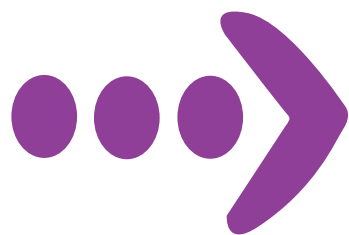


# Assessment



is for Learning:  
Development Programme

## Open Space Events for Pupils

Report  
February through May 2004



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

SCOTTISH  
QUALIFICATIONS  
AUTHORITY



# **REPORT ON OPEN SPACE EVENTS FOR PUPILS, AifL, SEED, FEBRUARY THROUGH MAY 2004, BY OPEN FUTURES LTD. AND LOCUS LEARNING LTD., EDINBURGH & DUNFERMLINE**

## **1.0 SUMMARY**

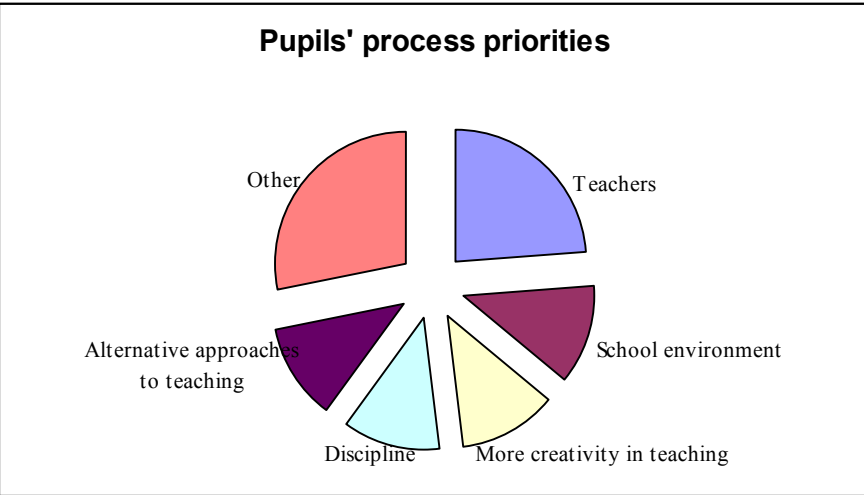
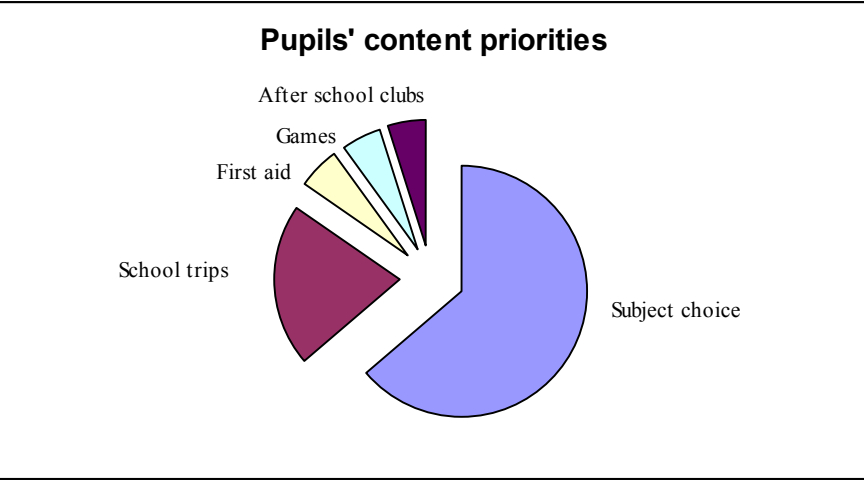
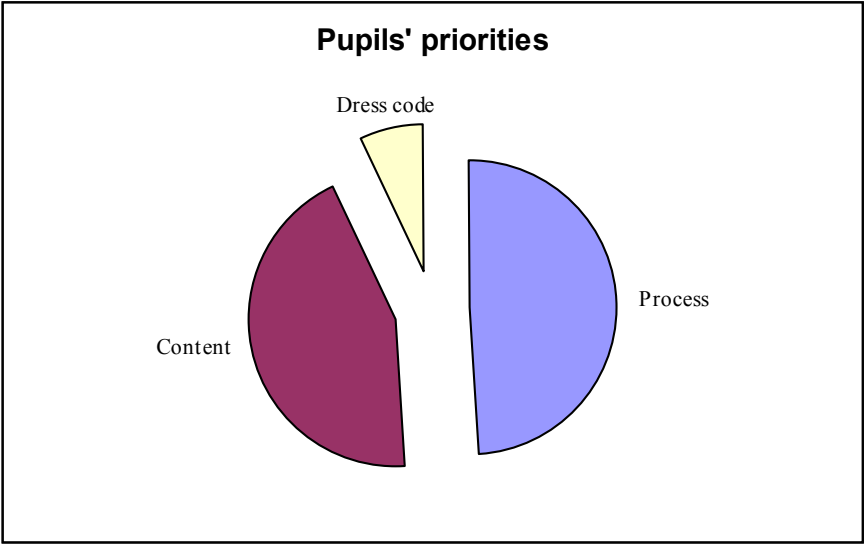
- 1.1 Five Open Space events on learning sponsored by AifL, SEED were held in Scotland with 272 pupils (age 10 to 16), 93 teachers and 41 student teachers. The sponsor's common theme posed two questions for participants to consider at each event: **What do you want to learn? How best do you learn?**
- 1.2 According to Open Space reporting methodology, the priorities described below are in the unedited words of participants responding to this theme.
- 1.3 Pupils identified and voted for 39 priorities from among 272 proposed actions discussed and decided in 90 break-out groups. Of these, 12 focused on **What do you want to learn?** Choice of subjects included music, drama, modern languages, skills for living, PE and first aid. For **How best do you learn?** 6 priorities proposed more school trips, fun and games and after school clubs and activities. In addition, 4 priorities dealt with what type of teachers pupils preferred and 8 centered on the teaching environment, making subjects more appealing, pupil behaviour and more fun in learning through alternative methods.
- 1.4 Teachers identified and voted for 20 priorities from among 106 proposed actions in 36 break-out groups. Ten priorities focused on changing the curriculum and five priorities dealt with teaching matters.
- 1.5 Pupils, teachers and student teachers worked very hard and consistently at all events, expressing high levels of enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to outcomes being implemented after the events.

