



Evaluation for Investing in Children membership

Walker Technology College

For the purpose of this evaluation I met with some pupils from the Executive council, the House council and pupils involved in the development of a peer led project within the school. They were Sarah, Sarah, Steven, Darren, James, Lee, Connor, Ken, Jessica, Lauren, Thomas, Kimberley and Steven.

Walker Technology College is situated in the east end of Newcastle and is a dual specialist status school in technology and visual arts. About 1400 young people attend the school and the sixth form. The school offers a formal curriculum and a vocational curriculum for students. When students enter year nine the school has developed a curriculum framework plan to allow pupils the opportunity to choose which direction they want to take in their education. The student decides to either select a formal curriculum approach or a vocational curriculum approach to learning. Pupils, with the support of the school, select a programme that meets their individual needs and learning style.

The school encourages all pupils to get involved in dialogue with the school. Young people are involved in various decision-making processes and developments within the school environment. They use a variety of methods to develop student participation. These include a house council system and executive school council that represents pupils. Young people are elected to represent their year group. Other opportunities also exist for pupils throughout the school to get involved in different aspects of decision-making. These include pupils being involved in the government's 'Building Schools for the Future' project and also the involvement of pupils in evaluating the school's behaviour programme. The development of a new school uniform is also something pupils have highlighted that they want to change and are leading on the re-design of the uniform. There are also some older students working with the school to develop a drug and alcohol peer led project, a joint collaboration between students and staff to develop a peer led 'English Language' project, is now in place.

This report will highlight a variety of opportunities young people have, through different methods of dialogue with Walker Technology College, to discuss and work in partnership with some of the school staff. As a result Walker Technology School has started to develop an inclusive environment where more pupils can have a say about what goes on there.

Opportunities for Dialogue and Change.

Our New School/ Building Schools for the Future Project

Walker Technology College is part of the government's 'Building Schools for the Future' project. The intention is to improve and upgrade buildings over the next three years. This has given many pupils the opportunity to think about how best they learn and enjoy life at the school. Their ideas have been discussed in regular meetings with engineers and designers from the project. The school has taken a positive approach in trying to

discover from young people how they can improve the experiences of being at school and in the developing of the design for the new school building.

Many opportunities have been created and continue to take place for pupils to engage with the design team. There has been a strong commitment by the school for pupils and staff to work together. The Student Executive has brought up some important issues, covering not only physical design issues but also concerns about the relationship between students and staff. These include:

- **The teacher's ability to make the lesson interesting and definitely not boring**
- **Unreasonable requests from teachers such as not being given enough time to copy work down.**
- **The behaviour of other students.**
- **The furniture.**

It will be interesting to see next year, how these areas identified by students have been addressed

Student Executive Council

The executive council is made up of students who are elected by their different year groups. The idea is for this group to be an independent voice in the school and to discuss different issues that are important to students of the school. For example they are developing and designing a new school uniform, involving different students at the school. Jessica told me, "**Designs have been drawn up by students and we have been talking about the best way to get the uniform so it doesn't cost too much**". Steven explained, "**Pupils have been visiting lots of different schools to get ideas**".

This is a positive example of how the executive council works within the school. They have really thought about the implication of the cost of a new school uniform for students and their families. The executive council have been working with other students and teachers to keep the costs down. Cheryl told me, "**There has been a change of plan now because not all pupils in the school could agree with a certain design**". Cheryl went on to explain, "**A survey went out to all pupils in the school with the new design and when they came back half the school wanted blazers and half the school wanted jumpers**". The school have made some decisions based on what the students stated in the survey. Students said they did not want to wear blazers in the summer and this has been actioned.

House Council.

This system allows pupils to elect a representative of their year group to the house council. Each year group at Walker Technology School is structured into houses. The young people I met told me of some of the issues they have raised, such as improving the toilets and wanting better vending machines throughout the school. (The students have been helping with developments made). It will be interesting to look at how this system develops in the future. However, some of the young people raised the issue about the way in which the house council representatives were viewed by pupils of the school and whether they could really change anything. Some young people also highlighted how they believed the house council could better link in with the school executive council. It was felt that not all students were given feedback on developments and opportunities within school and that the house council system could be developed further. I would recommend meeting more regularly.

Fundraising.

Some young people this year approached the school to raise some money for different individual charities. An example of this is when Tony, Louise, and Jessica approached the school to raise money for breast cancer charities. Pupils are encouraged to write articles for the school newsletter, which Tony, Louise and Jessica did for the March edition, Tony wrote about the experience's her family went through in the March edition , **"I was very happy with the support for my family, so I thought I would help raise money. We got lots of support from teachers and more than we expected from the students and are very grateful for the donations"** (Walker Technology School New Letter March 2007).

Peer Support.

I also met with Steven, David, and Kimberley who are part of a Peer Supporting Team. They were all asked to be Peer Supporters by the school and have identified issues which they believe young people need support with. Then the programme is planned in order to meet some of these ideas and needs of the young people who are part of the project. Steven explained, **"We chose to look at teenage pregnancy, drug education, relationships, friends, family and contraception"**. Darren told me why, **"We chose these because we think this is what young people need support and advice with and it is not always about school stuff"**.

The school have also been working in partnership to develop a peer led English language course after school as some students identified that they would like additional support with their English. Language staff and pupils who choose to get involved are working in collaboration to set this new programme up.

The 'Anti-Bullying Police' and the 'Discipline for learning programme' (DFL) were set up in response to issues that are important for students. The DFL programme is a 4-tier system approach to negative behaviour, from C1 first verbal warning through to a C4, which is a day spent in isolation from other pupils.

In February the school carried out a student survey on the DFL (which was circulated to different classes in the school). One of the main outcomes of the survey (151 surveys completed) was that 143 students did not think the DFL programme worked and that teachers used the programme in different ways and not how it was meant in the initial set up. As a direct result of this the school changed the training programme that was in place for teachers and ran a training programme based on the feedback from pupils. The school over the next year will be looking at how pupils can be involved more in improving a behaviour management programme, which is a question that has been put to the student executive council. Andrew told me that, since the survey was completed, changes have occurred. He explained, **"Based on what pupils where saying about C3 and C4 they changed it so you do detention at C3 and not just at C4 because pupils thought other pupils sometimes tried to go straight to C4 and miss out the detention"**

The school has to be applauded for the opportunities students are given to contribute to decision making processes. All of the young people I met with were able to talk about their involvement and tell me about some of the ways that young people participate in their school. The staff team ensure that a wide variety of opportunities exist for young people within the school, to have a say through the development of the student executive council, house council system, and other involvements in school policy and development.

For these reasons I would like to recommend Walker Technology College receives Investing In Children membership and look forward to seeing any further developments made by pupils and staff when coming to re-evaluate next year.

This report has been read and agreed by the following young people they are Sarah, Melissa, James, Roxanne, Dean, Andrew, Jack, Jordan, Cheryl, and Kelly.

Rob Johnson
Investing in Children
June 2007