

# Gateshead School Council Guidelines



**HEAR** By Right in Gateshead



Helping to Empower and to promote the Active involvement and Rights of young people in Gateshead

# FOREWORD


Gateshead Council intends to ensure that its response to the forthcoming Children Act, itself a development from the Green Paper “Every Child Matters,” will include a continuing commitment to listening to young people’s voices, recognising this as key in ‘helping pupils do their best and build on their achievements’ (DFEE 1999)

The DFES Guidance makes a clear commitment to increasing the participation of children and young people. Schools are expected to teach all students the necessary skills for effective participation giving them a significant, representative and meaningful ‘voice’ in the life of the school. The most effective way for them to acquire, practise and develop these skills is through school councils which provide the structures that make this possible.


This guide has been informed by the views of children and young people in Gateshead who have clearly benefited from having a say in decisions that affect them.



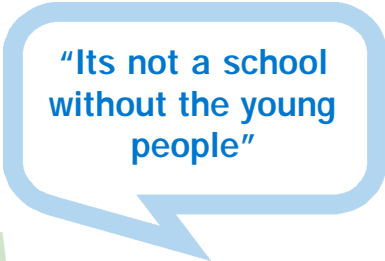
Maggie Atkinson  
Group Director Learning and Culture  
Director of Education



**“In primary school the school council was good. Meetings always started on time and kept to the agenda”**



**“The things young people want are constantly changing and schools need to move continuously and hear messages continuously”**



**“Its not a school without the young people”**



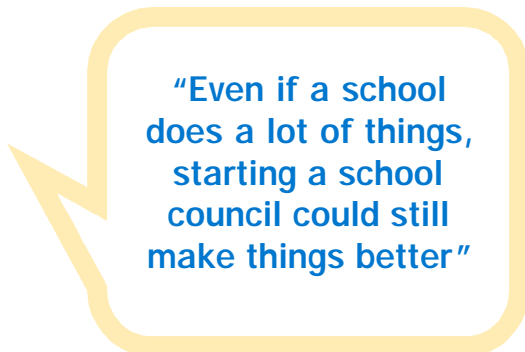
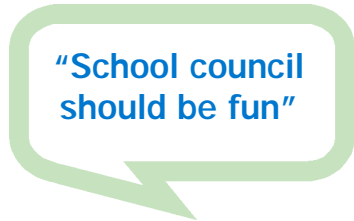
# INTRODUCTION

This guide is aimed at members of the school community who are, or intend to be, involved in developing an effective school council. It is designed to provide some basic prompts and pointers, whether you have an established school council, are just in the process of developing a school council or want to refresh an existing school council.

This guide gives a unique and contemporary view from young people locally who share their insight into how to achieve success with your school council.



Quotes from some of the children and young people involved in developing these guidelines are sprinkled throughout this document. Look out for what they said.



# WHAT OFSTED SAYS ABOUT ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN GATESHEAD SCHOOLS

'Healthy eating has been a continuing focus of the programme and after deliberations within the school council, it was agreed to introduce 'Fruity Friday'...The school council is an active part of school life and helps pupils to understand the nature of democracy and its value in today's world'

'The school council enables pupils to have a say in how their school is run and introduces them to an aspect of citizenship. Although this is a recent innovation the council has already discussed matters of common interest such as the behaviour policy and use of rewards to promote good behaviour'

'The school council is providing a very good opportunity for pupils to become involved in the improvement of the school'

Ofsted inspection report listed as a main strength 'all pupils in Years 3 to 6 are members of a democratic school council'

'The school council is effective in involving all pupils in improvement planning'

'The school council is a forum of two elected pupils from each class who represent pupils' views and pass these to the staff'

'Students elect year councils, which in their turn elect a school council which has real responsibility. Students also raise funds for national and local charities, and young students meeting the 'School Challenge' are expected to do work for the local communities'

'Senior pupils also run a school council, organise the tuck shop, operate a bank account and have opportunities to take part in work experiences and community service by visiting elderly people'



# WHY HAVE A SCHOOL COUNCIL? WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

- Creating a partnership between children and young people, staff and wider community improves relationships and can create an ethos of co-operation
- Children and young people who are encouraged to take responsibility for aspects of their school are more likely to show respect and consideration which in turn may improve behaviour and the school environment
- Involving children and young people in decision-making is not merely tokenistic. When children and young people are meaningfully consulted, they are far more likely to respect and value those decisions
- Being involved in elections, meetings and important decision making develops valuable skills, experiences and an enthusiasm for being an active member of a community
- Having an effective school council satisfies Charter Point 2 of Gateshead's Healthy School Award that is, in turn, accredited to the National Healthy Schools Standard.
- Research shows that schools with an effective school council can improve attendance, reduce pupil exclusions and have higher than expected attainment compared with similar schools
- Having an effective school council fosters the development of citizenship, increasing the skills and knowledge of democracy and politics.
- An effective school council is often favourably commented upon by OFSTED. (Some comments are included in this guide)

**"It's important that new pupils arriving at a school know who their school councillors are"**

**"Your opinion counts"**

**"Young people should decide themselves how formal they want it to be"**



# WHAT IS A SCHOOL COUNCIL?

A school council is a visible structure that can be used to engage young people and other members of the school community in decision-making.

