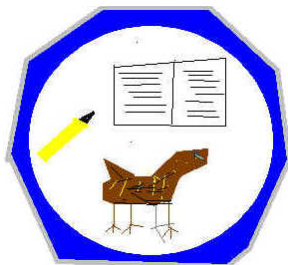


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## LARK RISE LOWER SCHOOL

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# Pupil Voice

February 2009

### POW WOW Sessions at our school

#### Introduction

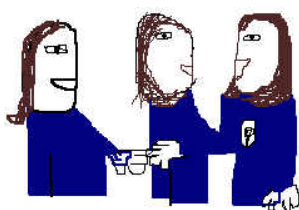
At the end of every school year we evaluate the outcomes of our work and seek to make improvements based on the voice of all the stakeholders. For over five years the school has had a section on the School Improvement Plan for "Pupils as decision makers". The emphasis is on listening with the intent to fully understand what children are telling us and working together, adults and children, in partnership. Everyone's opinion is welcomed.

At the end of last year the children were beginning to identify some issues related to the traditional structure of School Council formed as a democratic body to represent the views of all children. The level of pride in their work was exceptionally high amongst those duly elected and they took responsibilities seriously. However there were other voices that were not represented or heard in the busy meetings and school structures. From a series of focus groups with a variety of different characters some issues were arising namely:

- Over confidence of those elected;
- Disappointment of trying several times for election but not receiving a mandate;
- Events across the whole school organised by a few children;
- Views of all actions or issues in school told by those who behaved themselves;
- Lack of children who were having a difficult time represented;
- Cynical views about literature on 'anti bullying' days or weeks;
- Lack of emphasis on things that really mattered such as saving the world;
- Lack of feedback about what had been discussed in meetings;
- Having to give up lunchtime to get together.

The overriding message given from the wider pupil body was that all children should have a say and they liked the sound of **Every Child's Voice Matters**. They wanted to keep some form of class representative who could feedback their views and a body of older children who could be voted onto a council who represented children across the school in local, national and international events. The adults voiced their opinions about the current School Council Body expressing a desire to have more opportunities to listen and act on the opinions of many more children.

The children asked for time in the school week to discuss things that they were interested in and after brainstorming sessions settled on the term POW WOW as they would all sit around in a circle and talk.



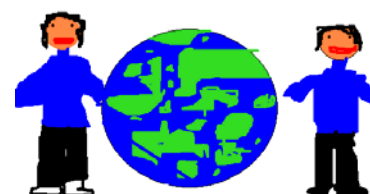
**Pupil Voice**



**Keeping Healthy**



**New Technology**



**Going Global**

### **What is a POW WOW session?**

Every week each class in the three Key Stages has a dedicated 30 minute POW WOW time in which they share views about school life that is the focus for the week. The opinions are gathered and formally minuted so that all children who want to speak know their ideas have been heard.

The sessions are led by the class teacher with the teaching assistant making the notes. At the end of the discussion time the class representatives take the sheets to the Headteacher. The opinions are collated and are then used for evaluation of processes or suggestions for future actions.

Currently the Headteacher sets the reflection questions related to the discussions for Staff meeting, school events, budget spending or issues that have occurred the previous week that needs immediately addressing.

The children are given the feedback about where the information has been used and any suggestions that have not been used.

### **Themes this year so far**

Themes are developed each week so that the school and children can respond to the notion of 'here and now'. It is quite refreshing to have sessions with no predetermined learning intentions other than to gather viewpoints.

The children have found the sessions that have involved their lives in the classroom or playground the most inspirational particularly the ones in which they could plan the classroom decorations and furniture. They are now mobilising their parents to come and paint and checking DIY stores for toilet seats with pictures on. The nursery children asked for beanbags they could snuggle into and a television. The reception class wanted the doors lowered in the toilets and mirrors. Comfy chairs and carpets became a theme across the school which are being investigated at the moment.

Another area spoken about with passion was the development of social groups our Friday afternoon arrangements. They felt that the activities were getting a little tired and although when introduced a few years ago it was much looked forward to exciting learning on other days has taken this events place. The children wanted to organise things differently and consulted with the teaching assistants following their two weeks POW WOW sessions.

The children tended to want to discuss classroom issues as that was their own worlds. This is very different to the items discussed in the older format of School Council.

### **What are the outcomes?**

POW WOW sessions empower the children and their classroom adults especially as the themes are to do with their everyday lives spent together. Whenever the adults discuss how an event or curriculum change has been implemented they now have a breadth of knowledge and understanding of what the children think.

### **What is different about this approach?**

This approach transforms a school because change is developed from within and therefore ownership is secured. Leadership is distributed with the Headteacher having support with strategic thinking rather than in the more traditional systems.

Although this approach is new for us I know it is going to continue with deeper reflections by the children.

Just to end here are just a few of the feedback quotes:

"In order to find out about life in our school why don't we ask each other how we feel, what we see and what we hear, our senses will help us" 6 year old.

"Children help each other out in the playground but sometimes a few don't think about what they are doing and then get too rough" 7 year old

"Sorry to say this but the new carpet tiles in our classroom are scratchy to our bottoms can we have a softer carpet" 6 year old.

"The plastic chairs need a soft cushion like the ones you have on chairs in the garden. I will ask my mum to make some for us" 7 year old

"You have to learn to read and write so that you can read a story to your baby when you grow up" 5 year old.

"Sometimes I find the challenges in numeracy difficult but when I discuss it with my partner it makes me understand more" 9 year old.

"A first when my teacher shows me an idea in numeracy I don't always get it, then we have a little practice together and I begin to see what to do. When I do another few examples I see and understand. Doing is more important than telling" 8 year old.

Sue Attard