## **2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 Open Space is a large group process devised in 1985 and currently used in 91 countries. It is a bottom-up process during which participants organise their own agenda around issues of concern to them. Other people volunteer to work in break-out groups on the issues raised. Actions from each group are presented to everyone who then vote on priorities, creating an agreed list of priority actions deemed most important on the day. Open Space provides easy access and total involvement of all participants who are invited to work on the sponsor's theme.
- 2.2 As participants create their own agenda and vote in real time in an open and transparent marketplace, the process generates commitment and ownership of outcomes. It also provides an opportunity for participants to learn from each other in a supportive and positive context, demonstrating participatory democracy and good citizenship by treating everyone as equals with access to raise and discuss issues and vote on priorities. The process is driven by passion (care about an issue) and responsibility (do something about it).
- 2.3 Open Space events for pupils, teachers and student teachers from AifL cluster schools were held in the following five locations between February and May 2004: Dumbarton, Livingston, Cumbernauld, Perth and Aberdeen.
- 2.4 A total of 272 pupils participated, an average of 54 per event, assisted by 41 student teachers from a range of university Faculties of Education. In addition, 93 teachers, who escorted pupils to the events, participated in separate but parallel events.
- 2.5 Pupils raised 90 issues and generated 272 proposed actions from their break-out groups, voting for a total of 39 priorities. Teachers discussed 36 issues in their break-out groups, proposing 106 actions and voting for 20 priorities.
- 2.6 There was a very high degree of enthusiasm and energy at all events with positive feedback from a high number of participants who spoke during the closing circle at each event. The closing circle is the culmination of an Open Space event where all participants have an opportunity to say anything they wish about the event and the future.

