

Footprints

Step by step together

Your newsletter from the Diocesan Board of Education

February 2022



Paul Dunning
Diocesan Director of Education

There is no doubt in my mind that all schools do a fantastic job in engaging with and listening to their pupils.

I witness a deep understanding that such a collaborative approach ensures schools have the best system in place for getting better, focused on the needs of those they

serve. Just read the examples that follow!

Your Diocesan Board of Education has also experimented with ways of listening to pupil voice. We have had inputs at our meetings from primary and secondary students via Zoom which have been informative and helped shape our thinking. It grounds us in reality. Please volunteer and let Jon Moule know if your school would like to contribute.

We do well to remember that there are Biblical examples of those who it might be thought of as being too young to have significant influence and impact. For example, the shepherd boy David and the servant girl used by God to heal Naaman, an army commander. And Jesus himself said in Mark 10:14 "Let the little children

come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." This underpins our Headteacher conference theme of "Let the children come – caring for and protecting the uniqueness of each child."

I came across a wonderful quotation from Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General to the United Nations (1997-2006) used in the foreword to the State of the World's Children 2000 report. I will use his words to conclude: "There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace." Amen!

Archbishop Sancroft High School goes to General Synod 2021



Our initial thoughts

We were invited to General Synod so that the Church of England community had a better idea about young and diverse people in relation to the Church and Christianity. At first, I had such mixed thoughts about the event: imagine speaking in front of a lot of people, but I was wrong! Members of the Church gathered from across the country to listen to us! It was such a breath-taking experience and the group I was in was extremely encouraging, making sure my suggestions and ideas were being absorbed by the group.

Our summary

We started off by reading a script alongside another school about diversity and youth within the Church. We worked in smaller groups where we spoke about our ideas on how to engage with the youth in Church and how to be more diverse. Talking to different people individually about their experiences in church and about their thoughts on how to involve young people in services, whether it was getting them to speak in Church or listening to their opinions, was extremely inspirational. The people we spoke to were very passionate about the younger generation and how to help them be more included, and they were curious about what we had to say even though many of us are not religious. We talked about how age, race, gender and sexuality shouldn't matter when people were at church, as everyone was there for the same reason.

Overall, it was a very eye-opening and educational experience, as many of us had stereotypical ideas of the church, and that it didn't accept certain types of people. However, speaking with the people at Synod, we have learnt that that is not the case, and that those people want change and more inclusivity within the church.

What surprised us

We were surprised to learn that the stigma and harmful stereotypes around the Church are not true; through our first-hand encounter we feel as though this is something we can and should spread awareness about! We all felt pleasantly surprised when faced with such accepting people. They all acknowledged how there are diversity issues in the church and were incredibly willing to use our ideas in order to challenge this. We loved how obviously comfortable they were among each other and showed a strong sense of belonging. We loved hearing their stories about converting to Christianity and how happy it made them.

What we will remember

To say the experience was inspiring is an understatement. Through our discussions, our eyes were opened to how communal the Church of England is. We learnt about the Christian values of kindness and charity, making it feel like a place you wanted to be. It was revealed to us how the religion isn't just going to church on Sundays, but is also a family. Stereotypes

were broken and we all have taken away how inviting Christianity is! We felt so appreciated when told about how they want to appeal to all people and explore diversity in such a positive light. Furthermore, we were informed about the process of converting and how it is accessible and encouraged at any age. Synod was amazing and the members were so willing to hear our opinions and ideas. The main thing we have taken away from this experience is how welcoming the church is, through letting younger people lead their services and creating clubs especially for people's desires. We are so thankful for such an astonishing and informative experience.

What we learnt

We also felt that we had learnt a lot from the discussion sessions. I discovered that the Church isn't just a building where people sit for two hours on a Sunday but that people also use the Church space to achieve so much with young people – such as being transformed into a Café for the day or as a stage for a performer, rapping from the Bible – as well as so many clubs and events that aren't necessarily about Christianity. It shows that Church is more of a community, and we found out that there is so much more you can do with a church to welcome young and diverse people. We realised that stereotypes of what Church, and even Christianity, is can deter people from joining this community, and that the Churches can be transformed into safe spaces for young and diverse people.

Gayle Platt
Headteacher
Dersingham VA Primary

Pupil voice can mean different things to different people; it is not fixed and absolute but constantly changing and evolving. Nothing can be truer recently, as we have had to cope with the challenges and impact that Covid has brought to all our school, limiting our interaction and changing our everyday practice. It has resulted in our school finding creative ways to gain pupil voice, often embracing technology, from zoom collective workshops to AhaSlide surveys.

In a nutshell, pupil voice at Dersingham penetrates every aspect of school life. It is about the pupils having a say in decisions in school that affect them, playing an active role in their education. Our student council, eco-council, sports council, pupil governors and e-cadets all have a purpose that feeds into the strategic direction of our school. In response, our school becomes more attentive and responsive to our pupils' needs in sustained and routine ways.



