

School or Local Authority	Case study focus	Other issues of note
Airedale High School, Wakefield	9 different student voice groups each with a focus linked to the SDP. Pupils volunteer to be involved for as long as they like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to the training and personal development of young people – peer mentors. Cyber mentors. • Tracking pupils on extracurricular activities – making sure everyone is involved and that the school caters to everyone • Commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils and under-represented pupils involved.

Airedale High School, Wakefield

About the School:

Airedale High School serves an area of socio-economic disadvantage. A higher proportion of students than average are entitled to free school meals. More students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low. Airedale High is a specialist Performing Arts school.

The school has achieved the Investors in People Award, the Healthy Schools Award and Sportsmark. In 2007, it qualified for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust 'most improved school' club. A fire at the school in 2006 destroyed many specialist facilities and the new buildings, including a state of the art 300 seat theatre, have only recently been opened

Pupil voice activities:

Student Voice Groups: Airedale High School has developed nine Student Voice Groups which are linked to the School Development Plan and which are reviewed annually. Each group focuses on an area or issue within the school that pupils and teachers think are important to give special attention to. These groups are:

- Behaviour & Attendance & Rewards system
- Teaching & Learning
- Community Cohesion
- Environment
- Canteen & Healthy Eating

- AMP (Awareness, Media and Publicity)
- Literacy
- Uniform
- Extended schools

Peer mentors: Two pupils from each year are trained as peer mentors. This is a successful scheme where pupils support other pupils with problems at school or at home. A space in the school is dedicated to allowing pupils to talk in confidence with a peer mentor.

Cyber mentors: Two pupils from each year are trained as cyber mentors. The school set up the scheme after reading national reports of increased cyber-bullying, and, through pupil assemblies and mentoring, it has been successful in reducing this, and also low-level disputes between pupils online.

Case study focus:

The focus of this case study is Airedale High's commitment to involving all young people in effective student voice, and to the personal development of pupils.

Aims:

Through effective student voice, Airedale High aims to improve the school environment, and help pupils to have a say in the direction in the school. They successfully use pupil engagement and peer mentoring as a way of solving low-level problems between pupils, and to improve behaviour. The school aims to improve the personal development of pupils through engagement in important decisions, central to the school's operation. The school also aims to support pupil confidence and life skills by encouraging effective participation in group discussions, chairing and note taking and the daunting challenge of presenting to staff meetings and assemblies.

Action:

Student voice is embedded in the core work of the school. The different Student voice groups can make real and lasting change in the school and it is clear that the school takes them very seriously.

The Uniform Student Voice group had a central role to play in designing the new school uniform, and the Teaching and Learning group, with support and training, carried out a series of teacher observations in 2008. The group pulled together themes that they felt were important and gave feedback to teachers. The group produced a 'What we want from learning' poster and put one up in every classroom to remind students and teachers. Suggestions on the poster included "more ICT" and "less copying from books". Lesson observation and senior management learning walks show evidence that pupils' views have been effectively taken on board.

The school's interest-based approach means that up to 80 pupils have been directly involved in school improvement through the different Student Voice groups. Many more have been involved in smaller ways. The flexible approach also means that interested pupils can become involved as and when they like, and has been successful in helping many pupils to take part.

Members of Student Voice Groups are visible and known throughout the school, and their work is supported through the AMP group who publicise their work. They make sure that the work of the groups is given a high profile with pupils, teachers, parents and the community through the school newsletter, and meeting minutes displayed on walls throughout the school. They also run a very successful poster campaign called 'You say, we did' - this tells the rest of the school about the successes of the student voice groups, and makes everyone aware that they can make a difference. Links with the groups are also made with the curriculum where appropriate, depending on what issues the student voice groups are discussing.

One of the problems that the school faces with the nine groups is that pupils often overlap between lots of the different groups. To tackle this, the pupils and teachers have developed a system where all extra-curricular activities, including those linked to pupil voice, are recorded in an Activity Database. This is updated by pupils and staff, and means that they can help to target and involve under-represented groups in the school.

Student voice is accredited at Airedale High and it can be used for pupils' record of achievement and UCAS form.

Impact:

The positive impact of effective student voice is widespread at Airedale High. It has helped to improve the confidence and self esteem of pupils, behaviour has also improved. Pupils around the school feel more empowered and take responsibility for their actions and helping others. One pupil mentioned that, "everyone gets on because student voice helps us to solve problems ourselves". Involvement is widespread, successes are well-communicated and this encourages other pupils to take notice and get involved. The mentoring schemes are a formal and successful way of showing how pupils can help and support each other, but it is a theme that runs throughout the school.

There are concrete benefits that can be seen around the school such as better ICT provision from money raised and a more popular uniform, but also teaching and learning have improved. Social skills amongst pupils are being developed as well - one pupil involved in the AMP group mentioned that, "it's a good school, and student voice helps it to stay that way".

Teaching staff believe that relations with pupils have improved and there is a strong feeling of a caring and inclusive school community. Keeping track of who is involved through the Activity Database has led to better understanding of pupils' interests and skills, and has helped the school see what pupils' are doing outside of school. It is encouraging for the school to be evaluating and monitoring involvement, and this has also taken place through student surveys on school life.

Despite the time constraints, and the wider commitment of staff, Airedale High School is an excellent example of how student voice can help a school to develop as a caring and inclusive learning community.