HOW YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL SUPPORTS ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTAINMENT
How Young People’s Participation in School Supports Achievement and Attainment

February 2015

Greg Mannion
Matthew Sowerby
John I’Anson

School of Education
University of Stirling
Scotland
FK9 4LA

(CCYP/2015/1) laid before the Scottish Parliament by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland in pursuance of Section 12(1) of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2003 on 06/02/2015
Contents

1. Executive Summary ........................ 1

2. The Research Approach ................. 5

3. What Young People Said ............... 7

3.1 Participation in the Four Arenas of School Life ....................... 8

3.2 The inclusive and respectful quality of the relationships ........... 22

4. Summary Discussion and Implications ...... 33

4.1 Summary .................................. 33

4.2 Children’s Rights, Participation, and Schooling .................. 33

4.3 A Rights-based Education and Doing Well ....................... 35

4.4 Addressing the Limits to Participation ........................... 39

4.5 Conclusion .............................. 42

5. References ............................... 44

Appendix 1: Participants ....................... 46

Table 1. The Participant Schools .............. 46

Table 2. Participants in the Research ........ 46

Appendix 2: Arts-Based Pupil Work .......... 47
1. Executive Summary

In the consultation, *A Right Blether*¹, young people’s views suggested there was a need to know more about what might make schools fairer places. In response, Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young people said that he would research why some children and young people were able to do well in schools – despite a lack of money or other important things – while others did not.

This research² was commissioned following a literature review³, an Ipsos MORI survey and some statistical analysis⁴. A number of secondary schools with catchments in more deprived areas of Scotland were identified as having higher than expected exam results. Seven of these schools were invited to take part. The goal of this research was to find out if these schools were addressing pupils’ participation⁵ and rights in ways that were distinctively supportive of pupil achievement and attainment. How would pupils themselves describe the links between different kinds of participation and ‘doing well’? We will use the phrase ‘do well’ to mean both attainment (as in tests scores, examination grades and formal qualifications) and achievement (wider success and development). Young people spoke of these as connected.

---

¹ This was the national consultation undertaken by Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2010.
⁵ For this research, participation “include[s] information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes” Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009). General Comment No.12 (2009): the right of the child to be heard. Geneva: United Nations, page 3
Findings

A rights-based education is a good education

In the seven schools visited, pupils said that opportunities to participate in all areas of school life were highly valued. From young people's perspectives, a rights-based education was integral to their achievement and attainment. It was noticeable that in these seven schools, across all arenas of school life, pupils had substantial opportunities to formally and informally take part in a variety of meaningful activities, to take responsibility for events, make contributions to school life, and have their views considered in matters that affected them. Our findings suggest that from young people's perspectives, rights-based experiences and a good education cannot be easily separated; they were intimately connected in the lives of the young people. We conclude, therefore, that it is less useful to see a rights-based education as an add-on to mainstream education; it is better understood as a way of working across all school life.

Supportive relationships count for a lot

Positive pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relationships were mentioned in all schools as really important for supporting pupils' participation, influencing change, and doing well. Across the arenas of school life, young people felt that relations among pupils, teachers, and their communities needed to involve power sharing and be caring, respectful, trusting, and purposeful to ensure achievement and attainment was supported. Meaningful and purposeful activities, respectful communications, and inclusive relations came together to support pupils' achievement and attainment, creating a sense of belonging at school, and bringing a rights-based dimension to educational experience.

There is room for improvement

In the schools we visited there were limits to pupil participation. We can say with confidence there was scope for doing more to both address rights and improve achievement and attainment. There were limits to pupils' participation in terms of what decision...

---

6 While some schools integrated these more naturally than others, we found no 'counter cases' for this finding in our study.
making could be about, who could participate in power sharing, and in the way schools were linking with their communities through participation. Pupils on committees, older pupils, and female pupils tended to have greater opportunities for engaging in participatory power sharing with adults in these schools. Pupils comprehensively felt schools were adult led.

In summary, in all seven secondary schools - all of which were enabling pupils to do better than expected whilst also having catchments in areas of deprivation – we found that:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>Participation in all of these four arenas of school life was seen by pupils as important for doing well:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. The formal curriculum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. The extended curriculum,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Decision making groups, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. In other places of informal contact among peers and adults.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>The inclusive and respectful quality of the activities, communications, and relationships pupils had with each other and with teachers helped them to do well.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Positive teacher-pupil relations were key.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. A culture of respect was highly valued.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>Young people's opportunities for participation were limited.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. These schools were adult-led.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Pupils felt there was scope for greater participation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications of the Study

1. Schools can and should robustly and confidently integrate rights-based practice across all of school life as part of a raising attainment and achievement agenda.

2. There is scope for further advancing rights-based education by:
   
   a. enhancing dialogue, power sharing, and decision making about how the school is run and what schooling is for with all pupils,
   
   b. enhancing purposeful, participatory opportunities for all pupils in all arenas of school life,
   
   c. developing schools’ links with local, national, and international communities, and encouraging relations that are equitable, respectful, caring and supportive across the arenas of school experience.
2. THE RESEARCH APPROACH
2. The Research Approach

To do this research, we visited seven secondary schools that were known to have catchments in more deprived areas of Scotland, yet, were also known to have exam results that were higher than expected given their contexts. We visited seven publicly funded secondary schools including both denominational (schools with a Catholic ethos) and non-denominational school types. (See Table 1, Appendix 1). Schools were all located in or near large urban areas or in towns. Three included catchments extending into rural areas.

For our research focus, we took ‘participation in school life’ to be all of those times and places when pupils have a chance to influence decision making and bring about smaller or more significant change. Using our experience and other research, we took a view that participation in school could happen in at least four different kinds of place or **four arenas of school life:**

i. **The Formal Curriculum.** (We included here class time, self-directed homework, homework clubs and some on-line work);

ii. **Extended Curriculum.** (Sometimes called the extra or co-curriculum, this included participation in clubs and trips, or events within the community);

iii. **Decision Making Groups.** (Here we considered pupil councils but also groups such as Eco committees etc. involving pupils and adults in sharing decision making and power); and

iv. **Other Places.** (Here, we considered less formal and less obvious places of participation such as the canteen, playground, or on the journey to school, or through social media, or in the wider community).

We asked about when and where pupils felt there were examples of information sharing and dialogue, participatory relationships, and shared decision making between teachers and pupils about the way the school was run and managed in class and beyond. In particular, we asked about when participation like this was seen by young people themselves as helping them do well through school.
We spoke directly to over 130 young people from S1 to S6 in small groups from the seven sampled schools (see Table 2, Appendix 1). We spoke to groups from the schools’ pupil councils (and similar groups), and to pupils that were randomly selected with each school’s assistance. Schools and pupils were given assurances that their participation would remain anonymous.

