Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Student Voice plays a central role in the mechanics of WWGS, Ireland’s Global Citizenship Education programme for post-primary schools. Post-primary curricula increasingly incorporate ideas and concepts relating to GCE, such as human rights, equality, solidarity and celebrating diversity, social justice, peace, poverty, sustainable development and much more. Covid-19 has highlighted the uncertainty of the future and uncovered huge societal problems that need attention. We have to learn to live sustainably; to find ways of responding to global challenges, such

as climate change, inequality and racial injustice, these are huge challenges our young people face now and into the future. GCE is a powerful vehicle through which we can better understand the world we live in and take action to change it as informed global citizens. It equips both educators and students with the knowledge, skills, and values to act ethically and sustainably in a world that is both complex and highly interconnected.

WWGS was established in 2013. Since then, the programme has worked with 70% of post-primary schools nationwide, in pursuit of integrating GCE into all aspects of teaching and learning at post-primary level. This is done by providing a comprehensive range of support and interventions for schools - including grant funding, professional development for teachers and school leaders, events, an annual student conference, resources and personalised support.

Since 2013, students have played a crucial role in all areas of GCE in schools across the country. One framework that was developed to facilitate this to happen is the WWGS Global Passport Framework and Award.

This framework is designed to support Student Voice in schools and student action on global justice issues. Student Voice is fundamental to any school's journey to committing to GCE and is reflected throughout the framework, and in the 'Student Capacity and Engagement' area of the framework in particular. Students have driven much of the expansion of GCE in post-primary schools, asking for GCE when it has not been present in their schools, choosing which issues to explore and take action on, and taking ownership of much of the global learning across the school community and beyond, both via the curriculum and in an extra-curricular capacity. As a programme, WWGS encourages a participatory and democratic approach to continuous consultation with students. At the heart of the WWGS programme is a commitment to the preparation of our students as active global citizens who are supported to become active partners in the process of learning, school decision-making and making our world more just and sustainable. The Global Passport Framework demonstrates how GCE can become embedded in school culture, creating an environment where teachers, students and school leaders can most effectively respond to local and global needs in relation to GCE. From our experience, in schools where students are at the centre of learning design and where the pedagogies involve real life learning, there are observable changes for the student, the teacher and the wider school community. These include students who are empowered, engaged, more responsible, confident, and positive about their own identity and place in the school, the wider community, and their role as active global citizens. Values such as respect, inclusion and responsibility have real meaning and impact when they are reached through agreement with students, modelled in day-to-day operations and reflected in decision-making and planning processes.

Student Voice and participation have to be at the heart of learning in our school communities. Students need a chance to deliberate together on how to make a better school, a better society both locally and globally and to be better global citizens.

They need opportunities to express their opinions and know they will be listened to. And if they express concern about the future, we need to listen and give them an opportunity to take meaningful action on what they are concerned about. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) sets out a set of participation rights for children that includes the right to a voice, to be listened to, to exercise agency and negotiate meanings with others.

Our experience and the experience of many of the schools engaged with the WWGS programme is that students can be quite independent when organising various school events and actions in relation to GCE. Students are increasingly developing the necessary skills to take responsibility and organise events, activities and take meaningful action on issues that they care about.

The autonomy of teaching methods, existence of a range of initiatives and programmes concerning GCE in schools and with the global perspective becoming more of an explicit component within the curricula, Student Voice in relation to GCE can and should be activated even more. There are numerous opportunities for Student Voice and participation in schools, including active social justice student committees, student-led actions, Model United Nations (MUN), student strikes, debates, and other opportunities for participation in tackling global issues such as the country's first Youth Assembly on climate change, which took place in the Dáil in 2019. For example, student GCE committees have given students a sense of ownership on tackling global issues, as they are now part of the school's decision-making process on how these issues can and should be tackled. These mechanisms and opportunities all provide an exciting display of Student Voice in action and are tangible examples of our educational investment in goals such as those reflected in the Statements of Learning (SOL) at Junior Cycle which states that a student 'values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts' (Framework for Junior Cycle, NCCA).

*They need opportunities to express their opinions
and know they will be listened to.*

What the Students Say About WWGS

'I feel more confident sharing and presenting my views to people effectively. I also feel like we can affect people's lives.'

'Since participating, it has made me realise the importance of communication and respect when discussing different topics.'

'Whilst participating in the Global Justice activities in class this year, I learned many things about global inequalities around the world. I learned about why and how these injustices are happening as well as how I can actively try and make a difference no matter how small. Before participating in the Global Justice project, I was of the opinion that I could not do anything to impact the many inequalities around the world and felt as though they had nothing to do with me - or if they did there was only some small connection. Now however, I see that these inequalities can all be connected to something I can change. I learned that by actively changing my way of living to make a change and also spreading awareness to those around me can make a far bigger impact than I previously imagined.'

'I believe more strongly that my actions have a direct knock-on effect to the rest of the world due to my belief being backed up by the results of our action.'

'I've always held empathetic opinions on all the matters discussed during developmental education, this course has only further solidified those opinions and helped me take action against the injustices.'



WWGS Annual Student Conference 2019, Croke Park, showcasing work on Global Citizenship Education.





We need to continue to provide more opportunities for developing such skills as leadership, motivation, engagement, self-expression, creativity, entrepreneurship, and activism.

Developments in curriculum frameworks and guidelines, such as Wellbeing at Junior Cycle have led to the development of strategies to promote social and emotional learning and Student Voice. For many teachers and school leaders, when engaging with the WWGS programme and the Global Passport Framework, they can immediately see what issues are important for their students. Students are encouraged to become researchers, activists, peer educators and to use a project-based approach to investigate global justice issues both locally and globally and to begin to explore meaningful actions that can be taken in their schools and wider communities. Student enquiry and research is at the heart of any WWGS student project and is a very powerful tool for young people to explore topics that they have prioritised as important to them. Students use a range of innovative ways to present their learning through newsletter, blogs and videos and other media-inspired reporting. They write poems, create art, engage in debate, campaign and create narratives to express how strongly they feel about the future of our planet and issues that they care about. They engage with their wider communities, including elected members of government, businesses, NGOs and parents.

A commitment to participatory democracy in schools has empowered many students to be activists in their own communities. What we have seen, in particular through the Global Passport Framework and Award, is that Student Voice and participation, has increasingly come in from the periphery of the school experience and is becoming more the core focus of classrooms, teaching and learning and the wider school community. WWGS strongly advocates this approach to classroom pedagogy, bringing student participation from the edge to the centre through participatory pedagogy. WWGS have reflected on the work of sociologist, Roger Hart (Hart, 1997) to consider the 'Ladder of Participation' and how schools can be encouraged to critically

engage with the various 'rungs' on the ladder. Hart proposed that the pinnacle experience for children in decision-making was to initiate action and share decision-making with adults. It is important that schools understand the ladder of participation, but more important is to encourage students and the whole-school community to examine why and how students are involved throughout the education system today and to do so in a meaningful way. The ladder can help us to understand the gradient ways students are involved throughout schools in relation to Student Voice and participation.

We need to continue to provide more opportunities for developing such skills as leadership, motivation, engagement, self-expression, creativity, entrepreneurship, and activism. The WWGS programme continues to focus its efforts on teachers' education and training on how to cultivate students' skills and to promote active Student Voice and participation in relation to global justice issues. WWGS teaching and learning materials and interventions offer teaching and learning methodologies that highlight and enhance the immense importance and significant impact of authentic Student Voice in driving meaningful change in the 21st Century. Students are invited to showcase their learning and comprehension of global justice issues through the WWGS Annual Student Conference. A key message to and from teachers engaged in GCE through the WWGS programme, is that student interest about global issues and perspectives was more likely to flourish in an environment where notions of democracy, Student Voice and participation were evident in school policy, culture, and practice. Student engagement with the world, whether in local or global contexts, is ideally built through rich and engaging participatory pedagogy, curriculum and a school culture that embraces and creates opportunities for authentic Student Voice, representation, and participation.



Millstreet Community School

Pobalscoil Sráid a'Mhuilinn

Our School – One World



Khushamdeed/Marhaba



Benvenuti



Bienvenido



Welkom/ Sawubona



Kaabo/Nnoo



Sveli



Witamy



Bine ați venit



Welcome



Yindī txnrab



Bienvenue



Қош келдіңіз (*Kazakh*)
Добро пожаловать (*Russian*)



Boyeyi bolamu



Siyalemukela/Mauya



Willkommen



Takulandilani

Our School One World Culture and Diversity in MCS 2021

In April 2021, Millstreet Community School launched an online event led by the Transition Year students involved in Global Citizenship Education which celebrated cultural diversity in the school community. The event which featured musical performances and country presentations can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tghRsSM9iKE&t=22s> The flags in this poster represent all the different nationalities which make up Millstreet Community School.

ACCS Student Voice Webinar January 2021

Well, who would know better how to improve their education or quality of education than the people learning?

I believe we are equals with the teacher. I'm part of it, not just listening to the teacher. And he is so open to our contributions and we have to really explain our opinions, so I'm developing my points and learning from others' points.



I would say that the morale has gone up because students got to see that the student council can do things that will make change. So, having something under our belt that proves that we can do something really helped making people in the community see that we can change things if they are really bothering us.

We get to choose what's best for us rather than the teacher deciding. It's our education and we are preparing for our futures. It's great to have lots of the decisions in our hands.

I think schools could at least have more meetings like this, where students can directly just talk about problems to their teacher. Time should be allocated to this. I think it's a student environment... they're in there for 8 hours a day five days a week, so they need to have their say in what's going on where they're working rather than just sitting back and letting stuff happen.

I like that our teacher wanted to help us and did the questionnaire and then did certain things in class because of what we told her.

We are given options. This makes me feel like I have control over my own school life, and it helps me prepare for bigger decisions I will have to make.

I understand that the curriculum has to be followed, but it still feels like we are driving it. It seems like the teacher is teaching us and taking our specific needs into account.

Every time a teacher confers with us about our learning it shows they trust us. And when you think of a school environment you think of control, but not here. Since 4th year especially I feel my opinion is taken into account in almost every class. It's definitely a conscious thing by the teachers and it's nothing like, "it's my way or the high-way".

There could easily be a greater understanding built between teachers and students if we give the students equal voices.



Other Stories from Other Schools

Learning from schools outside the Community and Comprehensive sector: Terence MacSwiney Community College in Cork and St. Joseph's Secondary School in Rush both have a long history of commitment and innovation in building an authentic culture of Student Voice in their schools. These articles give us insights into how their Student Voice cultures are evolving and going from strength to strength.



Terence MacSwiney Community College is a co-educational post primary school located in Knocknaheeny, Cork City. Our school is in an urban area of Cork City, has 196 students and has DEIS status. A recent positive addition to our school has been the opening of our Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge, Gaelcholáiste Mhic Shuibhne, which had 75 students enrolled in September 2021.

Student Voice on ‘Learning in Lockdown’

Our school ethos and mission statement outline our commitment to nurturing and supporting all of our students. We believe our school ethos is at the core of our strength. Our aim is to foster learning and to guide and nurture all of our students in a caring environment. We aim to provide a high level of support to enable our students to succeed on an academic and personal level. We are passionate about promoting positive learning experiences that are inclusive, dynamic, diverse and fulfilling, in terms of education, wellbeing and lifelong learning.

Our staff believe in the importance of fostering positive relationships with our students and Student Voice is central to this. Our school community had invested significantly in improving student and staff relationships. As part of the staff’s training in restorative practice, they have learnt how to support our students in using restorative language in managing their emotions effectively. We also involve students in policy development including the development of the school’s Code of Behaviour.

Significant Milestones

In our experience Student Voice has been a platform to develop students’ independence and self-esteem within a safe, respectful and caring environment. To date, our consultation groups have provided students with a platform to create change within our school community. This approach has provided us with opportunities to listen and learn, and it has also given students the opportunity to be heard on different important issues within our school. The involvement of school management can and should play a key role in the success of such initiatives as students deserve to know their ideas and opinions are valued by someone in a position to make changes. To date, our students have participated meaningfully in matters that affect them. The very nature of this collaborative process has resulted in an improved school climate, encouraged students’ level of engagement and attendance, positively impacted teaching and learning and has developed student teacher relationships.

2021 - Online Learning Consultation & Return to School

2020 - The Homework Policy Review

2020 - Addendum to The Code of Behaviour
Covid-19 Specific

2019 - The Code of Behaviour

2016-2019 - The Erasmus Bridge Project

2014-2017 - The Learner Voice Research Study

2017 - Whole School Evaluation
Consultations & Findings

2016-2017 - Forbairt ‘Identifying best practice to
enhance learner experiences in their transition
from Primary to Post-Primary’

2014 - Junior Cycle Reform

The First Lockdown

The first school closure on March 12th took us all by surprise. As a school community, we united in trying to do the best we could to support student learning by providing online classes, posting hard copies of material and simply, trying to stay connected with students. We soon realised that our students would inevitably struggle more than others, particularly those with special educational needs, behavioural challenges and those experiencing significant socio-economic deprivation. These students were finding it the most difficult to participate in a blended learning model. Providing a home learning space was cited by parents and students as a major obstacle to engagement due to large families occupying a relatively limited area. Shortage of devices and WIFI connectivity compounded these problems and the task of responding to the ‘new normal’ of our teaching and learning reality appeared more onerous by the day. Much of what we experienced was confirmed by the research of Dr. Selina McCoy⁶ in the area of social inequalities impacting learning during the pandemic.



We took each day as an opportunity to grow and ensure that no student would feel left behind.

The Student Support Team who plays a key role in supporting students expanded significantly to include all Year Heads and staff who wanted to contribute to and support our goal of “leaving no one behind”. This team ensured that every student and their family were interacted with individually. Phone calls were made to discuss any difficulties or obstacles for our students and home visits were arranged where necessary. The regularity of the contact helped build new relationships with families and a new sense of trust. Cognisant at all times of issues of confidentiality and trust, team members reported back to the group that a significant percentage of our school community was experiencing food poverty and encountering difficulties paying household bills. Whilst some additional government support was given through the extension of the School Meals Provision, it became clear that without additional support, our students could experience cold and hunger in their homes during the lockdown.

Cork City Council and a local government representative came to the fore in providing additional food and supports. Other agencies distributing food and supplies such as SVP, Penny Dinners, Feed Cork and the local GAA club, St Vincent’s also supported our students. The identities of the families receiving supports were protected and known only to those directly involved in delivering hampers. Strong relationships already developed with students proved central to us identifying those who were struggling the most and needed help. The Student Voice was loud and clear. They saw us as partners and not strangers.

The Second Lockdown

The second school closure was responded to differently. We felt more prepared to “do this”. We had expanded our online learning platforms. Students and teachers were more skilled in the delivery of and participation in online classes and staff appeared even more willing and determined to keep students engaged. The Student Support Team, Year Heads, Coordinators, teachers, support staff and SNA team set themselves the task of making weekly, and in some cases, daily contact with families and individual students. All subject

teachers recorded, tracked and reported on student engagement and those falling through the cracks were followed up on with phone calls, texts and house visits. A very discreet team of volunteers worked quietly behind the scenes, delivering food and materials to students every week and providing whatever support was required. Despite our best efforts, there were still students we simply could not reach, and it became clear to us that nothing could replace the interpersonal relationships as a key motivator to keep students engaged.

