
CELEBRATING DIVERSITY THROUGH PUPIL VOICE

A guide for Primary schools



Stonewall

Acceptance without exception

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A CHANNEL FOR CHANGE

School councils can have a really positive impact on the entire school ethos and every part of its community. And if the school council is set up to embrace diversity, difference and tolerance, that impact can resonate within the school gates – and beyond.

This guide will take you through the steps, issues and challenges of bringing diversity into focus in your school council. Before you get going it's worth noting that some schools choose to set up a dedicated diversity group while others integrate the work into their existing school council.

Whichever route you choose, your pupils' views and voices will echo throughout the school, changing it for the better for pupils, staff and visitors.

INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE AND SUPPORTIVE

Your school is made up of many different stakeholders; staff, pupils, governors and parents. All of them have their own take on what they want and need from the school and all of them have a role to play in bringing that vision to life.

An inclusive school is a better place to work and learn. But it takes buy-in from all the various groups to make it happen. This is particularly true of work around diversity. If governors and senior teaching staff are seen to be taking the issue seriously, it shows pupils and parents that it's important. And it makes staff confident that they'll be supported if challenges occur.

All voices are important but those of your pupils have special significance. They can give a unique perspective on which policies should exist and what they should look like. And members of school councils can act as role models for the other children, so the diversity message can 'cascade' to every year group.

There's a legal aspect to this work too. Under the Equality Act (2010) the public sector is obliged to foster good relations, advance equality of opportunity and promote understanding. And Ofsted expect schools to combat bullying of all kinds in line with its promotion of 'British Values', which places particular emphasis on respect for others. Your school council can be instrumental in helping you meet these requirements.

CASE STUDY: St Keyna Primary School, Bristol

Staff and pupils at St Keyna Primary School made a determined and long term commitment to tackling homophobic bullying and celebrating difference. Children, staff and governors all worked together to set up the 'E Team', a group that works to ensure equality and inclusion are central to everything the school does now and in the future. Their initiatives include a buddying scheme to eliminate bullying in the playground and making short films celebrating diversity.



LEAD BY EXAMPLE

It goes without saying that diversity has to run through every aspect of the school council or group.

- Make sure the membership is as broad as possible and that the activities are varied enough to appeal to the widest range of pupils.
- Pupils will attend the group if they think it's relevant to them, so find the triggers to motivate different pupils to come along.
- Stress that everyone will be listened to as every voice matters, regardless of language and learning ability.
- Ensure that resources exist to support this, such as picture prompts or bilingual material, and arrange for the meetings to be held in accessible spaces. If resources don't exist, try and develop them in partnership with relevant organisations or even the pupils themselves.
- Make it possible for pupils to make anonymous contributions.
- Approach situations with the assumption that everyone, children and adults, are working with the best intentions at heart. Sometimes that might mean a couple of extra conversations are needed, but you will get there.
- It may be that children reveal personal information during discussion. If this happens, ensure any disclosures are managed in line with the school's safeguarding policies. It is important to recognise, however, that a person revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity is not in itself a safeguarding issue, so this information should not be passed on to a safeguarding lead, unless there is evidence of other safeguarding concerns.
- Be prepared to signpost outside of the group if necessary. Ensure the group know where they can get further support or information, both within and outside school.

CASE STUDY: Saint Blaise CE Primary School

With a relatively low number of pupils, this small school took an alternative route to listening to students' voices and created a School Parliament. Meeting around twelve times a year, it involves the whole school working in their social house teams, where students answer questions on big issues suggested by their peers as well as by their teachers. Two Pupil Parliaments explored issues around equality, including uniform, fair and equal society and respect. These discussions led to key decisions, making the children instrumental in creating change in the school's policies and every day life.

This work produced an equality statement which was published to parents and the wider community using the school's website. The work also drove activities during Anti-Bullying Week, the theme for which was 'All Different-All Equal'. Pupils demonstrated that it was okay to be different by coming to school wearing odd socks. This supplemented the school's support of two children whose gender presentation is in contrast to society's expectations for their assigned gender.

A few of the parents found it difficult to understand why the work was important, but fears for their children were misplaced, as they became ambassadors for the work, leading smaller working parties. The children took home positive messages to their parents, who in turn saw the pride their children took in the work, which shifted the parents' focus.

The school's success is reflected in its inclusive community feel, which has been acknowledged by an Oxfordshire Gold Award.



A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF POLICYMAKING

It makes sense to get your pupils' take on school policies, including those that address:

- behaviour management,
- anti-bullying strategies
- ensuring diversity and inclusion
- discriminatory behaviour

and how these policies could develop in the future. After all, they're the ones the policies are supposed to protect and help.

