

FREE GUIDE · 2026/27

The School Council *Guide*

Everything you need to run an inclusive, self-managing school council. One that involves every pupil, barely touches your time, and doesn't fizzle out by February.

Written by **Greg Sanderson** · Founder, Smart School Councils

Five moves to pupil voice that *works*.

School councils are great. They empower pupils, build the skills they'll use for life, and improve your school community. But after ten years working with pupil voice in hundreds of schools, we see the same four struggles everywhere:

- Meetings that never get past toilets and lunches.
- Momentum that fades a few weeks into term.
- A school council that ends up being teacher-led.
- The same few pupils involved in speaking up. What about everyone else?

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Greg Sanderson

Founder, Smart School Councils

I grew up a quiet, working-class kid who didn't feel heard, so I founded Smart School Councils to give more young people a voice. Everything in this guide comes from what 700 schools taught us. I hope it's useful.

700

UK schools run *Smart* School
Councils

Infant to PRU, single schools to whole trusts.

250k

young voices heard through
their *Smart* School Council

Every class. Every child. Not just the elected
few.

1 Get more than a handful of voices *involved*

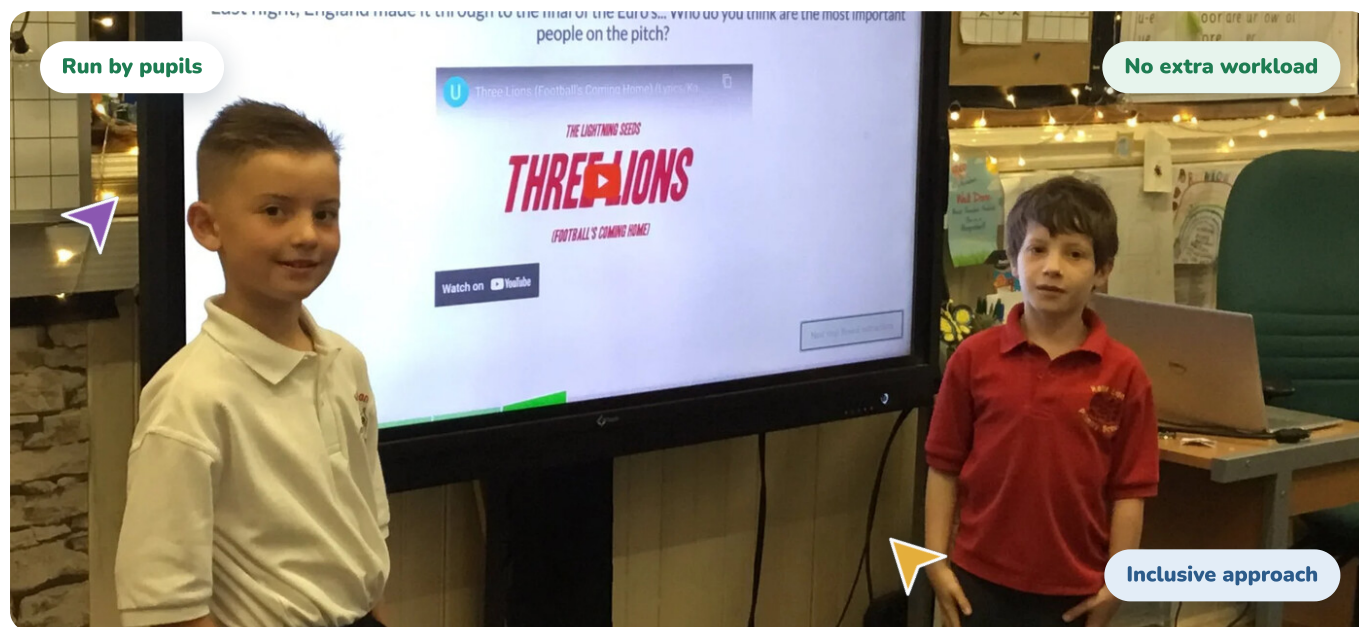
Whose voices are important in your school? It's everyone, right?

So let's not stop at ten or fifteen voices. Let's build a school council that reaches out to more voices, rather than only talking among themselves.



Research by the UCL Institute of Education found traditional school councils typically involve 'higher attaining, more confident pupils or those from more advantaged backgrounds'. Speaking up can't only be open to these pupils.

