

# DCSF: Considering Pupils' Views

## Consultation Response from the General Teaching Council for England

### Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to contribute to raising the standards of teaching and learning.
2. Pupil participation is firmly embedded within the Council's vision for the future of the profession, *Teaching 2012*, because appropriately defined, it is a public good, and it strengthens teaching and learning.
3. This principle is enshrined in teaching's newly-revised Code of Conduct and Practice. Registered teachers should:

*"listen to children and young people, consider their views and preferences, and involve them in decisions that affect them, including those relating to their own learning."*

### Overarching comments

4. The GTC has welcomed the Government's strategy to increase children and young people's stake in their education. These proposals stem from the Education and Skills Act 2008 meaning that the scope of what is proposed relates to remit of the governing body, rather than the generality of issues on which pupils might be consulted.
5. In promoting the regulations the DCSF may wish to take the opportunity to raise awareness of the UNCRC, which is relatively low among teachers (in comparison with the wider children's workforce), Article 12 of which stipulates that all children have the right to express their views and have them taken into account in all matters affecting them. Governing bodies might usefully be encouraged to consider how their school might respond to this challenge.
6. These regulations represent a minimum requirement which needs to be accompanied by a genuine commitment to enable pupils to participate in shaping

the experience of learning rather than being limited to having a voice in relation to matters such as behaviour and domestic arrangements in the school<sup>1</sup>.

7. Pupil participation or voice is a powerful tool to support personalised learning and if appropriately defined can be used to address inequalities in outcomes associated with class, ethnicity, gender and disability or SEN. Creating participative learning environments which provide ongoing opportunities for children to exercise real choice and realise tangible changes gives pupils agency and influence which leads to benefits in motivation, behaviour and achievement.
8. The *Developing Pedagogies for E-learning Resources* project (PELRS)<sup>i</sup> project – funded by the GTC found that an action-research approach which involved pupils explicitly in understanding how they learn fostered a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning. This three-year project, undertaken by researchers at Manchester Metropolitan University, investigated how broadening the use of new technology encouraged Key Stage 2 pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers participating in the project found that when pupils worked alongside teachers to plan how learning would take place, and could use digital video, the internet and other technology, their motivation and performance increased<sup>2</sup>.
9. The GTC's *Research for Teachers* summary of a study of collaborative learning in mathematics noted that teachers who adopted more didactic, 'transmission' styles of teaching, in which knowledge was 'passed' from teacher to pupil, lowered the self-esteem of pupils who were re-sitting GCSE Mathematics. In contrast, activities designed to promote collaborative discussion were found to raise the pupils' self-esteem. The pupils also attained higher marks on an algebra test. Analysis of the number of questions answered by pupils in the before and after tests indicated that the improved marks were mainly due to the pupils making fewer errors, not simply because they felt more motivated to attempt more of the questions<sup>3</sup>.
10. Opportunities to plan and design the curriculum and undertake research are identified as powerful tools to support children's engagement in their own learning. It is also a powerful experience of 'learning by doing' to take part in democratic processes. Moreover, it is consonant with wider public service reforms that encourage service improvement through facilitating user influence.
11. The current Government consultation on Pupil and Parent Guarantees proposes new duties on schools to enable pupils to have their say on standards of behaviour, overall progress and areas for improvement in their school. Any changes to existing regulations should ensure coherence with these proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Influence and Participation of Children and Young People in their Learning (IPiL) Project*, University of Cambridge, December 2008

<sup>2</sup> PELRS is based at the Centre for ICT, Pedagogy and Learning at the Institute of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University. The project director is Professor Bridget Somekh, and the research team consists of Dr Matthew Pearson, and Diane Mavers. A description of the work with schools and its theoretical basis is available at [www.pelrs.org.uk](http://www.pelrs.org.uk)

<sup>3</sup> GTC: *Improving pupil learning through enhancing participation: Engaging with research*, November 2009

12. The GTC suggests there are other areas of governing body responsibility that could be included within the regulations. Governors approve key school policies and some of these – for example, the behaviour policy – would seem appropriate topics for pupil consultation. Here again, governors might be encouraged to consider which of the policies they approve – or other key decisions they make – should be ones that would normally involve pupil input.

### **Specific proposals for consultation with pupils**

13. The GTC supports all the specific proposals for consultation with pupils. It is important that the consultation must have integrity, in the sense that the consultees must genuinely have an opportunity to shape the outcomes of the process in question. This can be achieved through engagement with children and young people as part of everyday practice and through informal opportunities, rather than as a series of one-off events<sup>4</sup>. The Council acknowledges that there may be circumstances when proposals for change are non-negotiable because of other constraints.

### **Equality schemes and/or policies**

14. The GTC supports the proposal that pupils should be consulted on the school's equalities schemes or policies, bearing in mind the regulations and any supporting guidance will need to help schools to understand duties upon them arising from the forthcoming Equality Act which will be extended to include age; sexual orientation; gender identity; religion and belief.

### **Curriculum policy**

15. The GTC supports the suggestion that pupils should always be consulted on the school's curriculum policy, as a matter of democracy, as a tool for helping to design the curriculum and to incorporate 'learning to learn' through subject teaching.

### **Concluding comments**

16. The GTC welcomes the commitment to not prescribing how schools must approach consultation with pupils, and allow for local discretion.

### **Examples of good practice**

17. *The influence and participation of children and young people in their learning (IPiL) project, University of Cambridge, December 2008:*

[http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/commissioned\\_research/pupil\\_learning/influence\\_participation/](http://www.gtce.org.uk/research/commissioned_research/pupil_learning/influence_participation/)

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<sup>4</sup> *The Influence and Participation of Children and Young People in their Learning (IPiL) Project, University of Cambridge, December 2008*

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