We carried out over 50 interviews with pupils. We also involved two artists (Anita Govan, a performance poet and Claire Hewitt, artist and storyteller) to help find additional ways of encouraging young people to share their views and experiences. (See Table 3, Appendix 1).
3 WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAID
3. What Young People Said

In all seven secondary schools - all of which were enabling pupils to do better than expected whilst also having catchments in areas of deprivation – we found that:

1. **Participation in these four arenas of school life was seen by pupils as important for doing well:**
   i. The Formal Curriculum;
   ii. The Extended Curriculum;
   iii. Decision Making groups; and
   iv. In Other Places of informal contact among peers and adults.

2. **The inclusive and respectful quality of the relationships pupils had with each other and with teachers helped them to do well.**
   i. Positive teacher-pupil relations were key.
   ii. A culture of respect was highly valued.

3. **Young people’s opportunities for participation were limited.**
   i. Currently, these schools were adult-led.
   ii. Pupils felt there was scope for greater participation.

In the following sections, we explain and explore in more depth what young people said about these three main ideas. The quotations are examples of the types of comment we heard. We have grouped them into themes or ideas that pupils focused on a lot. We also provide some examples of the work pupils did in the poem and story-based workshops. Some short vignettes or stories about particular issues or incidents, photographs pupils and researchers took, all serve to add further colour and explanation to our findings. The sub-headings are statements we, the researchers, came up with which summarise pupil views and expand on our three main findings.
3.1 Participation in the Four Arenas of School Life

Across all school life, pupils had substantial opportunities for participation. These schools were all different but all offered a comprehensive, linked and varied array of opportunities in all four arenas of participation. Pupils spoke about participation in formal curricular activity, in the extended curriculum, in decision-making groups, and in other less obvious places and times in the school. Taken together, participation in all of these arenas was seen by pupils as key to doing well at school. We look at these four arenas in turn.

(i) The Formal Curriculum

Formal learning through class work, in homework and for examinations – was seen as core but this was strongly supported by the extended curriculum (of trips, clubs, assemblies and other events), the work of pupil councils (and other groups) as well as less formal opportunities for interactions within the school community across the day. Pupils prized opportunities for engagement in formal learning where more responsibility lay with the pupils themselves, though they also valued adult guidance and support. Having a wide set of subjects to choose from and having some say in how and when learning would take place were all highly valued.

Importantly, in all schools, pupils told how schools worked hard to take account of every pupil’s need to achieve and attain. There were systems in place that sought to capture how each pupil
was doing and efforts made in many ways to ensure pupils were both visible and on track. These schools worked really hard at providing for pupil progression especially at the upper stages. There was an emphasis on the school's achievement and attainment record and reputation.

**Researcher:** *Do you think people are proud to be part of the school?*

**Pupil 8:** *We certainly are. It's a good school. It does get really good ratings.*  
[School D]

Pupils spoke about how they valued participation in learning in particular ways: collaborative and experiential forms of working, and opportunities to take responsibility involving personalisation and choice were noted a lot. Pupils valued taking part in active ways, having a range of subject choices, having a say in where and when learning took place, and in what the topics of study would be.

**Pupil 1:** *It's really hands-on.*

**Pupil 2:** *There's a lot of learnin' where the teacher actually gets you to go up and sometimes actually try and teach the class. And there's a lot of collaborative learning.*  
[School C]

---

**Figure 2.** The idea of school being valued as a warm, supportive if at times fragile community came through strongly in the seven schools. [Pupil's work resulting from work with project arts-based facilitator: a concrete poem.]

---

7 In upper stages a percentage of pupils will make transitions into college, training, employment or other destinations. We note, therefore, that in upper school respondents are the voices of the pupils who stayed on. We did not look at staying on rates in these schools as part of the study.

8 Pupils are described as Pupil 1, Pupil 2 etc. to indicate new voices in the focus group conversations.
Pupils spoke about how they valued the opportunity to learn through experiences of many kinds including contact with people from outside school.

**Pupil 1:** Every - I think every department now is actually kinda takin' that approach.

**Pupil 2:** Because all different subjects do have all these things like there's always people to do different things for you. It's not just always about bein' in school we have visitors all the time doin' different stuff.

[School C]

Some older pupils in one school spoke more of how they had opportunities to participate in influencing the design of the curriculum and use of teaching approaches.

**Researcher:** Can pupil voice influence learning and teaching?

**Pupil 1:** I think upper school – the higher you get up. I think so, yeah. Because in English last year, the teacher said, 'what do you feel you want to go over? [...] And that comes back again to the respect thing. I feel that I keep saying it... but it's a key thing...

[School D]

Pupils valued opportunities to say how they liked to learn and how their needs might be taken care of.

**Pupil:** Our maths teacher asks how we are with things, and if we'd like it taught a different way, or she'll go over things for us.

[School G]
Pupil-teacher relationships were key to engagement especially within the formal curriculum:

**Pupil:** The good relationship with the teacher makes you feel comfortable asking for extra help. Because sometimes it can seem a wee bit daunting especially when you're in a classroom environment. You don't always want to put your hand up in front of your peer group and say 'I don't get this'.  

[School E]

The reform in the Scottish curriculum and other policy initiatives were seen to have positive effects:

**Pupil:** [the extended curriculum is] more suited, like I think it's more of a Curriculum for Excellence thing. But it's also like gettin’ used throughout schools and it's called, we call it like the GIRFEC. It's like the ‘Gettin’ it Right for Every Child’ kinda thing.  

[School C]
In the formal curriculum pupils noted they would have liked even more responsibility and greater say. The focus on attainment seemed to mean that quite a lot of the work was heavily prescribed.

Pupil: In some cases the teacher could do more to give more responsibility. But I think it would be quite difficult in certain subjects. [School A]

In some settings, pupils noted that not all pupils were achieving and attaining to the best of their ability:

Pupil: [Some pupils] don’t do particularly well and they don’t do particularly bad. And the teachers just don’t notice them because they’re not doing well enough to be rewarded. They’re not doing badly enough to be punished. [School A]

Pizza and bowling

An adult-led approach to managing participation was evidenced through a rewards system in a couple of the schools we visited. Teachers collectively participated in daily monitoring of young peoples’ attendance, behaviour and academic performance. Pupils received merits and demerits accordingly. At the end of each term pupils with positive merit totals enjoyed rewards, (some of these were chosen by the pupils themselves) including visits to the cinema, pizza restaurants and ten pin bowling. Merit systems offering these types of reward carried greater currency if the school was located in a more rural area (where local bowling alleys and cinemas were less accessible).
Taken together, we can say pupils especially valued democratic forms of participation in the formal curriculum especially when learning was made possible through engaging forms of experiential learning involving personalisation and forms of choice. Individual teachers were seen to be responsive to pupils’ needs but there was limited evidence, however, of pupils having substantial say in curriculum making. Only some schools had more comprehensive structures and processes in place for involving pupils in feeding back to the school about teaching and learning.