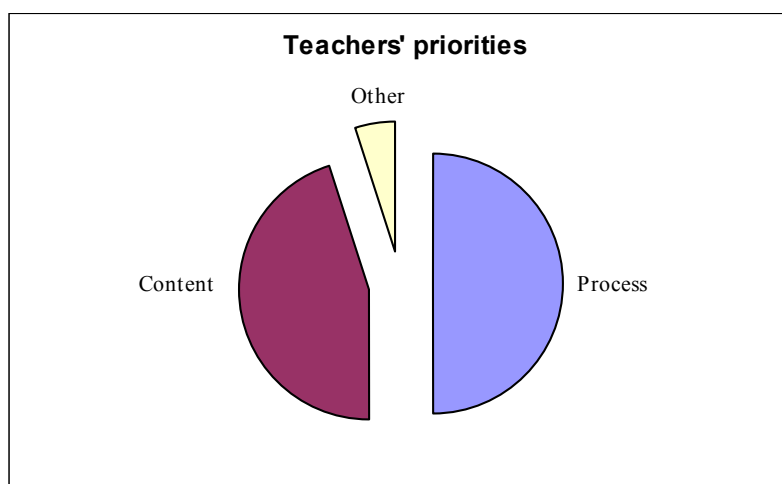
### **3.0 WHAT THE PUPILS SAID**

- 3.1 Of the 39 action priorities voted by pupils over five events, 49% dealt with content issues (what they wanted to learn) and 44% focused on process issues (how best they learned). The remaining 7% dealt with actions concerning dress codes.
- 3.2 Taking a closer look at curriculum content priorities, subject choice accounted for 12 (63%), school trips 4 (21%) and 1 each (5% each) for first aid, more time for games and after school clubs/activities.
- 3.3 Looking at process priorities, 4 (24%) concerned teachers (encouraging, let pupils find answers, younger, less boring) and 2 each (12% each) the school environment, making subjects more appealing and creative, discipline and alternative approaches to learning and teaching. Please see “Appendix 1: Pupil priorities from each event” for details.
- 3.4 Looking at all 90 issues raised in break-out groups, what you learn (content issues) were discussed in 33 groups (37% total). Of these, 71% focused on choice of subjects: general issues, drama, music, skills for living, P.E., modern languages and first aid. Another 21% proposed more school trips, after school clubs and activities and more fun during lessons with activities and games.
- 3.5 How you learn (process issues) were discussed in 49 groups (54% total). Of these, 24% focused on fun and alternatives, 22% on way teachers taught, 16% on the teaching environment, 14% on way subjects were taught, 10% on discipline and 8% on exams and homework.
- 3.6 Pupils showed very little hesitation in raising their burning issues, especially pupils from primary schools. They adapted to the process and went to work quickly in groups they selected. There was a high degree of creativity and productivity, as pupils seriously took the opportunity to discuss issues about their school life. During the closing circle at each event, numerous pupils thanked the sponsors (SEED) for the chance to talk about their issues and hoped people would listen and do something about them.
- 3.7 Two stories indicate how events may lead to initiatives afterwards, reflecting high level motivation and commitment. First, drawing on advice from former pupils, pupils from a primary school in Fife decided to deal with a lack of physical space to play by creating a project team to negotiate with an adjoining secondary school to share the secondary school’s playing fields. Second, a student from the Cumbernauld event was so committed to changing the school’s uniform requirement that she started a petition that attracted 800 names.

