

Student voice

At one school, the young people working with the project invited a student council representative to their group. They talked to him about what was not so good at their school and the things that mattered to them. He went back to the council and told them. The council then asked the school to sort these things out. Some things changed almost straight away – small things, like providing lockers for young people to put their bags in or allowing young people to go to the toilet when they needed to go and not just at break times when it was very busy (and scary) around the school.

Then much bigger things started to happen in this school. The young people held an event to tell the staff, fellow students, governors and their parents about their work as researchers for the project and their ideas. They offered an insight into their life at school by sharing their views and findings using photos, video clips and a powerpoint presentation. Their headteacher and the chair of the school's governors were there. They listened and then invited the young people to repeat their presentation to both the school governors and some architects who were consulting on future plans for the new school. The headteacher felt these people needed to know the students' views about making the new building a more pleasant, more accessible and safer environment. The young people told the architects about what was wrong with the old school and what needed to be changed to make things better.

The headteacher and the governors promised to listen to the young people regularly in the future. Another unforeseen outcome from this event was the encouragement and support that the SENCo and the support staff gained from their school colleagues. Staff and parents were amazed, not only by the presentational skills and confidence of the group of young people who had done the project work, but by the scale of their achievements and the valuable insights arising from their work. The profile of whole school inclusion was definitely raised and the value of the students' voice was affirmed.