The school council infrastructure should represent the full school community. The membership and democratic structures of school councils can vary. The main membership of a school council should be made up of pupils democratically elected by their peers. Within the wider or full school council individual schools may design links to ‘autonomous groups’ that may meet separately on occasion but still feed into the overall picture of decision making. When planning and illustrating the design of how decision making takes place in school, the school should consider carefully where links and relationships are between the school council and other groups including school governors, parents, community groups and so on. Schools should be able to map out these structures clearly and publicise this through school council.

A school council is just one of the many ‘methods of involvement’ that promote children and young people’s participation and active citizenship within the school and wider community.

Other ‘methods of involvement’ include activities like circle time, surveys, focus groups, recruitment and selection, action groups, class councils, work experience activity, creative arts work and volunteering. This list is not exhaustive but gives an idea of what is meant by ‘methods of involvement.’

A successful school council can be the heart of a healthy school. It can be a key way for teachers to involve students in decisions that affect their lives.

**“More attendance =  
more learning =  
higher results =  
raised school profile”**

**“Stop school councils  
becoming popularity  
contests by using  
PSHE lessons and  
literacy hours /  
persuasive writing”**

**“Every pupil should  
have an equal chance  
to stand for election”**



# SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO GET YOUR SCHOOL COUNCIL STARTED

- Each year every class/year group could elect 2 representatives to be members of the school council. The council could then meet to elect officers such as chair, secretary, and treasurer. In a large school it may be appropriate to have year group councils which meet frequently and a whole school council which meets once a term.
- The school council should be organised, chaired and have minutes taken by the members although it may be necessary for a teacher to support this.
- A constitution or terms of reference and code of conduct should be agreed and adopted. We have included some drafts that you could use.
- The school council should meet at least every two weeks and discuss issues which have been raised. These may include school lunches, behaviour, fundraising, staffing, correspondence received or matters the students put forward for discussion.
- Minutes from meetings should be circulated to those concerned and any correspondence dealt with as soon as possible.
- Training should be provided for the members perhaps using circle time and build up to a class meeting every week for about 30 minutes.

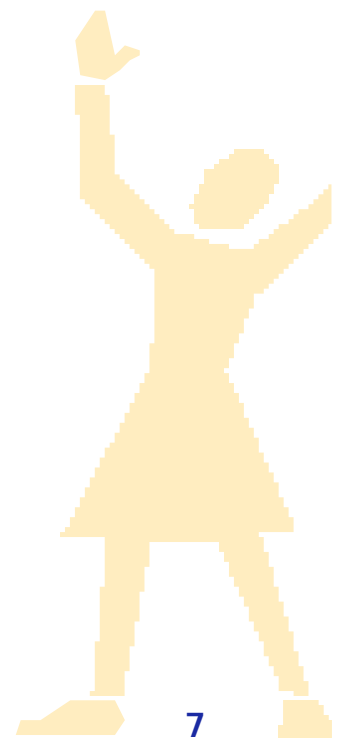
**“Pupils need to be made aware of the commitment expected to become a school councillor”**

## DRAFT AGENDA

- Welcome
- Register - present/absent
- Correspondence
- Class contributions - all year groups
- School projects - initiatives
- Any other business
- Date and time of next meeting

## SUGGESTIONS FOR AGENDA ITEMS

- Healthy School Award e.g. charter point 10 - whole school initiative
- Safer primary schools project - projects like playground marking
- Health and safety issues toilets
- School tuck shop
- School meals
- Uniform, PE clothing, jewellery
- First aid/accidents
- Bullying
- Fundraising
- School visitors
- School visits
- Playground activities/markings
- Residentials
- Wet weather activities
- School security
- Environmental issues/litter
- Extra curricular activities




# DRAFT CONSTITUTION

## Purpose

The purpose of the School Council is: -


1. To encourage a culture of participation in the democratic process and to develop the ideal of citizenship.
2. To provide pupils with the opportunity to convey their ideas and priorities to the wider school community, SMT and staff.
3. To provide a mechanism for the wider school community, SMT, staff, governors and other agencies to consult with the pupils.



“Let young people run their own council”

## Elections

- Two delegates should represent each class.
- The delegates should be chosen by means of an election.
- Schools may wish to undertake a whole school/class election, inviting candidates for election with opportunities for hustings and a secret ballot of all pupils.