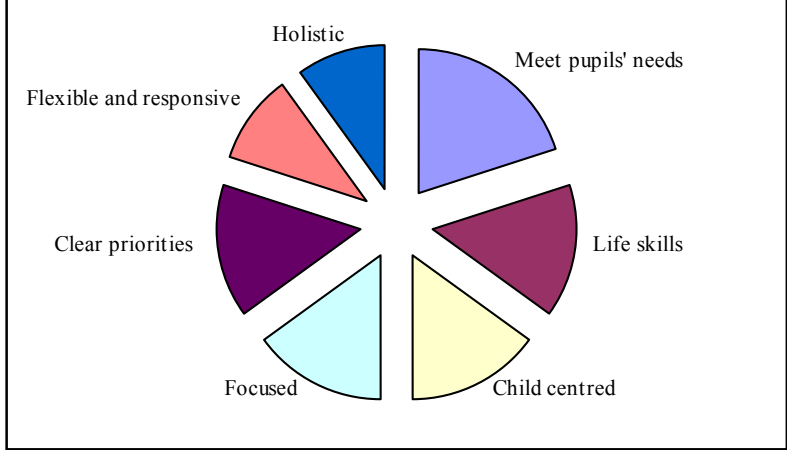


## 4.0 WHAT THE TEACHERS SAID

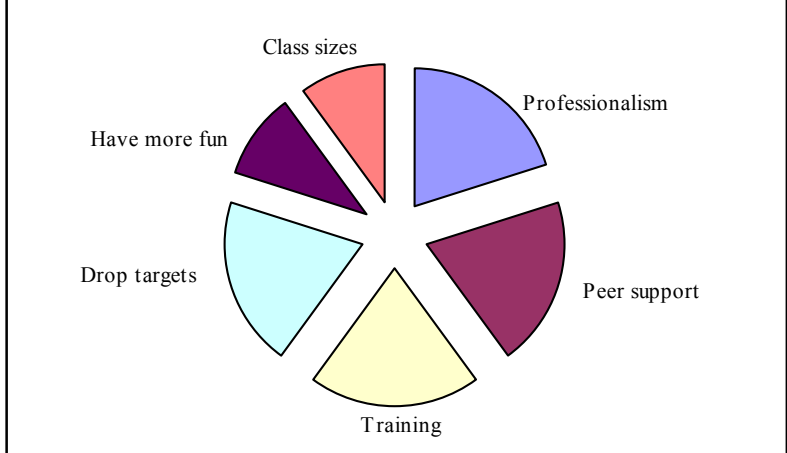
- 4.1 Of the 20 priorities voted for by teachers, 9 or 45% dealt with curriculum issues, such as life skills, citizenship, vocation, meaningful courses, more flexibility, responding to individual pupil needs, prioritizing needs and content, child-centered learning (spontaneous, enjoyable and motivational) and subjects relevant to life with more work experience.
- 4.2 Another 10 priorities or 50% concerned process issues (how best the school community learned). Among these priorities 5 focused on teaching priorities (trust in professionalism, working together, peer observation, training, share good practice and letting teachers teach). Individual priorities focused on rights for the majority pupils who were well behaved, making learning fun and involving pupils in the planning process, reductions in class sizes, revolutionising the entire education system and asking the Scottish Executive to restrict number of documents and reports. Please see “Appendix 2: Teacher priorities from each event” for details.
- 4.3 Teachers also took to the process quickly and seemed pleased to have an opportunity to discuss burning issues with peers, knowing that their pupils were working independently under supervision with children from other schools. Teachers were able to observe the pupils voting for their priorities and heard pupils’ priorities announced at each event.
- 4.4 Teachers were very positive in expressing their enjoyment of the process during the closing circle, making many comments on how proud they were of the work done by pupils. Like the pupils, many teachers expressed the hope that the outputs would be read, considered and acted upon outside the events and that the work done by all would not be wasted.
- 4.5 A number of schools and local authorities have expressed how much they enjoyed the events. Some have followed through locally to widen consultation with more pupils on similar themes. Feedback has been very positive although unsolicited and channeled informally through Locus Learning.