(ii) The Extended Curriculum

All schools in the study enhanced and extended the core academic curriculum through the many diverse kinds of experiences in which pupils could influence school life and make participatory contributions in arts, sports and other societies and events.

These schools were all providing activities connected to, and extending many areas of the curriculum. As such, these were less ‘extra’ to a core curriculum because they functioned as extensions of a wider curriculum of personal growth and development. A small number of pupils with experiences of other schools noticed the more enhanced provisions in the schools we visited. School trips in particular were seen as memorable, exciting, fun, but richly challenging events from which pupils learned. Through these events, year groups could generate more of a team spirit and learn about a range of subjects often in personally meaningful and interesting ways.

Participation in the extended curriculum often involved experiences of closer working arrangements with teachers or independent control by pupils in event management. The extended curriculum brought more challenge and enjoyment and, critically, opportunities for pupils to take responsibility in organising school life. Pupils spoke a lot about gaining confidence from these activities. As a result, the extended curriculum appeared to call pupils to respond to challenges in an invitational manner and pupils were, in the main, keen to take up these opportunities.
Researcher: Does participating in sport and participating in plays and music have an impact on your achievement? How can that improve your life chances as a young person leaving school?

Pupil 1: More experience.

Pupil 2: More experience, means more confidence. You’re more likely to maybe try different things that you’ve not tried before.

(School E)

Figure 4. Extended curricular events were seen as a key support for both participation and achievement and attainment.

(Pupil-taken photograph)

These schools had structure and systems in place that captured when pupils achieved. Different ways for having achievements recognised were highly valued by pupils:

Pupil: I think the award ceremonies are really good because they sort of give you something to work hard towards.

(School E)

Confidence building and skills in public speaking were seen as a key outcome from participation in the extended curriculum. Events involving discussions and interactions (such as a mock United Nations debating events) were common.
Pupil:  
*We do a lot a’ public speakin’ in this school*  
[School C]

Pupil 1:  
*It gets you involved with current affairs.*

Pupil 2:  
*It makes you more confident ’cause you speak out.*  
[School B]

Pupil:  
*You also get the opportunity to participate in debates outwith school with other schools.*  
[School A]

Pupils valued when the extended curriculum provided them with responsibilities; at times, these seemed to offer opportunities not easily found in the formal curriculum which seemed more constrained and prescribed.

Pupil:  
*Cause you’re going from having teachers telling you exactly what to do and just having to work from a book to being told roughly. And then working it out on your own.*  
[School A]

Pupils had a clear understanding of how these extended curriculum activities provided opportunities to take responsibility and try things out. These events fed into their development as people, enhancing their confidence and skills and widening their horizons (through for example, meeting new people, travel, or gaining an understanding of what university life might offer). In some of the seven schools, the role of the extended curriculum in helping pupils with their personal statement and their C.V. was emphasised.

Pupils highly valued the award schemes and merit schemes when these worked to recognise their achievements. Simple forms of public recognition (rather than token ‘reward’) within the school community worked as a very effective driver for most. In general terms, being noticed and visible within the school community and taking an active role (be that as house captain or pupil council member etc.) was seen as an expected and ‘good thing’ in these schools. In one school (School F), pupils valued the chance to manage and run events such as a sponsored walk involving the design of leaflets, and decision making about the timing and overall plan for the event.
Teachers commonly played a key role in instigating and making the extended curriculum what it was. This involved encouraging pupils to respond to challenges:

Pupil: *They don't push us into it, but they push us to try and be the best that we can be.*

[School C]

![Figure 5](image.png)

*Figure 5.* Pupils highly valued the recognition of their participation. This was accomplished in various ways in the schools visited. [Pupil-taken photograph]

In these seven schools, we can say participation in the extended curriculum resulted in improved working and interpersonal relations with teachers, greater independent control by pupils in some events, more responsibility, challenge and enjoyment in schooling, and increased confidence for pupils in communication settings.

(iii) Decision Making Groups

In addition to the formal curriculum and extended curriculum opportunities, all schools had active pupil councils and other governance groups that involved at least some pupils. In the interviews with these decision making group members, all valued their role in these schools.
Debate and Decision making

Young people at one of the schools we visited proudly told of a significant pupil council event. In a formal debate, senior pupils argued in favour of the right to wear a different school tie, to designate S6 status. The Head Teacher presented his argument ‘against’. In a democratic vote, the pupils won the right to the new tie and senior management abided by the decision. This event was very significant for pupils in demonstrating the manner in which democratic debate, pupil voice and mutual respect might influence change.

Older pupils, despite often having more opportunities to have a say and to influence change, were also more likely to express feeling powerless in terms of influence. This was, in the main, because they felt that adults within the school (teachers and management) made all the decisions:

Pupil:  I think a lot of the time there's points where there could be significantly more input from the pupils than there is, and it would still work just fine. [School A]

Some wished for greater monitoring and evaluation of the pupil council work by pupils themselves.

Researcher: What would make the pupil council better? If you could change the pupil council, what would you do?

Pupil: Being able to change things. I've been in it a few years. And whenever I've been in it they've changed almost nothing. They don't really have any power at all.

[School A]
We encountered mixed feelings on the ability of pupil governance groups to have an impact on decision making:

Researcher:  *So, what does the pupil council do?*

Pupil 1:  *They voice their opinions, and hopefully they’re listened to, and that there’s a change in the school.*

Researcher:  *That’s what it should do. What does it do?*

Pupil 2:  *We just go and say stuff, and usually it never happens.*  [School C]

---

**Figure 6.** Pupil council members in all the schools reiterated similar concerns about the importance of pupils’ own places and peer-based practices: for example, lockers, food in canteens, and the social spaces for senior pupils.  [Pupil-taken photograph]

---

Researcher:  *What can you vote on, in terms of the running of the school?*

Pupil:  *Very little. Whereas other schools are probably more engaged with their pupils. And we’re maybe slightly behind.*  [School A]
We explored pupils’ direct influence on learning and teaching through the impact of governance groups. Mostly, the schools did not do much on this topic.

Pupil 1: *We have a big influence cause recently we've been asked to give them feedback on the way that teachers teach and things that are good and things that are bad.*

Pupil 2: *The curriculum.*

Pupil 3: *Well not bad but things that could be improved and...the way that we like to learn, and things like that.* [School F]

In some schools young people perceived pupil councils to be more effective:

Pupil: *I'd like to think it's that the pupil involvement that the school gives us and responsibility, cause there is a lot of focus put on that - like pupils having an opinion not just at the pupil council it's not just us who gets that - it's every single pupil.* [School F]

In general, pupils felt the role of pupil councils could be more impactful and effective. Pupils in different schools noted that this could be achieved through, for example, increasing the scope of their work, increasing and enhancing engagement of non-council members, improving the opportunities for dialogue with adults (both staff and other community members), paying more rigorous attention to how minutes were written, shared and followed up upon, publicising the decisions made, and using more inclusive forms of agenda setting.