We suggest doing this through **class meetings**. A simple, common format where each class regularly discusses a single question, picked by your school council, led by pupils. Easy.



We help schools with a simple, free tool that makes class meetings easy to run, and evidences them as you go.

2 Want pupils to lead? Build the *structure*

Your pupils are more than capable of leading the school council. They just need structure, not a series of random meetings with no clear goal or consistent way of running.

So build it in. Help pupils lead in their classes, and create a common structure for your school council meetings too, led by young people. Each time, pick a single question or area of school life to focus on and involve more pupils in. Talk to other schools for ideas.

10,000 topics to borrow

🌟 Newest from our schools

🔥 Popular

📚 Whole bank

British Values

Debates

Special occasions ▾

Behaviour in our school is...?

☐ Outstanding

☐ Good, most of us behave well

☐ Needs to be better

☐ Really bad

Asked by 30 schools



Use this

How can we show kindness in our school community?

☐ Thank somebody

☐ Give a compliment

☐ Invite people to join in

☐ Help a classmate to learn

☐ Help an adult do a job

Asked by 28 schools



Use this

What would you do differently if you could start this year again?

☐ Put more effort into learning

☐ Spend more time making friends

☐ Focus on clubs and activities

☐ Nothing, I'm happy with it

Asked by 27 schools



Use this

What makes our school a happy place to be?

☐ Good friends

☐ Kind teachers

☐ Fun lessons

☐ Feeling safe

Asked by 25 schools



Use this

If you could change one thing about lunchtimes, what would it be?

☐ More time to eat

☐ More to do outside

☐ Better food choices

☐ Somewhere quiet to go



Use this

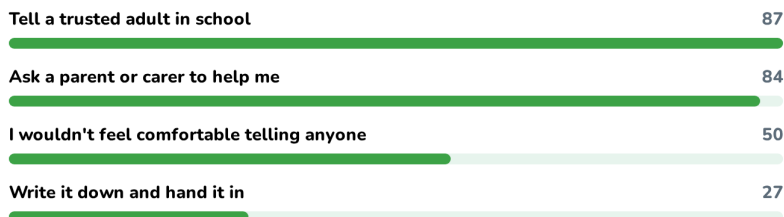
3 Move quickly. It *matters*

Be smart about what is on the table: pick small, tangible changes pupils can watch happen this term, not a six-year rebuild they will never see finished. And read the room quickly, so you always know what your whole school actually thinks.

● LIVE MEETING

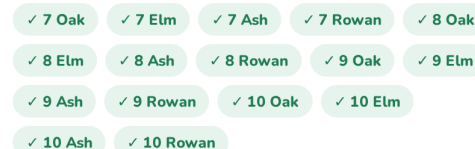
Our school council asked every class: if you had a worry at school, how would you tell someone?

HOW CLASSES ARE VOTING



WHO HAS VOTED

✓ 16 of 16 classes



RESULTS SO FAR

What pupils are telling you

Pupils are split. About a third would tell a trusted adult, and roughly the same number would ask a parent or carer. But one in five say they wouldn't feel comfortable telling anyone at all. One was direct about why: "I might get into trouble instead, and they might judge me." That's worth knowing, there's a real barrier here around trust, not just knowing the process.

WHAT PUPILS SAID



"I chose that because what is the point? I might get into trouble instead and they might judge me."

7 Ash



"Some of us wouldn't know which adult to go to first."

9 Elm

IDEAS PUPILS RAISED



A clear poster in every classroom showing who you can talk to.

8 Oak



A quiet way to tell someone, without the whole class seeing.

10 Rowan

For members: the moment classes vote, the meeting is read, summarised and laid out for you like this: the numbers, what pupils said, and who took part.

4 Make change *visible*

Very few pupils read minutes pinned to a noticeboard. A progress board is the opposite: a prominent display of what pupils asked for, what is happening about it, and which pupil is leading it. Pupils see that speaking up changes things, which is what keeps a school council alive.



REAL PROGRESS BOARDS IN MEMBER SCHOOLS

To set one up: pick somewhere prominent, use three headings (You said · We're on it · Done), and give two pupils the job of keeping it current.

