

A Snapshot of the Learner Voice Project in Piper's Hill College

Piper's Hill College has always strongly promoted student voice and it has been an integral part of our school culture since we opened ten years ago. Students were heavily involved in selecting our uniform, designing our school crest and even in choosing our school name and this created a sense of belonging and community from the beginning.

Traditionally, student voice has been developed through our prefect system, school council and mentoring programmes and these have been very positive endeavours, providing many leadership opportunities. Our senior wellbeing prefects have spearheaded projects such as the Amber Flag and Positive Mental Health Week, literacy prefects have led the Well-Read campaign and sports prefects frequently organise and lead competitions and activities with junior students. Our student council meanwhile is representative of all year groups, has a high profile within the school, and is very proactive in highlighting a range of issues from recycling and litter to cyber safety, traffic safety and school policies such as Code of Behaviour and Acceptable Use Policy. Currently we are updating our Mission Statement and Code of Behaviour and student voice is at the centre of this process- all our students have been involved in workshops, along with staff and parents, to contribute to the language, priorities and needs of our new policies. Student voice in this respect is a means of empowering students and promoting democratic citizenship and values.

In recent years, particularly with the introduction of SSE and Junior Cycle Reform, the concept of student voice has expanded and grown. Now it has become more integral to the classroom as a means for students to have agency, choice, and influence in how their learning takes place. Student voice has now evolved into 'learner voice' and supports the student-centred learning that is at the heart of what we strive for in Piper's Hill College. In our most recent subject inspection, it was stated that the student capacity to describe their learning experience in lessons was impressive and this is something we very much want to build on and develop further. Supported by the JCT training days, our SSE and teaching and learning team conducted a range of focus groups with students across all years to discuss their experience of learning and describe what positive and active learning felt and looked like for them. We have since conducted similar focus groups around learner experience of the CBA process across a range of subjects. When we showed student videos and responses to staff, they were impressed with our students' capacity to reflect on and describe their own learning experiences. Our teaching and learning club for teachers promotes a different instructional method or learning resource each month and this is also informed by learner voice and their experience of a particular tactic, skill or strategy.

When our TL21 teacher group decided to focus on embedding Learning Intentions and Success Criteria in Junior Cycle lessons, learner voice was at the heart of the action research as students were consulted throughout the process and their feedback informed how teachers would introduce these concepts at classroom level. This data was initially collected through small focus groups and classes and later, through whole school surveys, the wording of which was informed by learner voice to ensure the language and question structure was accessible for all. One thing we have learned regarding 'learner voice' is the importance of ensuring that we pitch discussion and dialogue at the appropriate level and avoid 'adulteration' of language, allowing the students to own their own learning and reflection.

As we engage with the Learner Voice Project, we are taking our work on Success Criteria to the next level as we work with students to co-create their own success criteria and experiment with various Instructional methods to ensure every learner in the class is engaged and confident in expressing their preferences and ideas. We particularly want to build and enhance students 'language of learning' and this will be our focus next year. We look forward to sharing our experience in our clusters over the coming months and in turn, learning from other schools how best we can bring the learner voice to the core of learning and teaching in our school and classrooms.

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Two photos below show students working into groups, using table mats to create success criteria for Home Ec CBA project, they then decide on top 5 in the middle and report bac to class. Example for Learner Voice Project



Photo shows a focus group of students discussing their learning experiences in Piper's Hill College