---

9 The evidence shows that in these seven schools, there was considerable cohesiveness around shared aims. In most of the seven schools, pupils regarded their pupil councils quite highly. More in-depth research would be needed to judge whether all were effective at making change happen or if pupils were more accepting of adult agendas in all cases.
(iv) Other Places

There were also times and places for informal participation for pupils among themselves, and for less formal contact between staff and pupils for example in the mornings, in corridors, social spaces and in the canteens. In this category, we found pupils had a lot to say about the less formal and sometimes less visible places that made school life participatory for them.

Pupils spoke about time spent at rest or moving through a range of physical places such as corridors, play areas, outdoor places, social or ‘hub’ areas, canteens and other places to eat, quiet places, places for reflection and prayer, and locations near the school campus (bus stops and streets that were used as part of the journey to school.

Pupil:  
[There is a] shelter next to music room you can usually hear teachers playing instruments there. Also my friends are there and we have lunch. It's always sheltered...and really nice, you don't get cold. It's just a friendly place in my eyes.

[School E]

Pupils spoke about digital or virtual places: for example, on-line environments where formal curricula and social media overlapped.

Researcher:  What do you think about schools using social media?

Pupil:  
I think you get more involved. You feel as if you know a bit more – they're trying to connect with you a bit more.

I don't think it's necessary. But it's quite a good step  

[School D]

Figure 7. Some schools were embracing social media more than others. [Pupil-taken photograph. (Part of web-link has been erased for anonymity purposes)].
Speaking about the role of these ‘other places’ helped pupils show us what was distinctive about the pupils’ experience of school life. These kinds of place were, on the one hand, valued because they allowed for peer-to-peer (pupil-pupil) forms of participation which might benefit from being more connected to the wider participation agenda in schools.

**Researcher:** *What do you think would be the benefits of the pupils having more say in the school?*

**Pupil:** *We’re more aware of the problems in the school than the teachers. They can’t see it from a pupil point of view. The same as we can’t see it from a teacher point of view.*  

[School A]

Other places allowed for peer-to-peer forms of participation. Some of this was pupil-led while other events were structured by adults but made relevant by pupils. We found evidence of practices such as buddy systems, house captain frameworks, on-line homework support, and use of participation in social media which were examples of how schools could enable this form of participation in ‘other places’ much of which pupils valued.

---

**Figure 8.** Pupils indicated that participation in school life was often experienced in less obvious everyday and mundane ways through activities in places that might appear otherwise insignificant.  
[Researcher-taken photograph of a place where pupils congregated and at times left their bags.]
### 3.2 The inclusive and respectful quality of the relationships

The opportunities provided by the schools (within formal learning, extended curriculum, and decision making groups) were part of a wider commitment to an inclusive and positive participatory culture. Pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher relations were spoken about in a positive light across all the schools which took part. In some cases, relations at school were very warmly and positively experienced:

**Pupil 1:** *The whole school is a group of friends. We obviously have our disagreements... but we are all friends. We all have laughs; [it] creates a good vibe, a good atmosphere.*

**Pupil 2:** *They take a lot of care to remind us that we’re all included.*  
* [School E]

---

**Figure 9.** Relationships that both pastorally and academically supported pupils were a key support for making participation and achievement and attainment possible.  
* [Pupil-taken photograph of art work with visiting facilitator; concrete poetry].

---

In all cases, pupils spoke of how this culture was created and supported: they noted the contribution of the head teacher, the schools’ staff, the explicit and shared value system or ethos of inclusion, and the valuing of high achievement and progression especially for those staying on. In these schools, pupils themselves generally valued achievement and attainment and availed of chances to take responsibility. “Here, I have responsibility” as one pupil put it. They valued the school’s reputation and the work
the schools did to enable them to do well. In no school did pupils suggest there was a narrow focus on attainment. Rather, in various ways, all of the schools strove to work as inclusive communities with a strong shared vision about the need for young people to grow and flourish as people.

Pupil 1:  
*School reminds me of warmth and happiness. I enjoy going to school ‘cause I see my friends. It's kind of a home in school – you go and each class has a new parent who looks after you and teaches you at the same time... in your home your parents teach you and look after you and it's like home at school.*

Pupil 2:  
*Everybody knows one another like a small village. [...] Teamwork – you do a lot of teamwork in classes. Caring and kindness. There may be people who don't like you but they'll always be kind to you if you're upset.*  
[School E]

Pupils in schools with a Catholic ethos were invited to consider when and how the distinctive ethos affected participation and achievement and attainment.

Pupil:  
*I think it ties in with religion as well because religion helps us iron out all the prejudice... and helps us to consider things from other people's point-of-view.*  
[School C]

The distinctive effects of the Catholic ethos of some of the sampled schools was discussed in interviews. In Catholic schools, pupils were keen to make clear that the school was inclusive of all kinds of pupil and that one religious viewpoint was not “forced down your throat or anything” (School C).
Another said there was no stigmatisation of pupils but a desire to share some values:

Pupil: *Because from first year we have had different, different types of people in our class. We've had to get used to that and we've been taught about different backgrounds as well. Even in PSE we, we were taught about disabilities [...] I think that's helped us bring together all our views as one almost, we all have the same morals and values in the school.*

*School C*

The evidence suggests that being and feeling included and having a positive experience of participation were not just aids for supporting achievement and attainment: they were the on-going pathway and deeply embedded approach needed to secure these ends.

**(i) Positive Pupil-Teacher Relations Were Key to Doing Well**

Connected to a feeling of belonging, to participating, and to doing well, was a widespread sense of the need for positive pupil-teacher relationships in these schools. Staff members were active in trying to include all pupils in respectful ways, which had knock-on effects that were far-reaching with strong effects on attainments and achievements. In all schools visited, pupils we met generally felt they belonged, were listened to, respected, and included, and experienced very positive staff-pupil relationships.

**Mentoring**

An S6 student spoke enthusiastically about his role as a mentor to younger pupils studying his subject specialism. The senior pupil spoke of his own sense of gaining achievement and confidence through knowing that his contributions supported both the teacher (by acting as a welcome classroom assistant) and younger pupils As the pupil put it: “It's the street-wise sense of it...”
More highly regarded teachers were those that were more approachable, could take and share a joke, but often went out of their way to create opportunities for active learning and pupil responsibility. Pupils of all ages, across all the schools were consistent with the message that teachers were valued if they used humour, smiled more, and were approachable, yet could show they were very able within their subject areas. These schools all had teachers who worked hard within and beyond school hours to make sure all pupils did well.

Pupil:  
*I think we just do really well because we've got amazing teachers and the things that they offer us.*  
*School E*

Individual teachers stood out for pupils in all schools when they took the time to support pupils (sometimes in the holiday periods or in their breaktimes), or if they took time to organise trips, or make provision for school events.

