

Appendix 6

Engagement Session with Gwynedd Children and Young People's Forum – June 2026

1. Purpose of the Session

An engagement session was held with representatives of the Gwynedd Children and Young People's Forum to understand their experiences of participation in schools and services, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the current arrangements, and gather views on what should be included in the Voice of the Child Strategy.

2. What does "Voice of the Child" mean to young people?

Participants were asked what the "voice of the child" meant to them. There was a clear consensus that it is a fundamental right to be heard and that their views are taken into account when making decisions that affect them. The link between the voice of the child and safety was also emphasised, with some young people noting that not being able to listen to children and young people can have a direct impact on their well-being and safety.

3. Main messages

- Children and young people have a right to be heard.
- Their opinions are important and relevant to decisions.
- Listening to children and young people is part of safeguarding and promoting well-being.
- Experiences of School Councils

There was considerable discussion on young people's experiences of school councils. While examples of good practice exist, the discussion highlighted a significant variation between schools.

The young people were positive about some recent developments, including greater representation by including representatives from all classes rather than just every year. However, a general concern was expressed that schools placed emphasis on the election of school councils at the beginning of the year but that the frequency, purpose and impact of the meetings declined over time.

4. Main challenges

- Lack of structure and clear purpose for some meetings.
- A feeling that some school councils are acting as a "tick-box" exercise.
- Lack of feedback on what has happened as a result of the pupils' comments.
- Lack of evidence of real influence on school decisions.
- Lack of awareness among some pupils about the role and work of the School Council.

There was a consensus that the main challenge was that young people did not always see evidence of change or action as a result of their contribution.

5. Representation and Fair Opportunity

The young people felt strongly that fair and consistent election and selection processes needed to be ensured.

Examples of effective practice were shared, including structured application processes where pupils explain their reasons for applying to be on the School Council and the change they would like to see. It was felt that this model placed more emphasis on commitment and leadership rather than on popularity.

At the same time, concerns were raised about situations where:

- Pupils are excluded because of previous behaviour.
- Processes depend entirely on a popularity vote.
- There is no consistent approach across schools.

The young people saw fairness and inclusion as key elements of any participation arrangements.

6. What makes an Effective School Council?

The session found that young people link an effective school council with four key elements:

- A real opportunity to influence decisions.
- Clear feedback on what has happened as a result of pupil contributions.
- Opportunities to take responsibility and lead.
- Clear structure and regular meetings with a clear purpose.

The young people stressed that giving only formal titles or roles is insufficient if the role does not come with practical responsibility or influence.

7. Priorities for the Future

The session also looked forward to future developments and highlighted a number of priorities:

a) Clearer Guidance for Schools

There was a strong consensus that not all schools understand how to operate an effective school council. The young people supported the development of clearer and more consistent guidance for schools and were keen to contribute to the formulation of those guidelines.

b) Strengthening Participation in Post-16 Education

A lack of equivalent structures within colleges was noted and a desire was expressed to see opportunities similar to school councils developed in post-16 education settings.

c) Learning from Good Practice in Primary Schools

The young people felt that many primary schools showed stronger participation practices than what is sometimes seen in secondary schools. It was suggested that this derived from smaller

communities, closer links between different groups of pupils and greater opportunities to see the direct impact of decisions.

8. How Did the Session Influence the Strategy?

The messages of this session had a direct influence on a number of elements of the Strategy, particularly:

- The emphasis on meaningful participation rather than symbolic participation.
- The commitment to providing feedback on what has changed as a result of the voices of children and young people.
- The emphasis on inclusion and fair representation.
- The need for participation structures with a clear purpose, influence and accountability.
- The expectation that services and schools will be able to demonstrate evidence of the impact of the voice of children and young people on decisions.

Voice of the Child Strategy Workshop - July 2026

1. Purpose of the Workshop:

A workshop was held with young people from across Gwynedd to discuss the draft Strategy and ensure it reflected what matters most to them. Rather than trying to approve a document that had already been completed, the young people were asked to challenge the content, identify gaps and propose changes that would ensure that the Strategy leads to real influence and impact.

The workshop focused on three areas:

- To change the principles of the Strategy into the language of young people.
- Define how a voice should move from experience to action.
- Develop a vision for future structures of youth representation.

2. Main Messages

A number of strong themes emerged across all the activities.

First, there was a clear consensus that mere gathering of opinions is not sufficient. The young people were eager to see their voice lead to noticeable and measurable change. They were clear that what builds trust is seeing decisions change as a result of their contribution.

Secondly, the importance of feedback was emphasised. There was a constant demand for clear information about what happened to their opinions, what was changed and why some suggestions could not be acted upon.

Thirdly, the young people wanted to ensure that participation was inclusive. They stressed the need to hear the voices of those who are less confident as well as those who are more willing to talk.

Fourthly, it was stressed that there needs to be clear pathways for raising issues and knowing who is responsible for listening, taking action and giving feedback.

Finally, a strong association was raised between being heard and well-being. The young people saw listening as part of creating safer, more supportive environments and helping to improve well-being.

3. Developing the Seven Pledges

One of the most important outcomes of the workshop was the work of the young people to redefine the principles of the Strategy in their own words.

It was from this work that the seven pledges at the heart of the Strategy were developed:

1. We have a right to be heard.
2. Our voice should influence, not just be collected.
3. Everyone should have a chance, not just the most confident.

4. The Council should say what it did with our opinions.
5. Our voice should reach decision-makers.
6. Adults should use methods that suit us.
7. Listening should keep us safer and improve well-being.

These pledges provide a clear summary of what matters most to the young people and are reflected throughout the whole Strategy.

4. How the Feedback Changed the Strategy

The table below shows how the contributions of the young people influenced the final Strategy.

What the young people said	Response in the Strategy
"Our voice should influence, not just be collected."	The emphasis on influence and decision-making was strengthened, making it clear that the aim is to achieve change and impact, not just engagement.
"The Council should say what it did with our opinions."	The sections on feedback, transparency and accountability were strengthened.
"Everyone should have a chance, not just the most confident."	Emphasis was added on inclusion and ensuring participation by children and young people at risk of under-representation.
"Our voice should reach decision-makers."	Governance arrangements have been developed that link young people's participation to the Council's decision-making processes.
"Adults should use methods that suit us."	The principle of using accessible, appropriate and appealing methods was strengthened for children and young people.
"Listening should keep us safer and improve well-being."	More emphasis was placed on the relationship between the voice of the child, well-being and safety.
"We need to see what's changed."	Monitoring and impact assessment arrangements have been added to measure and demonstrate change.

5. The Journey of the Voice: From Experience to Action

Participants were asked how a voice should move through the system of raising an issue to seeing change.

While the examples related to situations in schools, in communities and when using Council services, four common messages appeared in each example:

- Simple and accessible pathways are needed to raise concerns or ideas.
- Clarity is needed about who is listening and who is responsible for action.
- Timely updates and feedback are needed.
- Seeing evidence of change is essential to building trust.

These findings have informed the "Journey of the Voice" section of the final Strategy.

6. Young People's Cabinet

As part of the workshop, the young people developed their vision for a youth representation structure on a county level.

Among the key features suggested were:

- Wide representation of different areas and interests.
- Sharing responsibilities to reduce pressure on individuals.
- Clear roles such as Chair and Secretary.
- Regular meetings throughout the year.
- Focus on issues that are important to young people such as education, the environment, transport, well-being and economic opportunities.

These findings have contributed to the governance model and participation arrangements outlined in the Strategy.