

Enquiry question 25 Words.

Develop, and introduce Pupil Voice and evaluate the initial impact at Oldcastle Primary School.

Enquiry design and methodology 400

At Oldcastle Primary, we highly value our staff, pupils and the wider community, and feel that developing and evaluating the impact children can have on the organisation and running of the school is integral to working towards our school's values and vision - we aim to Inspire, Motivate and Educate.

The rationale that underpins the development of a Pupil Voice at Oldcastle Primary emerged from a desire to develop communication through and outside the school. Covid 19 had developed a partnership with our families never experienced before. Pupils became invested in their alternative learning and over time became part of a new education community. We felt we needed to maintain this level of resilience and belief in their community. As a result, the Senior Leadership Team discussed how to develop a pupil-centred support network that ensured pupils were at the core of school life, enabling them to influence decisions about their education, learning community and experiences.

Initially, we needed to evaluate historical Pupil Voice structures, identifying their efficiency and long term effects: Head Boy, Head Girl, House Captains, Sports day captains, Criw Cymraeg. Discussion groups were held with staff regarding the effectiveness of previous Pupil voice structures, previous experiences outside of Oldcastle with Pupil Voice and what pupil voice would look like in the future. The results of the discussions concluded we needed to introduce and develop a multi-tiered network that included a range of responsibilities and opportunities that would work in line with whole school improvement plans. It was also apparent, that we needed to develop a structure that was sustainable, effective and could be rolled across all phases, becoming part of the daily routine within the school.

After consultation with staff, pupils and governors, through questionnaires and Governor meeting presentations, we introduced a Pupil Voice structure that consisted of 3 levels of responsibility. A Junior Leadership Team, Pupil Voice Champions and House Captains. Together, their aim was to develop their voice in decision making, ensure a safe and happy learning environment and plan, organise and lead small scale projects.



The election process was introduced to parents and children through assemblies and the school Newsletter. Pupils were given the opportunity to apply for roles they felt best suited to, exposing them to real-life contexts, interviews and democratic decision making. The appointment of the Pupil Voice members was successful and the new structure was initiated and launched to the whole school.

In order to evaluate the impact in the early stages, 2 focus groups were run (one with the PVT and one with pupils). The aim of this was for the JLT to lead an informal discussion, with a series of prompt questions/statements (created by them) to gauge the overall impact of the team. Whilst questionnaires could be used, it was decided, as the lead enquirer, that the feedback should be verbal and led by the team themselves, allowing them, in turn, to become enquirers at a student level.

Ethical considerations*100 words.

Pupil Voice members and school pupils involved in the focus groups were fully informed of their participation and how the information from their discussion would be used. They were made aware their answers were not named when recorded and all information was to be destroyed after the analysis.

To avoid insider researcher bias, the enquirer did not lead the focus group but was present as it was felt they may have had an influence over pupils' feedback, whereby pupils feel they should answer in a specific way. The main aim was for pupils to have their freedom of speech and opinion.

Enquiry literature review* 300

According to Rudduck et al (2003), the introduction of Pupil Voice within schools shows 'increased pupil engagement, improved relationship between pupils and teachers, better communication between pupils and the school, and providing the right conditions for the school community to become a learning community. We are building a learning community at Oldcastle Primary and it is essential that we build robust relationships between staff and pupils and ensure that communication is the heart of important decisions about pupils' education and future. This is supported by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 'Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account'. Without a Pupil Voice Team, we as professionals making the decisions, are not allowing their voices to be heard.

Curriculum for Wales (Curriculum for Wales Guidance Jan 2020) states 'Schools and practitioners should have a vision to develop a curriculum which: draws on learner voice and responds to learners' needs, experiences and input '. By introducing a Pupil Voice team, we will be enabling pupils to develop their voice in a safe environment that will in turn give them the confidence to share their learner voice on education, have a say in what they need to become learners and citizens of the future.

Key/emerging findings 500

Despite it being in its infancy, the introduction of the Pupil Voice team has been a great success. All pupils within the team have been involved in a number of school initiatives - assemblies, Eisteddfod, rewards, token counting, meetings. They are an active part of the school routine and their roles are steadily growing and developing. The school community as a whole value their Pupil Voice team and are happy to talk with them, sharing their ideas and opinions.

Since being appointed, the Junior Leader Team has been an integral part of decision making, they have met with the SLT on numerous occasions, introduced whole school charity work, been involved in staff interviews and have met and presented to Governors and our school's Challenge Advisor. Members are confident with their roles and ensure they are developing ways to be approachable at all times.

Pupil Voice team feedback

Feedback from the focus group found that all the members were excited about their roles and what potential they had but felt frustrated that they hadn't had a bigger impact so soon. They felt they wanted to be 'involved in more decisions' about the school and what they were 'allowed to do'. The Pupil Voice Champions were 'very pleased' that they had been involved in helping choose the whole rewards.

The Junior Leadership Team were confident in their roles and felt they were 'listened' to by the SLT. Their regular meetings with the SLT ensured they felt up to date with 'what was expected' and knew what they needed to do and when. However, from the discussion they did feel they 'needed to meet with Pupil Voice before SLT, to be confident in what they needed to raise as a concern'.

The house captains felt they had a 'big impact' as they have been involved in token counting, running Eisteddfod and supporting with half termly rewards.

All members felt that children who were not confident were 'beginning to talk to them and share their ideas about what they wanted to happen' and that 'children have a voice that isn't the teachers'.

Student feedback

During the student feedback focus group, the pupils were pleased with the impact the Pupil Voice Team had overall. They felt their ideas had been 'listened to' and that they knew who they could talk to. One pupil felt that 'school is more exciting now and we are happier'. When asked to develop this answer further they replied 'we get to do much more fun things now'.

In comparison to the historical pupil voice structures, the new model has been most effective in the cross-phase representation, unlike the top-down approach when Head Boy and Head Girl were historically appointed. Their impact was focused around upper Key Stage 2, foundation phase pupils could only aspire to be heard when they progressed further up the age range. The new model, to date, has been welcomed by all internal and external stakeholders.

Limitations 100

Since COVID, pupils returning to school have displayed enthusiasm and excitement, matched with a change in the Headship, pupils have embraced and enjoyed the changes. Amidst this, pupils have had the opportunity to meet with the Pupil Voice team and share their ideas. It is unknown if the changes to being in school, the management or the introduction of the Pupil Voice Team had the greatest impact.

Key/emerging recommendations 200

To conclude the recommendations are as follows:

- Continue to develop a culture of pupil lead enquiry into their impact, focussing on reflection and ways forward. Ensuring pupils are able to see what they have achieved and how they are shaping the future of Oldcastle.
- Introduce a mapping system of what each level of the Pupil Voice team will complete - all aspects of the school - Health and wellbeing, New Curriculum, policies. This will allow pupils to have a clear idea of what is expected of them, shaping their roles and responsibilities and giving them purpose in their actions.
- Continue to evaluate the impact from the children's perspective but include the view of staff on the Pupil Voice impact. Oldcastle pride itself on communication and transparency, therefore it is essential to involve staff and their views on impact and ways forward.
- Pupil Voice Team to liaise and publish their findings from meetings with the rest of the school via newsletters and Radio broadcasts. - consultation and clear public actions - not just a meeting with no outcome, linking in with mapping of roles and responsibilities.
- Consider how we will listen to all learners - language barriers? As a school we are always looking for ways to reach all pupils, listening to their voices. As the Pupil Voice intervention strengthens, the way in which they reflect and evaluate must be innovative, inclusive and encompassing of everyone.