



## **INVESTING IN CHILDREN**

### **Membership Evaluation**

**Date** April 2005

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Dinnington First School
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>	Sycamore Avenue Dinnington Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 7JY
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### **SUMMARY OF EVALUATION**

Dinnington has directly participated in a Investing in children Agenda day and has 3 research groups looking at issues raised at the Agenda day. But the evidence for dialogue and change is not just the Agenda Day but also the activities of the School Council. The children talked about the changes the Council has brought about such as fixing a door which had squeaked for years but it was fixed once a child took the issue to the Council and the development of buddy scheme "it was mentioned in the Council and then everyone picked up on it" and lots of other examples of large and small changes. The Year 3 & 4 classes elect 2 members each to the Council but the year 1 and 2 classes are represented on a rotation basis to give everyone a chance to take part who wants too. The School Council also has a budget of £100 which they decide directly how to spend.

<b>Sector</b>	<b>School</b>
<b>Ages</b>	4-9 years
<b>Area</b>	North
<b>Ward</b>	Castle

**Number of beneficiaries**



investing in children

## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership:

### **Dinnington First School, Newcastle**

#### **Background**

Children from the school took part in an Agenda Day in October 2004 and there are now three research teams being supported by Investing in Children Newcastle called Scary Teenagers, Parks, and Traffic. They meet regularly after school and the evidence so far suggests that the themes they are researching reflect the current real issues for children of their age in the area.

Evidence for Dialogue and Change

#### **School Council**

There is a recently formed school council facilitated by Mrs Pay, Year 4 teacher. To make sure this had a firm base the children received training in how school council's work and those elected received further training in areas such as minute taking and chairing meetings. Years 3 and 4 have two elected members per class, a girl and a boy but the younger classes are represented on a rotation basis to make sure that everyone who wants to has a go at being on school council can do so. The full council meets every Friday and the representatives then feed back to a meeting of their classmates. At this class meeting there is open discussion about the issues of the moment and what has been discussed at full council. The members of the class ask the representatives to take their ideas and opinions forward to full council.

Features of the school council include;

- They have a budget of £100 and council decides how this is spent. This does not prohibit council approaching the head for other funds
- There is a school council notice board, which displays up to date notes of the meetings and council activities.
- Every effort has been taken to ensure that the meetings are owned and ran by the children. Mrs. Pay takes notes and acts as 'secretary'. The group will send a delegation to the head if they need information.
- Although sometimes 'unrealistic' suggestions have been made at Council the children value all contributions and all opinions are treated with respect

I met with ten of the council members – Rose, Sam and Matt from Year 4, Abby, Caitlin and Daniel from Year 3, Anna and Glen from Year 2 and Michael and Kayliegh from Year 1. They have done a Power Point presentation which they talked me through. Changes that the council have brought about are;

- Benches – There are benches in the playground for the children to use to sit and chat to their friends. Council was concerned that some children were using them to jump on. They were worried about safety and children not being able to use the seats. They decide to put up posters asking children not to jump on them and ran a poster competition. The head was asked to choose the two best entries from each class which were presented at an assembly of achievement. The children told me that the posters have raised awareness of the problem and the benches are rarely jumped on.

*"We did signs for the benches. All classes entered." – Rose.*

*"I've only seen one person jump on the benches since we put the posters up."- Glen.*

*"I haven't seen any." - Matt*

- Buddy Scheme – Although the staff had felt that playtimes were quite peaceful School council revealed that there were friendship problems on the playground. Some of the council members suggested forming a Buddy Scheme having heard about this from friends who go to other schools and from other sources. Mrs Pay was given extra time to set this up and a lot of discussion took place at school council about the format of the scheme. The group agreed to spend part of its budget on armbands for the buddies, having decided they did not want hats or sashes. They now have a functioning buddy scheme.