### Teachers' content priorities



### Teachers' process priorities



## **5.0 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUPILS & TEACHERS**

5.1 During the five events, the following similarities between pupils' and teachers' views were noted:

- i. There was a large measure of agreement about agreed about priorities: 49% pupils and 45% teachers focused on content (what to learn) and 44% and 50%, respectively, on process (how to learn).
- ii. Both commented on the adverse effect on learning of disruptive behaviour in the classroom.
- iii. Both focused on the relevance of the curriculum and choice, wanting attention paid to life skills during school and after leaving school.
- iv. Both felt learning should be fun and interesting.
- v. Both believed improvements could and should be made in learning and school life.
- vi. Both shared, in large part, mutual outcomes, and teachers were surprised and pleased with the outcomes of their pupils.
- vii. All participants felt involved and welcomed the opportunity to discuss ideas, issues and actions of common concern.

5.2 The following differences between pupils' and teachers' views were noted:

- i. Teachers wanted to be left alone to choose what they teach and teach intuitively and holistically what they felt pupils needed. Pupils on the other hand wanted more specialist teachers who offered variety and expert knowledge and skills.
- ii. Teachers seemed comfortable with learning based on talking and writing in an orderly environment, while pupils wanted more stimulation and, above all, action and movement during and outside classes.
- iii. Pupils were very definite about curriculum details, what subjects they wanted to learn. Teachers focused more on principles and concepts.
- iv. Pupils wanted more activities and a wider role for schools, such as school trips, games and after school clubs, while teachers focused on their role in the classroom.
- v. Pupils wanted teachers to be younger, more humorous, less boring and make subjects more appealing and creative. Understandably, teachers did not discuss these elements of their work.
- vi. Pupils were more concerned with the way they were taught, while teachers focused on how teachers could work better together.
- vii. Pupils were less concerned with resources and more interested in the way things were done. Teachers were more focused on resources.
- viii. Pupils had creative ideas about how to improve the school environment, for example toilets, dining and playing areas and food. Teachers did not raise these issues.

## 6.0 COMMENTS

The following points were observed during the Open Space events:

- 6.1 There were clear content issues relevant to any curriculum review, including more skills for learning and living. Pupils were very definite about subjects they wanted to learn and wanting a voice in the selection process. Subjects voted as priorities included expressive arts, drama, music, modern languages, physical education, sports and first aid. Other activities considered very important were more school trips, time for games and after school clubs.
- 6.2 Pupils were keen to be involved in having a say over several aspects of their school life, such as subjects, teaching styles and methods, more specialist teachers in primary schools, the teaching environment, making learning more fun and dress codes.
- 6.3 Pupil voices were heard, often for the first time, with increasing confidence, providing a clear lesson in participatory democracy and citizenship and leading to commitment and ownership of outcomes arrived at transparently in real time.
- 6.4 Pupils indicated the desire for much more activity in school, including physical and mental, during learning, implying there was too much 'teacher talk' and not enough movement and stimulation.
- 6.5 Pupils wanted more fun at school and opportunities to be creative and expressive, more interaction with teachers and each other and with movement and music.
- 6.6 A surprising number of priorities and issue groups focused on physical education and healthy eating, indicating an opportunity to promote education for a healthier life style.
- 6.7 Pupils were concerned about the bad behaviour (disruptive but rewarded) of other pupils interfering with their education.
- 6.8 Teachers welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their burning issues with peers away from the pressure of schools and appeared to learn from each other.
- 6.9 Several student teachers said that their work with children in break-out groups was the most significant experience they had in teacher training.
- 6.10 Sometimes it seemed that pupils wanted much more from school than a school or teachers might realistically be able to provide.
- 6.11 Many pupils and teachers expressed the hope that outputs from the events would be carefully considered and acted upon.

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Open Futures and Locus Learning propose the following recommendations for consideration:

- 7.1 Consider pupil comments on what they wanted to learn (subjects) for the curriculum review and the *Assessment is for Learning* programme.
- 7.2 Circulate this report to assessment co-ordinators in local authorities for consideration and possible action at local level.
- 7.3 Disseminate this report and pupil comments on teachers and teaching processes to faculties of education, for consideration by student teachers for future use in classrooms.
- 7.4 When personal learning planning is further developed, organize a pilot event for teachers to share the planning process and dynamic with pupils (and parents) and form effective partnerships with commitment from all parties.