Third year engagement was particularly worrying. The Deputy Principal and Principal designed a Third-Year survey in consultation with the Year Head. The purpose of this survey was to find out from the students what the challenges were for them and what would help. Students noted the lack of privacy, lack of motivation, dislike of being online, not feeling confident about being online and the pressure of others in the household also being online as obstacles to their participation. On a positive note, students said that their continued engagement was linked to wanting to do well at school, seeing other classmates online and reminders and support from school staff and parents.

The additional challenges in the second lockdown were weariness and fatigue. Lockdown in winter was significantly more challenging. One local primary school Principal summarised it as ‘being a choice between food and heat’ for some families. Not all families struggled equally but it became clear once more that the basics of heat, food and space were not available to some.

We drew on whatever resources we could, however, but still did not meet all needs. Our relationships with the community strengthened even further and we were met at doorsteps with genuine warmth and acceptance. The delivery team reported a high level of job satisfaction due to these strengthening relationships. Our SNA team noted that this support “bridged the gap between school and home” which resulted in what they described as “breaking down barriers, building relationships and gaining a real closeness to the families”.

However, we were aware that without our students being physically present in school, an essential part of the key relationship was absent. We looked forward to their return to the school building with great joy and anticipation. By conducting a survey and interviews with them, we found out how they felt.

The Return to School

The return of the Leaving Certificate class to the school provided us with a unique opportunity. Because of the significant interaction we had had with these students during lockdown we had some understanding of their needs and challenges engaging with school. Our first meeting with them provided us with the opportunity to really listen to them and to respond to their requests. They clearly expressed a desire for a more focussed timetable, a shorter lunch break to ensure an early finish and a more informal school approach which recognised their adult status in the school setting. Without the pressure of certain Departmental requirements regarding subject provision and in class time, we were able, with them, to go back to the drawing board and to design a school programme that responded to their needs and requests. This gave them co-partnership with school management in their educational provision and served to cement our already solid relationship.

In a survey, students were asked to respond to twelve questions about online learning and the return to school. The DEIS Coordinator collated the data which gave us insights to the areas for concern and allowed us to identify our best practices. The school was seen to be doing a good job in responding to challenges where they could make a difference. One student said that “the school did everything they could to make our home schooling as easy/interesting as possible”. The only real plus of online learning was seen as it being in the ‘comfort and safety of their own homes’. Whilst the vast majority of students reported positive feelings about their return to school, ‘happy’, ‘relieved’, ‘delighted’, a small number of students indicated that they felt ‘nervous’ and ‘non-committed’. Seventy percent of students identified sleep patterns as a challenge.

Changes to the school timetable were responded to positively and whilst some students felt their relationship with school was unchanged, others felt that they were now more part of the school and that student and staff relationships were better. Contact and encouragement from school staff had impacted positively on student engagement. Student satisfaction with school interventions was high with

one student stating that the school had done its “absolute best” and others acknowledging that “it couldn’t have done more”.

In the interviews students were asked about their experience of online learning and what they found most challenging. The majority of students commented on the challenges rather than the positive aspects of home learning. Students were very positive about their experience of coming back into school. A number of them described their relationship with the school now as being ‘closer’ and were clear that the school couldn’t have done more to support them. It became evident that students appreciated the more adult like relationship with staff since their return to school. Many of the students mentioned, in particular, that they liked being the only group in the school that were consulted about the food provided and the focus being on them.

Incredibly, attendance, always an issue in Terence MacSwiney Community College, improved from 74% to 95%. Once we abandoned the “one size fits all” of the system, students felt heard and understood and in response, voted with their feet by arriving early every day and engaging with their learning.

Looking back, the pandemic provided us with an opportunity, a platform if you will. We gained the chance, as a school, to assess how we would cope under pressure. This led to a discovery of our own strengths, weakness and areas that we needed to improve upon. There was never any question for us that the online learning would not suit all learners or that every student’s experience of this pandemic would be the same. This awareness led us to being able to rise to the occasion and make a concerted effort at supporting all of our students as opposed to meeting the needs of some.

We had some learning to do as a school as this was uncharted territory. However, we took each day as an opportunity to grow and ensure that no student would feel left behind. The only way we envisioned this experience being of any benefit was if we gained the perspectives of our students. Our learning happened through listening to the voices of our students and hearing their lived experiences. Without their voices we never would have gained the understanding we have in terms of their educational, physical, social and emotional needs.

Phil O’Flynn and Yvonne Calnan



St Joseph's Secondary School Darren Byrne is a newly appointed Deputy Principal in St Joseph's Secondary School in Rush, Co. Dublin. Darren, together with his colleagues, have been building a culture of listening to and collaborating with students in the school for over ten years now. Ger O'Sullivan and Ger Halbert spoke to Darren for this article and what follows is a snapshot of some of the initiatives and the values and principles that underpin Student Voice in St Joseph's.

Student Profile

St Joseph's is a DEIS mixed school with a diverse student population. The school is committed to building their young people's confidence and agency to contribute to making their school a better place. This all hinges on the notion of service and students being and becoming morally, conscious citizens. Building a culture of Student Voice in St Joseph's has required a significant investment of time and commitment by the school management and teachers.

Similar to many schools, some students in St Joseph's can experience challenges at a social and cultural level. Some students may not hear the language of education in their homes and may not use the language that is deemed acceptable in school. Sometimes, their language can be used to express anger and frustration. The Student Voice process in St Joseph's focuses on helping the young people to build their sense of agency – helping them to develop their communication skills so that they can refine and express their ideas, opinions and concerns clearly. This is a slow process and builds on multiple conversations with the young people in the different

Student Voice settings. It requires that teachers and students unpack what is meant by the different ideas, words and 'education speak' used to work towards a shared understanding about what is important, how it can be expressed and shared and what needs to be done next.

What are the different ways that students can have their voices heard in St Joseph's?

Darren spoke about three different spaces, which collectively, provide a range of opportunities for Voice but also keep the importance of building students' agency to contribute to the fore.

In the Classroom

Although the curriculum as envisaged places the young person and their learning at the centre of learning and teaching, we are reminded by Darren that this does not automatically happen. Students and teachers must work to address the power imbalance in the classroom moving towards more effective partnership with all students in a given class.

Agency	Leadership & Participation	Classroom
Building young people's capacity and confidence to articulate their ideas, opinions and concerns – language, key words and phrases being shared, and an understanding being brokered between all involved.	Multiple opportunities to lead and participate in the Representative space. This engagement can be consultative, collaborative and/or student-led. The Student Voice Forum is the principal vehicle.	Junior Cycle Framework providing multiple opportunities to consult and collaborate with students in and about their learning.

Leadership and Participation

While there is the potential for every student to have a voice heard in the classroom, St Joseph's places particular importance on their students being heard in the Representative space as an essential part of building a school wide culture of Student Voice.

In the Leadership and Participation space, Darren emphasises that students are in different places in terms of their capacity and confidence to both participate and lead at representative level. He talks about two different levels of voice: emergent and experienced. The emergent voices are those young people who have little or no experience of participating or leading. They have yet to build their confidence and agency to participate and/or lead in Voice initiatives. The experienced voice, on the other hand, has perhaps been in this role before or already has the capacity and confidence to express themselves.

St Joseph's is committed to enabling all students to contribute to decision-making and Darren used the

Student Representative group to explain how this is done. At present there are 132 students involved at a representative level. All of the procedures and titles for the representatives have been negotiated and agreed with the students over multiple meetings. Students are currently looking at new titles for the Student Council head boy and head girl, for example in favour of more gender-neutral titles.

It must also be said that many students may see the Student Council model as being flawed with a small demographic of like-minded students more likely to put themselves forward for election to the Council. The school has moved away from electing student representatives to inviting students to get involved. It is their experience that elections do not encourage a broad range of students to get involved. Teachers and students have collaborated over many meetings to ensure that students see this representative forum as being an authentic and worthwhile decision-making space. As a result, students are keen to get involved.

How the Student Representative Forum Works:

At Class Level

Students are invited to put themselves forward for one of four roles: Masks, Homework, Rewards or Wellbeing. Student representatives are called Cara. These roles can be taken up by others over the course of the year and/or rotated between the Cara. The Cara students liaise with their form tutors about any issues of concern expressed by their classmates in relation to that Cara's brief. Emergent voices can build their confidence and sense of agency in the class context.

At Year Level

Each class is invited to select the Cara they want to represent them at a particular time at the meeting with the Year Heads. The Cara will be selected depending on what is important for the class at that time and who they think can best represent their voices. This student is called a Ceannaire. Once a student assumes this role, another student takes up their space as a Cara. The conversations with the Year Head tend to be more refined and demanding so often the more experienced students will be selected.

Junior School and Senior School Meetings

Every three to four weeks, there are separate meetings of Junior and Senior School Year Heads and management. The class Ceannaire represents their class at these meetings. Again, the more experienced voices tend to undertake this role.

Student Council

The Student Council comprises the 6th year leadership team – head boy and head girl, their deputies and one representative from each of the years in the Junior or Senior School. In the context of the Council, the representatives from Junior Cycle are seen as being emerging voices with the representatives at senior level being seen as experienced voices. This is the group that would meet twice yearly with BOM for example. As with all other groups, those representing their peers may change depending on the particular agenda or focus. Only the head boy and head girl are constant on the Council.



Other Stories from Other Schools

These four different levels enable a wide range of young people to develop their sense of agency and confidence to contribute meaningfully to decision-making in St Joseph's.

While the classroom space may appear to be the easiest place to begin, it cannot be assumed that all teachers will embrace the importance of listening to and collaborating with students in their class. Therefore, Darren advises that a culture of Voice must be expanded beyond the classroom and become school wide.

Darren's experience in his own school and his insights into what other schools are doing would suggest that providing the Space and the means to listen to the voices of students can be the less challenging than the Audience and Influence considerations. It is critical that those listening are the important audience and that the students can see clearly that their efforts and contributions are being taken seriously and can lead to change in their school. At each level, while there might not be

a resolution to every issue, students' input should always be acknowledged and the reason for the outcome fully explained.

Darren emphasises that it is never possible to arrive at a place where you can be confident that your work is done, and that Student Voice is meaningful and inclusive of all students. Every year they become aware of a voice that has been marginalized despite all the best efforts. In addition, building a Student Voice culture must have many subcategories and be sustainable. To this end, St Joseph's have an API post holder responsible for their student and parent forum.

Darren reminds us that as adults, none of us really understand what it is like to be a young person in second level right here, right now. The dream for St Joseph's is that as many of their students as possible will achieve their own agency and the confidence to have their voice heard and to contribute to making the school the best that it can be for the whole school community.

Darren's final insights include the following:

- Be prepared to invest time and energy into this process.

- Check for understanding: '*So am I right in saying that what you think is...*'

- Sit with students and talk to them –

Compare and contrast with what someone else has said in the room.

- Teach them about understanding how someone else has a different view.

- Always try to refine the Student Voice process – it is all about inclusion.

*Thank you, Darren for an
inspiring conversation,*

The Two Gers!



Our Schools

The following pages are dedicated to the Community and Comprehensive schools that have engaged with us on their Student Voice journey. In their stories, these stakeholders reflect on the positive influence of Student Voice on their school community and how this voice enables student agency as understood in the context of the OECD Learning Compass 2030.

Student agency is defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others. (OECD)



Ashbourne Community School

Profile: A mixed school of 1,050 students

Principal: Ciarán Stewart

Deputy Principals: Pat Moriarty, Gillian Casey and Niamh Kelly



Our names are Laura Bolster, Aoife White and Mollie White. We are TY students in Ashbourne Community School.



We signed up for a new program called the #andshecycles ambassador program. This program aims to encourage young secondary school girls to gain more confidence cycling to school and in general. Only one in 250 teenage girls cycle to school. In the case of our school 60 boys cycle daily but no girls. This shocking statistic awakened our campaigning spirit. We wanted to know why such small numbers of girls cycled and find out could we help change the trend.

We are using our voices to tackle this issue and are making excellent progress addressing the main issues. We are collaborating with other student groups in our school who are working as Climate Ambassadors, Green School's committee members and students involved with the Pulchra* Programme. Collectively we feel people are listening, even if all our communications are virtual.

There are a total of 27 #andshecycles ambassadors in the country. We trained together in January and we all work well together even if we have not met in person yet. We are all looking forward to returning to school, but the online classes gave us an opportunity to get ourselves into a routine and to gain more confidence talking online. This could benefit us when we return to school as we will have a lot of talks/speeches to present.



Considering this program has only happened in lockdown, we would say that it has worked out well to date.

Photo by: Allison Carberry, 1st year Ashbourne CS

Some of our achievements include:

1. A cycle audit of the routes to and from school which is currently with Meath County Council's road safety officer and area engineer.
.....
2. Approval and setting up of a no idling zone in front of the school which will reduce air pollution around our school.
.....
3. Construction of a pedestrian path and cycle route separated from traffic in front of the school. This safer route is being funded by Meath County Council and will reduce traffic congestion in front of the school.
.....
4. A social media campaign has been set up to address the issues, real and perceived, faced by female cyclists.
.....
5. We are awaiting a new bike shed from Green Schools which we are going to paint to raise awareness among students regarding this issue.
.....
6. We have approval to supply lockers to all students who wear helmets when they cycle to school. These will be in the Sport's Hall, beside our new bike stand.

As you see, we have adapted to our virtual world and have continued to get things done. A global pandemic may have changed the TY experience we were planning, but it has not silenced our voices. We think this work is important because we are students campaigning for more choice for other students. Our motto for the year is "Be the solution" and we are doing our best.

**PULCHRA is an EU funded project with partners from ten nations. It encourages and supports students in urban schools to investigate environmental and sustainability issues in their localities with a focus on the topic "Cities as urban ecosystems".*



Athboy Community School

Size & Profile: A mixed School of 593 pupils

Principal: Anthony Leavy

Deputy Principal: Tom O'Dowd

Athboy Community School was formed by the amalgamation of St. James' Vocational School and St. Joseph's Secondary School in 2004. The school provides a wide range of subjects in practical, academic and vocational areas of the curriculum. A co-ordinated system of pastoral care, combined with the promotion of extracurricular activities will facilitate the holistic development of all pupils. Our mission is to provide quality, holistic and inclusive education for the community. Our aim is to create a safe and caring environment, which encourages pupils to reach their full potential in an atmosphere of mutual respect.



Above, Athboy CS Student Council. Student Voice is crucial to their work.



Left, Conor Muldoon is a 2nd year student at Athboy Community School.



The Student Voice is crucial in the Student Council.

As without students, the Student Council cannot run or exist. So as a Student Council member at Athboy Community School, it is an honour to represent the students' voice on the Council.

In Athboy Community School, the students' view is always taken into consideration when decisions must be made. When school events are being organised, students are always involved.

