

# School councils



School councils are democratically elected groups who represent their peers and enable pupils to become partners in their own education, making a positive contribution to the school environment and ethos. (Wyse 2001)

School councils make a positive contribution to every aspect of the school community. They:

improve academic performance

reduce bullying and vandalism

reduce school exclusions

improve teacher-pupil relations (Daniels and Ivatts 2003)

School Councils have been used in British schools for about the past ten years. According to a BBC News report, School councils - giving students a say in how their schools are run - are given a vote of confidence by researchers." (2005) They suggest that student councillors and their teachers feel the councils benefit the school as a whole. " The youngsters involved also learn about society and citizenship as well as developing their personal skills. " (BBC News 2005)

In a separate survey by BT and the charity Childline, only 47% of the children questioned said adults listened to what they said and acted on it. (Anderson 2004) Most adults agreed it was important to listen to children, but only 57% said this happened. The effectiveness of these School Councils is not as positive as some of the media would like for us to think. There has been recent research on the School Councils and the results are similar to the ones revealed by Anderson (2000)

The work on school councils was done by the National Foundation for Educational Research, examining in particular their impact on citizenship and personal and social education.

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Citizenship becomes a part of the national curriculum in England's secondary schools from this autumn. (Crown Copyright 2005)

The research suggested a school council could make a significant contribution to the life of a school and to young people's experience of democratic processes and practices. (BBC News 21005) Setting one up did not guarantee a positive outcome, though. " As with any other learning strategy, the context in which the council operates and its processes and practices need to be supported and kept under review in order to generate positive outcomes for students and for it to have an impact on the school," said the co-author of the study, Monica Taylor. (Daniels and Ivatts) there needed to be a school-wide culture of consultation, respect for the views of students and staff, participation - and the possibility of change. In the BBC News report, it spoke with students and councilors and others involved in the School Councils directly.

All being well, students could have " a sense of empowerment and ownership". (BBC News 2005)

The findings were based on a phone survey of teachers leading school councils in 25 primary schools and 25 secondary schools across England and Wales. Fifteen-year-old Sophie Mills said the council worked at her school, Dagenham Priory Comprehensive in Essex. As an example, the top two years were now allowed out at lunchtimes, subject to their having dinner passes, she said. (BBC News 2005)

In conclusion, it must be taken into consideration that the process is still fairly new. The research that has been conducted does not take this into account. The School Councils were implemented for the benefit of the entire educational process and it appears that some of this vision has gotten lost

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along the way.

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