## **APPENDIX 1: PUPIL PRIORITIES FROM EACH EVENT**

### **DUMBARTON FOOTBALL CLUB, FEBRUARY 25, 2004: 80 PUPILS, 26 TEACHERS & 8 STUDENT TEACHERS**

TOP EIGHT (8) PRIORITIES VOTED BY PUPILS (VOTES):

1. WE WANT MORE CREATIVE SUBJECTS! Ordinary subjects should be more creative. (53 votes)
2. HUMOUR IN CLASS: Sack the boring teachers. (52 votes)
3. NO UNIFORMS: We need to take responsibility for the clothes that we will wear if we didn't have uniforms. (52 votes)
4. REWARDS & PUNISHMENTS: Separate department to deal with behaviour so not to waste class time. (42 votes)
5. MORE TRIPS OUT OF SCHOOL: One trip each term, 3-4 for every child. (41 votes)
6. MORE FUN ACTIVITIES: More time for games. (39 votes)
7. MORE TIME FOR DRAMA & MUSIC: Drama is a good way of learning. (39 votes)
8. COMPARE YOURSELF TO YOURSELF! Teachers should encourage you to do your best – no matter what your best is! Praise Cards. (37 votes)

### **LIVINGSTON FOOTBALL CLUB, MARCH 17, 2004: 45 PUPILS, 16 TEACHERS & 3 STUDENT TEACHERS**

TOP SEVEN (7) PRIORITIES VOTED BY PUPILS (VOTES):

1. FIRST AID: ALL people should learn about First Aid. (50 votes)
2. IMPROVING EXAM BOARD: Exam leave, holiday and then time for exam leave (for 3<sup>rd</sup> year exams). Then time with teacher. (45 votes)
3. EATING IN CLASS: Because if your hungry, you loose concentration! (36 votes)
4. AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES: More provision of after school clubs/activities, which are fee paying, including choice in when/where and who runs it. Progressive through year groups for abilities: S1/S2, S3/S4, S5/S6. (24 votes)
5. COMFORT IN LEARNING (SCHOOL UNIFORM): Design Modern Uniform. Pupils design, self-confidence, art practice. Voting for the choice. (21 votes)
6. LEARNING SUCCESS: FUN – Using alternative means of learning: games, videos, smart boards, computers/computer games, equipment/surroundings and colours. (21 votes).
7. YOUNGER TEACHERS: They are more active! Because they are more fit and have their own bones! (19 votes)

**CUMBERNAULD TOWN HALL, MARCH 24, 2004: 40 PUPILS, 8 TEACHERS & 8 STUDENT TEACHERS**

TOP TEN (10) PRIORITIES VOTED BY PUPILS (VOTES):

1. MORE PRACTICAL MUSIC: More teachers with more experience (specialists). (29 votes)
2. MORE EXPRESSIVE ARTS: A wider more varied experience with things like plays, art and trips; more specialist teachers should be introduced. (27 votes)
3. MORE MODERN LANGUAGES IN SCHOOLS: A wider choice of modern languages. (23 votes)
4. MORE PRACTICAL MUSIC: More (and bigger) classrooms (meaning smaller class sizes). (23 votes)
5. MORE DRAMA: Link drama with other subjects and to make more time. (22 votes)
6. HOW TO BE MOTIVATED TO LEARN: Have more fun by making lessons interesting: play more games in Maths and English and more P.E. and a longer playtime. (19 votes)
7. CHOICE OF CLASSES: More control over subjects. (18 votes)
8. CHOICE OF CLASSES: Wider range of choice. (16 votes)
9. MORE PE: More lessons dedicated to PE in the timetable. (16 votes)
10. MORE PRACTICAL MUSIC: Instruments – more, better and a bigger selection. (16 votes)