Throughout the last few years and this year, students have been heavily involved in setting up events and in making their voices heard on topics that are of concern to them such as getting our new PE tracksuit top, getting a new PE t-shirt and deciding to review our Student Council constitution which was last reviewed in 2015. Students have worked alongside teachers on many events like our Creative Arts Night which showcases the talents of students in the school from art work, wood work, metal work, music and gymnastics.

There was also the teachers' cook-off where students got to see a different side to the teachers as well as the enjoyment the evening brought. Last year the teachers had to cook a dish from a different country and had to go and ask the students from that country what the national dish was.

This kind of event enhances the Student Voice when students see the teachers outside the classroom. Students would probably be able to relate to them more as this event shows that they are not in the classroom all the time. Positive relationships between students and teachers make the school more student-friendly.

Sadly these events did not go ahead this year because of Covid. We did get to run the National LGBTQI+ Colours Day which was a great success with each year group wearing a coloured top from the Rainbow flag for a day.

The Student Voice has also been heard at Board of Management meetings and at Parent Association meetings. Every year two members of the Council attend a Board of Management meeting and

a Parent Association meeting and discuss what the Council has been doing during the year.

The Council and I are currently discussing the constitution and are also in the process of getting new PE t-shirt and tracksuit bottoms. Students get to discuss the school policies and have their voice heard at Board level. Students have voiced their opinions over the last few years about a new P.E top which we finally got this year, and which has been rolled out successfully this year. Students took the lead on the PE top which shows the input of Student Voice. We gathered the students' opinion on this by going to our own classes and asking what they thought about the top.

This year the Student Council has conducted two surveys. The first survey was about how students were getting on with home schooling and the second survey was about how students' mental health was during the lockdown. Four hundred and fifty students replied out of five hundred and eighty-eight which has put us on a firm footing for next year knowing how students are coping. The results were then discussed by the Council and then discussed at a Board of Management meeting.

For the rest of the year the Council hopes to plan for the release of a dri-fit PE t-shirt which we hope will be available for the start of the next academic year. Our meetings this year have taken place online every Wednesday at 5pm on MS Teams which helps us to get our voices heard. Since the return to school, we have held our meetings at 1:10pm socially distant in the PE hall. At the start of the meeting, we bring up any issues that Council members want to report, then we discuss year by year what problems have come up and then we address issues that the Board of Management or those that the Deputy Principal or Principal want discussed. These are brought up by the student liaison officer. We report back to students by posting a message on Teams about the issues that have been brought up and also outline what we are in the process of doing.

Conor Muldoon



Ballincollig Community School

Size and Profile: Mixed School with 853 pupils

Principal: Kathleen Lowney

Deputy Principals: Gary O'Sullivan & Karen Forde

Ballincollig Community School first opened on September 14th, 1976, with 109 pupils. In the intervening years over 5,000 pupils have attended here. During this time the school has developed a proud academic and sporting tradition.

Our mission statement outlines the school aims:

- To enable pupils to develop their full potential – intellectually, spiritually, artistically and socially.*
- To foster in pupils a sense of respect for themselves and others and a sense of civic pride.*
- To provide the educational base from which pupils can proceed to earn a living in the future.*

Our students have their say...



Maeve Brett, 4th Year

In Ballincollig Community School we are fortunate to have a strong Student Voice and link with staff and management. Students are regularly consulted on important matters such as school policies, the school motto and changes in the canteen menu. As a student I truly feel like the Student Voice is heard and valued.

The main place for students to raise their own issues and views is through their class representative and the student council. When we returned to school in September, issues such as the heavy school bags and wearing masks for long periods of time were raised. These issues were truly listened to by management. They allowed students to leave their textbooks at home and implemented regular mask breaks.



Our students have their say...



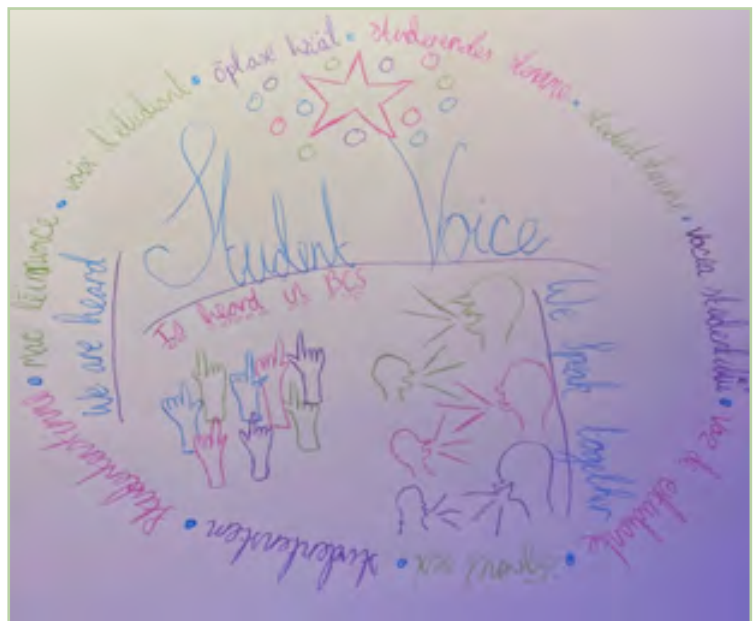
Sofia Unna Hernandez, 6th Year

La voz estudiantil es muy importante para cualquier escuela. Es gracias a estas voces que somos capaces de desarrollar muchos aspectos que hacen una escuela mejor. No solo académicamente, también socialmente y espiritualmente. Mejora la relación de los estudiantes y la escuela, creando una atmósfera más agradable para ambos estudiantes y profesores, un ambiente en el que los estudiantes se pueden sentir escuchados y al que desean ir todos los días.

Siendo miembro del consejo estudiantil, estoy agradecida de tener la oportunidad de expresar my voz y de ayudar a expresar la de otros, pues es por nuestra voz que podemos mejorar la educación, aunque sea solo un poco; para los futuros estudiantes.

Student Voice is very important for any school. It is thanks to these voices that we are able to develop many aspects that make a better school. Not just academically, but also socially and spiritually. It improves the relationship of the students and the school, creating a more pleasant atmosphere for both students and teachers, an environment in which students can feel heard and to which they want to go every day.

As a member of the Student Council, I am grateful to have the opportunity to express my voice and to help express that of others, as it is through our voice that we can improve education, even if it is just a little, for future students.



*Artwork by:
Donacha Ruane,
1st Year*



We, as students feel valued and respected when our views are taken into consideration.



Meg Foley, 6th Year

My name is Meg Foley, I am 18 years old and in my final few weeks at Ballincollig Community School. I'm more of a language person than a maths one for sure. BCS has a fantastic foreign language department, so I have been able to excel in that area for many years. Irish would have to be my favourite subject in school, I went to an Irish primary school so it's a huge part of my life.

I'm also a Regional Officer in the Irish Second Level Students' Union, I represent the students of Cork City within the union. I have learned a great deal about Student Voice through working with the ISSU. I have learned to believe in myself and my ability to use my voice and represent young people of all backgrounds. I have learned that young people like myself - can and are the driving force of great change in

our educational system. I am immensely proud of the fact that we advocated for the accredited grades system and that most of all, our voices were heard and change came about.

I find myself making sure I use my own voice more in a lot of situations, especially as a young woman. I feel that young women's voices are not always heard or listened to. I want to change this. In school, I get involved in as many leadership roles as I can.

I put myself forward for every opportunity going. I consider myself very lucky to be a student in Ballincollig Community School because I have had the chance to get involved in so many different roles over the years.

I am very active on the Student Council. I have been a Meitheal leader and was responsible for mentoring and supporting incoming 1st year students during their transition from primary to secondary school. I have been involved in the LGBTQI+ awareness campaigns, Seachtain na Gaeilge and MS Teams training programme for incoming students to name but a few.

I feel very proud to be a young woman who has been given that chance to speak on behalf of my peers. I know that my involvement

in so many school roles speaks loudly for the need for more female voices. I really hope that younger women and girls might see me and think... I can do that too. It's very important to me that I use my new knowledge about Student Voice in the school setting. I feel this comes easily to me as a member of BCS' Student Council, we are now more engaged than ever before. The same is true for the entire student body in BCS.

My voice has certainly been heard more in the classroom setting. My own teachers are very compassionate and understanding. They have always listened to our thoughts and views on the Leaving Cert situation. There have definitely been some very valuable discussions about the current situation. I think a lot of students benefit from those kinds of chats. We, as students feel valued and respected when our views are taken into consideration. We feel that we matter and that we have a co-operative relationship with our teachers. This really motivates us to work harder and has such a positive impact on our wellbeing. Overall, BCS is becoming a much better place for every type of student. I believe things can only go upwards from here.



Bishopstown Community School

Size and Profile: A mixed school with 307 pupils

Principal: Edwina Gottstein

Deputy Principal: Lorna Finnegan

Bishopstown Community School is a secondary school in the Bishopstown area of Cork city. Established in 1979, it is the only co-educational secondary school in the area. In Bishopstown Community School we see ourselves as a school community, committed to excellence and achievement. We encourage our students to participate in all the activities the school offers knowing this will enrich their education and allow them to become successful students and successful adults.

Going 'Meta' on Student Voice – The 'Power' of Student Voice



Above, Irish Sign Language Act Passed, Ms Denise Dowling, Teacher BCS, Alain Newstead, Student BCS, Senator Mark Daly, Katlyn Griffin Student BCS and Ms Edwina Gottstein, Principal BCS.

Jenny Leach and Bob Moon (2008), in “The Power of Pedagogy”, challenge educators to reflect on pedagogy not on a level of exploring different methods or practices but on a higher level of thinking, they describe as going ‘meta’, with meta defined as deeper thinking, asking the big questions to consider a higher state of development for change and transformation. Drawing on their approach I present the concept of going ‘meta’ on Student Voice while reflecting on a narrative from Bishopstown Community School where the seeds of change, sown in 2017, are being reaped today.

Student Voice is a complex concept that is gaining increased space on the educational agenda within school policies and frameworks. The challenge for us is to provide opportunity for authentic and meaningful Student Voice in our schools. We need to avoid tokenistic, directive and restrictive efforts as we would become gatekeepers (Lundy, 2007). Rather, we need to create the conditions to empower our students to express their views and value their opinions, taking them seriously as well as helping to develop their skills to increase their capacity for two-way dialogue. Lundy’s (2007) model, of “Space, Voice, Audience and Influence”, provides a framework for schools on Student Voice.





'Agents of Change', above left: BCS students watch as fellow student Alain Newstead addresses the Oireachtas. Right, Alain makes a submission to the Oireachtas Committee, Leinster House.

Bishopstown Community School has a facility for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The school strives for each member to be respected and valued for their unique qualities and abilities, to develop the whole school community so that we may be better able to realise our full potential as individuals and active members of society. Irish Sign Language (ISL) is an indigenous language of the Deaf Community and the first or preferred language of the majority of students in our deaf facility. All students in Bishopstown Community School are given the opportunity to learn ISL.

Recently, students in the deaf facility organised a challenge for primary school pupils to learn the ISL version of the national anthem. The overall aim was to increase the number of people across the country who knew of the ISL version in order that every citizen in Ireland would be able to join together in the national anthem. Concurrent to this was a challenge to the wider community to sign "Happy St Patrick's Day". The greater purpose of this project

was to raise awareness of ISL and create space and audience for our Student Voice.

The response to both challenges was exceptional, with seventy-seven submissions of videos from primary schools across Ireland and the project reported on by RTE. The "Happy St Patrick's Day" challenge made its way around the world on social media platforms with video messages from countries such as UK, Vietnam, Netherlands and the US. By raising awareness of ISL, students are having both their voice and language recognised. We witnessed their growth on their own personal journey and also in their Deaf identity. Their voice had audience and influence in their school, across Ireland in primary schools and in areas around the world.

This project stemmed from previous campaigns, by students in the school, raising awareness of ISL, demonstrating that by creating the conditions to value Student Voice, students' capacity and weight also increase. In 2017, students campaigned with the Deaf Community to have

ISL recognised as an official language in Ireland. Enshrined in law, the ISL Act 2017, provides for the recognition of Irish Sign Language. While this constitutional recognition was a huge achievement for all in the Deaf Community who campaigned for decades for full equality of participation as citizens of Ireland, there is still much to be achieved. Leah Katz Hernandez, former receptionist of the White House, visited the Deaf Facility as a guest speaker in 2017. In the US Leah, as a deaf person, is entitled to have a paid American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter with her in her employment. This means Leah is able to have equal access to employment and participation in the world of work. I was left thinking how can these opportunities be also available for our students? Her speech brought to the fore the inequality that exists in our country as ISL was not even recognised as an official language at that time. It left me thinking how can we empower meaningful Student Voice in our school and how can we improve students' outcomes and opportunities?



“My disability doesn’t stop, and shouldn’t stop, me reaching my goal, and my potential.” *Alain Newstead*

Creating space for the students to express their view and facilitating their voice I heard their desire to have the same rights and opportunities. Discussing the issues and challenges with a Teacher for the Deaf in our school, Denise Dowling, who also is deaf, I became aware that there was a bill to recognise ISL coming to the Seanad. We actively listened to students and believed we had a responsibility to respond and give their voice audience. Together with the students we organised a whole school awareness campaign and each student was given the opportunity to write to members of the Seanad. The response was immense. A representative group of students attended the Seanad for the debate on the bill, during which one of the students’ letters was read. Alain Newstead called on the government to “end the silent war” and recognise his language, ISL believing:

“My disability doesn’t stop, and shouldn’t stop, me reaching my goal, and my potential.”

The students of Bishopstown Community School were highly commended for their campaign, their active citizenship and for standing together with the Deaf Community. Senator Martin Conway acknowledged, “I received their correspondence. It is great when young people go to the trouble of writing to Oireachtas Members to try to influence legislation.”

The benefits of increasing the volume on Student Voice further empowered meaningful Student Voice when the Lord Mayor came to visit the school in October 2017. As there was no official ISL interpretation of the national anthem some of our Deaf students were excluded from participating with their student body in the anthem. Responding to Student Voice a submission from the school was made to the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on the treatment and use of the national anthem. Alain Newstead, Leaving Certificate Deaf Student and John Cottrell, Student Council

Vice-Chair together with Ms. Dowling spoke in the Seanad explaining the exclusion of deaf citizens of Ireland. The response of the Seanad Committee to our submission was to task us with the job of “coming up with the sign language version, for the nation.” (*Senator Mark Daly, Seanad Eireann, Tuesday 5th December 2017*).

Bishopstown Community School led a collaborative process to develop the ISL version of the national anthem. The goal was to ensure that a standardised version that is meaningful and true to the rich language of ISL was created. The steering group wanted the process to be inclusive and democratic, so they extended an invitation to the wider deaf community to invite submissions. These versions were then viewed by the Consultative Group who proposed one standardised interpretation to be submitted for consideration by the Seanad Committee.

