

Learners' Voices

These are some of the things the young people told the CIRCLE Team

<p>Don't forget me:</p> <p>"You do sometimes feel that you are forgotten about – the teacher talks to the class as a whole and then you don't understand something, and you put your hand up first and then they go straight over to someone else, and it just gets a bit annoying...you're trying to catch up with everyone else – not to show that you're better than them but just to try and keep up."</p>	<p>Where I sit in class is important:</p> <p>"The best place for me is in the middle or wherever the teacher stands most because I mostly lip read. In one class he's put me right beside the door and I keep telling him that I can't sit next to the door and I would like to sit back where I was before but he won't put me back...it's a bit annoying and it slows me down."</p>
<p>Other problems make learning difficult:</p> <p>"Because I had a speech and language problem, it affected my understanding both of what I heard and what I read. I think this made me switch off."</p>	<p>Homework issues:</p> <p>"Homework's difficult... we get plenty of homework. Keeping up – I mean you want to do it but if you don't do it at once then you get more and it all starts piling up... and more pressure starts getting to you; you are nervous and worried that you've not done it."</p>
<p>I just want to be like everyone else:</p> <p>"It makes me feel quite sad that I am not like everyone else. It just gets irritating when you get stuck on everything, and everyone is finished, and they are all waiting for you. And you try your hardest but it's not working."</p>	<p>Print-outs help:</p> <p>"So now I get things printed off, which is easier but it's still hard in class – if there's loads of notes and the teacher forgets and I've got to ask her for a printed copy and people in the class ask why they can't get a printed copy. It's embarrassing."</p>

Helpful supports and strategies

Learners were asked about supports and strategies that they found particularly helpful – those which, in their opinion, facilitated their learning and engagement with school life.

The group thought that a lot of the strategies outlined below would be beneficial for the whole class – several commented that they knew that other learners in some classes were sometimes struggling as much as they were but did not have 'identified' needs.

Although views varied between learners, the following themes were voiced by the majority of the group:

<p>Be aware of our individual needs and listen to our views on what works.</p> <p>Learners like being part of meetings and having their voice heard, knowing that something was being done to help them.</p> <p>They appreciate when teachers regularly ask and listen to their ideas about what strategies work best for them (as these can change).</p>	<p>Use a mixture of practical as well as written work in lessons.</p> <p>Learners felt that listening for long periods of time or spending most of the lesson writing or copying notes were both challenging and not motivating</p>
<p>Be aware that we can't always go at the same pace as others.</p> <p>Consider pace of delivery and how fast visuals are presented and be aware that repetition and clarification may be required. Giving additional thinking/ processing time, particularly when reading, can be particularly valuable.</p>	<p>Give print-outs of instructions and notes where possible.</p> <p>Learners felt that keeping up with note taking is often very challenging and means that they cannot pay full attention to what the teacher is saying. Break down instructions into manageable chunks. Where possible, keep instructions short and make sure they are understood.</p>
<p>Make the objectives of the lesson clear from the start.</p>	<p>Consider presentation of materials for activities and resources.</p> <p>For example, consider the use of illustrations, diagrams, colour and different font sizes.</p>

Consider homework demands.

Not surprisingly, less homework was requested! Learners felt that, where possible, homework should be written down or given as a handout – often it is put up on the board only briefly and they may not have time to copy it down or to remember it. Learners also reported that it was useful to have a place to go to do homework at school at an allocated time.

“You probably won’t believe this but I’m starting to like homework. But sometimes I feel that it is quite a lot. Although I can do it I maybe need to ask my Mum for help, or sometimes if I don’t understand it at first I’ll ask the teacher...but it is quite a lot.”

“I suppose just clarifying what they mean, what the subject is... what they are talking about, recapping.”

Use groups.

Learners described situations where the teacher allocated them into groups. This enabled them to help each other out with various things such as copying work down, explaining things to each other, working on tasks together

Plan Pupil Support Assistant time.

Most learners discussed how Pupil Support Assistants provide useful support but prefer it if the Pupil Support Assistants work with the whole class. This avoids the learner being singled out too much – although they know that if they are struggling with anything then the support is available.

Provide practical supports.

Several learners talked about the need for practical strategies in classes where they are required to use specific tools or support in recording information.

Give us a ‘safe’ space.

The need for time out or having a place to go was frequently mentioned. It was particularly relevant for learners who were challenged in managing their behaviour but were making attempts to do so independently.

Encourage peers to provide support.

Learners talked about having support from other learners, such as those in their class groups or an older learner (as a buddy or as part of a befriending system). This helped them both in class and in the wider school. The group thought that a lot of these strategies would be beneficial for the whole class – several commented that they knew that other learners in some classes were sometimes struggling as much as they were but did not have ‘identified’ needs.

How support could be co-ordinated

Learners were asked how they would like the support that was put in place for them to be coordinated. Although learners may not always be fully aware of or have a lot of involvement in management or coordination decisions, some were able to reflect on this and give insightful suggestions.

Place learners at the centre of all decision making, for example, involve them in meetings where possible; encourage participation in learner-led councils and committees.	Provide regular updates and reminders to those with whom you are sharing information about individuals' needs.
Ensure that supports or strategies that are put into place are consistently used.	Provide clear channels for learners to seek and/or receive further support if appropriate.
When sharing information with others, for example, Higher Education establishments, make sure that it is relevant and up to date.	Use learners who have (or have had) strengths and support needs themselves to support younger learners who may have similar difficulties.
<p>“I went for an interview at college for a catering course. The guy had a copy of my old school file where it said I had difficulty concentrating in noisy backgrounds. He thought this might mean I would find it hard working in a kitchen. That was a problem I had in the past and was no longer an issue...I could not believe that he was bringing it up.”</p>	<p>“I’ve been to a couple of meetings...they make me feel better - if it’s about things to do with helping me then I feel much better if I’m involved.”</p>