Ask them:

- what sort of bullying takes place
- where in school they feel safe or unsafe
- if their lessons and resources show a range of different people and families
- if the playground and club activities cater for everyone's needs

- to review books in the library to check if they have a broad range of characters

Giving your pupils the chance to have their say on your school's policies and resources will make sure they suit everybody's needs and cover all types of bullying. Let them help come up with the wording of child-friendly policies and encourage them to explain the policies to their peers too. It creates a sense of ownership and credibility. If you need help in shaping policies, our *Getting Started Toolkit* for primary schools has some examples to work from.

You should ensure that any issues which arise from discussion are approached in a way which is in line with the school's safeguarding, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and equality policies.

CASE STUDY: Frederick Bird Primary School, Coventry

Staff at the school unanimously decided that diversity work would have more impact if it was led by the pupils. School Councillors feed back to their classes directly, complete a half term report which goes to Governors and are often featured on the school website for parents and carers to see. Staff and pupils are supportive of the work that the School Council do on celebrating diversity, and School Councillors are excited to share their work with their peers.

CASE STUDY: New Moston Primary School, Manchester

Analysis of the school's data on behaviour incidents revealed, at one stage, a small increase in the use of homophobic language. As a result, all classes completed a series of Philosophy for Children sessions about anti-LGBT language and bullying, and the school created a new event. The 'Pride of New Moston' celebrated diversity with children designing class posters, wearing Rainbow Laces and parading in front of the school community. Parents and staff have been supportive of the school's diversity work, although one parent did have concerns about the 'Pride of New Moston' event. After a meeting between the parent and the Head Teacher, the child took part in the event which was attended by around 600 parents.

LET THE GROUP LEAD

It's no surprise that your pupils should be involved with setting the pace and the scope of your diversity work. They've played a big part in getting it going after all.

You can get things started by looking at the year ahead and picking out a few events that you think they might be interested in. There's plenty to choose from, including:

- LGBT History Month
- Black History Month
- Trans Day of Visibility
- World Book Day
- Safer Internet Day
- International Women's Day
- World Religion Day
- International Women's Day
- Anti-bullying Week
- World Autism Awareness Day
- World Refugee Day
- International Week of the Deaf
- Dyslexia Awareness Week
- Disability History Month

Ensure you make links with any PSHE or other curriculum planning for lesson input on these events.



New Moston Primary School, Manchester

CASE STUDY: New Moston Primary School, Manchester

New Moston Primary School has put pupil involvement at the heart of its work on diversity, encouraging them to lead discussion and activities. Meetings between the Junior Leadership Team (JLT) and the Senior Leadership saw the children offer suggestions for events to celebrate diversity, such as the Rainbow Laces campaign and International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. And participants in the annual JLT Pupil Voice survey made sure at least one question specifically about diversity was included. Pupils also take the lead during Philosophy for Children sessions, where their discussions centre around LGBT issues, gender identity and gender stereotypes. The JLT also shared responsibility for choosing the winners of a competition to design a school poster promoting the 'different families, same love' message, and pupils blog about the work being done at the school. The role played by the Junior Leadership Team was key to the school securing Gold School Champions status.

KEEPING YOUR GROUP BUSY

Once the group have decided which events they think the school should get involved in, you can ask them for suggestions for activities for everyone to take part in. There are no limits to what you can do, so fire up your group's imagination to see where it takes you. Here's a few suggestions to get the ball rolling:

- deliver an assembly
- create a school display
- run a series of competitions
- raise money for charity by hosting an EqualiTea or using the schools Come Out Walking fundraising pack
- conduct an anti-bullying survey
- develop a peer mentoring and peer mediating scheme
- choose new books for the school library, some of which might make a good platform for your school's next performance (such as *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell)
- identify sources of support within school, and create ways to publicise these to their peers

The work is fun and important, so don't forget to share it with the rest of the school community. Put it on display, and write pieces for the school newsletter, blog and website. The more people who know about the work, the more inclusive and 'routine' it becomes. And it'll help get more people involved too; ask parents, carers and others in the wider community to help organise the events and invite them along so they can see the work in action.



CASE STUDY: Frederick Bird Primary School, Coventry

The School Councillors decide on which celebrations and fundraising will take place across the year, and then come up with ideas to get the whole school involved. For example, Councillors launched a quiz on the achievements of black people across the world for Black History Month. School Councillors also get involved directly with promoting inclusion across the school; during LGBT History Month, pupils from the School Council shared the book *Vincent the Vixen* by Alice Reeves with younger children. They used a puppet fox and a range of dresses to expose gender stereotyping and what it means to be transgender. Due to their learning in the School Council, Councillors were excited to share the book with their peers and were able to talk about gender in a sensitive way.

THE TRICKY BITS

No matter how much you try and involve and include everybody, no matter how well you communicate what diversity work is all about, you could encounter a few challenges.

