



Re-evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Sugar Hill Primary School

Sugar Hill Primary School is based in Newton Aycliffe and has been successfully awarded Investing in Children (IiC) membership since the pilot scheme in 2000.

I briefly spoke to Frank Ridley, the head teacher, about the work of the school council to get a little bit of background before I spoke to the young people. He told me that he believes that he and the teaching staff are there for the benefit of the children and not vice versa. He said that when he spoke to the young people about a recent development in the school yard he had told them “I don’t get a playtime”. He went on to say that the playground and equipment had to be right for the young people and what they wanted, otherwise they wouldn’t use it.

I had the pleasure of speaking to members of Sugar Hill School Council:

- Scott Dawson
- Lois Rivers
- Celine Hetherington
- Lewis Brown
- Abbi Turnbull
- Callum Thain
- Connor Ingham

School Council – Colour Council

I had already read an article the school council had written for IiC newsletter in September 2007, but I asked the young people to tell me more about the school council and how it worked:

Abbi told me that on Friday’s at 2.00pm members of the school council go into each class. They are named Blue/Red/Green/Yellow and there are 2 classes for each colour. There is a school councillor for each class. The children talk about what they’d like to change in school for example games in the playground. The council then come back into a group to discuss the ideas.

- Scott – Ideas come back into the group. We tell Mr Ridley the most important stuff from that session and discuss how we could do it. You get lots of ideas verbally but not written down.
- Lois – There is a suggestion box as well, but we get most ideas from talking to the classes.
- Connor – No one puts suggestions in. Lack of students taking part.
- Abbi – Year 6 gets squares and others get triangles. If you match up you go into that group and it stays like that for the whole year.
- Callum – We have different boxes for bullying, buddy, and suggestions

I asked if there is anything they would like to change about how the Colour Council works:

- Connor – Change to council could be to bring suggestion box to them to sort (Connor thought the ideas in suggestion box could be brought to their meetings for the school council to deal with – most of the others agreed)
- Scott – Mr Ridley would let it happen (changes to the council ways of working) cos he's nice. Unless it's a daft idea he would say to do it. Teachers get piece of paper to explain what they have to do. But think they need training how to do it. They don't always seem to know what the school council is about.
- Anonymous - I think Mr Ridley should be on time cos sometimes he's late.
- Abbi – teachers go over it. We have ideas to change the processes of school council.
- Lewis – I would change the order we do things. Time of meeting is an issue. We miss playtime. We decide what we want and put money towards it. When we can't have something it's usually explained and it's normally down to money!
- Callum – it's difficult to get your lunch as the stuff we like is usually gone by the time we get finished.
- Celine – It's ok. I like doing it how it is. Others are happy with it.
- Scott – we get a sheet with names on of people who want to be a councillor. We all get to vote against those names. Someone from year 6 gets to announce who have been elected. Think using this political process its better and fair. We don't want teachers to pick.

The Investing in Children Award

I asked the young people if they could tell me if they thought that Sugar Hill should get IiC award. I also asked if they could give me an example of change that had come about as a result of what a young person had said.

- Connor – Yes, think so. Cos it's a good school. New playground. The Huff and Puff – that doesn't get used much anymore. It should be used more.
- Callum – Yes cos it's good to get ideas from young people. We had asked for a Jungle Gym but we need more money. We introduced sports leaders.
- Abbi – Yes it's a fair school. Most new things in the school have come from young people in the classes and then via school council and then actioned.
- Lewis – Yes, cos we let children decide, not like some schools. It's not the teachers deciding.
- Celine – yes. The study was made as that's what children wanted and it was built from the old store room.
- Lois – yes. Cos got extension to dining hall because the children complained they were all cramped.
- Scott – Yes. With the uppers and lowers I had concerns. But now we have a new queue system for dinner times. We used to end up queuing outside so it didn't work. We changed the card system at lunchtimes. Playground markings.

School Council observation

At the end of our meeting the young people invited me to observe how it worked in practice so I went with Abbi to the class she was working with. The teacher explained what Abbi was going to do. Abbi explained role of peer mediator, which has been reintroduced due to the school council. The class also discussed how they could all get their chance to speak about any particular issues, using a ball or object. If you hold the

object you can talk and everyone has to listen. There is no pressure to say anything – if you have nothing to say you can pass the object on.

Examples of dialogue and change

Dialogue	Change
Young people raised issue of being too cramped in dining hall	The dining hall has been extended
Young people voiced concerns that they had to queue outside the dining hall and there was a card system for pupils in uppers and lowers	There is now a new system for dinner times
Young people wanted an adventure playground	Young people have been involved throughout including deciding on location and equipment and fundraising

Endorsement

On a return visit to discuss the report with the school council a few amendments were made and then the young people agreed the report.

Recommendation

Based on what the young people have said and with their endorsement of this report, I recommend that Sugar Hill Primary School receives Investing in Children Membership status once again.

The adults in the school genuinely want to find out what young people think and make changes based on what they have raised. Indeed on my return visit an issue that the young people had raised at my visit has been resolved. The members of the school council had complained that due to the timings of their meetings they were unable to have lunch properly that day as most of the food had gone by the time they got finished. Now the meetings have been moved back for 30 minutes to allow them time to get lunch.

Farewell but not goodbye I suspect!

Mr Ridley is leaving the school as head teacher at the end of this term. He told me he is going to be chair of regional board of governors. He hopes to be able to use his influence when visiting Whitehall to make things better for young people in schools, and ensure they are involved in decision making in a meaningful way.

On behalf of Investing in Children I wish Frank Ridley well and thank him for being an enthusiastic supporter of young people's participation and the work of IiC from the beginning.

Congratulations to the new head teacher, Linda Cumming, and we look forward to working with her in the future.

Angela Stobbart
Investing in Children
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