*"It was mentioned in school council meeting and then everyone picked up on it. - Matt*

*Now a lot more people seem to be a lot happier in the yard." – Sam.*

- School Toilets – The council want the toilets upgrading. The Head is seeking funding for this.
- Snakes and Ladders in the Yard – Although there has been a snakes and ladders board painted on the school yard for some time, it was never used. A simple suggestion by Council to provide large dice has changed this
- Classroom Door – Although this issue was presented as a small example I think it highlights the usefulness of the group in achieving change. A classroom door had been squeaking for years and the handle did not work properly until Michael brought this up as an issue. It was rectified immediately but the children told me it had been like that for years.

*"It was like a haunted house. It annoyed all of us." – Sam*

*The door handle didn't work properly until Michael put it into School Council." – Anna*

- The Council has asked to plant more spring bulbs and have chosen the ones they want. They are discussing how this should be paid for and have suggested this should come out of the schools budget or by donations from parents rather than out of the council's budget.
- An example of issues discussed is the cloakroom area where some children wanted rules bringing in but after consideration the group rejected this as they felt they could end up having too many rules.

### **Food Club**

This is an innovation that the children said they really enjoyed where they get to try "lots of different foods from all over the world – apricots and pineapples"

### **Circle Time**

The children told me they value this very much and that it is a place to "tell their troubles and be listened to".

### **Investing in Children Club**

This is where the three research teams mentioned in the introduction meet to carry out their work supported by a worker from liC. The children thought it was a good idea and that they should be involved in local decisions that affect them

The children I met with felt that they were able to talk to the staff freely and that they are always listened to. The children who attended the Agenda Day all seemed comfortable with the idea of being involved and spoke positively about their opportunities to comment on anything at school. "Mrs. Farrer always takes time" was a comment from Matt.

I would like to recommend that Dinnington First School be awarded Investing in Children membership.

Graham Bristow  
Investing in Children Project Worker  
April 2005

## School works for pupils

Dinnington First School pupils take a real interest in their surroundings and school life. The school has a weekly school council, set up after the children received training in how councils work and the skills they would need. Years 3 and 4 elect a boy and girl from each class. The younger classes have representatives on a rotation basis, so everyone who wants to can have a turn. After council meetings, the representatives feed back to a meeting of their classmates, and gather opinions and ideas to take back to the council.

The council decides how to spend its budget of £100. It can also ask the head teacher for other funds, or for any information it needs. Though sometimes suggestions from the children are unrealistic, all contributions and opinions are treated with respect. The meetings are owned and run by the children, and meeting notes and council activities are displayed on a notice board.

The council has brought about some positive changes in the school, some of them significant, and some relatively small, but equally important. For example, to discourage people from jumping on benches in the playground, it ran a high-profile poster competition. This raised awareness of safety issues, and now children rarely jump on the benches. "I've only seen one person jump on them since we put the posters up," says Glen. "I haven't seen any," adds Matt.

Staff thought playtimes were peaceful, but the council revealed friendship problems and suggested a buddy scheme. Some of the budget paid for armbands for buddies to wear and, "Now a lot more people seem to be a lot happier in the yard," confirms Sam.

**"...I've only seen one person jump on them since we put the posters up..."**

Following the provision of large dice at the council's suggestion, pupils are using the previously ignored snakes and ladders board painted on the yard. A squeaky door handle was immediately fixed when the council brought it up, though it had been squeaking for years. "It was like a haunted house. It annoyed all of us," says Sam.

Some children wanted rules for the cloakroom area, but after consideration, the idea was rejected on the grounds that there could be too many rules.

The council has asked the school to look for funding to upgrade the toilets and to plant some spring bulbs.

Other groups at the school include a food club, which tries "lots of different foods from all over the world – apricots and pineapples." There is also circle time, where children can "tell their troubles and be listened to." And three groups of pupils meet regularly after school to research themes important to them and to other young people in the area – scary teenagers, parks and traffic.

The Investing in Children assessor says, "The children at Dinnington First School feel they are able to talk to the staff freely and that they are always listened to. They all seem comfortable with the idea of being involved."

[suggested pics – poster and benches, door handle, snakes and ladders board being used]