Pupil:  
*You can go to teachers at any point and talk to them about anything cause they're so welcoming and understanding.*  
*School E*

These positive relations developed as pupils progressed through the school. Head teachers or key members of staff – many of whom knew the families attending the school intimately over many years – were key in noticing pupils, attending to their specific needs and being there when needed.

(ii) A Culture of Respect

In all seven schools, we found various degrees of reciprocal respect across the generations between staff and pupils. The word ‘respect’ was used a lot in pupils’ accounts of their experience. It appeared that the quality of their participation experience counted for as much as what participation was about.
Give-and-Take

All the schools we visited operated a uniform code - which proved to be an area of much contention for young people in some schools, and of little concern in others. One school, upholding a long-standing uniform policy offered pupils the concession of wearing any footwear they liked. Pupils appreciated the opportunity to subtly assert their individuality. Some schools appeared to use a ‘give-and-take’ approach to participation which supported to a considerable degree a culture of respect.

Researcher: And do you feel that [the head teacher] is in control? In charge?

Pupil: He's got an air about him that he's got control, and we know that we've to respect him. Because [...] he's good at listening at what we've got to say. And he takes what we've got to say into consideration, and not just what he thinks is right for the school. [School B]

Researcher: What happens in class that makes your school distinctive in its achievement and attainment?

Pupil: I feel there's a really high level of mutual respect, that pupils listen to the teachers, but the teachers listen – and value – the pupils’ points of view and things to say, so it makes you more confident and you're open with your ideas. [School D]

Pupil: There's a lot of respect for teachers in the school, I would say. And there's a lot of good relationships. So you're less likely to misbehave with a teacher that you've got a good relationship with. [School A]
In some schools more than others, however, pupils and staff appeared to be more ready to engage in intergenerational and reciprocal approaches to participation, sharing in problem solving, collaborating on events, compromising on thorny issues, and generally being ready to learn and change, be this as a pupil or as a staff member.

### Pupil Autonomy

In one school, staff take up positions at entrances to actively welcome pupils into the school ahead of the day. One teacher quietly alerted the head teacher to an individual wearing a decorative accessory which departed from the uniform code. The pupil was asked to meet with the head teacher. This meeting took place quickly, calmly and informally in a meeting room off the senior management and administration corridor. The head teacher explained to the individual that the school uniform policy had been discussed and agreed with the pupils. (Senior pupils at the school had won a pupil council debate and voted to design a distinctive S6 tie.) The HT calmly asked the pupil to, ‘go and have a think about that’. An hour later, a member of staff noted that the pupil had removed the accessory and was going about their regular school-day.

Only some schools appeared to more actively learn more about what pupils’ wanted from their teachers and had systems in place for teachers to learn from peer observations.

**Pupil:** Last year actually we focused on why and how some teachers are more effective teachers than others. So we got to have quite a big say in that: how teachers could improve the learning experience. The funniest thing was they approached us about it.  

**[School E]**

**Pupil:** Last year’s third year took a questionnaire thing on how the course was run and what they can change in it, and they’ve changed it.  

**[School B]**
In another school, pupils had worked on a rights charter. As part of this they specified ways that pupils and teachers should respect each other. Teachers regularly drew pupils’ attention to this in classes. Pupils did feel it made school fairer:

Pupil: *I think people will look at it and think, well, that’s fair on what the teachers expect of the pupils, and what the pupils would expect from the teachers, so they can make it work together. I think people see it as a rule, sort of - a make-it-fair between teachers and the pupils.* [School G]

**Figure 11.** Respect between pupils and staff grew from a reciprocal valuing of each other’s contributions to school life. [Pupil-taken photograph of notice boards].

Pupils in all of these schools felt most teachers were good at listening to pupils. Pupils mostly felt content that staff considered these views in how the school was run. In the main, pupils were very proud of their schools. Pupils generally shared the same goals and overall purposes as their teachers when it came to achievement and attainment. Of course, participation can have other purposes and we discuss these tensions later. There were also dissenting voices and issues pupils wanted raised or addressed in all schools. We look next at some of the limits pupils felt they experienced on their participation.
3.3 Young People’s Opportunities for Participation

In all seven schools, there was a widespread culture of pupils participating in order to do well. However, there were limits to what pupils generally participated in, what they could influence, and when and how they could share in decisions in all schools visited. There were limits to how deep and wide the participation agenda was experienced across the seven schools.

Pupil councils and other decision making groups were limited to certain pupils. As a result, council member roles in sharing the information, in agenda setting and in feeding back and monitoring the outcomes of decision making was important. In many cases this lacked coordination at times. In some cases, there was a lack of attention to the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of participation. Contact with adults, especially adult community members beyond school, in devising longer-term plans, and in monitoring outcomes of participation was not a widespread experience and certainly not a widespread experience for all. Links between pupil councils and community groups including parent councils was weak at best in most schools. Some schools, however, had stronger community links.

School-Community Participation

A large secondary school is located in a high-density public sector housing scheme. As part of their responsibilities, the head boy and girl attend residents’ association meetings. Communication between the residents and school is made possible through regular pupil council meetings. This succeeds in building and maintaining valuable links with the community. This school maintains an active social media presence and also uses the local newspaper to ensure the publication of a regular stream of positive stories about school-wide achievement and attainment.

In the following school, a perception of weaker pupil voice was countered by a sense of trust in teachers’ control and ability to listen:
Pupil: The thing that I know, well me anyway, that I’ve been struggling to put into words a wee bit, but I think it’s because it’s so natural. It happens without you even realising it: that you get respected, you get heard, without even realising it. It’s just became a normal thing. And I’ve experienced this for the six years that I’ve been here now. [School D]

We found only a few examples in these schools where pupils felt their participation in matters that affected them had been overridden to some degree. One pupil noted that one of their peers had been referred to a guidance teacher without her agreement. In another school, pupils felt aggrieved that they needed ‘a pass to go to the toilet’. However, in only a couple of the seven schools, for example, did teachers actively seek through a formal consultation the participation and views of pupils on how they felt teachers might better teach or how the formal curriculum might be redesigned.

Figure 12. In some schools, uniform was much more of an issue for pupils than in those where there had been sustained negotiation with pupils about what it comprised and the rules around wearing it. [Pupil-taken photograph of notice boards].

(i) Schools Were Adult-led
In this study, school decision making was, expectedly perhaps, shared between pupils and staff but not comprehensively so. From the pupils’ perspectives, these schools were adult-led. Overall, pupils in the schools were clear that power in decision making mostly rested with the teachers, particularly the head teacher. Adults in these schools were seen by pupils as taking an expected lead as they were seen as having the expertise needed to create the opportunities pupils felt they needed, or could diffuse conflicts or confusions when pupils did not agree. Pupils in these schools were
largely accepting with the ‘balance of power’ being with the adults. The power difference was palpable in this account of reciprocal respect:

Pupil: If the teachers keep up their part of the deal, we’ll keep our part of the deal, if you know what I mean. And then if they treat us with respect we’ll treat them with respect. [School G]

Individual teachers who were seen to get this balance ‘right’ were most highly regarded. Teachers who were approachable and friendly were seen as more likely to listen and respond to pupils’ views and share power.