Edwina Gottstein



BCS Students & Teachers with members of the Deaf Community with Senators, 2017



Carndonagh Community School

Profile: A mixed school, with 1,099 students

Principal: John McGuinness

Deputy Principals: Owen McConway, Elizabeth Kelly and Nabla McGeehin

Carndonagh Community School is a mixed school, founded in 1977. We are a large rural DEIS school on the Inishowen peninsula in Co. Donegal. In aspiring to achieve our Mission Statement, we recognise the responsibilities of the school community to respect the entitlement of all to a learning, teaching, and working environment where the dignity of each person is recognised.

Student Voice in Carndonagh Community School



*Above, Student Voice in Carndonagh Community School:
Katelyn Mc Daid, Caoimhe Murray & Stephen Farren*





Students in this school are aware of the importance of expressing their concerns and having accommodations made accordingly.

How is your voice heard in the classroom and how does this help you as a learner? Teachers and students share a good communicative relationship with regular discussions in the classroom. Teachers value our voices and consult with us on the topic of upcoming assessments, and they make sure we feel comfortable and safe in our learning environment, which in turn motivates students to do well. Mutual respect between student and teacher allows students to have a co-operative learning experience. Some students felt there were too many assessments set for the week before Easter. Teachers took the students' wellbeing and opinion into consideration and several assessments were rescheduled. This provided a massive relief for students as they could then focus on their top priorities. This is a great example of the Student Voice being heard in the classroom. Students in this school are aware of the importance of expressing their concerns and having accommodations made accordingly.

How are the different student voices heard in school? Regular surveys are sent out to assess the wellbeing of students (ganstór) and their opinions. If there is an upcoming decision e.g., going

back to school surveys were carried out through google forms, there's always an active response to any student needs or worries. The Student Council is regarded as a major stakeholder in the school, and they regularly meet with management to discuss the running of the school. The student body was surveyed in January 2021 at the beginning of remote learning to assess how they were adapting. From this survey it emerged that students felt that a live Google Meet for every class of the day was too much. As a result of the school gathering this information, each subject was asked to reduce their Meets by one class a week. This meant Leaving Cert. students would have seven less Meets per week and Junior Cycle students would have ten less meets per week. The school was able to conclude that a mixture of Google Meet and Google Classroom was the best approach to remote learning. Also from the survey, it was evident that students were feeling overwhelmed with homework. The school acted on this concern by issuing one assignment per week, allowing students multiple days to complete it.

The results of these surveys were looked at separately for each year group and the changes were made accordingly. LCA students

were also surveyed, and their needs would have been different to that of the Leaving Certificate students.

What has worked well in your experience of school since lockdown began? The move to online learning came into immediate effect as we are a technologically advanced school and had Google Classroom previously setup. There was constant communication between teachers and their students. The teachers provided a learning platform for students to continue their education and there was an increase in alternative learning methods e.g. Kahoot. The importance of the Student Voice shone through in the transition to online learning. As we were isolated, disconnected and engaging in remote learning, it was more important than ever that students were transparent about their learning experiences, their wellbeing and their workload. The school wanted to accommodate the students as best they could therefore, students filled out regular surveys. After three weeks of online learning and several surveys, there was less homework and Google Meets.



The Student Voice addresses the needs and concerns of all students in the school.

Is your voice heard when you're learning remotely? A survey was sent out every two weeks to assess students' online learning. A contact team was set up to liaise with home and offer support to those who had difficulties with online learning. Technical issues were dealt with through the distribution of iPads. The guidance department and School Completion provided support for those who were struggling through 1-1 Google Meets. There was also constant communication between year heads and their year groups. At the beginning of remote learning, a survey was sent to students which included questions surrounding how they wanted their remote learning to happen. At the end, the student's opinion was also asked for with regard to their experience of online learning.

What can we do to improve school life? We would encourage more students to take an active role in expressing their Student Voice. Some students may not express their opinion as they may fear it could be easily disregarded but in reality, student voices

are regarded very highly in our school.

In your opinion, why is this work so important? The Student Voice addresses the needs and concerns of all students in the school. For example, the first survey concluded that there was high levels of anxiety amongst all students and as a result, it was brought to the attention of the wellbeing committee in the school. To alleviate stress and anxiety the wellbeing committee devised targeted lesson plans which were then delivered by the SPHE teachers. This initiative was a great success and provided to be very helpful for many students. The importance of this work was definitely highlighted to us as students when we took part in the ACCS webinar. It was interesting to hear from other students about their experiences of remote learning. Directly after our ACCS webinar we met with the Student Voice coordinator and the Deputy Principal to discuss issues of importance to us in our own school. As a result, homework and the overall workload was reduced. Students

were also given a 5-minute break between classes.

Before the return to school in late August focus groups met to identify the concerns of students around returning to school. One of the issues raised was in regard to uniforms. Our school was proposing non uniform for two to three days a week. However, the students voiced their concerns with this proposal and asked if the students could wear their uniform every day except for the day they had PE. The student proposal was immediately accepted by the school.

A lack of storage area for sixth years and mask breaks were also brought to the attention of management and this too was dealt with. In CCS Student Voice provides students with a platform to express their thoughts and opinions, and it emphasises the school's mission statement which 'is to create the best school in which to teach, learn, work and play'.

Katelyn, Caoimhe & Stephen

Creative Schools Programme

As part of the Creative Schools Programme that we have been running in the school over the past two years, we surveyed both students and parents about what aspects of the arts they would like to see more of. As part of this initiative our TY and Fifth year students worked with local artist Ben Holmes to create a mural which they felt represented their local area and Donegal in general. The students first brainstormed ideas and then created drawings of their chosen areas or objects. Ben collaborated with the students to create the overall composition. The mural design includes the Carndonagh cross, Shove lighthouse, the Colgan Hall, Banba's Crown, a wolf representing the wild Ireland park and objects representing their interests.

Creative Schools Programme





John the Baptist Community School

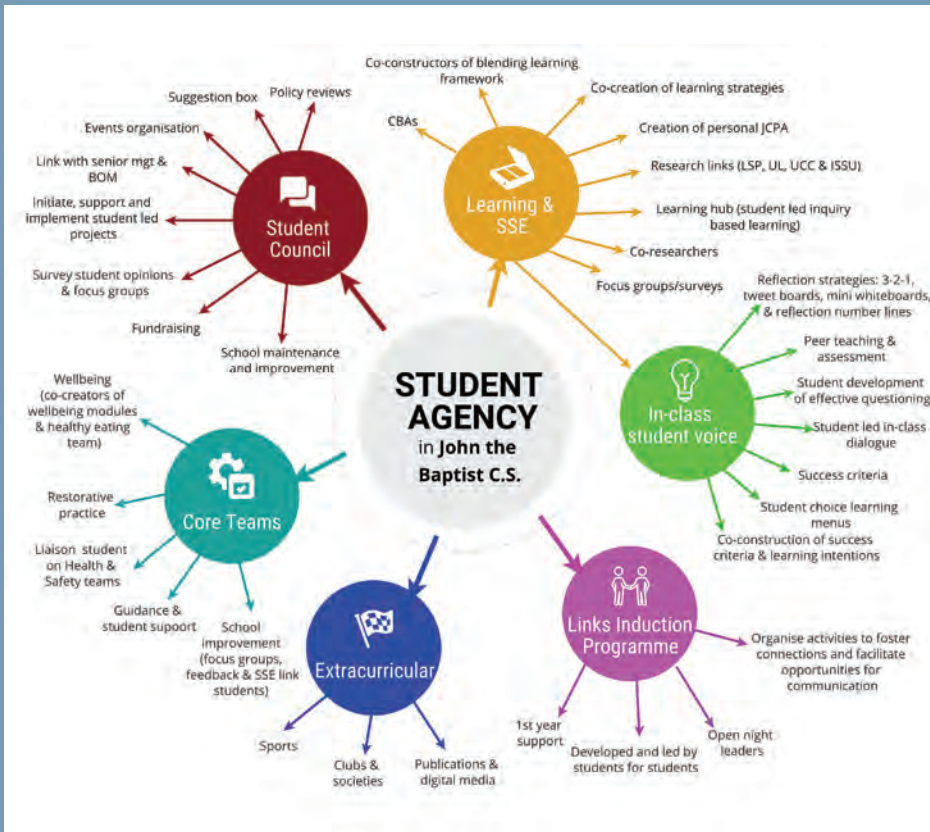
Profile: A mixed school, with 1,117 students

Principal: Noreen Rafferty

Deputy Principals: Ita Browne, Rachel Hayes, Elaine O'Donnell

John the Baptist Community School is an established school in Co. Limerick with a proud tradition in the provision of education to a wide catchment area. Established since 1997 John the Baptist Community School has established strong links with primary schools, local organisations, businesses, sports clubs and third level education colleges. The spirit of community developed in the school is typified by the real partnership between students, staff, parents, Board of Management and the local community.

Student Voice in our school community... at a glance



Student Voice is already there. It's not something we give. It's something we honour. And we do when we listen.

Monte Syrie, Teacher

Student Voice is central to the ethos of John the Baptist Community School. We are a progressive learning community, underpinned by communication, dialogue and the sharing of expertise. We are driven by an innate belief and understanding that we work better when we work together. Integral to this belief is the value and the promotion of a culture of Student Voice within the school. There are many layers to Student Voice within our school community, but at its core is the understanding that students have a genuine impact on how learning and teaching develops in our school.

There has been a seismic shift in education in recent years, with the introduction of SSE and school improvement planning, LAOS, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle reform. Such changes explicitly recognise and value meaningful student involvement in areas of education. While these initiatives provided the catalyst for elevating Student Voice in our school, we view it as so much more.

Over the past number of years, a central focus has been the progressive development and elevation of the agentive role that students have in shaping their own learning experience. In John the Baptist C.S., Student Voice is fundamentally learner voice.

Reflecting on our progress

To ascertain the nature of Student Voice within our school,

we mapped its presence in its many varied forms, illustrating a distinctive picture of student participation, collaboration and learner agency that is unique to our school community.

This infographic illustrates the valuable and respected contribution of our students as they lead highly effective, positive changes to life and learning in our community. As can be seen from the mind map, our active Student Council is merely one representational aspect of Student Voice; one small piece of a much wider jigsaw that creates the full rich picture.

Moving beyond the representational

We have consistently engaged with students, through our SSE process, not merely as sources of information and data gathering, but as explicit co-researchers and informed agents of change who can directly affect our vision for future learning. Since 2012, our data collection and focus groups are designed to be open-ended, dialogic and inclusive, actively seeking the voices of a diverse student sample including those involved in SE, and other such illusive voices in waiting that are often unheard. Thus, these focus groups have been illuminative as a means of delving into and understanding the lived reality of students, and not our perception of it.

As co-researchers (a status embedded and highlighted throughout to participants), students have contributed to all stages of the development process. From implementation, to reflection, to feedback, students not only gain a deep sense of their role in school improvement, but also of the opportunity for them to lead the development of effective active learning strategies. Moreover, on our open nights, it is our students themselves who lead and present on Learning and Teaching strategies and SSE active learning methodologies, passing the torch to perspective students.

Students have also stepped into the role of co-creators of curricular and extracurricular elements, their feedback helping to establish, guide and enhance wellbeing modules embedded in our school and their feedback has directly informed how we can develop this area further. This started with the very first group of students to complete the Junior Cycle – their feedback started our first redesign of our wellbeing provision. Students also co-constructed our TY Links programme. This is a First Year induction programme developed and run over First Year, by students for students and gives a unique opportunity to develop their leadership skills.



Activating Student Voice in the classroom

This co-development and embedding of such learning strategies has also been based on activating Student Voice inside our classrooms. Indeed, such approaches have been designed to provide concrete opportunities for all students to articulate their own voice in class, individually, through peer and group work and with the teacher. Strategies such as the Tweet Board, reflection number line and 3,2,1 are underpinned by the importance of actively seeking student engagement and actively listening to Student Voice. This helps to foster a space where teachers are receptive to feedback and students know that they have influence on their own learning.

Responding to the unprecedented shift in educational provision, our active learning methodologies have been re-defined to be effective and efficient in a blended/remote learning environment. This refining process was based on direct feedback from the students themselves, through the use of large-scale surveys for all students, more tailored questionnaires for specific student cohorts, and a series of progressively refined focus groups, that allowed the specific experiences of students, both negative and positive, to be heard. This dialogue, as well as informal feedback in class with our students, led to the tweaking, improvement and re-construction of our strategies to make them effective in a digital space. Furthermore, the effective use of the One Note collaborative space for peer learning, as well as the

use of the chat function and mini-whiteboards (with gallery view) as a means to articulate each student's voice, emerged from the students constructive evaluations.

Our Vision for Student Voice

Looking at Student Voice as a continuum of enhancement, we constantly endeavour to move from the point of Student Voice as compliance, to engagement, to empowerment.

As a dynamic learning community, we are always trying to probe deeper and move forward in a strategic and purposeful direction, to tune in to and tap in to Student Voice in a meaningful, cohesive manner. What has been fascinating as we have embarked on this journey is an emerging disconnect between the term Student Voice and student's perception of what it is, what it can be and what it should be.

The term 'Student Voice' sometimes carries with it a limited interpretation; a narrow lens through which initiatives or opportunities may be viewed. Based on this perspective, students may have developed schemas of understanding of the nature of Student Voice, of what it means to be 'heard' and what constitutes opportunities for it to be articulated. It is vital to address the meaning of the term 'Student Voice', to explicitly open up a dialogue around it and unhinge and re-frame the misconceptions that may have developed. In doing so, it facilitates the move from any form of superficiality and tokenism to genuine stakeholder status and authentic agency. By listening to understand, and not merely to

respond, it is establishing a solid foundation on which we can build all future initiatives.

While we have made progress, there is undoubtedly capacity to further improve, by planning for and creating concrete opportunities for students to influence issues that matter to them (Pittman, Irby and Ferber). Our aim is to develop a Leadership Team of both students and teachers in partnership, to develop collaboration and "leadership at many levels" (Fullan, 2002).

We will explicitly plan for Student Voice at a whole school level using the four dimensions of Lundy's model: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. We aim to listen to learn, rethinking roles and relationships in the hope of tapping into the transformative potential of activating and elevating Student Voice. Promoting a cohesive holistic approach, underpinned by dialogic conversations between learners and teachers, ensures that we will grow as an organic, proactive 'listening' school.

*At John the Baptist
Community School
Student Voice is
already here;
it is our role to
honour it.*

*Ita Browne, Marie Sheehan,
Caroline Liston, Elaine O'Donnell*



Kinsale Community School

Profile: A mixed school, with 1,168 students

Principal: Fergal McCarthy

Deputy Principals: Kathleen O'Brien, Claire Sheehan, Ger Hogan

Kinsale Community School is based in the town of Kinsale, Co. Cork. The Community School officially began on August 1st 1996, following the amalgamation of two schools, 'Our Lady of the Rosary Secondary School' and 'Kinsale Vocational School' with 500 students. The school motto, "Omnes Communiter Discendo" adopted by the first Board of Management, states that we are "All Together in Learning". The school has become known for the successes in the Young Scientist, the Google Science Fair and the European Young Scientist. However, the school is also a strong centre for the students interested in other extracurricular activities.