**PERTH, HUNTINGTOWER HOTEL, MARCH 31, 2004: 58 PUPILS, 26 TEACHERS & 8 STUDENT TEACHERS**

TOP SEVEN (7) PRIORITIES VOTED BY PUPILS (VOTES):

1. HOW CAN WE MAKE SCHOOL MORE RELAXED? Comfy chairs/cushions/carpets. (68 votes)
2. HOW CAN WE MAKE SCHOOL MORE RELAXED? Music and plants. (34 votes)
3. HOW DO WE LEARN? Give more warning and flexibility for homework. (31 votes)
4. MAKE LEARNING MORE INTERESTING: Go on more trips to explain things. (29 votes)
5. IMPROVING TEACHING METHODS: Making subject appealing and motivating with practical methods. (27 votes)
6. MORE FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN PRIMARY: Choice within subjects – language (French, German, Spanish), music (instruments to play), sport (different games, choice, choice of sport to learn). (26 votes)
7. SHOULD THERE BE REWARDS IN SCHOOL? Less rewards for bad behaviour. (25 votes)

**ABERDEEN, PITODDRIE STADIUM, MAY 26, 2004: 49 PUPILS, 18 TEACHERS & 11 STUDENT TEACHERS**

TOP SEVEN (7) PRIORITIES VOTED BY PUPILS (VOTES):

1. DRESS CODE: Mixture of smart and casual clothes with small removable logo. (91 votes)
2. PUPIL SUBJECT CHOICE: Pupil choice over number of subjects and time. (38 votes)
3. SHORTER SCHOOL DAYS: Shorter days in summer & longer days in winter. (33 votes)
4. LEARN MORE LANGUAGES: Trips to the country the language comes from. Learn about the background of the country, and money. Fundraise. (27 votes)
5. MORE DRAMA: Learn practical skills. (25 votes)
6. TEACHERS EXPLAIN LESS: Find things out for ourselves and at the end explain answers to see where we have gone wrong. (24 votes)
7. MAKE SUBJECTS MORE FUN: More school trips. (21 votes)

## **APPENDIX 2: TEACHER PRIORITIES FROM EACH EVENT**

### **DUMBARTON FOOTBALL CLUB, FEBRUARY 25, 2004**

TOP THREE (3) PRIORITIES VOTED BY TEACHERS (VOTES):

1. FUN IN TEACHING AND LEARNING: Trust in teacher's professionalism. HMIE – Local Councils – schools – HT – CT. (29 votes)
2. DISCIPLINE: Recognise the rights of the majority of well behaved, and not pander to the “rights” of the undisciplined. (27 votes)
3. PRESSURE OF CURRICULUM ON LEARNING: Assessment – The curriculum should reflect learning needs more than content and should allow for responsive planning. (21 votes)

### **LIVINGSTON FOOTBALL CLUB, MARCH 17, 2004**

TOP THREE (3) PRIORITIES VOTED BY TEACHERS (VOTES):

1. INCLUSION – MONEY & TIME ISSUES: Prioritising every child's needs – flexible curriculum, life skills, the Whole Child. Conditions, e.g. ADHD etc., routines and procedures – roles, responsibilities of all (including parents), interagency, accountability. (30 votes)
2. INCLUSION – MONEY & TIME ISSUES: Training for ALL staff – Class Teachers, Management, Nursery Nurses, Classroom Assistants, Special Auxiliaries, Playground supervisors, etc. (22 votes)
3. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES: Scottish Executive must put a realistic ceiling on the number of documents/reports (expect HTs/Ts etc. to read) they produce, because that way the following should happen:
  - quality of reports/documents produced
  - quality of the development of initiatives would be improved
  - fewer staff absences
  - save trees/ we'd become an eco-country. (16 votes)

### **CUMBERNAULD TOWN HALL, MARCH 24, 2004**

TOP THREE (3) PRIORITIES VOTED BY TEACHERS (VOTES):

