

Transcript from a pupil focus group facilitated by a SNAP young person ambassador

1. What do you think a school should look like?

“It is all about the quality of the teaching not what the school looks like”

Pupil A: Secondary to the teaching. If the school looks pretty but can't teach you, then what's the point of the school?

Pupil B: Parents don't send children to schools based on their buildings; they send them based on their reputation, results and quality of teaching.

Pupil C: I think some students respond better to bright colours and posters on the walls and those kind of things, but those sort of things aren't paramount. At the end of the days it's the teaching that's important. I personally can't work in a minimalistic classroom of black and white but others may prefer it as there are less distractions.

Pupil D: Schools should spend the money they spend on redecorating on having more provisions and employing more teachers, not making the classrooms pretty.

2. What is important for you to learn/experience in your school life?

“Learning life skills: social skills - to communicate, work in groups; financial skills; to be able to decide what is right; learning how to be healthy.”

“Literacy and numeracy as distinct from maths and English/Welsh”

All: Social Skills

Pupil D: Learning to communicate properly and learning to work in groups, as that's what's important when it comes to the world of work.

Pupil A: These sort of skills need to be focused on when children are younger, like in primary schools.

Pupil E: Pupils should be taught ethical issues, or at least be aware of them such as abortion, so they are aware of different viewpoints and morals. However, a certain viewpoint of what is 'right' shouldn't be pushed on or influence children as they need to make their own decisions, they should just be guided.

Pupil A: Ethics are difficult to instil through school as it is difficult to find a common view of what is ethical or moral.

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A Pupil Perspective

- Pupil F: I think it's very important for schools to teach children how to be healthy, both mentally and physically, as with all the fattening food that are readily available these days, children may not know how to be healthy.
- Pupil B: Perhaps these sort of things could be taught in P.S.E lessons rather than being a lesson by themselves. However more emphasis is definitely needed in these areas.
- Pupil A: I think children should be taught more on financial issues like tax and credit as people seem to have no knowledge of this when they leave school. More emphasis should be placed on these life skills.
- Pupil E: We need to be taught these sort of skills at an earlier age. It's all well and good teaching 17 and 18 year olds about money, however, we need to start earlier so young people won't find themselves in debt with payday loans and the like. Like how to get a mortgage and how to pay taxes. As when you get to university or get a job and leave home you won't have any idea about how to take care of yourself.
- Pupil F: I agree that we need them earlier on like in year 8 so that we have more time to focus on these skills than when 16 year olds and older and are focusing on exams.
- Pupil E: Maybe we could have a set lesson every two weeks to teach us these sort of skills.
- Pupil F: I think numeracy and literacy skills need to be pushed more at a primary school level. Possibly even teaching foreign languages so we could compete with other people from other countries who are taught to be bilingual.
- Pupil D: I speak Welsh fluently and think it's a really important skill to have, especially in the workplace, so I think it should be pushed more from an early age. It also teaches children to have pride in their country and culture and it's a beautiful language so it should be taught more.
- Pupil E: I think numeracy and maths are two different things. Numeracy to me seems like adding and subtracting and day-to-day skills, whereas maths seems more in touch with equations, science and engineering. As they are different I think they should be taught separately so children who aren't naturally good at maths won't be forced into learning complicated maths and can focus on day-to-day maths.
- Pupil F: I think, especially in primary schools, they need to stick with the traditional methods of teaching maths, as it's quite confusing to have lots of different ways to sort one problem.
- Pupil D: What needs to be done in Welsh schools in particular is that they need to be able to translate some of the technical terms of science and maths more from English to Welsh and vice versa. As it gets confusing when you can't find the English word for a technical term and can impact badly on your education.

Pupil F: I think primary schools need to focus on teaching everyone the same level of maths and getting everyone up to a basic level. It good to help those who are especially gifted and give them harder maths however I think they need to focus on teaching a basic level to everyone rather than focusing on a select few gifted children.

Pupil E: I think they've gone too much the other way. Teachers are spending most of their time helping those who struggle yet aren't offering any support to those who are naturally gifted and aren't motivating and helping them to achieve their potential.

3. What do you think of the purposes of the suggested curriculum?

“Quite good - better for employment. We will know more about the world that is better, it will help us be more informed. But we need positive and passionate teachers”

Pupil F: I think they are quite good as they are teaching children more adaptable skills .