Even when power was seen to be more shared (as in this case below), pupils tended to defer to adults as the key decision makers as a more powerful party. Across all schools adults were seen as the main decision makers.

Researcher: Who do you think makes the important decisions in the school?

Pupil 1: I think it’s half and half, really.

Pupil 2: Everyone really has an input.

Pupil 3: But I think the teachers just, kinda, finalise it. And, like, make it a proper rule. [School G]

Figure 13. Curriculum for Excellence and a variety of award schemes (for example, Duke of Edinburgh, EcoSchools, Rights Respecting Schools) contributed to the ways in which participation and rights were respected in these schools. [Pupil-taken photograph of notice board of the four capacities in Curriculum for Excellence].
Pupil: It's not our school. It's not us who run it, and it's not us who teach the kids, it's them, it's, they're adults, you just expect that. [School C]

Pupil: Obviously they are in charge. [School F]

(ii) Scope for Greater Participation

Overall, schools limited participation by not always making decisions in fully shared ways. This was the case either because some pupils were excluded from power sharing, or because some kinds of school decisions were obscured from their view. In all schools, pupils were largely accepting of this as the status quo, trusting teachers to make decisions without them (or with little input) or accepting that it was not that much of a concern for them.

Across all schools visited, we found evidence that schools could go even further with the participation agenda of pupils in ways that would enhance achievement and attainment and in ways that would enable pupils to enact their rights. These advances could be made by making opportunities available across the four arenas of school life through enhancements in pupil-teacher relations, and through more effective power sharing arrangements.

Power Sharing?

Some senior pupils were given the opportunity to organise a year-group social event. They described problems in making and communicating strategic decisions regarding their peers. The senior pupils requested intervention by teachers which brought about the speedy resolution of the issue. However, such an incident draws attention to the importance of young peoples' confidence and capacity for participation and questions around where power really lies and how participation is supported.

10 Readers are reminded that our inquiry looked at four arenas of school experience: The Formal Curriculum, The Extended Curriculum, Decision Making groups, and In Other Places of informal contact among peers and adults. We found opportunities for participation were experienced by pupils in all four arenas in all of the sampled schools. See also pages 5 and 6.
4 SUMMARY DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
4. Summary Discussion and Implications

4.1 Summary
In the seven schools visited, pupils said that opportunities to participate in all areas of school life were highly valued and were seen as a necessary and integral part of achieving and attaining. From young people’s perspectives a rights-based education was integral to their achievement and attainment.

The approaches to rights-based education we heard about were made possible through the many and varied opportunities pupils had to develop positive relations with others, and to formally and informally take part in meaningful and purposeful activities wherein they could have dialogue with others about issues that affected them.

However, there were limits to pupils’ participation. We noticed when and how these limits were found in what decisions could be about, who could participate in power sharing, and in the way schools were linking with their communities through participation. Pupils on committees, older pupils and female pupils tended to have greater opportunities for engaging in participatory power sharing with adults in these schools. Pupils comprehensively felt schools were adult led.

4.2 Children’s Rights, Participation, and Schooling
Clearly, pupils need to take part in school in some way in order to do well there. At its most basic, attending school, turning up on time and taking part in the programmes on offer are part of participation and having one’s rights respected. But it may be the quality of these experiences that are key to (1) gaining qualifications, (2) becoming socialised into the world, and (3) developing as an individual.\textsuperscript{11} The participation experiences we found in these schools supported these kinds of purposes.

\textsuperscript{11} Biesta (2010) explains three main purposes for education through participation: participation for academic development / gaining good grades (participation for qualification), participation as taking part in existing ways of doing things (participation as socialisation), and participation as part of becoming a unique person (participation for ‘subjectification’ is how he phrases this). The opportunities for political participation – having a say and an influence – appears to be a possible way of achieving all of these purposes.
We asked pupils about participation with a wide lens: as having a say and influencing change in all areas of school life, in formal and non-formal settings, shaping what the school did and the meanings created there. What was striking was how, in all of these schools, pupil participation was clearly to be found in all four arenas of schooling. According to pupils, all of these forms of participation supported their achievement and attainment.

In the light of our findings, we can say participation is a core vehicle for the goal of achievement and attainment and is a critical part of the wider education of the young person. We found that in schools that do well,¹² there tended to be a shared understanding among pupils and staff of the value of participation across the four arenas of school life for achievement and attainment. Pupils and staff alike saw participation in these arenas as needed for the wider project of enabling young people to develop and ‘do well’. Put simply, participation in all forms across all arenas was important for their achievement and attainment.

¹² For our respondents, this meant both attainment (as in tests scores, examination grades and formal qualifications) and achievement (wider success and development).

**Figure 14.** Some schools addressed rights in a more explicit manner. [Pupil-taken photograph].
4.3 A Rights-based Education and Doing Well

In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Article 28 says young people have the right to an education. Article 29 says schools “should develop each child’s personality, talents, and abilities to the fullest” and “should encourage pupils to respect others, human rights, and their own and other cultures” and “should help them to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people”. Article 12 applies to schools too: decisions made in schools affect children and young people and should take pupil views into account. Governments have been called upon to take a human rights based approach to education. UNICEF (2007) suggest education must incorporate a rights-based approach:

The right to education must be understood as incorporating respect for children's identity, their right to express their views on all matters of concern to them, and their physical and personal integrity.

Our findings show that rights-based experiences are not ‘add-ons’ to educational experience; another framing is needed. In this study, we saw that (to invert UNICEF’s framing), a rights-based approach will be taken by default as part of the expression of a good education.

In this study, pupils' experiences of participation showed that their educational and political participation rights were being addressed in the round across all four arenas at least to some degree. For young people, good teaching and learning and rights-based experiences were intimately connected. In these schools, pupils told of how teachers took pupil opinions seriously and responded and how this happened in a reciprocal manner too. These schools, as organisations, also worked in ways that meant examinations, assignments, club and society events and informal contacts, all appeared to ‘call on’ pupils to respond to a whole range of participation opportunities across all school arenas. This calling and responding in dialogue was part of good teaching and support for learning, and was what made school life possible. In particular, addressing the participation rights of pupils to have a

---

13 Of course many other articles in the UNCRC relate to school education. The Office of the Children’s Commissioner in England and UNESCO/UNICEF (2007) discuss Articles 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 14, 16, 23, 28, 29, 31, 34, 42 as relevant.

