



## How are all children helped to learn?

### An account of practice from collaborative action research in Norwood Primary School

## The Research-Practice Partnership

The **School Voices Research-Practice Partnership** aims to support schools in **responding to student diversity** and **improving learning outcomes** for all, whilst at the same time **promoting inclusion**. This will be achieved by focusing on **students' voices and dialogues** between teachers and children and young people through **participatory research approaches**.

The Partnership has been partly funded by **UKRI – Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)**. The Partnership consists of a collaboration between: **University of Southampton** and three **hub schools (St John's Primary and Nursery School, St Mary's CE Primary School, Redbridge Primary School)** that were involved in an earlier pilot study. The hub schools and the University of Southampton support other schools in introducing these ideas through collaborative action research, considering the complexities within each school context. For more information - [www.schoolvoices.soton.ac.uk](http://www.schoolvoices.soton.ac.uk)

## The school

Norwood Primary & Pre-School is a diverse, inclusive school with 397 students. Its name is taken from local hero Percy Norwood, who was awarded the Edward Medal for Gallantry after saving a man's life on the railway lines at Liss. This school comprises classes that include Pre-School to Year 6 (3- to 11-year-olds, mixed gender). There is a total of 15 teachers and 14 support staff. A significant number of pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium, and the school supports a wide range of special educational needs. 33.7% of children have English as an Additional Language (above *national average*). And 23.5% of children receive Pupil Premium Funding. **13.3%** of children have identified Special Educational Needs or Disabilities.

The school promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Pupil voice is highly valued by this school, and children are actively encouraged to contribute to the school community. Each year, students elect class representatives to the School Council. Through this, all children have the opportunity to discuss important school issues and suggest topics for consideration, ensuring their opinions are heard and respected across the school.

## Research focus and process

The new headteacher, who was previously involved in the School Voices since the piloting of the ideas

in one of our hub schools, promoted new changes in this school, which aligned with the School Voices principles. Two teacher staff (from Reception Class and Year 4) co-led this project, alongside six pupil researchers (3 from Year 5 and 3 from Year 6).

These students were picked in consultation with their class teachers: some had English as an Additional Language (EAL), others were defined as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), some children were often “overlooked” or “particularly behind in their learning”, or “who were harder to reach”, or “who were quite new to the school”.

They linked this project with part of their school improvement plan - focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, they focused on conducting a research project investigating how all children can be supported to learn. Their main questions were:

- **How are all children helped to learn in every lesson?**
- **What can we do differently to help children learn?**

The two teachers worked together with pupil researchers in three stages:

**Research training:** This involved photo elicitation, sentence stems and discussing various questions around the concept of learning, and the project’s plan. The key areas that were discussed were the following:

- What does it mean to research?
- What are we aiming for?
- What’s this project?
- What, how are we going to do this?

**In-lesson observations:** Linking this research to the school’s new teaching-learning framework (Rosenshein's principles), student researchers carried out classroom observations in different lessons across year groups, with directed questions, a questionnaire, and photographs to discuss.

**Feeding back to teachers:** oral feedback as a group, a role-play practice, and notes to support conversations.

## Participatory methods

### Researchers training

Teachers spent several sessions discussing with pupil researchers before going into lessons – “What learning actually means, what are we looking for?” They used a flip chart and looked at some pictures of children, asking pupil researchers to name children in photos who they thought were learning and others who appeared as if they are not learning. The pictures were both from indoors and outdoors.

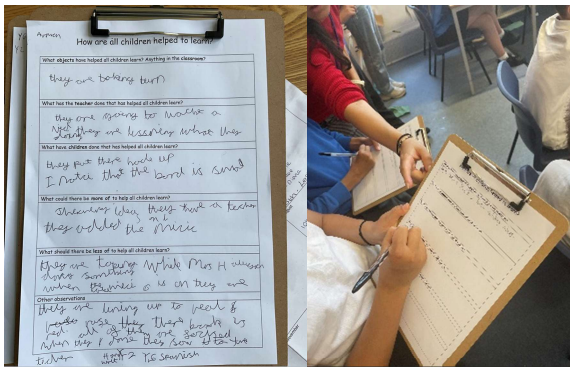


Photo-elicitation for discussion among pupil researchers.