A Typical Irish Morning by Saoirse Hayes, Kinsale Community School



A selection of photography by Kinsale students from left 'Warm Bridges' by Emma O'Keefe, 'Path to the Past' by Joshua Holford and 'Arctic Plunge' by Grace Hynes.



My name is Sarah Deasy, and I am a 16 year old Transition Year student in Kinsale Community School.

Being an active member of the Student Council has shown me that the Student Voice is way more powerful than I ever anticipated. I feel that we are all given the chance to speak, and not only feel that we are being heard, but that we are being listened to. Our teachers and peers are interested in what we have to say, and I believe this is what gives us the confidence to speak out. As a student, I feel I have benefited from knowing in confidence that my teachers will always give me the opportunity to voice my thoughts or ask for help in times when I am unsure in myself. It brings us together as a school and gives us a sense of belonging and community. I believe the reason some students find it so difficult to speak out is simply because they are unaware of how much their voice matters. They have the potential to change so much, as they might have a

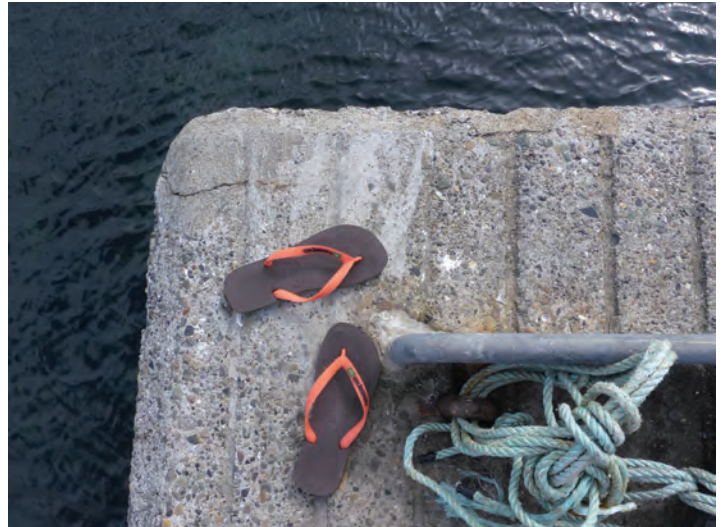
different perspective to others which is so valuable. This is why I think that a diverse Student Council is so important.

I believe that working to make school life better for everyone is so important as it gives people a greater chance of having a positive school experience. For me, school has always impacted my life in positive ways. I feel that by working together, and simply letting people express themselves openly makes school life so much easier for everyone. I would urge every student to let their voice be heard, as the opportunities are there and all they need to do is grasp them.

My name's Kate Redmond and I'm a 5th year in Kinsale Community School.

The Student Voice plays a vital role in our school, both inside and outside of the classroom. On the most basic level the Student Voice in our school is heard in the classroom by all students through discussing the topics we

are learning. This voice provides the teacher with an insight into how students are progressing and also provides for an active and engaging classroom. The Student Voice is heard outside of the classroom through the Student Council. Council members are elected by their classmates to represent them who in turn voice their opinions, issues and concerns to teachers and school management. I believe this is really important as the majority of students feel comfortable giving feedback to their year reps than directly to the staff, and in doing this their voice is equally heard. To summarise, I believe the work of promoting the Student Voice in schools is extremely important as it allows for feedback to be given to staff to support the student's educational needs. Students can always consult with the Student Council who are happy to communicate with staff and promote the Student Voice around the school community.



My name is Hannah Hayes, and I am a 6th year student in Kinsale Community School.

Personally, in my classrooms I feel my voice is always heard. In our school we have a cooperative, communicative relationship with our teachers which allows us to voice any concerns or worries we have. Luckily, the teachers in our school have participated in an array of Student Voice workshops such as Féilte. These workshops have taught our teachers the importance of listening to us students.

There are hundreds of students in our school so it is important that each and every one of their voices is heard. To do this we have implemented a Student Council and a Student Prefect team. The Student Council has representatives from each year group. This means that students can communicate comfortably and honestly to peers the same age as them. These representatives then bring any complaints, wishes or wants to the council. Our prefect team is made up of 5th and 6th years. This team articulates the needs and wants of the students

to school management, and it is comprised of older students. School is a place where we go to learn, but the only way we can learn efficiently and successfully is if everyone is working in collaboration. This is why Student Voice is so important to me. If students who are shy and unconfident feel they are starting to become overwhelmed with schoolwork, they should be able to have their voice heard, even if it's not them saying it. I think it is great that the school receive a first-hand account from students themselves about how they feel and how they want the school to run. At the end of the day when students and teachers are working in conjunction then optimum results and happiness can be achieved.

My name is Chinemerem Nnamani (Chichi) I'm 16 years old and I am a student in Kinsale Community School.

My voice is being heard when teachers ask for my feedback or asking about my life beyond the classroom. Knowing that my voice is being heard can help me to see that I'm not alone.

There are different ways in which a Student Voice can be heard to engage students and ensure that schools reflect the interests and needs of the students they serve. They could be heard through student surveys, the Student Council and through students and teachers feedback as well.

Having your voice is difficult during lockdown but I do know that the teachers are always willing to help if needed and that's all that matters. Bad WiFi or no WiFi at home at all didn't help. Lagging WiFi means missing out on chunks of conversation when the internet freezes. Engagement was helped by more breakout rooms and projects involving other students. Teaming students in groups to complete assignments, and giving them the tools to do so, is a great way to encourage involvement. One of the challenges students most often describe attending their learning online is the feeling of "isolation". Connection of the online classroom is vital as these feelings can have a negative effect on student learning.



*It makes me feel like I have a voice
and that my opinions are heard.*

Hello, my name is Shannon Murphy. I am a 1st year in Kinsale Community School.

I feel like my voice is heard in the classroom when I have a suggestion the teacher will take it into consideration and that helps my learning because it makes me feel like I have a voice and that my opinions are heard.

There is a good few ways that a student's voice is heard in the school. For example, if a student wanted to make the school better, they could try and join the Student Council and that way they would have a group of people to help them.

Hi, my name is Ben Loughnane. I'm a Transition Year student in Kinsale Community School.

KCS is a vibrant school of over 1,110 pupils with a major emphasis on the experience of each individual student, as

emphasised by the school motto, "All together in learning". In our school, there is huge importance placed on creating a safe and secure, yet energetic environment that then facilitates student interaction. Thus, I as a student in any class always feel comfortable expressing myself because of the mindset that all efforts from students in the classroom should be embraced and given their due respect. When multiple students are comfortable giving their views, there is a much more engaging atmosphere in the classroom. This is because everyone is learning from each other, the teacher included. This communal ambience means students then look forward to coming back to class the next day.

On a personal note, I can directly recount many experiences as outlined above. For example, in a series of History and English

classes that centred on essay writing, there was a clear methodology followed that was so beneficial for me. After writing an initial draft, I would have a discussion with the teacher about certain aspects of the essay I could improve. Then as a class, we would evaluate the initial draft we had all written and identify key principles that needed to be prevalent in future drafts. The class repeated this process then until we had reached a stage where the essays were of a high standard. This process sounds effective in its ideals and is even more effective when enforced with enthusiasm by students and teachers alike. In my opinion, it really showcases the importance of a Student Voice in the classroom.

Photo by Evan Casey, St Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon



Millstreet Community School

Size and Profile: A mixed school with 358 pupils

Principal: Pól Ó Síodhcháin

Deputy Principal: Frances Moynihan

Millstreet Community School was established in 1973, opened in 1974 and was fully refurbished in 1999. Our Mission is to promote all aspects of the growth and development of each student in a warm and caring environment, seeking the best outcome for each student.

Say Nothing to No One...



A Teacher's Reflection on Developing Student Voice

I had a wonderful conversation recently with Niamh Kavanagh, Ireland's Eurovision winner when the contest was held here in Millstreet, in 1993. She stated her steadfast belief that voice is the most underutilised and undeveloped instrument of them all. "Everyone has a voice; we just need to figure out how to develop it". I have been trying to develop Student Voice in a variety of contexts over the last twenty years or so and I am still searching for that elusive 'douze points'!

Having researched Student Voice as part of postgraduate work up to and including my 2013 MEd thesis, I tried many different approaches over the years. I always wondered if the teacher-led element in this work could be moved to one side and the needs of the student become the driving force. How can we avoid the development of Student Voice being labelled by some as yet another initiative in an initiative-fatigued profession? As an external appointee to the position of Principal in Millstreet Community School in 2018, how was I going to develop Student Voice in a school without it being labelled as something only the Principal is involved in?





We talk. We listen. We hear. We act.

After much deliberation and reflection, I decided on the most radical approach of all: say absolutely nothing to anyone (about Student Voice!). Of course, I constantly speak with our students and I find that to be one of the most energising and rewarding aspects of this great job. Crucially though, I listen. My Deputy Principal, Frances Moynihan, listens. Our colleagues listen. And we act upon what we hear.

Not every request is honoured. As Principal, I take no pleasure in saying no to our students (or staff!) but sometimes it must be said. The process through which we arrive at decisions is often more important than the decisions themselves as it is that process that defines who we are as a school and how we do

things here. It defines our school culture. Space, Voice, Influence and Audience, Lundy's Model of Participation, is the framework to ensure that Student Voice can be meaningfully developed. It ensures that what matters to our students is at the centre of their learner experience. It does not require a student committee nor is it a threat to teachers and their methods. We talk. We listen. We hear. We act.

Whether student requests result in action or not is not the focus of developing Student Voice; the process, and the participation of students in it, is vital. The result will be many student-initiated shared decisions with teachers or other adults in the school. I am not positioning all that we do in MCS at this, the eighth rung of Roger Hart's (1992) Ladder

of Participation but I would like to think that our process-based approach positions us more towards the participatory than non-participatory rungs on that ladder. You will read elsewhere in this journal individual pieces by some of our students. You can decide for yourself if we score 'douze points'!

Saying nothing to no one, the Millstreet Omerta, has ensured that Student Voice has not become yet another initiative in our school. Student Voice is a valued element of our school. As Niamh Kavanagh stated, everyone has a voice. It is how you develop it that counts. Our secret is out, our omerta is no more... I hope we have made you an offer you cannot refuse!

by Pól Ó Síodhcháin, Principal



Spotlight: Sanitary Products in the Girls' Toilets - what the students say....

Since the school has provided sanitary products in the girls' toilets it gives the girls a sense of reassurance knowing that they are being provided and supported for in many different ways including these products. There has been an increase in confidence within the girls now that they know they can trust and feel secure in their own school environment.

The body can be unpredictable at times, and it is very comforting knowing that these products have been supplied especially for our use. Many of us girls forget or unfortunately are unable to purchase these products and knowing that our school and staff want to take care of us as best they can, is a truly heart-warming and supportive system that allows us to be comfortable and feel protected.

We cannot thank our school management enough for providing what seems to only be something very small; it makes a huge difference to us!!



My Name is Katie Morley, and I am currently a TY Student in Millstreet Community School.

I believe for First Year students, 'example' is everything. They see older classes voicing their opinions or recommendations to teachers or management and therefore follow suit. From the time they step through our doors, Student Voice is very evident. As well as this, there are many

different opportunities they can avail of. These include a class representative from their tutorial group to represent them on the Student Council. This gives them a chance to voice any concerns they personally might have or that the class would have approached them with. The tutorial class is another space that allows students to create connections in a relaxed environment with their classmates and tutor.

This, in turn, gives them more confidence to and encouragement to make their voices heard. As well as these platforms, for the students who are not comfortable speaking in front of people, our Guidance Counsellor, Chaplain and tutors as well as any member of staff are available whenever needed.

The support and encouragement we obtain from both teachers and management at all times is the foundation for each student's success during and indeed after their time at Millstreet Community School. I believe that the encouragement we get from our teachers and school management is the foundation of Student Voice in our school. No matter what, you are always assured of a fair hearing, regardless of what you request. As a result of the encouragement we receive, the confidence of each student dramatically increases as their time in MCS progresses. Without fail, you will always encounter a number of students who have gained their voice throughout their years here thanks to the support obtained.

Our students raise their Voice



My name is Esfir Connolly. I was born in Kazakhstan and raised here in Ireland.

Our school has its own Student Council where students from every year group bring any issues or new ideas that their classmates have raised and bring them together to present to our principal. This has worked

extremely well over the years. If there are any issues, they are brought up in the tutorial classes which promotes discussion and communication with the teachers and your fellow classmates. If an issue has been raised the Student Council members from that class will provide that information to the Student Council meetings where it will be dealt with and brought to the principal if needed. Many changes have occurred. Only recently, outdoor bins around the school grounds, canteen/picnic tables and sanitary products have been introduced in the school after students suggested it. Everyone benefits from these positive changes whether they raised the issue or not and issues have been resolved perfectly to ensure a happy and fair school

environment. This has really built a strong trust between students and the staff.

This year I have been involved in our GCE (Global Citizens Education) class which deals with any global issues and how we can raise awareness and teach people about it. We have done this by teaching the younger students from 1st to 3rd year in school and online. The classes work around how educational and effective the classes will be. If there are any issues or interests that the TY GCE students think are relevant and important to teach, the class will organise the classes and the content taught. These new experiences teach you a lot about educating others and they help with public speaking.



My name is Tomás Cronin, and I am a Transition Year student in Millstreet Community School.

This Transition Year has been a very strange one. All of our usual trips and activities were cancelled for obvious reasons. Naturally, this limited our TY experiences. Without these excursions and activities outside the school one cannot deny that a whole social aspect of the year did not develop. However, this could not be changed, and I quickly realised that I had no reason to dwell on it. I would happily give up a month of

my summer holidays if it meant I could do all the TY trips instead. I think what stands out to me most as a student of Millstreet CS is how easy it is for students to approach teachers, especially as a TY student trying to make the best use of all activities that can be participated in during these times. With the willingness of teachers to help in every way possible and meeting them outside of the formal classroom settings, it doesn't feel like your stereotypical student-teacher relationship. Members of staff are very approachable. They are all looking out for us, and each and every student knows this. I believe this is due to the role of Student Voice in our school and our staff. Everyone's opinion is valued regardless of year, gender, race or role in the school community.

A positive student-teacher relationship is crucial. A positive relationship gives the student the confidence to make their

voice heard. The exact same as any person you know, a good relationship makes all the difference for the exact same reasons. Confidence to speak and no "barriers" to hold back for. If we receive a new student who does not have English as their first language the chances are there are others of a similar culture also here in the school community. By having such a diverse school all problems that could be faced by a new student such as a language or religious "barrier" will be nullified. I very much believe good student relationships are the foundation that everything is built upon. A positive student-teacher relationship also motivates the student to work harder as they are now no longer just working for themselves but also to make their teacher proud. As said previously, a good relationship is the foundation for these open lines of communication, social and academic development and enabling students to flourish.

My name is Ryan Carroll and I am a Transition Year student attending Millstreet CS.

