

Voice of the Child

Midlothian Council Educational Psychology Service

"Every child deserves a champion
-- an adult who will never give
up on them, who understands
the power of connection, and
insists that they become the
best that they can possibly be."
-- Rita Pierson

Supporting the views of children

All children and young people are entitled to express their opinion in deciding their future and there are legislative requirements that state that children and young people's views must be considered (Education Act 1996, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 & UNRC). For children with Additional Support Needs, this right is even more vital. Fundamental to all work involving children and young people is that the child's voice is at the centre.

Midlothian aims :

- All children and young people in Midlothian with speech, language and communication needs can contribute to and express their views about their education and wider plans.
- Education staff feel confident in using a range of appropriate strategies and tools to help these children achieve this.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) is in line with Scotland's vision for placing children and young people at the core of planning and decision making. Therefore, it is vital that we provide opportunity for children and young people to share their sense of identity, how they see others around them, the part those people play in their life and how, working collectively, each individual involved can help to build a plan which endeavours to support them.

Visible Learning drivers

How visible learning links with pupil voice:

I engage in dialogue not monologue – assessment capable learners are involved in their own learning and the teacher welcomes pupil feedback on their teaching. Within this aspect, pupil voice is central. In order for future planning to be effective, pupils should be encouraged to be involved, have their views and opinions sought and any input should be valued.

Error and mistakes – This is the essence of learning. We can link error and mistakes back to growth mindsets in that children and young people need to have the confidence to communicate, and not be afraid to ask for help, or worried about making a mistake. Within this, the teacher has a role in promoting the expectation that children will be meaningful participants in the decisions that affect them and their learning – as all pupils including those with communication difficulties internalise this message, their confidence in communicating their views increases.

Building Trust - Schools need to build relational trust to make further improvements. This focuses on working cooperatively to achieve school goals (there needs to be a whole school ethos) and building trust across the school community to create a positive learning atmosphere for students and staff.

Respect – recognising the role that each person plays in learning. Adults are encouraged to work with children and young people in an inclusive way to ensure that their views are heard and valued in decision-making.

Resources to support capturing views

Children's rights clearly relate to their wellbeing. If we value children and young people's rights, then we must provide a learning community which makes them feel included, where their achievements are valued and celebrated and where their voice is heard. To ensure we take practical approaches to supporting children and young people, the GIRFEC approach should underpin practice in eliciting these views.

There are a number of resources available to support capturing the views of children and young people. The following is not an extensive list, but provides some examples of approaches for consideration.

ACHIEVING: Developing new strategies and skills for thinking about and expressing choices are important. Having a meaningful say in learning plans so that the child/young person is motivated and it is meaningful to them will encourage ownership and will create more of an impact. To enable views to be captured in relation to choices in target setting and evaluation, talking mats may be a useful tool. Talking Mats is an interactive resource that uses three sets of picture communication symbols – topics, options and a visual scale – and a space on which to display them. Once the topic is chosen e.g., 'activities' or 'people', the participant is given the options one at a time and asked to think about what they feel about each one. They can then place the symbol under the appropriate visual scale symbol to indicate what they feel

ACTIVE: This indicator relates to the child/young person being an active learner in how to participate in decision making, and expressing their choices and feelings. Choice should be embedded in everyday educational experiences. The Mosaic approach is based on using multiple methods to gather multiple perspectives about a child/young person's experience, enabling children to communicate their views in alternative ways. Visual methods in which children are actively engaged -e.g. book making using children's own photographs or photographs of child-led tours to gain insight into how they perceive their environment- can inform planning.

RESPECTED: Having a meaningful, direct and consequential role in the planning process is essential for effective planning. Person Centered Planning (PCP) is an ongoing process used to support planning for the future. PCP is an inclusive approach where the focus is on the individual, what is important to them now, their vision of what they would like to do in the future and how this can be supported in alliance with key individuals. There are various tools that can be used to help support capturing views.

RESPONSIBLE: Supporting children and young people to understand their own needs, identify their own preferences and choices, and to take on a role in giving that information to the people around them is essential in ensuring the best support. Communication passports are a way of pulling complex information together and presenting it in an easy-to-follow format. This helps people to get to know the person with communication difficulties and provides information on how other around them can interact/respond in the most effective manner.

More information about resources can be provided by the EPS on request.

My Voice My Plan

Claire Finlay, Katie Hayes, Fiona Brown (Midlothian EPS) and Suzanne Smith-Main (speech and language therapist) have been developing the project 'My Voice My Plan' within Midlothian. The focus is on supporting children and young people with communication difficulties to express their views effectively. Planning and delivering of this new initiative is underway. So far, two sessions have been delivered within Midlothian, mainly attended by Support for Learning teachers but also other teaching staff and learning assistants interested in accessing children's views, especially those who have language and communication difficulties. The EPS are continuing to work with Suzanne and are now focusing on developing materials to support this work.

The ultimate aim of this project is to fulfil the vision that the voices of children in Midlothian are fully represented in all aspects of their educational lives. This will involve eliciting and including children's views in all plans such as their Child's Plan, IEPs and CSPs.