### Classroom observations

Teachers prepared a paper with questions to help pupil researchers when observing lessons. It wasn’t aiming to guide them, but to give a little prompt or guidance in case they stumbled. The form included the following questions:

- What **objects** have helped all children learn? Anything else in the **classroom**?
- What has the **teacher** done that has helped all children learn?
- What have **children** done that has helped all children learn?
- What could there be **more of** to help all children learn?
- What should there be **less of** to help all children learn?
- And any other observations?



Pupil researchers are using a semi-structured observation form.

Pupil researchers observed different subjects (e.g., music, Spanish, handwriting, PE) across year groups (Year 1 to Year 6). In each observation, six researchers were divided into two mixed groups, alongside one teacher.



Pupil researchers carrying out observations in two groups

After observations, all pupil researchers gathered, shared and discussed what they had observed.



Pupil researchers discussing what they observed

## Outcomes

### Identification of effective teaching strategies:

Through classroom observations and peer discussions, pupil researchers identified specific practices that enabled all children to learn, for example:

- Use of music to support focus
- Use of symbols alongside explanations
- Allowing time to share ideas
- Use of timers
- Whiteboards to aid thinking time
- Reducing "calling out"
- Opportunities for partner talk
- Physical modelling of tasks (e.g., relay race demonstrations)
- Awareness of too much on the board, which could be overwhelming for some learners

### Insights into learner experience and classroom atmosphere:

Pupil researchers gave thoughtful feedback on classroom dynamics. For example, they appreciated the option to use whiteboards, which allowed them to make mistakes without pressure. Some commented that shouting out when work is finished made others feel anxious or under pressure.

**Staff reflection and next steps:** Findings have been shared with the wider teaching team, prompting reflection on teaching and learning. Teachers have already made small adjustments in response to pupil feedback, such as reducing clutter on whiteboards and encouraging more structured partner talk.

### Planned whole-school feedback and future development:

The next step is for the pupil researchers to come together to prepare a role-play presentation. This will help them confidently share their findings with the whole teaching team, not just the staff directly involved in the project. The aim is to reflect on how these insights can inform future practice and support planning for next year's project.

## Key ideas emerging

**Understanding learner experiences:** Through the process of listening to students' thoughts and observations and having dialogues with them about what they had observed, teachers understood what helps children to learn and what makes it difficult for them in lessons. Teachers also realised how some practices were putting pressure on children, such as calling out when they had finished work, whereas others such as the use of the whiteboard, allowed them to make mistakes without putting any pressure on them. Overall, children's observations and the discussions that followed between children and teachers allowed them to understand better children's experiences in class.

**Transformation of student behaviour:** Some of the children who took the role of student researchers, who were particularly quiet in classes, behaved very differently in the small group of student researchers. They became active participants and were confident to share their views throughout the whole process.

**Impact on staff practice and future whole-school development:** The understandings gained through the process allowed reflection and adjustments among the participating teachers. Also, pupil researchers will prepare and give a presentation to the entire teaching team and inform next year's planning to facilitate whole-school development.

## Teachers' and Students' thoughts

I feel like we found some value in the discussion after the observations, talking with them about what they saw, but then digging in a little bit deeper based on what was observed.

Year 4 teacher

I think he's enjoying it and he's taking part and he's trying to communicate a bit more. I found they've been really, surprisingly open and chatting, they have been quite talkative, yes, they've wanted to share their ideas and, yeah, they've been enjoying it.

Year R teacher

We went in classes and got to the back of the class and listened and saw what teachers do to help the children learn.

Pupil research, Year 5 girl

Pupil  
researcher,  
Year 6 boy

We sat down around a table with pictures around us, and then we took a picture to see what they're doing outside.

## Teacher team

- Eli Plaza (Year 4 teacher)
- Sarah Stockwell (Year R teacher)

**Headteacher:** Steph Mander

## Research team

- Professor Kiki Messiou
- Dr Jay de los Reyes
- Chinmaya Potnis
- Ping Dong
- Karen Ibáñez Riquelme

We would also like to acknowledge the participation of many children and other staff in the school who have contributed in various ways.