

St. Pius X BNS – School Self-Evaluation Report on Student Voice & Autonomy

Subject Areas – SPHE & Literacy

The Focus of the Evaluation:

A school self-evaluation of teaching and learning regarding **student voice** and **student autonomy** was undertaken in St. Pius X BNS during the school year 2022/23. It was widely acknowledged that, as a result of the school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the **language skills** of our pupils have been greatly impacted. Children need to be able to communicate and connect with others in order to participate in wider society, learn how to share their experiences, thoughts, ideas and feelings in a variety of ways, and learn how to observe, listen to, interpret, and show respect for the perspectives of others.

Another key competency of the Primary Curriculum Framework is that of the children being **active citizens** – to foster the knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values and dispositions in children that motivate and empower them as citizens to take positive actions to live justly, sustainably, and with regard to the rights of others. It places democratic practices at the centre of the learning process.

School Practices Presently Adopted to Promote Student Voice and Autonomy

Teaching Practices: Through teacher reflection groups and discussions at staff meetings, we concluded that our teachers are employing a wide variety of methodologies and approaches in the teaching and development of student voice in our classrooms. These include drama/roleplay activities, co-operative games, classroom discussions, group work, games, reflection, circle time, oral presentation of schoolwork and projects, class debates, show and tell, listening to and recording of the 'Daily News' in younger classes, written activities, stories and poems, and guest speakers. Teachers endeavour to adapt and modify these activities and methodologies to encourage participation by children with additional needs. The SET team supplement the work of the class teachers where necessary.

- **The Student Council** is a representative pupil group consisting of one boy from each class from 3rd to 6th class who are elected democratically by their classmates to represent the voice of their classes in all school matters. Their role is to listen to the needs, thoughts and suggestions of the boys in their class and endeavour to take action to achieve these for them. The members of the student council are also the members of the **Green Schools committee**.
- **School Website:** It is in the publishing of school newsletters and articles reporting on school-based and class-based activities and extra-curricular activities, that the students themselves have particular input. Children love to see photographs, or read and write articles about themselves and their classes or school celebrating their work and productivity, achievements and success.
- The **Yardaí programme** was introduced in the school year 2022/23 to promote safety, responsibility and citizenship. Groups of 6th class boys assist teachers with yard-time duties before, during and after yard times. These duties include bringing out the first aid benches and boxes, putting cones around large puddles or as instructed by the teacher on duty, observation of movement of students from yard to yard, and supervision of yard programmes (in infant yards under teacher supervision).
- **Ideas & Suggestions Boxes:** Students are encouraged to voice their thoughts and opinions on current school practices and to provide their ideas and suggestions for future improvements and upcoming projects and programmes.
- **Cara Clóis:** St. Pius X BNS has a safe play area next to the infant block for pupils with additional or complex needs and those who cannot participate fully in yard, e.g., due to injury. Older

students are encouraged to volunteer themselves to play with or assist these children during yard times.

- **Pupil Mentoring Programme** – Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic placing restrictions on the mixing of children from different classes, St. Pius X BNS had a very successful pupil mentoring programme. As part of this programme, older students from the senior end of the school were paired with younger students in the junior classes and given responsibilities of care towards these children.
- **Paired Reading / Peer reading** – Paired reading is where boys from our senior classes visit the classes of our younger students and read books with them on a one-to-one basis. Peer reading is where children at the same class level are put in pairs with a strong reader being paired with a boy who benefits from their assistance.
- **Incident reports** – On occasion, it is necessary to hear from students involved in yard or classroom incidents and to give them an opportunity to voice their side of a story or to give an account of an event from their perspective.

Summary of School Self-Evaluation Findings

Our School Strengths in Relation to Student Voice and Autonomy:

- The school is friendly, welcoming, and accessible to all the school community. Children feel respected and safe at school. The school environment is used to display pupil work and celebrate pupil achievements.
- Responses were very positive around school community interaction and relationships including staff interactions and relationships, relationship with parents, school ethos of respect for and acceptance of all, school links with community groups and external services, teacher-pupil relationships, teacher-parent communication, and school-parent communication structures such as newsletters and email correspondence.
- The school currently runs a number of programmes considered successful at promoting student voice and autonomy including the Student Council, Yardaí programme, Cara Clóis programme, paired reading programme (younger pupils with older pupils), and peer reading in classrooms.
- Classroom activities such as daily news, show and tell, class debates and discussion, circle time, and project presentations encourage student voice and provide opportunities for children to voice their opinions and talk about their interests and achievements.
- The school website publishes articles celebrating students' work and productivity, achievements and success and provides opportunities for children's input, as do the termly school newsletters.
- Suggestions and Ideas boxes allow students to voice their thoughts and opinions on current school practices, along with ideas and suggestions for future improvements.

Priorities for Improvement:

- Further development of the **school student council**, e.g., more student council members per class, more regular meetings between the student councils of the BNS and GNS, the introduction of junior student council members to provide a voice for youngers students.
- Provide a more structured and regular **mentoring system** or **buddy system** between older and younger pupils
- Introduction of a **pupil newsletter** and a **pupil noticeboard** on which children can post child-led content including articles, interest pieces, student surveys and reviews.
- Provide more opportunities for students to have their voices heard via **ideas boxes** and the **suggestions boxes**.