



## Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

### Somers Park Primary School

Somers Park Primary School is in the centre of Portsmouth. It is a large school with a large staff team who has shown a clear commitment to involving children at all levels of their education during their time at the school. Mrs. Fleming leads a very friendly and welcoming school, and I met a number of children who are involved in lots of different and innovative ideas at the school.

### **Evidence of Dialogue & Change**

#### Student Governors

Pupils being part of the school governors board is an initiative run by Portsmouth City Council. They are known as SAM's (Student Associate Members), and at Somers Park Primary there are currently four children who are SAM's, and I met two of them, Savannah and Charlie.

An announcement was made in assembly asking if any children would like to be part of the governing body. Mrs. Fleming told me that the school is now in the second year of having SAM's as Governors and it is running very well.

The governors have been encouraged to write an agenda that involves the children and they are not excluded from anything. There is an adult body governor who spends time before meetings with the children. They look at the agenda and papers so that they are well prepared for each meeting. Savannah told me, **"We don't use any acronyms because they're confusing."**

Children from all over Portsmouth who are SAM's had a chance to meet and talk about their roles, get to know each other and share ideas. Savannah told me about an idea their team had got from the day. **"If we're sitting and we want to say something but you're too scared we have these cards and you can put it up and the chair will ask you, red means you don't have anything to say."**

The children feel that they are an important part of the governing body and that they are making changes to the school. As a result, Charlie told me, **"It has changed our school."** Savannah is in year six and will be leaving soon; however, she has enjoyed being a SAM and feels she would like to continue. **"They've got it at my next school and I'd like to do it."**

Charlie has also felt his experience has been good, **"I'd probably like to carry on."**

## Topic & Timetable Planning

I had the chance to meet the school's Head boy and girl, Luke and Yasmin. The Head boy and girl were voted for by the whole school. Luke and Yasmin are very *proud* to be in their positions. Luke told me, "When I went to my Nan's house she had baked a cake that said 'Head boy' on it."

They take on many different jobs at the school, from showing visitors around, helping new children settle in and even making sure a card for a member of staff who was leaving got passed around everyone. Luke and Yasmin talked to me about a very exciting part of Somers Park Primary School, the topic and timetable planning.

This idea began three years ago when the school decided to change its curriculum. Mrs. Fleming talked to me about the area which the school is situated, and there were some statistics which showed that the life expectancy in the area was eleven years shorter than those just a few miles away. The school asked the children and the community what was important to tackle this and it emerged that a focus on how to be fit and healthy, and how to cook. The school had a cookery room built and the work began. It was decided to look at what the children already knew and then to find out what they would like to learn about and how they would like to learn it.

This idea grew and two teachers ran a trial for their classes. This was soon discovered by the rest of the school and everyone wanted to try it.

The children are told what the new topic will be for the next term. Luke told me, "**When we start a new topic the children get to say how they want to learn it.**" Yasmin went on to add, "**Our last topic was the world, we chose a part and it was global warming. We do a spider gram and write what we already know, what we want to know. We say when we want to learn the lessons and what days.**"

Luke told me, "**We get slips for every subject we need to cover like art and DT, and try and think how that subject fits in.**" The children plan what they want to learn. Yasmin said, "**We work as a class to organise, or we have small groups for each subject: English, maths, science, DT and art and give ideas, everyone has a turn, then you do a little presentation and people listen and decide.**"

The class teacher allows the class to do all of their planning and only steps in towards the end with suggestions but the class takes control of their learning. The class then goes on to plan their own timetable. They are given the number of hours each subject needs to be taught for in a week and then they arrange the timetable how they want it.

I also met Bethany Farzana and Chloe and they told me about planning their learning. Bethany's class decided to have a full day of PE, as they thought that would be fun. She told me, "**We had a whole day of PE, but we made it so we didn't use up all the PE and had some on other days.**"

When I asked the children if they enjoyed planning their timetable and work, Luke told me, "**It's a wonderful way of learning.**" Bethany said, "**It's a very good idea, we know what we're doing, it's up to us. We all agree at the end, and *people are happy because you know when it's happening.***"

## Curriculum Monitors

I met with Tyler, Wezley and Sanjeta who are curriculum monitors. Sanjeta told me what the role entails. **“We go to other classes and see how well they’re learning and how well they’re listening. We ask the children what they do and how they enjoy it.”**

Wezley said that they visit other classes once or twice a week. When I asked how other children let them know how they feel about their lessons Tyler said, **“You can tell by their faces,”** and Wezley added, **“They sometimes refuse to do the work.”**

Sanjeta told me that the curriculum monitors write notes in their folders and then feedback to Mrs Nixon who then talks to the teachers. She told me, **“We think of ideas of how to do it better, and then we go back and check.”**

All of the curriculum monitors were invited to join the teachers at an INSET day at the school to plan next year’s curriculum. As it was a day that the children would have been off school, not all of the monitors joined the meeting. But some of them did, and they helped to choose six themes for next year.

