

# Pupil voice

## A guide for governing boards in schools and trusts

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Using pupil voice (or pupil participation) in school means listening to pupils' wishes and opinions and involving them in decision-making.

Schools that are committed to pupil voice:

- provide time, space and resources for pupil participation
- train and develop staff so they can support pupil participation
- encourage and value the voices of all

Ofsted expects schools to actively seek and listen to pupils' views and experiences so that they can take action to address any concerns where needed.

This guide provides an overview of the benefits of pupil voice and explains the governing board's role in supporting effective pupil participation.

## 1. Pupil voice benefits

Effective pupil participation can support pupil success and wellbeing. It encourages buy-in, agency, and citizenship skills by making pupils active participants of the school/trust. It can also help to build positive pupil-staff relationships.

Engaging directly with pupils can help governing boards to:

- understand how the vision and strategy work in practice
- remain accountable to the community it serves by being visible and transparent
- provide insights that support triangulation and effective challenge
- support the culture of safeguarding
- assess the effectiveness of curriculum planning and delivery

## 2. Effective pupil engagement

Refer to the following guiding principles when discussing pupil participation in your school/trust.

### Engagement methods

Schools should use a range of methods to regularly engage with pupils. Methods vary based on the setting and phase of education. Examples include:

- surveys
- focus groups
- one to one discussion
- working groups (which could include pupils, staff and governors/trustees)
- school councils and other peer-led activities

Some schools and trusts use schemes such as the [UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award](#) to support their work around pupil engagement.

### Adaptable and inclusive

Opportunities to participate should be accessible and inclusive for all pupils. This means the methods used consider the age of pupils, communication abilities and needs, and methods do not exclusively favour 'articulate', 'confident' or 'well behaved' pupils.

### Questions to ask

- What mechanisms are in place for regular, meaningful engagement?
- When are pupil views gathered? Are they involved throughout the decision making process?
- Are we involving a range of different pupil groups?
- Are the methods used suitable for different age groups and for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)?
- Do pupils have the knowledge and skills they need to get involved?
- How are pupil engagement activities managed safely (considering data protection, confidentiality and safeguarding responsibilities)?

### Clear scope and responsibility

Pupil engagement should have a clearly defined scope and purpose, which is communicated to all those involved. This means:

- pupils understand the purpose for which they are sharing their views, how their views will be used and what may or may not happen as a result
- leaders are able to manage conflicting views, including from pupils and staff
- pupil voice is not used as a tool to provide judgment on teaching practice

## Tangible outcomes and feedback

Pupil voice activities should have tangible outcomes, and feedback should be shared with pupils.

In practice this means:

- engagement has a real impact on pupils' education, their wellbeing or wider school experience
- pupils know how their views have been used and what action has been taken as a result
- engagement is continuous and intentional

### Questions to ask

- Do pupils know how their views will be used?
- How is feedback provided? (a useful method to consider is 'you said, we did')
- Do we explain how decisions were made? (particularly when the course of action differs from what pupils have said)
- Are staff trained to facilitate engagement?

## 3. Governing board engagement

While school staff are responsible for pupil voice activity, there are occasions for the governing board to engage with pupils. Examples include:

- talking to pupils on [school monitoring visits](#)
- inviting pupils to governing board meetings
- governors/trustees attending pupil councils (and similar forums)
- pupil reports to the governing board

Pupils' views should be taken into account as part of the board's monitoring activity and to support decision making, particularly in relation to:

- **Setting strategic priorities** – consider how the issues that are important to pupils may be fed into the strategy and accompanying school/trust development plan.
- **Major decision making**, including changes to school life that will have a significant impact on the educational experience and wellbeing of pupils.
- **Policy development and review** – ensure pupils are involved in policy development and the review of key policies, such as behaviour and attendance.

Governing boards should work with school leaders to identify pupil feedback channels and determine suitable topics and methods for engagement.

## Pupil voice in multi academy trusts

In multi academy trusts (MATs), the trust board is responsible for establishing a culture where all stakeholder voices are valued. Trustees have an important role in overseeing how pupil voice is used across the trust, drawing comparisons between academies and encouraging collaboration to ensure that successful initiatives are shared.

Academy committees (local governing bodies) have a strong connection to their individual school and local community. As such, in larger MATs, academy committees are well-placed to engage directly with pupils given that engagement between the trust and its school communities can be challenging.

## 4. Monitor and evaluate

Governing boards should evaluate existing engagement activity to identify what is working well and any areas requiring improvement. The following questions provide a starting point for conversations with school/trust leaders:

- How do we capture what our pupils think about school, how do we know they feel safe?
- Do we take the views of pupils into account when developing our strategy?
- Do we include pupils in the development of our vision and values?
- Does pupil voice feed into policy development?
- Do our pupils and staff feel comfortable sharing their views?
- How are pupils equipped to express themselves? Is this reflected in the curriculum?
- What training do we provide to staff to facilitate effective pupil voice?
- Do we have any specific pupil voice initiatives or awards? What has the impact of these been?
- Are we hearing from a range of pupil groups, including those with SEND or eligible for pupil premium?
- What do pupils know about the work of our governing board?
- Are there any common themes appearing in pupil surveys? What changes have we seen from previous surveys?
- How are the results of surveys acted upon?

## Stakeholder engagement resources

- [A guide to engaging with parents and carers](#)
- [How governing boards engage with staff](#)
- [Webinar on engaging with stakeholders](#)
- [Stakeholder engagement: The governance role](#) - bitesize Learning Link module