One method of active citizenship used within our school is the oldest children acting as fellowship leaders, facilitating small group collective worship, enabling children to explore life's questions in a creative and interactive way, often through shared reflection or prayer space activities. These experiences help all our children develop their sense of identity, self-worth, personal insight,

meaning and purpose.

Pupils are entitled to express their views about things that will affect and determine their future. Pupils are inspired and enthused by the belief that their ideas matter and make a difference. But it is also about the mutual respect given and received between pupils, where communication is open, honest and valued.

Jonathan Barber
Headteacher
Thurton VC Primary

At Thurton CE Primary School our approach to encouraging pupils to have a voice, be listened to and be heard has evolved over the past 24 months. Like all schools, we have gained experience in using a variety of technologies as ways of obtaining pupil's views, feelings and wishes, from Zoom to web based platforms like "padlet".

In its broadest sense, "pupil voice" at Thurton includes a wide range of approaches to allow and encourage children to share their views or preferences. Each day, there are many informal opportunities for this to happen within classrooms, the school hall, prayer spaces or on the playground. There are also more formal occasions, such as at our weekly lunchtime Treasure Seekers club with Gary or with our Well-Being Coach, Bev, when children require a more intimate space for a conversation.

Last year, and again this year, we have been part of the National Younger Leadership Group led by the Archbishop of York Youth Trust and the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership. This project provides an



opportunity for our pupils to join with other children and leaders from across the country to discuss current themes and topics which are relevant to them. Daniel, who completed this last year, said: "I enjoyed taking part because it gave me an opportunity to give my opinions on various current topics such as climate change."

Following this experience, we have adopted a class-based approach to promote pupil voice where two pupils

in each class are selected for the role of Class Ambassador. Each term they are responsible for leading their class in completing a project focused on either a school, community or a global based project. Class Ambassadors also support our school leaders in shaping school improvements, systems and policies. Olivia, Class Ambassador in Blue Class, said: "We get to share ideas. We also get good opportunities to do different things and a choice to lead something important to us."

Governor focus



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Pupils who are given an opportunity to express themselves through the promotion of discussion and debate feel valued and engage better with their learning. Being heard also leads to greater confidence not only in school but as they go forward into their post education lives.

When a governor has a responsibility, often called a "link", for a particular area of monitoring, the emphasis can be on meeting and discussing with the members of staff responsible, but remember you can talk to the pupils too.

Steve Potter, Trustee and Transition Board member in St Benet's MAT did just that in November 2021 and he very kindly agreed to write about his experience.

"Whilst it may be suggested the only way of monitoring effectively is by being 'in school' and it might, therefore, be easier to wait until we can walk the corridors again before we continue our monitoring and support, I'd like to share

a recent monitoring activity which may be of interest.

As a link safeguarding governor, I've been thinking about how I could support and follow up the recent safeguarding audit completed by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) from the Trust, given that currently it isn't possible to visit the school.

Following a discussion with the Head Teacher we agreed a Zoom meeting with a small group of Year 5 and Year 6 students, accompanied by a DSL, so I could obtain a better understanding of the students' awareness of safeguarding and how they are supported. My prepared questions aligned closely to the OFSTED framework, and we focused on: safety in school, safety outside of school and also safety online.

I was met (virtually) by six expectant faces, with the DSL, and I was pleasantly surprised by the thoughtful and insightful discussions and answers they gave. All the students were attentive and keen to participate, and they didn't appear to feel the need to look to the member of staff to validate or reinforce their responses. I was impressed by their openness and enthusiasm.

A conversation with the member of staff immediately following the group discussion identified a couple of areas that could be improved upon, which we have agreed will be actioned and evidenced at our next Local Governing Body meeting.

Overall, I can conclude that this virtual monitoring has helped to inform and clarify the school's approach to

safeguarding for me. Having identified and agreed the areas for further training I believe the school has also benefited from this activity."

I want to thank Steve for his contribution and also for persevering with virtual monitoring while he was unable to visit the school in person.

It can be challenging for governors to bring what we call "pupil voice" into their meetings but remember, pupil voice is not just directly listening to the pupils in the school but also building on our understanding of what it is like to be a pupil in the school.

A traditional way to obtain pupil voice is a pupil survey. Some schools have taken this a step further and invite termly pupil feedback on their learning experience. The feedback sessions are led by teachers who are not teaching them regularly so that the feedback is objective and honest. The insights are taken into consideration by school leaders when planning for the next term. The key outcomes from the feedback session can then be reported by the headteacher to the Governing Body who can then hold the leaders to account for their responses to what the pupils are telling them.

However your school and your governing body accesses the pupil voice, it can be useful to reflect at the end of your meeting on whether through the discussions, reports and presentations you have been able to build a picture of what it is like to be a pupil in that school or schools.



Race awareness training for all

One-hour online session led by Allana Gay exploring 'Why look at Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) in schools?'

We have set up two dates, funded by the Diocese, for all staff and governors to attend. Please share this with your colleagues and to book either session (only need to attend one) just click on the links below.

Wednesday 23 February, 6.30 – 7.30pm
www.DofN.org/EDI-23Feb

Wednesday 23 March, 6.30 – 7.30pm
www.DofN.org/EDI-23Mar