



Re-evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Woodham Community Technology College

For the purpose of his evaluation I met with members of the school council. I had the pleasure of meeting with Daniel, Charlotte, Sophie, Josh, Amir, Josh, Simon, Ben, Emma, Emma-Jo, Richard, Kray, Sarah and Connor.

Evidence of Dialogue & Change

School Council and Year Council

The school continues to operate a school council as a means of representing year groups. The group told me how they were elected for the school council.

“It was in tutor groups, we wrote down who was interested, and then you wrote letters to the head of year to say why you’re interested in being on the council. There are two representatives from each tutor group.”

The school council meets twice a term and they feed back to their year groups in council meetings, however, the group I met with felt that they didn’t always feed back to the rest of the year group effectively, and suggested that **“the rest of the school needs to be informed.”** As we discussed the issue of passing on information a suggestion for **“more year, and tutor group meetings”** was made. Currently each tutor group has one lesson a week with their class tutor, and the young people I met with felt that this was an ideal time for further discussions with the rest of their year group. This suggestion was passed on to Mrs Clements who works with the school council and she agrees that the process needs to be reviewed and hopes that in the new school year she can work with the young people to find a more effective way of working. It will be interesting to see how this develops in the coming year.

Youth Centre Survey

Sedgefield Borough Council had funding from the Children’s Fund and sought the views of young people as to how the money should be spent. The school council identified priorities for service improvements in the Newton Aycliffe area. They decided to focus on the first two priorities of cheaper leisure facilities and provision of a bus service. The young people have conducted a survey about the youth centre to find out how much it is used and what young people felt was needed (see attached).

Presentation on Developing an Effective School Council

Some of the members of the school council attended a conference entitled “Children and young people’s involvement in governance and leadership” in December 2006.

They presented a workshop called “Developing an Effective School Council”, and looked at the benefits of a school council, the barriers and difficulties that need to be overcome when running a school council. They also highlighted examples of positive developments and good practice. Miss Clements commented on how well the young people handled questions from the audience. Richard said, **“A couple of people tried to catch us out, but we were able to answer them.”** The workshop went well and the young people

received very positive comments from those who attended and were told that they were impressed at their ability to cope with the difficult questions.

School Development Plan

The young people at Woodham continue to have a say in the planning for the school and its future development. The school council made suggestions for new flooring in some of the corridors and this has been done.

Refurbishment of a toilet block has happened as a result of the school council putting forward complaints on behalf of the rest of the students. The young people told me, **“We’ve got new toilets, the last ones were bad, people complained.”**

Dining Halls

Young people had previously contributed to the school development plan with suggestions for the dining hall and this has been a continuing interest for the school council.

Richard told me, **“We’ve got a new chef, Phil, and he talked to us all, and asked what we wanted on the menu.”** Everyone agreed that the dinners had improved as a result of this.

Two dining halls now have televisions in them, although there have been few teething problems in getting them set up, the group were confident that when the new school year begins all of the work will be done.

Interviewing Staff

Students have been involved in the interviewing of new staff at the school. Sarah told me she interviewed and appointed Miss Potter who is now the director of student support. When I asked Sarah how she felt she had contributed to the interviews, she told me, **“I was definitely listened to.”**

What makes a good teacher?

The students at Woodham were asked to comment on what they felt made a good teacher, and what they style they prefer a teacher to work in. Their comments were compiled following a Behaviour Policy collapsed day, which is a day when students go off timetable to consider a particular issue – in this case the behaviour policy for Woodham; and with further comments from the student council (see attached). This will be used to feed into the principles of the Behaviour for Learning Policy. Students have identified many characteristics they would like a teacher to have, such as **“Calm – not shouting”, “Teachers who treat us like adults”, “Teachers who get the culprit and not shout at the whole class”, “Teachers who allow us time to calm down”, and “Teachers who show respect to students by not drinking/ chewing/ answer mobile phone/ eating in lesson”.**

A point which was raised on the feed back for teachers was **“Good behaviour should be rewarded.”** This was an issue that was raised with the young people I met with. One young person said, **“We see others getting rewards for bad behaviour, we should get rewards for good behaviour. We don’t always get to do the courses we want to do.”**

I asked the young people who they would take their identified issues, problems or suggestions. They told me, **“We’d go to Miss Clements, or the head of year, or Phil if it’s food, or the head of the subject.”**

I asked about approaching Mr Harness, the head teacher, and the response was mixed. Some young people said, **“He always seems busy.”**

Other young people were very quick to respond and said, **“He would take the time to talk to you.”**

More comments about Mr Harness were, **“He’s keen to hear.”** And, **“He co-operates very well, he doesn’t dismiss it.”**

Following further discussion it became clear that the younger members of the school council found it more difficult to approach Mr Harness, however, the young people who had been at Woodham for longer felt more relaxed and at ease in talking to him. Connor said, **“You can just knock on his door.”**

Everyone agreed that they tried to come up with answers to any problems they have before passing on their issues to Mr Harness, saying, **“If there’s a solution he’s happy with that.”**

When I asked the young people I met with if they felt that they were involved in having a say in the development of the school, and that their school should receive Investing in Children membership again, the group agreed and said, **“You get listened to.”** And so with their agreement I recommend that Woodham Community Technology College continue to be members of Investing in Children.

Lisa Lines
Investing in Children
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