14 See Jons, L (2014) who suggests that it is as much tasks, assignments and ideas that challenge learners by calling them to respond.
say in matters that affect them (Article 12) was closely linked to the kinds of educational opportunities being created which afforded pupils the right to an education (Articles 28 and 29).

This last point is worth exploring. Our findings show that a political dimension of participation – as encouraged in Article 12 – at least at times, was part of the forms of engagement pupils valued. This political dimension to participation was experienced at times through being an active participant in class, taking part in formal decision making groups, engaging in extended curricula in responsible ways, and in many ‘other’ arenas of school life. Our analysis suggests that there is a strong link between the political and educational dimensions of rights in schools where pupils do well. These schools appeared to be committed, to varying degrees, to a challenging project: providing for pupils’ rights to participate within and through meeting their rights to an education: an education in the wider sense of growing up and becoming someone.

Figure 15. Young people noted pupil-led activities. [Pupil-taken photograph: ‘enterprise’ activity].

---

15 Cross et al (2009) have argued for ‘bringing together’ three different dimensions of participation: learning, civic, expressive) and recommended that schools consider the ways in which the extra curricular and expressive arts-based approaches might mutually reinforce other aspects of school life. This study adds weight to this kind of argument showing empirically that in practice such a coming together is both possible and fruitful.

16 They may not have always got that balance right but they were aware of the connections. One wonders if all staff and pupils would use the language of rights-based education as expressed in the UNCRC, however, or if this way of expressing what they did was tacit or less explicit.
In this research, in the schools known to be doing well, we found that the pupils we met understood that participation across arenas was a linked process that helped them grow up, become someone through respecting others, being respected, and attaining and achieving. Hence, for pupils, these were deeply connected processes. Pupils looked at schooling as more than academic development and saw formal achievements and attainments as being deeply connected to ‘becoming someone’. These schools were important to young people for more than socialising pupils, and for gaining qualifications, knowledge and skills. School life could, at least at times, allow for an exploration of what it was to hold a human right. For example, we saw at times how quite mundane events in the running of the school could be transformed into key learning moments for individuals and the emergence of new relations among pupils and staff.

Taken together, the evidence suggested that the participation agenda, though limited in different ways in these schools, was a sufficiently important focus to support achievement and attainment. Taking a rights-based approach was at least tacitly (if not consciously on the part of all) part and parcel of a wider agenda of support for young people’s upbringing. In these schools, pupils certainly understood the need for qualifications, the need to learn useful things, and they were aware of the political nature of their role and the need to have a say in how the school was run, and, to a lesser extent, have a say in community and global issues. For pupils, all forms of participation were connected to ‘becoming someone’ and being a committed citizen of the school and at times wider communities. As these pupils explained it, participation was not an outcome of achievement and attainment or vice versa. Rather, a respectful culture of participation, supported by positive pupil-teacher relations, was the valued vehicle for making achievement and attainment possible within a good education.

---

17 It was not part of this research to seek out counter cases or visit schools known to be achieving lower than expected examination results for their catchments (though to do so would be interesting and revealing we expect).

18 Gert Biesta suggests this kind of learning involves ‘coming into the world’ as unique singular beings” (Biesta 2006 p. 27).
Our findings suggest that a truly rights-based education and a good education cannot be easily separated out within the lived experience of these young people. They strongly enhance each other, making each other possible.

**Implication 1**

*Schools can and should robustly and confidently integrate rights-based practice across all of school life as part of a raising attainment and achievement agenda.*
4.4 Addressing the Limits to Participation

We found that there were limits to participation. One limitation perhaps came from a deep-rooted acceptance that schools are or need to be adult-led in particular ways. Another limitation appeared to come from schools having quite weak links with their communities (though there were exceptions) and less than regular contact with adults from outwith school.

How are we to understand and address these limitations? Was it that the schools encouraged participation within a norm where adults held a superior position of power over pupils? Pupils were clear about the idea that adults were the main decision makers in their schools. But we need to also note that the pupils we met seemed relatively at ease with this situation. Perhaps this is because in these schools other opportunities for less formal influence and positive relationship overall meant they were less concerned about this aspect. An alternative view might be that these pupils accepted a subordinate position to adults or were without knowing it only tokenistically involved in power sharing. Either way, there were limits to what was possible in all schools. Some pupils in all schools wished for more of a say and greater influence in some situations.

Overall, we found that pupils had only limited times and spaces for interrupting school norms. Pupils felt they could – albeit within limits – have their views respected in school life across all four arenas. In part, this was made possible by an inclusive culture. These schools did at times seek to manage and control pupils or
ignore their differences. But we also found evidence that at times adults sought to understand and respond to pupils' actions when they interrupted the norm or created new meanings. Especially through extended curricula (for example through the arts and sports), there was scope for the creating of new meanings, for example, in the school newsletter, in art displays, in pupil council meetings and in other times and place, pupils could extend what was possible and try things out.

Our research focus meant we asked pupil if they could account for participation being supportive of ‘doing well’ in school. But participation can have many goals: the realisation of the pupil as a citizen (a) who is an honest individual and works hard, (b) who works with others for the good of the community, and (c) who seeks to make the world more just. For this study, we have collected data that addresses (a) perhaps more than (b) and (c), since we were looking for links between participation and achievement and attainment. But we can and should comment on these wider ends for participation. Space here does not permit a fuller exploration of what goals, scope and purposes might be realisable through improved dialogue, equitable and respectful relations, and linking with local and wider communities. For example, the goals of education for sustainability, development education, and other social justice and ecologically oriented approaches can form part of such a rights-based citizenship agenda within schools and beyond.

---

19 We did find evidence of this though space here does not allow for a full exploration.

20 Student actions that interrupted what school norms were, at least at times, responded to as “the very point at which students [might] begin to find their own unique, responsive, and responsible voice” (Biesta 2006, p. 115).

21 Biesta (2008) draws on Westheimer and Kahne to describe the personally responsible citizen, the community-oriented participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen. He suggests active citizenship can either operate for social or political ends but that the less political goals can easily dominate. Similarly, Ross, Munn and Brown (2006) suggested that citizenship in Scottish schools was less radical and transformative and more contained within school’s own cultures and structures.
In these schools, there was evidence of pupils working as individuals and as collective citizens built upon common understandings but we found these were mostly school-focused and, for that reason among others, were limited in scope and impact. There was scope for more participation both within the school community and as part of wider local, national and international / global communities.

**Implication 2**

There is scope for further advancing rights-based education by:

a. enhancing dialogue, power sharing, and decision making about how the school is run and what schooling is for with all pupils;

b. enhancing purposeful, participatory opportunities for all pupils in all arenas of school life;

c. developing schools’ links with local, national, and international communities; and

d. encouraging relations that are equitable, respectful, caring and supportive across the arenas of school experience.
4.5 Conclusion

We have shown that, as pupils experience it, a rights-based education is integral to a good education, enhancing their achievement and attainment. Thus, it is not helpful to see a rights-based agenda as an add-on to ‘normal’ schooling, and better to see it as a beneficial way of working across all of school life. Importantly, advancing pupils’ rights is necessary for a purposeful education based on democratic principles, whilst also having significant potential to support achievement and attainment.

