

PUPIL VOICE TO BECOME LAW

The Government has accepted a Liberal Democrat amendment to the Education and Skills Bill at present going through Parliament which will require school governing bodies to 'invite and consider' pupils' views. Baroness Morgan, the children's minister, has said that this must include their views on 'the curriculum, behaviour, the uniform, school food, health and safety, equalities and sustainability, not simply on what colour to paint the walls.' This has provoked both positive and negative reactions.

A positive reaction

ESSA press release: Young People Welcome Greater Student Voice

School students across England have welcomed the amendments to the Education and Skills Bill that will make it compulsory for schools to listen to students' views when making decisions that affect them.

The amendment will put a legal responsibility on schools to "invite and consider pupils' views". Guidelines, which have yet to be drawn up, are expected to include consulting students on a wide variety of issues, not just on cosmetic changes.

Rajeeb Dey, Founder of the English Secondary Students' Association (ESSA) [1], said: "this amendment is an important first step in recognising students as the end-users of education and their ability to co-create the education they receive. Having a voice in education is enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and it is crucial that we move beyond merely seeking students' views on toilets and meals to discussing wider issues such as their experiences of teaching and learning."

Christine Blower, Acting General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said: “Whilst schools might have legitimate concerns about yet another duty being thrust upon them, a key attribute of a successful school is participation by pupils in the life of the school. Of course very many schools already have systems in place which allow just that. I do, however, welcome these amendments and look forward to contributing to the promised consultation on how best the regulations can be brought into effect”.

Independent research [2] shows that engaging young people in active decision-making within education is an effective way of counteracting pupil disillusionment and underachievement while also improving relationships between teachers and students. ESSA is keen to work in partnerships with other stakeholders in education, including teachers, parents and governors, and seeks to use students’ views to improve the education experience for all.

[1] The English Secondary Students’ Association (ESSA) is a representative body for secondary school students in England. Launched in 2005 at the Trade Unions Congress, ESSA follows the example of its European counterparts who have celebrated great success in recent years, gaining influence and respect. ESSA’s decisions are made by a National Council of students aged 11-19, who are elected democratically by our members. ESSA is a member of OBESSU (The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions) and works closely with schools, unions, charities and individuals to ensure greater student participation and consultation.

[2] Independent research commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust resulting in the publication *Inspiring Schools* shows that ‘students in more democratic schools were happier and felt more in control of their learning; skills in specific curriculum areas such as citizenship improved as well as in other curriculum areas, and behaviour was improved.’

Negative reactions

The NASUWT and the Association for School and College Leaders are infuriated, saying the changes are crazy, will add to the burden on schools and may well result in parents complaining because their children were not properly consulted.

'These changes are crazy' is hardly a rational criticism but other even less rational reactions appeared on the TES web site.

"Well, I'm sure we'll have to play more games in lessons because a lot of the children I teach don't like reading, listening and writing," wrote one obviously unsuccessful teacher.

Another launched into sarcasm: 'I look forward to going into school and wearing my own hoodie and listen to me tracks loud on my mobile mp3 player because kids will definitely vote for that. In fact I might even move to a school where I know children would vote for lets all dress up like celebrities and become footballers so there "wats da point, i aint neva gonna use mafs coz we gots kalklators".'

If you enjoy reading the thoughts of teachers who despise the children they teach, there is plenty more at

<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6005072&navcode=94>

Many of the contributors say that they are going to leave the profession. Perhaps it is just as well.