“Give every member of the school community an equal voice and equal opportunity”

## Operation of the School Council

It is envisaged that: -

- The School Council should be representative of both gender and race.
- Adult support for the School Council would come from an interested adult/teacher.
- The School Council would meet every two weeks with at least one meeting being for the sole purpose of training.
- Elections to the School Council will be held early in the academic year

## Meetings

- That the School Council would meet every two weeks.
- The School Council may decide that it needs to meet less/more frequently or on an ‘as and when’ basis.
- Time must be built into the system to allow delegates the opportunity to report back and consult with pupils, SMT, governors, staff or other individuals/agencies etc.

## Mechanism

In advance of any meeting delegates will be invited to submit in writing a motion for consideration by the School Council and decide on the priority

At some stage delegates to the School Council may wish to develop a constitution, explaining aims, objectives, electoral proceedings, roles and responsibilities, voting procedures etc.

# MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

Participation activity can be a challenging thing to measure. Schools may have high quality and valued structures with excellent involvement from young people but how do we prove what we are doing is working?

Schools should remember to record, publicise and showcase any participation activity however big or small.

'Hear by Right' is a set of standards published by LGA (Local Government Association) and NYA (National Youth Agency) that have been adopted by Gateshead Council and by other Local Authorities across the UK offering a credible framework with which to effectively measure any involvement activity. The standards offer the user the choice of three levels - Emerging, Established and Advanced with which to measure any work across Councils including schools. The standards also include the use of a traditional tool 'the ladder of participation' that allows activity to be placed according to its participation level.

## Young People Initiated, Shared Decisions with adults

Young people identify the issue and work with adults as equal partners in a project

## Young People Initiated and Directed

The idea and implementation of the idea comes from young people

## Adult Initiated, Shared Decisions with Young people

Genuine partnership between adults and young people - young people fully involved in decision making with equal say

## Active and Informed

Project run mainly by adults but young people understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously

## Assigned but Informed

Information obtained from young people but no effort made to explain if and how their views will affect decision making

## Tokenism

Young people appear to be given a voice but have no choice about the subject, method of communicating or how the event is organised

## Decoration

Young person is asked to take part with no explanation of the issues or reason for their involvement

## Manipulation

Tokenistic exercise, which does not allow young people to influence or change the decision

**"Not all school councils need to be the same, adapt your school council to suit individual schools"**



# CHECKLIST OF GOOD PRACTICE

- ✓ Does the school council have a constitution and terms of reference?
- ✓ Does each class/year group have elected representatives to school council?
- ✓ Does the school council elect officers such as the chair, secretary and treasurer?
- ✓ Is there a mechanism for members of the wider community to be involved in the school council?
- ✓ Does the school council meet at least every two weeks?
- ✓ Is there an appropriate gender and racial balance among the representatives?
- ✓ Does the school council have access to the SMT and teacher support when necessary?
- ✓ Is there training provided for the school council members?
- ✓ Is there recognition of the achievements of the school council members?
- ✓ Does the school council have a budget that it manages?
- ✓ Is the infrastructure of the school council clear, in terms of decision making?
- ✓ Are there clear two-way communication routes between school council, parents, governors, staff, pupils and SMT?
- ✓ Are the meetings held at times and places that are accessible?
- ✓ Is there a code of conduct for school council members?
- ✓ Is the school council clearly publicised within the school? Are the students aware of who the representatives are and the work they do on their behalf?
- ✓ Does the school have an involvement policy which includes the school council and other participative activities?
- ✓ Is the function and effectiveness of school council reviewed on an annual basis?

**"If young people have their say the school moves up the ladder more quickly"**

**" Organise exchange visits to other schools to see how they do it - you can get some great ideas"**

**"If things are good young people can make it even better"**



This guide has been written by Valerie Ender, Don Sweeney and Andrea Wilkinson in partnership with the following young people from Gateshead Youth Assembly: Dominic, Shaun, John, Steven, Sam, Chris, Sean and Charlotte.

Valerie, Don and Andrea are accredited Schools Council UK trainers and are available in an advisory capacity to help Gateshead Schools develop effective school councils and participative activities. To contact us email: -

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"School councils can listen to everyone's opinions and value their contributions towards running the school"

"Have a special information pack for school council members"

"The setting up of a school council should be the same regardless of the size of the school. Same principles just on a different scale"

"Equal voice and equal opportunity for everyone in the school community"

"It's not a school without the young people, pupils points of view matter"

"I like being on the school council 'coz you use gel pens"  
Year 1 pupil

"Schools can network with other school councils and helpful organisations"



# HEAR

By Right In Gateshead



Gateshead Children and  
Young People's Rights Service



October 2004