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Our School Council: DE Guidance & Information (2024)

The following information and guidance are offered by DE to help stakeholders understand the importance of having a school council. Importantly for Irish Medium Schools, the idea of a school council is not new - Patrick Pearse had his pupils in St. Enda's form a school council.



From DE website 23.10.24 [School councils and pupil participation | Department of Education](#)

School councils and pupil participation

Topics: [Support and development](#)

The Department of Education (DE) is keen to support all schools to have structures in place which allow pupils to have a real say in issues that affect them and to know that their opinions count. There are a number of ways in which schools can choose to help achieve effective pupil participation.

What is a school council?

A school council is a formal group of pupils within a school who are elected by their peers to represent them and their views.

Why have a school council?

There are lots of reasons.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) says that children and young people should have a say in decisions that affect their lives. A school council can provide a meaningful way in which pupils can voice their opinions and have their views considered in decisions which impact upon them.

Experience from schools here and further afield shows that a school council that is supported and nurtured helps to improve many aspects of school life.

It is an important and useful way for schools to provide leadership and development opportunities for their pupils.

Within the school curriculum, one of the key areas making up the 'Learning for Life and Work' theme is active participation. The curriculum requires that young people are provided with opportunities to participate in school and society. School councils are an excellent way in which to increase

participation, teaching young people about democracy, local and global citizenship and accountability.

Where do I start?

DE encourages those schools wishing to establish a school council to adopt the 'Democra-School' programme developed by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

The programme is designed to support and encourage the development of meaningful school councils and the practice of democracy in the school environment.

If your school is interested in this, more information can be found within the Democra-School guidance pack which gives detailed practical advice on how to set up a school council and steps that can be taken to involve pupils in school councils.

The pack was developed with the co-operation and involvement of teachers, pupils, and key officials from the former Education and Library Boards (now the Education Authority) and DE.

The guidance can be downloaded on the NICCY website

- [NICCY\(external link opens in a new window / tab\)](#)

Information resources

The Democra-School pack provides a range of other resources, outlined below, which can assist with establishing and operating a successful school council including a number of sample forms which schools will find helpful.

Information is provided on:

- election guidelines
- the 'first past the post' system
- sample nomination form for school council
- the 'proportional representation' system
- roles and responsibilities of key positions within a school council
- student council action plan template
- school council meeting minutes template

Pupil participation

In line with the UNCRC, the Executive, all government departments and public bodies have a duty to ensure that the views of children and young people are sought in matters which impact on their lives.

As outlined in the policy for school improvement, 'Every School a Good School', DE wishes to see a greater focus on engagement within schools, particularly with pupils.

As part of his statement on advancing shared education, delivered to the Assembly on 22 October 2013, the Minister for Education also made clear his aim "that every school will have an effective method of encouraging young people's participation in the life of the school".

Guidance

DE has developed a school circular which provides guidance on how to encourage pupil participation in decision-making in schools.

The circular

- outlines the range of benefits that pupil participation can bring not only for pupils, but for schools and the wider community
- explains how successful participation can be achieved
- highlights a number of key issues which schools need to consider to ensure that pupil engagement is meaningful and effective
- signposts schools to other sources of help and support

School councils are one way in which schools can try to encourage the involvement of pupils, but there are many others. The circular seeks to assist schools in identifying and establishing the most effective method/s of participation which best suits the needs of their pupils and which allow children and young people to have a real say in issues which impact on them and the wider school community.

In developing the circular, DE worked closely with a range of other organisations including the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and schools as well as consulting with each of the recognised teaching unions.

The circular can be accessed below

- [Circular 2014/14 Pupil Participation](#)

Good practice case studies

Many schools already have in place forms of pupil participation. A selection of those schools demonstrating good practice in this regard have been identified by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). Schools are encouraged to refer to the examples highlighted below

- [Pupil Participation - Case Studies](#)

Schools will also be able to access best practice material on Every School a Good School (ESaGS) Tv in due course.