5 Connect pupil voice to leaders and your priorities

At its simplest, this means a governor who takes pupil voice as their named role, with two pupils who keep them informed. Once your school council is running, the termly update writes itself: what every class discussed, how they voted, and what changed.

To set up: ask a governor to take the pupil voice link role, appoint two pupils to send a short update each term, and invite them to see a school council meeting happen.

YOU SAID, WE DID

This year

MAY 2026

✓ DONE

You said: Could we have somewhere calm to go at lunch?

We did: Two quiet rooms now open every lunchtime, run by Year 9 volunteers.

MARCH 2026

✓ DONE

You said: Can we make morning reading more enjoyable?

We did: Comics, manga and modern titles added to every class book corner.

FEBRUARY 2026

IN PROGRESS

You said: The lunch menu needs more variety.

We did: Working with the catering team on a new rota. Pupils tasting options this term.

JANUARY 2026

CONSULTED

You said: How could we make break times better?

We did: More equipment out at break and a rota for the field, trialling now.

NOVEMBER 2025

✓ DONE

You said: We want a clearer way to report bullying.

We did: Worry boxes in every corridor and a named pupil in each form group.

For members: this record writes itself, ready for pupils to take to governors.

Point pupil voice at your school *priorities*

Get your school council involved in your SIP or SEF. Bring in your priorities, and pupils lead on the very things your school is already working to improve.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Oakfield Primary School Improvement Plan 2026/27

Your plan, as questions pupils can lead. Pick any to run: every class discusses, votes and acts, and the evidence builds against your own priorities.

Run these to give your pupils a voice on all 3 priorities

Inclusion: removing barriers for all learners

Priority 1

Making sure every child, including those with SEND or facing disadvantage, can access great teaching and thrive.

What stops some children learning as well as they could? What could we do to help?

● Make sure everyone knows what help there is

● Check our classrooms work for everyone

● Train staff to spot and fix barriers

Maps to: barriers to learning for all pupils

Autumn



Use this

How do we make sure everyone can join in clubs, trips and events?

● Same activities with small changes

● Let everyone join clubs and trips

● Teach the same skills a different way

Maps to: inclusive practice and access to enrichment

Spring



Use this

For members: upload your SIP or SEF and it instantly becomes pupil topics and class meeting questions, then holds all the evidence of what pupils say about each one.

Evidence for *Ofsted*, as you go

Run pupil voice against your priorities and the evidence assembles itself, mapped to every duty inspectors look at. No scramble before a visit, no folder to build the night before.

Summary

British values

Debate & oracy

Pupils' views

Citizenship

Leadership

★ Recommendations

AT A GLANCE

Your inspection evidence, all year

2 of 6 areas evidence-ready

32 class meetings · 1.1k pupil votes

3 building · 1 not started

EVALUATION AREAS



British values

The rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect aren't evidenced yet.

1 of 4 evidenced



Debate & oracy

Some activity here, but the evidence is still thin.

Building



Pupils' views

Strong evidence on record. Keep the cadence going.

✓ Evidence ready



Citizenship

Strong evidence on record across the year.

✓ Evidence ready

For members: every meeting, vote and action maps itself against the frameworks the moment it happens, so the picture is always ready when anyone asks.

//

We want our children to be leaders of change. It's their school.



Lisa Taylor

Headteacher, Halling Primary

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Teachers on what actually *changed*



ACROSS THE WHOLE TRUST

"It's their school. It's not my school, it's theirs."

Damien Cresswell

Associate Head, Keys Group



A DOOR OPENED

"He's gone on to college, and he pins it on talking."

Danny Hart

Head of Literacy, SEMH school



PUPIL-LED CHANGE

"That's democracy, you know?"

Rachel Gray

Year 4 Teacher

"They designed a railway and won first place, all through school council."

Hannah Jarman · SEND school, Wolverhampton

"We're in this together, and everyone's voices are important."

Louise Russell · PSHE lead, international school

USED BY SCHOOLS AND TRUSTS ACROSS THE UK



Selworthy School

**BECKFOOT
ALLERTON
SCHOOL**



CTDARI
Blackburn Diocese Multi Academy Trust





You've got the guide. Now see how it *works*.

Step inside a real Smart School Council and see exactly how it runs:
live class-meeting voting, the pupil team, every meeting written up,
and the evidence building itself. Try it free, no signup needed.

Try it free →

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