Participation in schools is promoted through positive and supportive relationships (peer-to-peer, pupil-teacher, as well as school-community) and engagement in purposeful practices (formal and informal curricula, across all arenas of school life). Limited as this study is, the experience of these schools suggest there is likely still some way to go before the school system embraces a rights-based agenda. Based on pupils’ views, some obvious directions of travel are emerging.

The key relationships pupils valued most significantly when it came to achievement and attainment appeared to be those with staff they could approach and trust, who gave respect and were respected in turn by pupils. There were staff members in these schools who worked hard for young people’s wider development within which attainment was a goal, but never the only goal. Similarly, pupils’ rights experiences were lived through relations: addressed in the links schools made between core and extended curriculum, between school and community, between adults and pupils. Relations in all four arenas and between different interested parties (pupils, community members, and teachers) needed to be respectful, trusting, yet challenging to ensure achievement and attainment was supported. Supportive relations within a right-based education made possible the kinds of participation pupils valued.

The opportunity to participate in purposeful practices – activities found across all school life – was also significant. Most commentators agree there are different kinds of participation: at times pupils’ participation can be trivialised (for example, where a school trip is offered as a reward for following school rules), and at
other times, pupils have more in-depth dialogue with each other and with adults to decide what the issues are, and what might need to be done. These ideas remind us that participation cannot be merely about adults listening to pupils’ views and making a quick fix response. Neither is authentic participation merely about socialising pupils into the world as adults see it.22

Biesta’s (2008) views on democracy in education may be of use here.23 We suggest two starting points for schools to make participation purposeful and less trivial: these are (a) agreement that younger and older school community members are in fact equal, and (b) that pupils should not always be seen as dependent on adults as somehow their masters. On the ground, through activities and events, we can imagine that rights-based participation will in fact lead to pupil’s and adults’ sharing power, or intergenerational emancipation, involving active experimentation among the interested parties.24 Critically, authentic participation by young people and adults will need dialogue. We suggest such dialogue will enfranchise both adults (teachers and community members) and pupils to create new interests. Importantly, we think the process of creating and addressing such interests – or intergenerational emancipation – will affect both generations. This will involve finding out what is at stake, working on what is possible, and experiencing how things can be different in and through schooling.

In conclusion, schools can and should robustly and confidently integrate rights-based practice across the curriculum and the life of the school as part of a raising attainment and achievement agenda. Further advances in rights-based education practices are both needed and possible and will likely support gains in achievement and attainment and enhance the democratic nature of school life for all pupils, teachers, and school-linked communities.

22 We did find evidence of such trivialisation of pupil’s participation in this study but there were also times when adults and pupils were more relationally involved in sharing power and in the practicing of powerful acts of citizenship.

23 Biesta (2008) provides this view on what is needed to educate for emancipation. He suggests that it is not adults who hold the key to pupils’ emancipation: teachers should not seek to emancipate their pupils or try to ‘set them free’.

5 REFERENCES
5. References


Appendix 1: Participants

Table 1. The Participant Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Participants Schools</th>
<th>Non Denominational</th>
<th>Denominational (Catholic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Possible Schools – (Schools Doing Better Than Expected for their Catchments)(^{26})</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Schools Approached</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Total Number of participating Schools = 7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participants in the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants in the Research</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls(^{27})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number Participating in Arts-based Approaches</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Governance Group Members Interviewed</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers by Level / Year Groups</td>
<td>S1-3</td>
<td>S4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Randomly Sampled Pupil Participants</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers by Level / Year Groups</td>
<td>S1-3</td>
<td>S4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Numbers of Boys and Girls participating = 136</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Interviews with Pupils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews with Pupils</th>
<th>Non Denominational</th>
<th>Denominational (Catholic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Focus Group Interviews with Pupils</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance Group Interviews (Eg Pupil Council)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Interviews &amp; Photo-Interviews with Pupils</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number of Interviews and Sessions</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{25}\) Hinchliffe and Bradshaw (2014). In this report schools were anonymised.

\(^{26}\) For many of the interviews we requested mixed genders of various ages to be selected randomly. However, girls and older pupils were somewhat more likely to be selected for interview because of their 'governance group' membership. In this report, we do not explore the possible gendered and age-related nature of participation in such groups in schools here but suggest it warrants further inquiry. Ross and Brown (2013) also noted that pupils in the senior phases of schools had more opportunities for leadership and participation.
Appendix 2: Arts-Based Pupil Work

I learn under the sun
I sleep under the stars
My friends hold my hand in the hard times
And I hold theirs in turn
Our enemies strike us down
But we fight for our right to be us
I am strong and I am smart
I am me and you are you
All of us – We live together in harmony
For eternity
Under the sun and under the stars

Figure 1 Arts-based Production. Pupils’ collective poem

Figure 2 Pupil-taken Photograph

Figure 3 Pupil Work: Concrete Poetry

Figure 4 Arts-based workshop activity
Pupils’ Collective Poem
Arts-based Workshop

Everyday Life in School

Everyday, Everyday, I say
As I hear the ringing of the bell
Or the buzzing of my alarm clock,

Everyday, Everyday, I say
“Here, Sir”, or “Here, Miss”

Talking and Walking

With Friends
Just in School

At 8.45….Tannoy

“Good Morning, Everyone
Could all staff stop
what they are doing
as we start our morning Prayer”

‘O Jesus, through the pure heart
of Mary, Thank you’

A long walk to class
As we lower our heads
And tread our feet

My brain starts to activate
Watching the clock TICK TOCK
It went TICK TOCK
It’s time to learn

Teachers Talking, People
Writing, Doing Work

Cold clean Colourful Corridors
The road to our success
Leading to the class room
The sweaty heat lingers around

Ten Past One: Rampage

Time to fuel our brains
with sweets & sour crunchie
and chewy-chippy chips
crush hall crush

Back to class
Will it repeat to the same beat?

As we spend some more
seconds
Studying in silence
As a slide-shows is shown
CLICK, CLICK, the pens go
We scribble down the
information
off the board
I thought class would never end

It’s like a roller coaster
It has twists and turns
Ups and downs
Never knowing when it going
to end.

Will it repeat to the same beat?
Will it repeat to the same beat?
Again, And again?
If you would like to receive this report in another language or format (such as audio, Braille) please contact:

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People
Rosebery House
Ground Floor
9 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5EZ
Tel: 0131 346 5350
Young People’s Freephone: 0800 019 1179
Fax: 0131 337 1275
Web: www.sccyp.org.uk
Facebook: facebook.com/RightsSCCYP
Twitter: @RightsSCCYP