



Re- Evaluation for Investing in Children membership: Gainford Primary School

Gainford C of E primary school is situated in the village of Gainford near Darlington. It is a small, colourful and friendly village primary school with teaching staff, classroom assistants and volunteer parents. The Head Teacher Mr Blindt has been in post since September 2002.

For the purposes of this re-evaluation I spoke with Mr Blindt on the phone and arranged to meet with members of the school council. Since the last evaluation in November 2005 there have been significant developments in the school and achievements that the staff and pupils can be rightly proud of. The school council has continued to build on a strong foundation based on active and informed dialogue with pupils with Investing in Children principles at heart.

In February 2007 I met with Lucy, Grace, Ross, William, Reagan, Crystal, Max, Kyle, Emily, Holly (pupils from year 2,3,4,5 and 6 who feedback to reception class and year one and communicate with the rest of the pupils via a notice board) as well as Mrs Kidd and Mr Blindt who support the children.

These young people are all active members of the school council and were incredibly keen, enthusiastic and descriptive about their roles, responsibilities and the achievements they feel the school council has made.

They made me feel very welcome and spoke with real honesty and enthusiasm as well as showing me round the school to take photo's for this report.

Evidence of dialogue and change

School Council

- The school council continues to meet every other week usually on a Tuesday lunchtime

"we meet every week, on a Tuesday lunchtime after we have eaten our dinner"
Grace

- Nomination - Children from each year group are nominated onto the school council by their classmates and are not picked by teachers

"Our class vote for us" Max and Kyle

- Badges - School council members get a badge to wear which tells other pupils that they are on the school council. This identifies them as school council members so the other children in the school can pass on their ideas and suggestions.

“Sometimes the badges prick our fingers but they are good because everyone knows who we are” Ross

- Notice board - The School council now has a notice board in the main corridor of the school which informs staff and pupils about the school council agenda, discussions and achievements as can be seen in the photo below. This is a way of encouraging other children to get involved in the school council agenda and discussions.



- Voting - The school council members don't always agree and sometimes have discussions about topics. If they can't all agree they take a vote on a topic after talking it through

“we have a vote thing so we can decide....we don't always think the same and that way its fair” Crystal

- Minute taking - The children take turns to write the minutes of the school council meetings in a special book

Emily and Holly showed me the school council minutes book “here are the ones we wrote...we take it in turns”

- Lockers / storage boxes - One of the outcomes of the school councils work the children wanted to tell me about was the “lockers and storage boxes” debate. This was an example of where there was a discussion, vote and then a period of negotiation where practicalities were explored. The children had asked for lockers for their belongings as well as coat hooks. This was discussed at the school council and after a discussion and a look at finances and practical issues (eg. Space) boxes were purchased and placed under the benches for the

children's belongings. This is an example of active and informed dialogue and debate leading to positive change.

"the lockers were too big so we decided to have boxes under the benches for our stuff" William

"Everyone loves the boxes and there was not enough space for lockers" Reagan

- The Swimming pool discussion – some children had asked if a swimming pool could be built on the school site. The school council have discussed this many times and the compromise reached is that the children use busses to get to the local swimming baths in Barnard Castle. There are many practical and health and safety issues that have influenced this decision and the school council members understood and were able to explain to me the reasoning behind the decisions taken. This is an example of how the school councils discussions relate to school budgets, health and safety and County Council policy.

"it would be great to have a swimming pool but we would have to have lots of teachers and someone might get hurt so its better to go to the proper swimming baths where there are lifeguards" *"It would cost too much money"* Ross and William

- Chocolate fountain – a request had come in to the school council for the purchase of a chocolate fountain. The council discussed healthy eating, cost and use but decided it wasn't the best use of resources. However the idea has been passed to school governors as an idea that could be used at school fundraising functions. This is an example of how even the most "unusual" of suggestions can be discussed and even actioned.

"I still think a chocolate fountain is a good idea as a treat but chocolate isn't very good for you is it?" Emily

- Smoothies and juice – young people now have the choice of buying smoothies and juice as an alternative to water and milk
- Meeting with small schools group of head teachers – the members of the school council met with head teachers from the small schools group to tell them about how the school council works. The discussion was lead by the children.

"we got to speak to all these people about what we do that was good" Max

- Play equipment – the school have purchased more outdoor play equipment and the school council have been involved in purchasing this.



- Collecting and spending vouchers from supermarkets – table tennis table and rocket totalizer. Children were involved in choosing how to spend the Sainsburys equipment for schools vouchers. This year they chose a table tennis table and motivated people to collect vouchers by using a totalizer that looked like a rocket. The children showed me the catalogue for this year and some ideas for things to buy.

“You can look in this catalogue and choose what to buy....we help chose what the other kids want....you get a lot for your money” Lucy and grace

- Bad points of being on the school council – The school council members said that they enjoy being part of the process but sometimes it means they miss out on lunchtime activities. They have decided to swap the dates of meetings to get around this.

“sometimes you miss a play or activity” Crystal and Reagan

Mr Blindt also raised the issue of making the school council a meaningful, active and informed forum which is not tokenistic. He is keen for the discussions to be informed and realistic and for the children to try to

understand that the council is a forum for discussion and that decisions will be influenced by budgets, resources, county and national policy. The school council clearly has a lot of power within the school and this enables the children to experience decision making.

Pupil questionnaire

- Feedback from this annual pupil questionnaire informs developments within the school and sets some of the agenda items for the school council discussions.

Blue Peter Appeal

- Children and young people asked to participate in this years Blue Peter charity appeal.

Red Nose day

- Children and young people have decided how the school will participate in this years Red Nose day events.

Gainford Primary continues to support active dialogue with the children in the school and positive changes have been made. The school council is very much owned and valued by the children. *"Its not just our ideassometimes people come up to you in the playground to tell you things" Emily*

There have been many achievements and developments that the school can be proud of that demonstrate that children as well as staff and governors have been involved in the discussion and decision making. The ongoing challenge will be to continue to develop innovative ways to meaningfully seek and represent the views all of the children and young people in the school so that the school council is an active forum for discussion and dialogue.

This is an active school council which receives the full support of the teaching staff and Head teacher. This report has been seen by the children who helped me write it. I have no hesitation in recommending that Gainford primary have their Investing in Children membership renewed. Well done and good luck for the future. I hope your school council can be a model for other schools in the County.

Shelley Gill
Investing in Children
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