- Questions and concerns from parents and carers. Make it clear that the group is just another way the school expresses its ethos and policies on diversity and inclusion. Diversity issues in schools can be sensitive for some parents and carers, so let them know your door is always open if they want to discuss something. Be sure to tell them it's important that children have as wide a world view as possible, and diversity work helps with this.
- Getting support from SLT and staff. The group will be more successful if it has the full support of your colleagues so get them on board from the start. Their open support gives the group and its activities visibility and credibility. Get them involved too by sharing the group's plans and activities and invite them to lend their specialist skills when appropriate.
- Children's lack of knowledge or understanding (within the group and the school as a whole). Understanding what diversity means, and how to ensure and celebrate it, takes time and skill; so, take time to explore the subject and support pupils both in their own understanding and in communicating it to their peers.

CASE STUDY: Carleton Endowed CE Primary School, Skipton

The school's development plan identifies the targets they want to work on, then lets the pupils come up with ways to bring it to life. Once the days the school wants to celebrate are marked on the calendar, the school council and prefects work out the best ways to deliver the theme and the celebrations to the school community. The school council's ideas were put onto different coloured t-shirts to make the Pride flag.

Taking Stonewall's 'Get Over It' campaign as their starting point, the pupils adapted its themes of individuality to highlight why it was good to be them and to be different. The reasons why it was 'good to be me' were put onto t-shirts designed by the children as they wanted to wear the slogan and show their parents the work they were doing.

This work is discussed with parents and carers with all but a small number accepting it. Those who had concerns about teaching children about 'the gays and the lesbians' were reminded that the work is mainly about embracing inclusion and diversity. Those concerned that the children were too young, were reassured that the focus is on acceptance and difference rather than 'the mechanics' and that all teaching was done in a way appropriate to the children's age.

All pupils, staff, school council and governors attended the activities around International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia and all their work on diversity is shared with the local press and on Facebook.





IS IT WORKING?

Seeing young people open up to and embrace diversity is a fantastic experience – but can it be quantified? How can you demonstrate to others that the school council's work is having the desired impact, that it's a worthwhile initiative, deserving of the time and resource it takes?

The best ways are to monitor levels of bullying and compare them with previous levels, and to conduct anti-bullying surveys which will give a clearer picture of what type of bullying is taking place and where. You might also want to draft your own well-being survey as part of your school's pastoral care programme.

These measures will supplement the work you do with the school council and ensure it plays a vital and vigorous part in creating and sustaining a truly inclusive culture that benefits pupils, staff and parents alike.

WE'RE RIGHT BY YOUR SIDE

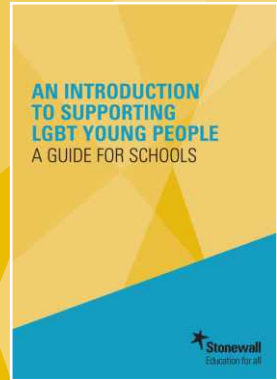
Introducing diversity into your school council might seem a bit daunting but you're not on your own. We've a whole suite of resources to help you everystep of the way. These include:



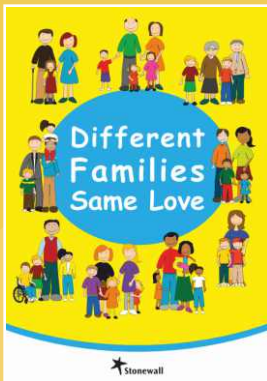
Stonewall School Report



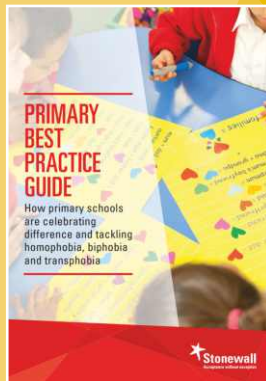
Getting Started – A Toolkit for Primary Schools



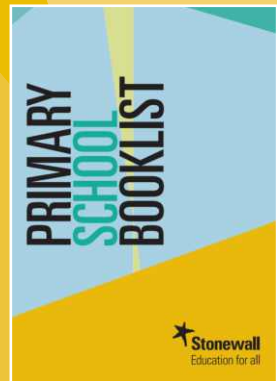
An Introduction to Supporting LGBT Young People



Different Families, Same Love: posters, stickers and postcards



Primary Best Practice Guide



Primary School Book List

If have any questions, please get in touch by email at education@stonewall.org.uk

OTHER SOURCES OF HELP AND SUPPORT

These organisations also produce resources you could find useful:

School Councils UK

Participation Works

Mermaids

Gendered Intelligence

National Autistic Society

Council for Disabled Children

Refugee Council

Mencap

Show Racism The Red Card

Charity No. 1101255

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