

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SEN HANDBOOK

THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

'Children who are capable of forming views, have a right to receive and make known information, to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them. The views of the child should be given due weight according to the age, maturity and capability of the child.'

See Articles 12 and 13, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

INTRODUCTION

The SEN Code of Practice 2001 strengthens the idea that the views of children should be sought and taken into account in any matters affecting them.

As one of the major aims of education is to enable young people to become as self-sufficient as possible, every effort should be made to help them all to make choices and decisions at whatever level, during their time in school. At the same time it is recognised that not only is there a huge diversity of special needs, but also individuals with widely differing capabilities. Indeed, although a small number of pupils may be unable to express their opinions about how they perceive their future in a meaningful way, they should still be encouraged to make choices.

PRINCIPLES

The main principles of successful pupil participation are that as far as possible:

- there should be a culture throughout their school years, whereby teachers, parents and adults from other agencies are prepared to provide opportunities for them to make choices and to set targets for themselves
- adults should listen to pupils' views and encourage them to take an active role in making decisions which are likely to affect them
- a fine balance is maintained between giving pupils opportunities to voice their opinions and to make informed decisions, and overburdening them with issues that are beyond their experience and understanding
- pupils recognise their views are valued and that participation is meaningful.

Section 4 of the SEN Toolkit gives guidance and suggestions for 'Enabling Pupil Participation'.

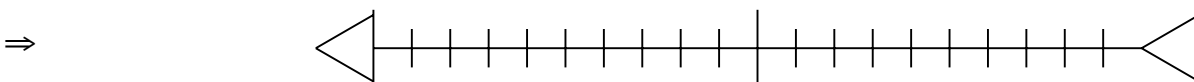
SOME IDEAS ON CONSULTING CHILDREN

Listed below are some suggestions for enabling pupils with SEN to express their views:

- indicating what interests them through gazing intently, turning towards or reaching out for objects or people
- indicating how they are feeling through facial expressions, body movements and responses such as tears and laughter

- indicating preferences between given options (the pupil chooses from options selected by the adult, which take into account the safety, health and welfare of the pupil) by:
 - reaching out, grasping or pointing
 - nodding or shaking their heads as options are shown to them
 - nodding or shaking their heads in response to questions with yes/no answers such as 'Do you want?'
 - verbal communication
 - suggesting additional options, using language, mime, movement
- express feelings, using language, mime, movement, painting, music
- making representational drawings and models
- compiling books about themselves
- discussing issues raised in books
- making up and acting out stories personally or using puppets
- taking part in group activities and discussions
- showing on a line or ladder how things might change and how much, including how it might be possible to change
- group discussions, brainstorm, examining pros and cons, prioritising
- drama, music and movement
- writing stories, letters, plans
- making maps, posters, books, models
- using cameras, DVD/video/audio-tape recorders
- using a prompt/recording sheet e.g. a 'salmon line':

⇒ Draw a Salmon Line



⇒ Write **GREAT** at the head and **POOR** at the tail.

⇒ Ask the child to mark where they feel they are regarding various aspects of school life and record the words at that point on the line e.g. Reading, Spelling, Maths, PE, Music, etc. Homework, Confidence, Friendships, etc.

⇒ Date the line and store in their file.

⇒ In preparation for the next review, ask them to show where they think they are now regarding the subjects marked on the last Salmon Line.

PUPIL PARTICIPATION AT REVIEW MEETINGS

The review meeting is a forum in which pupil progress is discussed and decisions made about future targets, resource requirements and placement. It is considered that as far as possible and practical, all children should have the opportunity to contribute to the discussions which take place. Some children with severe learning and physical difficulties may not be able to communicate their wishes or feelings in

any formal ways but should be encouraged throughout their lives to make relevant choices. Others may exhibit behaviours that would interfere with the review meeting and consequently their presence may be counterproductive. Many other children are perfectly capable of presenting a view and therefore should be involved in reviews where as much as possible is conducted through them. In other words, they should not be 'talked about' while they are present, but be active participants. In some cases there may be very sensitive issues that probably need to be discussed without the child being present. It may be, for example, that a parent will refuse to attend if the pupil is present.

Bearing in mind the range of need and the capabilities and ages of individuals, listed below are some suggestions to encourage pupil participation:

Before The Review Meeting

- explain to the child what the review meeting is, when it will take place, who will be present and what it entails
- record a pupil's opinions about his/her progress on the IEP and on a 'pupil comment form' if it is an annual review of a statement. Often help will be needed to complete this in a one-to-one situation, and the views expressed written down by the teacher, key worker or a partner chosen by the pupil. Another example might be using 'Writing with Symbols Programme'
- it may be useful to ask children what aspects of their school life they would like to share with the people at the meeting. The use of a 'Record of Achievement' document might be helpful
- if there could be disagreements between children and their parents then it is generally useful to have tried to tease out the issues in advance of the meeting
- consideration should be given to the length of time the pupil spends in the meeting, such as joining the beginning or the end of the meeting. However, there is an expectation that some children should be present throughout
- consideration may also be given to reducing the number of adults present whilst the pupil is in attendance
- pupils should be strongly encourage to attend the meeting. When children are adamant that they do not want to attend, then other ways of involving them in the process should be sought. In some instances appropriate technical or communication support may be required (i.e. equipment or personnel). Certainly a person who knows the pupil well and is able to convey information both to and from him/her, is crucial
- role play and coaching are useful methods for helping a pupil to prepare for an annual review meeting.

During The Review Meeting

- pupils should not be patronised or feel out of their depth. It should be clear that their opinions and preferences are taken seriously and, where possible, actions should be undertaken which show them that this is the case
- when pupils are present then discussion may centre around the responses made on the pro-forma prior to the meeting, or alternatively be prepared with a set number of questions which you are sure the pupil will understand, e.g. 'If you have a problem who do you talk to?' 'Do you hand homework in on time?' 'Who are your best friends?'
- the questions need to be balanced between the academic and social matters that schools present
- pupils should be praised for progress that has been made and encouragement given in their endeavours to attain new goals. As far as possible they will also need to feel that they have had some say in the setting of new IEP targets.

After The Meeting

- an explanation of the outcomes of the meeting and what action is to be taken must be conveyed to the pupil. This can be done both in written and verbal ways
- management systems need to be in place to take account of the views and ideas expressed by the pupil and for suitable responses to be made
- if unreasonable or impossible requests are made by pupils then it would be generally good practice to discuss these at an opportune time outside the meeting.