

RETURN TO SCHOOL:

ARTICLE 12

PUPIL VOICE & ENGAGEMENT GUIDANCE

Throughout the pandemic Unicef has campaigned for the voices of children and young people to be listened to and acted upon. We have asked public authorities to address children directly and to listen to their questions and opinions.

As your school considers welcoming larger numbers of pupils back, we would like to encourage you to put their voices at the heart of your planning. Our questionnaire in mid-May with over 1,500 respondents, told us 33% of Rights Respecting Schools are already planning to do this

We believe that now is a critical time for children and young people to have their views considered and taken seriously. This short guide intends to support school leaders and colleagues responsible for enabling pupil voice and engagement. The circumstances in each school are unique so we are not offering a 'one size fits all' template. Instead we are posing some questions for you to consider in your pupil voice work.

- Our standard RRSA guidance on Participation can be found [here](#).

With the majority of children and young people still accessing their right to education from home, the chances are you will be using digital methods to empower them and hear their voice. The Unicef UK programme, Child Friendly Cities and Communities, have developed guidance to support professionals in safely engaging with children and young people while they are away from their normal settings.

- You can find their top tips for running and planning a digital engagement session [here](#).

We suggest there is a need for two types of opinion gathering at this time, **personalised** to determine individual children's views about the support they might need going forward and also a **communal** response collecting common priorities to feed into your strategic planning.

PERSONALISED

There may be a need for confidential but not anonymous questionnaires (or short interviews/calls) to gather each pupil's view of their emotional wellbeing, their concerns

about returning, the experience they had during lockdown and their perceptions about their learning and progress. All of this will inform your planning for support provision and help in putting together a case for additional support, if needed.

COMMUNAL & STRATEGIC

Many surveys have asked school leaders, teachers and parents what they see as most important. What do your children think? You may ask simple open questions or invite pupils to rank a top three or five from a list you provide.

For example: Which of the following are most important to you when you come back to school? (Rank from 1-3)

For older pupils, a de-personalised question may work:

When school re-opens which of the following do you think should be the biggest priorities? (Rank from 1 – 5)

The following may help to start you thinking:

- Time to catch up with friends
- Keeping everyone safe from coronavirus
- Catching up on missed learning
- Opportunities to talk one-to-one with teachers or other staff
- Having time and space to play
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- Re-joining clubs, sports and extra-curricular activities
- Missing family and being at home
- Doing fun activities to help me learn
- A safe journey to and from school
- Getting ready for next year.

OTHER KEY CONSIDERATIONS

SPACE¹

This is about planning and being proactive, conveying to pupils that their views are not only welcomed but valued. How can you make this opinion gathering as inclusive and accessible as possible? If existing Councils or focus groups are used, are there mechanisms for others to feed in their thoughts to make the process as representative as possible?

VOICE

Ensure that children understand the purpose and context of your consultation and share as much information as you can to make their responses meaningful. How can children be helped to express their views? Do they understand that it's OK not to take part? Are there alternative ways for them to convey their opinions and express themselves?

AUDIENCE

Be clear to pupils about who is requesting their opinions, why this is happening and how the information is to be used. Give clarity about the decision-making processes to which they are contributing.

INFLUENCE

Consider how decision-making systems will give due weight to the views of pupils. How will pupils be informed about their 'collective' view? How will their contribution be acknowledged and appreciated? How will decisions be communicated and explained to pupils, particularly when these are contrary to a strongly expressed view?

¹ *The framework of Space – Voice – Audience and Influence is taken from the Model of Child Participation developed by Professor Laura Lundy of Queen's University Belfast.*