

Committees - The Education Committee and School Councils 2012

KEY:

I: Interviewer

MS: Mervyn Storey

V1: The Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education has agreed to hold an Inquiry into School Councils. I'm here with Committee Chair, Mervyn Storey, to find out more about it. Firstly, can you tell me what a School Council is?

MS: A School Council is a group of young people who are appointed by their peers, actually elected through a process in the school. That sets up a Council which enables the young people to raise their views or concerns and has a very direct interaction with the Principal, the staff and the pupils in the school.

I: Committees hold Inquiries for lots of reasons. Why have you chosen this issue in particular?

MS: Democratic participation is vitally important and this is the first opportunity that young people would have to have an interaction in the democratic process. So I think it's important for that reason. It's also important because research would show that there is a varying degree of participation. There are different levels of expertise and interaction across schools, so we want to try and see how we can have more information given to schools, that the Department of Education has an interaction with those Councils.

I: And how are you going to go about carrying out this Inquiry?

MS: Well, there seems to be very little information generically across the system in regards to School Councils. So one of the first things we'll do is we're going to send out a questionnaire to all schools and we have partners who are helping us in regards to trying to gather that information. The other part of the work will be around going out and meeting School Councils and having that interaction with Councils which already exist and, in conjunction with them, gather information which we believe will be relevant. And then that information will be all collated together and our purpose would be to put together a report, and that report would have recommendations, and those recommendations then would go to the Department of Education, and we trust, as a result of that, there will be progress made.

I: And what do you hope will be the outcome of the Inquiry?

MS: I trust that, as a result of this Inquiry, we will have School Councils that will become champions and there will be something for us to celebrate along with our young people in our schools raising their aspirations, raising their participation, and raising their confidence that their voices are as equal and necessary to be heard as anyone else's.

I: The Committee hopes to complete its Inquiry by September 2012. If you would like more information, or to follow its progress, please click on the link at the end of this video.