A new timetable was introduced for our second period of online learning which I find to be perfect for school at home. It is not overwhelming but still plenty of learning is done throughout the day. Student Voices are still heard during this time as students are free to ask questions either during online classes through a direct message or email to their teachers. It is important for Student Voices to be heard in the classroom because when the students can communicate with their teachers online about their experiences and situations, their

ability to adapt to such a change in the school workplace can be greatly improved.

I have been involved in Green Schools and Formula 1 In Schools this year. In Green Schools we have been working to make our school more environmentally friendly one step at a time. We have been identifying issues when it comes to being green while working to make solutions. We have also been working towards educating students about Green Schools which will improve our school's effect on the environment and also help future Transition Year students to take over when we move on into later years.

Students educating other students is an effective practice because the students who are learning are able to receive this information from another student's perspective which will help them to decide whether they want to participate in this subject in the future.

Personally, I learn better when everyone is comfortable with each other, and I'm sure more students feel the same way. When everyone is comfortable with each other, people aren't afraid to make mistakes which is an excellent thing because making mistakes is how one learns.



My name is Molly Morley, and I am a Transition Year student in Millstreet Community School.

In Millstreet the Student Council has a class representative from each tutorial group. This is very helpful for communicating general recommendations within the school. However, every student in our school has a voice. As a student who has never been a class representative on the Student Council, I have always had my voice heard and can

openly discuss any concerns or opinions I have.

Every student has an open invite to speak with any teacher they feel comfortable speaking to, and they can be assured that their problem will be addressed. The most common time people speak with a teacher is after class but many also find them in the staffroom or ask to speak to them when they meet them in the corridor.

The thing that I value the most is that there is no time limit for this, and it doesn't have to be in an office which can be intimidating. Alternatively, all students are welcome to email a teacher, the principal or deputy principal if they do not feel comfortable speaking to them in school or if they do not want anyone to know, which is comforting for people.

In our school there is a great sense of a "family" as students work with teachers who in turn

support them to achieve the best results they possibly can. This voice within the classroom allows people to speak up if they are struggling. I think every student is catered for when it comes to their voices being heard. Every student can avail of the opportunity to speak to someone themselves. However, those who weren't willing or capable to speak up for themselves were involved in an anonymous class vote at the beginning of the school year to elect a class representative for the Student Council that they'd feel comfortable with speaking for them at a designated meeting or otherwise.

The Student Voice allows students to speak up for themselves and others which is a skill for life and is vitally important especially in today's world.



These Millstreet Community School students participated in the WorldWide Global Schools (WWGS) project.



Newpark Comprehensive School

Profile: A mixed school, with 856 students

Principal: Eoin Norton

Deputy Principals: Lynn Anderson & Andrew Adams

Newpark Comprehensive School is a mixed state comprehensive school in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. It was established in 1972 under the patronage of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. The school traces its origins to the Avoca and Kingstown School which formed in 1968 after an amalgamation of two long established schools: Avoca School founded in 1891 in Blackrock and Kingstown Grammar School founded in 1894 in Dún Laoghaire.

Newpark is a caring friendly school that provides an atmosphere for constructive and creative learning for students of all backgrounds, ethnicities and abilities. It is a supportive and compassionate community in which students are provided with every opportunity to achieve their chosen goals.

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A Snapshot of Student Voice at Newpark Comprehensive



Newpark Comprehensive sixth year students, Bruno Ciulli & Maya Garcia

We continue to work together to bring students experiences outside the curriculum, something to brighten up these difficult times.

Clubs have always been around in Newpark Comprehensive School, some coming and going, others holding steady over the years, but it was not until early March last year that the leaders of each club came together for the first time to work together.

The Cultural Council was started by both pupils and teachers as there was a growing need to formalise and unify the clubs and societies in the school. The idea was initiated by a 6th year student who was on the Student Council and felt that there was a real gap in the Student Voice in the school. She wanted to formalise and centralise all the student-led cultural activities in the school. The Student Council had a limited number of representatives and tended to attract the same type of people. Having a group of Cultural Club activity leaders coming together gave a greater representation of the school body. It has definitely brought different voices to the forefront and represents different areas of students' lives in a unique way. It was necessary because clubs would often go by the wayside and we needed structures put in place for the clubs and societies to flourish. It has helped raise the profile of other areas of school and student life. It also allowed for a greater level of interaction, coordination and collaboration and has provided support structures. We feel we

can organise creative school wide events and take ownership of them.

This became what we now call the Cultural Council, a centralising group dedicated to coordinating club activities, organizing school-wide creative projects and bringing student voices and ideas to the extra-curricular side of Newpark.

It has been a rocky start, the pandemic tripping us up just after having started but slowly, we have learned to work online and continue to work together to bring students experiences outside of the curriculum, something to brighten up these difficult times.

The month of March was completely online for all of the school population except for sixth year students and their teachers, leaving the school echoey and empty. Unable to host any extra-curricular activities or even events at lunchtime, we decided to start something to make up for it. A creative challenge, open to all students and staff revolving around the theme of "Hope". The submissions could take any form at all and then be submitted online.

We were pleased to receive a boatload of all kinds of submissions from a number of different years; pencil sketches, paintings, photography, dance, craft, poetry, videos, drag

performance and more. With the first signs of the arrival of spring and better weather, the school community were enthusiastic to express "Hope" and share what brought them hope in their lives in a creative manner.

Students, staff and parents said that this challenge was a great outlet for them in these challenging times and gave them an opportunity to do something new and different other than schoolwork and general despair about the pandemic. It was wonderful to see the school community respond to the creative challenge in their own unique and individual ways.

While the events of the last year ensure none of our original plans went ahead, we still have big hopes for the rest of the year. We are currently planning workshops and a creative challenge around the theme of unique Irish-language words which demonstrate our cultural connection with our coasts and the sea. We are even laying the groundwork for a mural to be painted on-campus!

Maya & Bruno





Old Bawn Community School

Profile: A mixed school, with 1,015 students

Principal: Ursula McCabe

Deputy Principals: Jennifer Gray, Kevin Shortall, Sarah Gibbons

Old Bawn Community School was founded in 1978 and is situated in Tallaght, Dublin 24. Old Bawn Community School since its foundation has found itself partnering with the community in terms of youth development, family support, health and social services. The term 'community' is essential to its founding. Old Bawn Community School is a place where students learn 21st century skills, where students are tolerant of each other, where we embrace diversity and care about the wellbeing of staff and students. Our aim is to create a happy, stimulating, mutually respectful community environment in which all of our students are able to develop the full range of their talents and abilities.

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Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.

(Ruth Bader Ginsburg, US Supreme Court Judge)



This should be our mantra when thinking about Student Voice in our own schools and nationally. It's not only important for school leaders to know that real and enduring change can happen. It's equally important for students to know that real and enduring change can happen and that they can be at the heart of it.

Real Change:

Partnership with students in policy development.

While the 1998 Education Act doesn't mention students as stakeholders in schools, the 2016 Looking at Our School Quality Framework does. This is a real change. But it is also something we must aspire to. Students are mentioned alongside other stakeholders when looking at our schools, but do the students have the same influence and power? Perhaps the more prudent question for us should be - how much power and influence should students have and in what areas?

Artwork by: Zuzanna Cieslewicz, 3rd year

Three years ago, in Old Bawn Community School we asked that question - or more accurately, we asked the students. While developing our new Learning Code (formerly Code of Behaviour) we convened randomly selected focus groups of students. Students were not asked to check a draft, or an almost finished document compiled largely by someone else. They were involved from the beginning. Of course, there were ground rules and structures, but nothing was off the table. Our Student Voice Coordinator and a Deputy Principal were a constant presence and an essential scaffold for the work. The new Learning Code would have a bearing on students' everyday school experiences, so who better to ask other than the people it was being written for?

One memorable comment from a student was: "The definition of stupidity is to repeat the same things and expect a different outcome". When asked to elaborate he said, "the same people are at detention every week, it's not working!"

His comments, word for word, went into the final document and had and continue to have a perpetual influence.

Without going into the intricacies of the process, it is enough to say that the school used, what Pasi Sahlberg calls 'small, localised data' that our school gathers through everyday informal conversations with our students right up to what we learn from them through surveys, focus groups and class conversations. The design and direction of

the Learning Code was heavily influenced and coloured by students' input and agency and they knew it.

Enduring Change *The importance of valuing students – lessons from Fergal Quinn.*

Fergal Quinn, the famous supermarket magnate, Irish entrepreneur and a great supporter of the Leaving Cert Applied Programme wrote a book called *Crowning the Customer*. His central message in the book was that if the customer was listened to and happy with their experience, all other aspects of the business would thrive. In many ways, in Old Bawn, we have crowned the student. This elevation has not been to the detriment of anyone or anything else. Similar to Quinn, who was a great supporter of his staff, our school really values the students. Great schools crown their teachers and parents too and everyone in their community.

In Old Bawn, students have had a direct bearing on how we monitor, sustain and promote wellbeing. Students' feedback about team teaching and resource support has been recorded and shared with staff. It was the students' voices that ultimately led to students participating in parent teacher meetings. Year heads regularly gather focus groups during school time with an open and uninhibited agenda. What happens often, in a visible and organised way, becomes habit and irreversible. The power and importance of Student Voice has become embedded in the culture of our school.

One Step at a Time

We are what we repeatedly do.

There is still much to be done. In recent years we've organised our focus groups based on Professor Laura Lundy's model for student participation. We deliberately make space to hear the Student Voice. It's formal and regular and happens in many contexts and at all levels. The audience always consists of a coordinator facilitator and a member of the senior leadership team. Possibilities for influence and change arising from what the students are saying is formally discussed and explored.

When changes are made based on the ideas, thoughts and/or concerns of our students, this is formally reported. Every time this happens, one step at a time, the culture of the school changes. In Old Bawn, all the stakeholders know that when the students speak, we listen and act. Every student is involved at different times or through varying media. Similar to the continuum of support in a pastoral setting where interventions can be for all, for some and few, our Student Voice practice is designed along similar lines. One step at a time, using the same type of tried and trusted activities, the process of consulting students can become many steps in a short space of time. What was forced and deliberate becomes natural, expected, habitual and necessary. This is real change, enduring change, one step at a time.

*Kevin Shortall & Laura McCarthy,
Old Bawn Community School,
March 2021*



Hello, my name is Andrea George and I'm 15 years old. I am a 3rd year student attending Old Bawn Community School.

I was born in India. There are five people in my family, I have an older brother and an older sister and I'm the youngest child. I would describe myself as a sporty, inquisitive and a talkative person. I love trying new things to challenge myself!

Firstly, in my school, I feel like my voice is heard in class as I

am regularly given opportunities to express my feelings freely. In subjects such as history, CSPE and SPHE for example, we are often asked what we would like to recap on, or what method of learning we want to use.

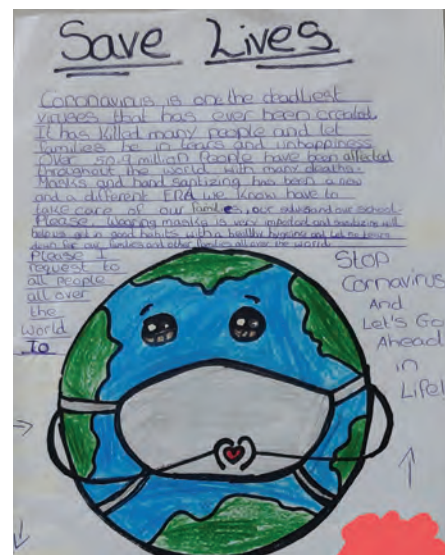
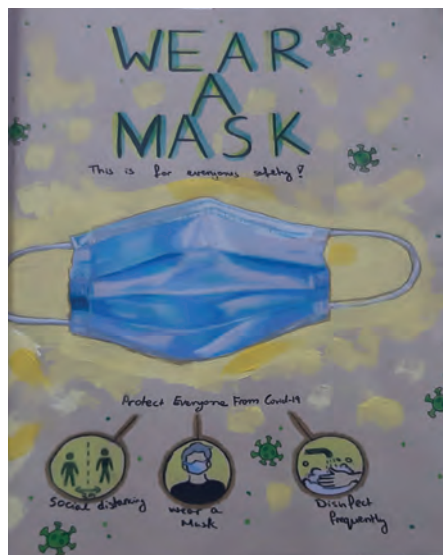
We generally go for an open discussion because that's where we can all use our voices. In this type of class, we feel like we are partners, or it feels like you are on the same level as the teacher, and we are all learning together. We get to tell the teacher things that we have discovered.

In my opinion, Student Voice is a really important part of life in Old Bawn. The work we do in Student Voice is really important as it helps develop future life skills, such as group work, independent work, stating your own opinions etc. As a member of the Student Voice, I felt really fortunate to contribute, as this opportunity helped me

feel as if I had more control over my own life and become more involved with others, as learning from my peers helped me develop new skills and teach them to myself!

What I love about Student Voice is that each individual's voice is heard, and everyone's opinion is taken into consideration. In my opinion, Student Voice helps promote motivation and it encourages you to express your own talents to others. I'm so appreciative of the fact I'm a member of the Student Voice Team as not only it was a great and fun experience, but I was able to represent myself on behalf of my friends and classmates! I think Student Voice should be encouraged throughout all schools as it helps schools have a student's perspective on a particular decision.

Some Artwork from our Students





Hi my name is Sarah Whelan. I am sixteen years old and am a TY student in Old Bawn Community School.

I have taken part in multiple Student Voice events over the past four years while I have been in the school and have loved every minute of it. I am naturally quite a loud and opinionated person, so it was the ideal thing for me to get into. I think it has really helped me adapt to secondary school and gain confidence.

I never really thought that anyone was interested in my opinions when it came to learning until I got involved in Student Voice. At the

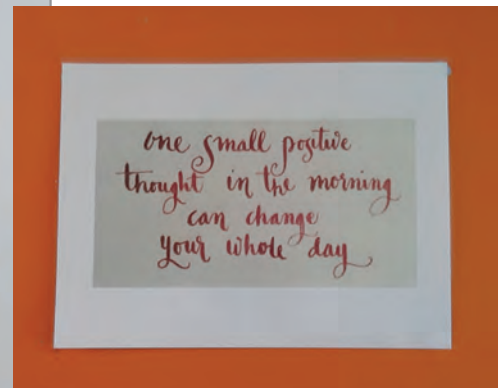
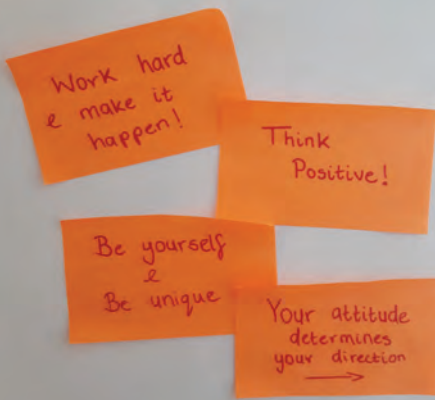
start of Transition Year, teachers asked students what they wanted to learn about in different subjects, and we were given options of the type of learning activities we could choose. We discussed the pros and cons of different types of learning models such as group work, project work, digital, discussion, debate, research or reading and so on. I feel like I have made more progress this year especially in languages because we chose the type of things, we wanted to do ourselves. I think it has really helped me to speak up when I think there's a better way to do things or when I have an idea to improve the school. Teachers are now more interested in what we have to say which I think is really important as people are more likely to listen if they are learning about something they are interested in. Teachers talk a lot to us outside of class on our own or in smaller groups. They ask how we think the course is going or if we would change anything and if we're interested and learning. They also ask if we'd like to change anything or do

something different. This "other time" talk and space makes you feel like your opinion counts and makes you want to give your opinion more. Our maths teacher often asks is the method of teaching working or would we like to try things a different way.