## School Council

The school also has an active school council. I had the pleasure of meeting with Nathaniel, Chloe and Joe who are on the school council. The council meets as and when it is necessary depending on what is happening at the school. Nathaniel told me, **“Everyone voted, they chose someone who would be sensible and good at the job, not just their mates.”** Joe went on to tell me, **“We go to loads of meetings and sort stuff out.”**

Some of the issues that the pupils at Somers Park Primary wanted the school council to look at have included toilets, school dinners and the playground. Nathaniel told me that the school council has changed school dinners, **“The children didn’t like the dinners much so then we changed them, we have choices now and we wear bands to show what we want, more people have the dinners now.”** Some of the younger classes have pictures of the meals to help the children choose what they would like.

Recently the children changed the music room; they have chosen the colour of the walls, the carpets and the blinds. Joe said, **“Before it was boring white.”**

The school council also helps with fund raising at the school and has raised money for Jeans for Genes and Denim for Diabetes.

## Hear by Right

I met with Bethany, Farzana and Chloe who are part of the Hear by Right group at the school. The group has met with staff and looked together at the Hear by Right standards.

As Bethany told me, **“We looked at what we think we already do, what we don’t do enough of, and what we don’t do at all.”** Chloe went on to say, **“We then decided what we wanted to focus on, what to make better and what to do about it.”**

Bethany had a file and an album to show me, which records all the work they are doing. She told me, **“We have a budget and this is what we are spending our money on. We’ve got a digital camera, we want signs for the friendship bench, badges for the**

**friendship bench monitors, a success board for every class, refreshments, and worry boxes.”** She went to explain about the worry boxes, **“If you’re worried you can put your worry in the box and someone will check it and in circle time it gets discussed. If it’s more serious they will find out who the person is and sort it out.”**

The classes have golden time for good behaviour and each class has £40 from the budget, **“They can buy board games and activities or colouring things.”**

The Hear by Right group have also looked at the toilets in the school. There will be an archway over the two sets of toilets for the boys and the girls. The group has asked everyone what they think about the idea of the archway, as it will mean there is not a main door on the toilets. At first the boys were not happy as **“they thought it was an invasion of their privacy.”** Once they realised that all the cubicles would have doors on they agreed it would be a good idea. The children have been asked to decide on the colour of the archway.

Another area the Hear by Right group has been involved is in jobs for younger children in the school. Many children in the school have jobs to do and the group had a meeting about it. Bethany told me, **“We thought that little children didn’t have any jobs that they could do so we went around looking at different things that they could try. We took photos of jobs like watering plants, litter picking, picking up coats and being friendship monitors.”**

The Hear by Right group felt very strongly about re-introducing the hero tree at Somers Park Primary. The hero tree is a display which shows who has been a ‘hero’ at school. Chloe told me, **“It could be if you’ve behaved or done something really good, like commitment to the school, or being a good friend on the playground.”**

Bethany said, **“The hero tree was used a lot before and now it’s not used and we want it back up and running.”**

The group has designed leaflets asking the children to spot heroes at school and nominates them so they can be put on the hero tree.

The children also want to create a friendship bench, using a wall which is already in the playground. Bethany explained the idea behind it, **“If someone is lonely and got no-one to play with we’ll have monitors to see if they want someone to play with.”** The children are planning on painting a design on the wall and will be looking for ideas from their classes.

Having met the children it is clear that they are very much part of their school. They have taken control of their learning, they are motivated and engaged and this is supported fully by Mrs. Fleming and the entire staff. I was very impressed with the children and the way in which they could explain to me all of the different ways in which they work to develop their school.

It is a truly innovative school, in allowing the children to plan their curriculum and learning. The children were enthusiastic about their school and were in total agreement that Somers Park Primary should receive Investing in Children membership, and I would fully support their endorsement.

I would like to thank Savannah, Yasmin, Charlie, Luke, Tyler, Wezley, Sanjeta, Nathaniel, Chloe, Joe, Bethany, Farzana, Chloe and Mrs. Fleming for making me feel so welcome in their school, and congratulate them on their success.

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**Investing in Children**  
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