Pupil D: They're better for employment which is the most important thing at the end of the day.

Pupil F: Although I think these purposes can only be achieved through the right sort of teaching. We need teachers to be more positive and passionate so that students feel like they want to learn, in which case the purposes of the new curriculum will be met.

Pupil D: I think it's important for schools to teach us about our country (Wales) and the wider world and make us informed citizens as some pupils parents don't teach them these things and they may not learn it from anywhere else. But perhaps at a secondary stage rather than primary.

Pupil B: I think it would be good for us to learn more about the wider world, as we seem to focus on Britain a lot in terms of history, and hopefully with this curriculum we'll be better rounded individuals in that we'll know more about the world as a whole rather than just Britain.

Pupil E: We need to learn about global history and issues so that we can understand current affairs.

Callum: I think we need to learn about Wales (and Britain) otherwise we won't understand our culture and won't understand our value as a country.

Pupil E: But not to the extent that we do now - all we learn now is about England and Wales. We need to learn more about other countries as we live in a global world and we're more connected.

4. Are the areas of education that have been proposed enough?

“Too many subjects are lumped together. English, Maths and Science need to be in their own group”

Pupil B: I think the provisions lump too many subjects in one area, such as Drama and Music at the risk of them being dominated by the 'traditional' subjects like English and Numeracy.

Pupil E: It's quite confusing as there's no distinction of what subjects are anymore.

Pupil D: It increased the divide between these areas as they have been lumped into six large groups and perhaps makes it difficult for children to learn if they're lumped into these areas.

Pupil A: Possibly English, Science and Maths need their own individual groups as they're too important to be lumped together in large groups where they may not be focused on as much.

5. What do you think of the proposals for the Welsh language?

(mixed views)

“It could teach more respect for the Welsh language, as a minority language Welsh needs to be revived, but it must be taught well. Having Welsh is an advantage”

“Welsh should not be forced on you after year 9. Welsh should not be given any more priority than other MFLs. Welsh is only an advantage in Wales”

All: *murmur* Yeah Welsh is really important.

Pupil D: I think it will teach children to have more respect for the Welsh language and will revive it. As right now a lot of people disrespect it and degrade the language, which is annoying when you've learnt it for 15 years. Although perhaps it needs to be taught better so that children want to learn and they learn to be passionate about their language and culture.

A Pupil Perspective

Pupil E: I don't think it should be forced until you're sixteen. Maybe up until year nine then it's fine but I don't think you should be forced to take a qualification in it.

Pupil F: It's such a good advantage to have in the job market and it could also make Welsh more respected as a language.

Pupil D: Welsh is a minority language and it needs to be revived. This could help revive it if it's taught well.

Pupil E: I still don't think it should be forced until such a late age, as young people should be given a choice in what they learn.

Pupil G: I don't think Welsh should be given any more provisions than for example Mandarin or German, as at the end of the day these foreign languages will help us get jobs around the world but you can only really get Welsh jobs in Wales.

Pupil D: But other countries like Germany teach children the language of the country and English or another foreign language, but they see the need for their own language as important as it's a part of their culture and national identity, it's the same for Wales. I think it's good for children to learn Welsh as young as possible, as they're more likely to have actually learnt to speak it fluently by the time they leave school.

Pupil B: English is promoted around the world as most countries have it as a second language or use it in business. However Welsh is very limited in this sense.

Pupil E: I think learning Welsh is okay when you're younger, but it shouldn't be compulsory at an older age. Also I think foreign languages like German should be given the same sort of provisions as Welsh, otherwise it's not fair.

Pupil B: I don't think Welsh should be weighted more heavily in school just because we're in Wales. Children shouldn't be forced to learn it if they don't want to.

6. What do you think about assessment and accountability?

“ Regular assessment is fairer, it promotes the idea that school is about learning not just exams and can allow all to show what they can do”

All: Very good idea.

Pupil F: Everyone has an off day, so assessing people all year round is a fairer and more accurate way of gauging pupils' intelligence.

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A Pupil Perspective

Pupil D: I think it allows for people who may not be good at exams to still prove they're intelligent. It also shows people have been working hard all year, not just for an end of year exam or the like.

Pupil B: I think it promotes the idea that school is about learning not exams.

Pupil A: I have Dyslexia and I think this would allow those with additional learning needs to not stress so much on a single exam and would allow them to work to the best of their ability.

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