It's hard for some people who are less outspoken to have their voices heard. At the start of the year many older more confident and experienced students are assigned different smaller groups. We are told to try to listen to every voice and encourage everyone to speak, even the quietest person. We look out for these people on the corridors and in the school throughout the year. Sometimes we get them to write things down instead of speaking.

I think the work that the ACCS does is incredibly important not only for students but also for teachers. They give students a voice and help us feel heard. It also helps me feel like I can make a difference.

Positivity at all times!





Portmarnock Community School

Size and Profile: Mixed School with 929 pupils

Principal: Eithne Deeney

Deputy Principals: David Clarke, Orla Molamphy, Helen Dargan

Portmarnock Community School is situated in Portmarnock, County Dublin. Built in 1979, it was one of the first Community Schools built in Ireland. It is a co-educational school that caters for students' secondary education. It provides a fully comprehensive education which is designed to ensure equality of educational opportunity for all its students. Portmarnock Community School is committed to an educational policy that fosters the development of the whole person. It provides a structure that facilitates religious, social, physical and intellectual growth in an integrated manner.

Student Voice in Leadership

I began an Action Research Project in Portmarnock Community School, in 2017. My aim was to help students create better connections with themselves, their peers and with their teachers. I hoped that our work would result in pupils learning the importance that relationships have with regards to their learning. My aspiration was to adopt the students as co-researchers, remembering the words of Hopkins, 2016, "young people can only begin to take responsibility for each other's wellbeing and their own behaviour, when adults begin to share their responsibility with them".

The fundamental principle behind the Project was centred within the application of Restorative Practice. This practice is a values-based philosophy which nurtures and promotes empathy and fosters relationships between students and teachers. This practice informs 'how we think, engage, speak, listen and approach situations all day every day' and it offers students 'a door to their best selves' in a 'solution-focussed community', Michelle Stowe, 2016.

As Hopkins, 2016, states "when young people have more pro-social connections with fellow students and their teachers, they feel safer" and a "safer and happier person is more receptive to ideas".

The aim of the Project was to explore how Restorative Practice could influence the relationship between the students and the teachers, and from there, how could the students themselves have an impact on developing positive relationships with other students within their school.

Currently, our now called 'Leadership Groups', are part of the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Programme. We have 4th, 5th and 6th Year Groups all engaging in this Restorative Platform. Students, who complete their 4th year training programme, are awarded their Leadership Badge. The Badge comprises of three circles intertwined, representing unbroken and intertwined link between the heart, soul and mind.

So, as with all things in our Leadership Groups, it is the students themselves who are writing the main body of our Article.

Orla Molamphy, Deputy Principal

Student Voice in Leadership



Our Leadership Team Badge

We learned the true meaning of being a leader is how to be compassionate, vulnerable and most importantly how to listen.

Leadership is an initiative that has been ongoing in our school since 2017, where students over the course of their senior cycle journey are able to participate. Those who participate, are first given training days in their Transition Year to fulfil their role as a member of the Leadership Team in Portmarnock Community School.

But what exactly is the purpose of leadership? It's an opportunity for students to come together, away from the stress of the classroom, study and exams. An opportunity for students to share and listen, to talk about their passions, their interests.

We are trained in the skills of Restorative Practice through our training days in fourth year so we can facilitate group circles with younger year groups - in particular, with first year students. It's so vitally important for first years to have this opportunity as they can engage with each other, learning about the importance of people's individual personalities- what they're interested in - the sports they play, music related or anything else. It's little things

like this that make such a huge difference in the bigger picture as without this, there is very little opportunity for students to show off what makes them individual and unique from their cohort. There is such constant pressure on getting schoolwork and homework completed in class time, so that the true essence of school is taken away - the true key learning principles, the basic learning blocks - the key skills of communication and listening. Leadership restores these learning principles.

Even though the groundwork of leadership is to work with the younger year groups, I can say on behalf of all the members of my 6th year leadership group - that it has such a positive effect on us as individuals too. As part of being a member, we meet once every week for 40 minutes and especially now, out of all years I think we can see how important it has become. It takes our mind away from the stress we find ourselves under with the looming exams. It's a chance for us to have a laugh, have a joke - a refreshing change to our usual timetable. It's so important for

our mental wellbeing just to have that little break, even if only for 40 minutes - that is sometimes all that is needed to make the difference.

When we first heard of the Leadership Group, we thought about the leaders we wanted to be and what we imagined a Leader might be. We thought a Leader was someone who could take charge of a room, be efficient and provide results. While those things are important, we learnt the true meaning of being a leader is how to be compassionate, vulnerable and most importantly how to listen. Through our restorative practice circles we have learnt that to be a true leader is to engage, with each other, in an authentic and vulnerable space. This is a skill that will remain with us forever and has no doubt made us better people.

To sum up our experience, our Leadership motto is, "out of your vulnerabilities will come your strength".

*Emma Rouine and Emily O'Shea,
on behalf of the 6th Year
Leadership Group*

Student Voice in Leadership



What Senior Students Say:

“My experience of the Leadership Group has given me the skills to allow me to move calmly through my day. It has made it easy to explore my feelings and easier to communicate with my peers. I have grown much closer to my classmates as I have learned much more about them outside of the classroom.

It has also allowed me to transfer these skills towards helping the first year cohort as they navigate their way into secondary school life. This is especially important in terms of this year as, with masks and social distancing guidelines, it hindered both the sixth years and first years. Through Leadership I have had an opportunity to open up and connect with my peers.”

Aoibhinn Clancy

“Leadership has definitely been a light through dark times. I find it such a warm, welcoming and uplifting space, to discuss how we are doing. This has given me great solace through this Covid year. It can be easy to hold a lot in because of the masks, they can almost muzzle you. Through the Group I made lifelong friends, and, in my opinion, everyone should do Leadership.”

Ava Byrne

Above left, Sixth Year Leadership Group



What Junior Students Say:

“Doing Leadership has made it easier for me to settle into the school. I was a bit nervous starting because I didn’t know many people. The Listening Circles made me more comfortable with my class. We started with a big circle but then they became smaller. This made me more comfortable because it was less intimidating to speak. I think the Circles have helped me especially with Covid as it can be hard to talk to other people.”

“I like Listening Circles. It is nice to talk to everyone and to have senior students working with us. The Circles have helped me make new friends and learn more about my class. I find I am not as worried about speaking about myself in front of my class and I look forward to the days when we do our Circles. I wish I could do more of them.”



Portumna Community School

Size and Profile: A mixed school with 436 pupils

Principal: Shane McClearn

Deputy Principal: Michael Fallon

In 1990 Portumna College and St. Brigid's V.S. amalgamated to become Portumna Community School, the extension to which was officially opened in 1996. Portumna Community School has a proud tradition of academic excellence in several educational programmes, while also supporting student interests across a range of extracurricular activities. As part of a wider local community, Portumna Community School students are encouraged to develop themselves not only as responsible individuals but also as members of an inclusive school community, embracing citizenship and taking their place among a vibrant and often challenging society.



Left, the Students Council - raising Student Voice.
Right, first year Home Economics students plant a herb garden.



My name is Hannah Killeen, and I am currently in Transition Year in Portumna Community School on the Galway, Tipperary border.

I am 16 years old and the oldest of three. My sister is in 3rd year and my brother is in second class. I have always enjoyed school as I have a wide variety of academic interests and I also love the school environment with friends and classmates.

I know that for some people school may not be a welcoming or enjoyable place, but I have always felt comfortable and happy in my school. Having a voice is very important, not only in everyday life but in school as well, and I think that our school excels in this area. If I didn't have a voice in school, I definitely wouldn't be getting good grades, making progress in studies, making and building friendships, or having an overall good time.

My voice is heard by not only fellow students but all members

of staff in the school. Because of our school size and location, we are quite a close-knit community, and everybody knows everyone. I think this is invaluable because it gives you that comfort of being recognised and appreciated in school. Our teachers express interest not only in our academic learning but in our wider lives as well, eg. Social life, hobbies and pastimes, aspirations and dreams. This environment encourages sharing and provides you with a support group or trusted guidance if it is needed.

Not every student is the same and that is always vocalised. Every year a Student Council is elected by the students ourselves which gives us the opportunity to have a say in our education. This teaches us that school is not one-sided, but you must work hand in hand with teachers in order to have a successful learning environment.

Since school resumed in September, a class captain

system has been brought into place where each individual class group elects a captain and a vice captain. Because of changes to Covid regulations in school we must stay with the same class group throughout the day and by having a captain/vice-captain, our class group becomes a team.

There are always resources to use and people to talk to in our school to make sure everyone's voice is heard. Different teachers may appeal to different students and may find them easier to talk to. We are always encouraged to ask for help if we need it whether that be school related or otherwise.

I think that although our online learning has gone well, it is not suited to every student. It is difficult to build your own timetable and have enough self-control to get work done at home without getting distracted. I believe once we return to school it will make a massive improvement in student's interaction and mental health.

Lockdown has taught me that I don't depend on school for learning, but for the community and the voice that it gives me. Hannah Killeen



Portumna CS students get stuck in at time capsule ceremony.



St Mark's Community School

Profile: A mixed school, with 847 students

Principal: Eithne Coyne

Deputy Principals: Paul Dempsey & Tracey Christian

St Mark's Community School in Tallaght was established in 1977 to provide a comprehensive co-educational and multi-denominational education for the young people of the area, an area which has experienced significant change, particularly in the last decade. At St Mark's Community School we share a happy, safe, caring environment where we celebrate difference, recognise all gifts and strive to bring out the best in everyone.

Some days the magic happens...





Take the time to stop and learn!

Huda came to live in Ireland from Iraq when she was in 6th class. She has a rare and seriously debilitating medical condition called EB or butterfly disease. At the beginning of 2nd year this young girl just finding her feet in school and in her new country asked me, through an SNA, if she could speak to her class. They were “being mean” to her because it was “unfair” that she was “getting off work”.

What a brave girl, I thought. Confident that Huda would have a safe forum because of the community building work done in the school, including a lot of circle time, we made a plan.

A week later when I slipped quietly into the back of the classroom during her talk, I was overwhelmed by the transformative power of her words. She told her story from her heart - a story of difference, pain, struggle and now hope. She only wanted her classmates to understand that there were good reasons for her to sometimes be excused from doing work, but she did so much more. She enabled all of us in the room to listen with our heart, even the giddy and restless listened deeply. We were all moved. We were all changed - and the change lasted.

Isn't this the kind of school we want? A community where the most vulnerable have the courage to speak up - to tell their story, where people listen and are open to changing their perspective, where people care.

How was she able to do this? Where did Huda get the courage to allow herself to be so vulnerable? How did the culture of our school help? These are the kinds of questions we ask ourselves when we are attentive to the culture of our school, when we constantly check in on, consider and assess the lived life of our students in our schools.

Like all community schools, St Mark's has always had a strong pastoral tradition. Over forty years ago the founding Principal, Frank Murray and Deputy Principal, Billy O'Hara placed at the centre of their vision for their new school, one of the first community schools, the values of respect and fairness - promoting a sense of community and belonging, for staff and students. They articulated this values-based vision and showed the way by their example, their guidance and by putting in place robust systems to bring these values to life in line with the founding intentions of the school patrons.



This page and at at right: Student Voice & Recognition on Culture Day at St Mark's Community School.



Back in 2010 we found a way to give this safeguarded vision new life when we embarked on what we call our restorative journey. Although acknowledged as having a strong culture of care we knew that some areas needed attention. For example, our focus on rules broken as opposed to harm done and the use of resentment - building suspensions did not fit with the emerging messages from neuroscience and neuropsychology about the importance of compassion, understanding and empathy. And they certainly did not align with our values!

Knowing that what you pay attention to grows, we opened ourselves to new learning and committed a lot of time and resources to our new project. We soon realised that Restorative Practices with the values-driven relational approach would sit well with our traditions and culture, that it could provide a common language across the school and make us stronger. We were also lucky to see great champions emerge to drive it on.

Extensive professional learning with staff saw us really explore our values and attitudes and deeply and openly examine how we were doing things. In other words, we took a long hard look at ourselves.

We had all the difficult conversations, developed our skills, and competencies. We sometimes got it wrong and felt the frustration but always came back again. We had to be really honest with each other.

At the same time of course, we worked with our students providing training and awareness as they experienced restorative questions, affective statements, restorative chats, and conferences. And students got on board as trained student leaders, presented to SPHE classes, and worked with tutor groups.

By the end of 2012 our full staff committed to using Restorative Approaches school wide. We eventually achieved that paradigm shift – a shift from a punitive to a restorative mindset. It probably took three years. For many, it happened easily but for some this paradigm shift was very challenging. Happily, with our collective desire to make it work, remarkable change happened. Our school became calmer and more democratic, and we definitely saw a subtle shift in power imbalances across the school. Where we had pockets of power and control, we saw a welcome move to more understanding and kindness. Suspensions and behaviour referrals also dropped.



Above, right and below right: Student Voice & Recognition on Culture Day

When our students began to understand and experience the change in approach, they certainly kept us on our toes. There was no going back!

They now had a legitimate and clear expectation of how they would be spoken to and treated especially in challenging situations. A process that respected their dignity no matter what harm has been done.

It was written and spoken about and true to their spirit and belief in us they held us to it. Comments like “I thought the teachers were supposed to be restorative around here” or “that wasn’t very restorative of you” or from teachers “I was dead restorative today” or “I’ll start again tomorrow” let us know that the change was happening. Now we hear less of that.

Our dreaded yellow report sheet was replaced by a new blue sheet scaffolding the restorative approach, guiding us and making us take the time to respond rather than react to challenging behaviour.

I think of all the changes we made, the introduction of circle time was the most transformative. The circle is a distinctive kind of space for Student Voice. We use circles to develop trust and build community and for problem solving.

Now when conflict happens, we try not to steal it from the students with our rules and suspensions. We remember that the problem is the problem, the person is not the problem. Scaffolded by curious

questions rather than bombarded by judgement and frustration those causing harm are helped to be accountable and are empowered to find solutions. After all they usually have to continue to live together where the harm happened!

In a restorative meeting all are respected and listened to and make that journey inward. As a community we started to have high expectations of each other. We also continue to provide a strong network of support for each other in order to be the best we can be.

Maybe it was trust that made Huda feel safe enough to tell her story to her class. Maybe she was empowered through circle work and the strong relationship she had developed with SNAs and teachers. Maybe she “got it” that when someone does harm, they are held accountable.

Huda came top of her LCA class in 2020 and presented the school with a piece of her artwork. When asked for permission to use her story I asked her about the talk – she remembered it and said, “I just needed them to know, and I knew you would help... Miss, I loved my school”.

Note: Restorative Practice, Restorative Approaches, Restorative Justice Approaches can be interchanged. I like to hold on to the justice idea as it speaks of the dignity of the person – not just a reference to the development of restorative approaches within the Criminal Justice system.



The Power of the Circle!

It is structured to promote equality, interconnectedness, and interdependence. Everyone in the circle agrees to speak from the heart and listen with the heart. We are encouraged to let go of the stories we have created and listen deeply.

Students really like that everyone in the circle is equal. All have equal voice including the circle keeper (facilitator) regardless of age, status, or role. There is great power in the narrative. And there is choice – you can pass your turn to speak no problem.

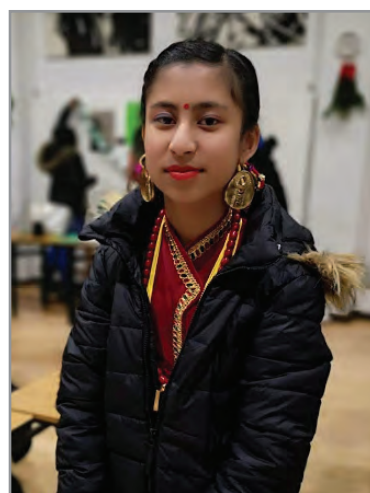
Our key to building a democratic, fair, and happy school lies in the conversations we have and the structures we have in place. We guard this carefully and pay attention when things go wrong providing support for each other so that we are the best we can be.

This culture at which we work, creating and recreating every day, underpins our work in promoting “voice”. The openness and trust evident in everyday interactions and in the relationships between staff and students perfectly positions Student Voice and enables it to thrive while the circles themselves support what Lundy calls audience and influence. We have circle agreements. The circle keeper oversees the follow through.

We have seen how this work supports learning and learner voice in our classrooms. It complements and supports the development of many Key Skills in the Junior Cycle classroom. Classes with experience of circles have a more positive classroom climate, stronger connections with peers, better listening skills and can give and take feedback more easily and effectively-a critical

part of 21st century learning and an essential part of developing/enabling Student Voice in our school. When students trust each other, they have greater freedom to engage in thinking and learning. In circles they have space to test the trust.

*Eithne Coyne, Principal
St Mark's Community School
Tallaght*



St. Peters

Actively Amplifying the Learner Voice

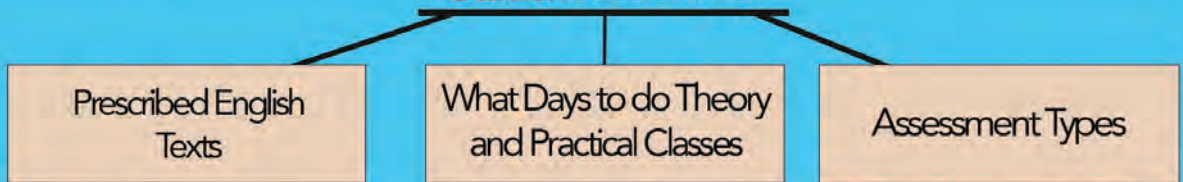


Past Students' Advise

Recent past students return to outline what worked for them when studying and contributed to their success

Kirsten - "It was great to hear from X, because she's been through it and had a real experience of the leaving cert"

Student Choice of:



Clodagh - "The whole class felt privileged that he gave us the choice"

Laura - "It felt like we had a say in our learning and it made us more comfortable to ask him to give us a choice again"

Pair Work

Teachers set up opportunities for students to work together allowing every student the opportunity to contribute

Chloe - "It helps us gain more confidence in speaking... I like this because it helps us put together what we both know, instead of just what I know, and you learn from each other as well as learning from the teacher"

Direct Student Involvement

Leaving Cert students invited to attend parent /teacher/student meetings to allow for an enhanced and more constructive discussion.

Thomás - "Coming to the parent teacher meeting helps me a lot, cos it's a three-way conversation...and I get to give my view of my education so far and I get to agree or disagree with what the teacher has to say"

Consultation

Student / Teacher discussion on subject comment in end of term report

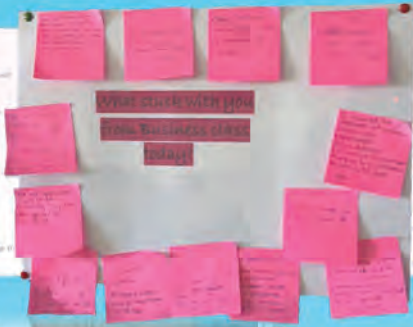
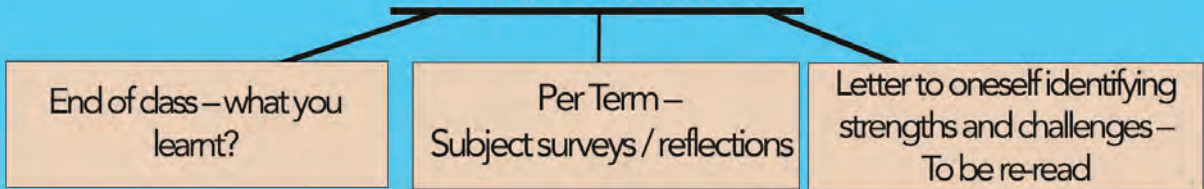


James - "I debated with him and he gave me an option to change it. I feel by being involved in the writing of my comment that it's more fair and that I listened to it more and I'd apply it more to my school work"

Teacher asking the class for feedback on their teaching methods

Aidan - "In the classroom people felt like we weren't getting the most out of the way that we were taught...and sir addressed the issue...and I feel the whole class has definitely benefited from it"

Student Feedback :



Anna - "I like at the end when the teacher asks each of us to say one important point we learnt during class as it makes me remember everything more"



Tallaght Community School

Profile: A mixed school, with 757 students

Principal: Aidan Lynch

Deputy Principals: Ian Boran, Claire Green, Ryan McCarthy

Tallaght Community School opened in 1972 as the first Community School in Ireland. It is a co-educational, multi-denominational school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Trust, Marist Brothers and Dublin & Dun Laoghaire ETB. Tallaght Community School is a partnership of students, staff, parents/guardians, Board of Management and our local community. Our mission is to promote and foster a sense of mutual respect within this community. We aim to develop each person's academic, physical, moral, cultural and spiritual potential by providing a broad-based education in a safe and supportive environment. Tallaght Community School encourages all students to become confident, responsible and successful individuals who will make a positive contribution to society.

Student Voice Testimonials



My name is Adam McDowell. I'm a 6th year at TCS. I'm the Chairperson of my Student Council and I feel my voice is generally heard quite well. Typically, the Student Council which includes representatives from each year group spreads word about the issues we're working on through word of

mouth. This makes us seem more connected to fellow students in my opinion. We also hold outreach programmes so students can raise issues or suggest changes themselves.

We go to a school that values student input and opinion. As a learner I feel a lot more engaged in my work when I feel heard. Knowing I have a voice motivates me to work, and I feel less like my only purpose in school is to tick boxes and achieve good grades. Feeling like an active part of the school community is a great motivator for me personally.

I think the school has been very determined to have each student feel individually supported and

the teachers are great at making us feel at ease. Especially during the periods of online learning, it wasn't unusual to have teachers sending me emails checking in. I was regularly asked about the workload and stress, and when the student body complained about the workload, the faculty responded by noticeably changing it. My voice was heard when I volunteered it during remote learning.

Students need to be heard to feel equal. You can't claim to care about the wellbeing of your students and then not listen to them. Even something simple like a teacher asking, "what's going on with you?" can make a big difference.



Hi, I'm Madara Kalnina, I'm a 6th year student in Tallaght CS. I'm from Latvia and have lived in Ireland for almost 15 years.

I am a member of the Student Council in TCS. It gives students a representative voice in the running of the school. For example, students' opinions are taken into consideration when it comes to changes in school, like changes in the canteen regarding lunch options so that there is a wider variety, and it can cater to people with specific dietary requirements. During lockdown, the Student Council spoke to the Board about how to make online schooling as stress free as possible.

Even in lockdown, the Student Council was able to communicate with the Principal and faculty and were kept in the loop through online meetings.

My thoughts on how to improve school life are simple, to keep communications open and for the students to know that they are represented, and their voices heard with opinions considered when it comes to making a decision that will impact their daily life in school.



My name is Bethany Osemede. I am in 5th year at Tallaght Community School.

I feel like my voice is heard when I choose to speak up and this helps me as a learner because I know if I have a question it'll

be answered. It can be heard through the Student Council and our management system. My voice would be heard if I felt motivated to use it I guess. I don't feel motivated to use it because I feel like everyone's going through the same thing so we all feel the same.

If the education system as a whole was better and wasn't as exam focused as it is right now, that would certainly make school better and not stress us out as much, I guess. Student Voice is so important because we need to let people know that their voice is heard, that it matters and is important.

In Tallaght Community School we have three core values and principles that we want all our students, teachers and staff to embody:

Learning together,
Everyone matters,
Every moment counts



Hello my name is Kathy Okoeguale. I am in third year attending Tallaght Community School.

I believe that my voice and my opinions have been heard in my classroom. This helps me as a learner because it enables me to have confidence and speak up when I see something I'm not sure about. I think that the way your voice is heard in school depends on your rank in school. Promoting Student Voice is important because students should be able to speak out when something is wrong in the school, or there is something they don't agree with, without the fear of being told "you're just students" or brushed to the side.



My name is Jake Bushe. I'm a 5th year student in TCS. I serve on the Student Council and am on the National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg.

Some teachers are up for new teaching style suggestions, some ask for constant feedback on lessons which again benefits our learning, as they are suiting our current needs and wants. The Politics and Society class is a democratic classroom which allows the student to gain more independence and freedoms than one would possibly have in any other class. We drafted up our rules and aims as a class group. Discussion is key and with this subject each student is again, given the chance to be heard, something my teacher really emphasised. Also, the modern teaching style has really suited me as a learner.

I believe there has been a clear lack of consideration for those suffering with mental health issues nationwide. Student wellbeing needs to be prioritised, the importance of this cannot be underestimated as sadly I believe it's taken a global pandemic to highlight the deeply flawed Leaving Certificate and second level education system in general that causes such anxiety, stress and uncertainty to many.



My name is Kelly Okoeguale. I'm in 5th year at Tallaght CS.

My voice is heard a lot in my classroom. Anytime I need help, or I'm confused I don't hesitate to ask a question and be heard.

I think this benefits my learning and also my relationships with teachers. Different students have their own ways of getting their voices heard. For example, some are upfront and outspoken as in

they speak their mind and others may not be comfortable doing that, but that's fine.

In my point of view, it is very important to work on promoting our Student Voice because young people's opinion matter in adult decisions. It is also good to have a body for students to reach and communicate with their teachers, principals etc.



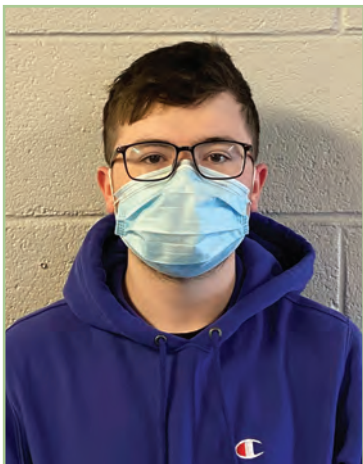
Hi, my name is Marilia Netto, I'm in Transition Year in Tallaght CS.

I am 16 years old and I was born in Brazil. I live with my mom and my stepdad in a shared house, but we are moving soon to our own place. I attend Tallaght Community School, I have been attending this school from first year. At school I am part of the Student Council and my goal is to become the Chairperson. I am in TY and also working on the LIFT project.

I'm a very social person so I tend to ask a lot of questions in class and of other staff in school. I have

no problem when it comes to communicating at school.

In my opinion what has worked since lockdown started, was the teachers and staff being supportive and being very communicative to us students. Yes, I believe my voice is heard when I am learning, teachers answer questions and try to help and support us students. In my opinion something that school could improve is the building. It needs to be upgraded and repaired, especially the leaky roof!



My name is Liam Duffin and I'm a 6th year at Tallaght CS.

My voice is heard by the teachers, especially being a sixth year. I have always found our teachers and management available and willing to give time to whatever issues we had e.g. toilets, lunches, school work. They're always very considerate towards us and willing to work through chosen topics with us when we have free class time.

In my experience since lockdown started, the one-way system and the queues for lunch have worked well, they were executed properly

so there was very little congestion in the corridors. Not a lot needs to be changed, maybe just the lunches not being the same every week, it traps you into feeling like you're in a loop.

It is important to listen to the student Voice because of the stress students are under, especially right now. It's incredibly important to make sure students feel understood and listened to, it helps us to feel like we are almost the adults we are meant to become.



My name is Shona Joyce, I'm in 6th year at Tallaght CS.

I think the student voice in our school helps share people's opinions on topics and it helps me learn by asking questions. Lessening the stress would help with the school life for example getting involved in extracurricular activities and not leaving things to the last minute like studying.

To improve school life, from my experience I think it's good to be involved. Promoting Student Voice is so important as it gives us the data and helps the Student Council set goals and achievements. An example of one of our achievements this year was a memorial bench where students can take time out to think to remember our past TCS members and friends. Something that has worked well in my school life since lockdown was routine and constantly checking Teams and logging into all my online classes. This benefited me now as I'm not behind on my classwork.



The Joint Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht in regard to Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill



Thursday, May 6 2021



In May 2021 students from Tallaght Community School appeared before the Oireachtas Joint Committee to share their views with politicians, on ways to tackle cyberbullying.



Artwork: Anna Skelton, Ashbourne Community School



“Dialogue between children and adults, rather than just ‘listening’, has been identified as one of the most crucial dimensions of meaningful child participation (*Lodge, 2005; Mannion, 2007*). The feedback given by adults to children at the end of a process is a pivotal point in this dialogue.

I suggest that there should be a requirement that the feedback provided to children is sufficiently full, appropriately child-friendly, fast and followed-up in order to create the optimal conditions for adults to engage seriously and sufficiently with the views that they have sought or been given.”

‘In defence of tokenism? Implementing children’s right to participate in collective decision-making.’

by Laura Lundy

Queen’s University Belfast, UK

Footnotes

1. The term 'Student Voice' (with higher case use) is invoked throughout this article to denote the concept around which the project is based, promoting the voice, agency and participation of students in the classroom and school life.
2. National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making
3. Lansdown, G. (2018). Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation. New York: Unicef.
4. Ruffling the calm of the ocean floor: merging practice, policy and research in assessment in Scotland Hayward, L. and Priestley, M. (2007) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0305498042000260502>
5. Since this toolkit was published, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has published its National Implementation Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. The Framework supports departments, agencies and organisations to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. The NCCA/ACCS project aligns with and supports the key messages and emphases of the Framework.
6. Learning for all? Second -Level education in Ireland during COVID-19. ESRI Report June 2020



Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
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