1. DIFFERENT STYLES OF LEARNING: Loosen up the curriculum: more child centered and more choice, e.g. life skills (13 votes)
2. CONSTRAINTS OF OVER-CROWDED CURRICULUM REDUCES FLEXIBILITY FOR QUALITY LEARNING: Prioritise curriculum content and shape it better to suit pupils' needs. (9 votes)
3. INTER-SCHOOL COLLABORATION: Time built into school year for all staff from various schools to meet and share good practice (one afternoon per term). (7 votes)

## **PERTH, HUNTINGTOWER HOTEL, MARCH 31, 2004**

TOP FIVE (5) PRIORITIES VOTED BY TEACHERS AND STAFF (VOTES):

1. SUPPORT FOR PUPILS/TEACHERS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Recognition this is a needs driven service not a budget driven one! (30 votes)
2. ENCOURAGE A LOVE OF LEARNING IN PUPILS: Making learning fun and involving pupils in planning process. Use of PLPs. (24 votes)
3. SUPPORT FOR PUPILS/TEACHERS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Class size issue: Reduction in (actual not notional) class sizes to cater for the educational needs of all pupils. (22 votes)
4. BARRIERS TO WORKING TOGETHER (TIME & MONEY): Opportunities for teachers to work together – supportive peer observation (in Secondary in and across Departments, in primary across subject areas/schools). (21 votes)
5. HOW DO WE PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL (PUPILS/TEACHERS) TO EXPLORE INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL WITH BALANCE? Life skills, citizenship, vocational “meaningful” courses to be developed. (18 votes)

## **ABERDEEN, PITODDRIE STADIUM, MAY 26, 2004**

TOP SIX (6) PRIORITIES VOTED BY TEACHERS, STUDENT TEACHERS AND SEED STAFF (VOTES):

1. THE BALANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM: In the primary sector, restructure the curriculum to make it less cluttered, and focus basic skills. (39 votes)
2. THE BALANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM: Introduce more flexibility in the curriculum to enable learning to be more spontaneous, enjoyable and motivational. (31 votes)
3. THE BALANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE CURRICULUM: Make the curriculum more relevant to real life; and link more work experience to school for 14+ age group. (19 votes)
4. PARTNERSHIP (SCHOOLS ARE NOT THE STICKING PLASTERS FOR THE AILMENTS OF SOCIETY): Let teachers teach. (We are not social workers, dieticians, community police ...) (15 votes)
5. HOW CHILDREN LEARN? More focus on children’s needs rather than teachers needs to cover the curriculum and meet targets. (13 votes)
6. IMPROVING PRIMARY-SECONDARY LIAISON: Revolutionise the entire system, i.e. lower/middle/upper school. Stop targets/league tables. (10 votes)

## **APPENDIX 3: MAIN PRIORITIES FROM SOUTH AYRSHIRE EVENTS**

Two other follow-up local events were initiated by South Ayrshire Council in cluster schools at Belmont and Ayr Academy on 17 April and 25 May respectively. With around 120 participants in each event from P5-7 and S1-4, pupils voted 15 top priorities covering many of the items voted in the other five events.

### **AYR ACADEMY CLUSTER**

In order of popularity, the first seven themes pupils voted for were:

1. Making teaching fun: Working outside on a nice day
2. Making teaching fun: Laptops for lessons
3. Environment around the school: making it nicer: No smoking
4. More opportunities to perform in Drama
5. Horrible food, messy dinner halls, school dinners: Better quality of food and variety of food for everyone
- 6= Choose your homework. What you are good at or the subject you need to work on.
- 6= Improving lunchtime: More lunchtime activities. Pupils running activities, not just teachers.

### **BELMONT CLUSTER**

In order of popularity, the first seven themes pupils voted for were:

1. Learning new things and making it easier to do so
2. No uniform
3. Make school more fun
4. More sports in school
5. More study periods
6. More drama
- 7= Not waiting till S3 to choose what they study
- 7= Teachers helping pupils who are struggling with work in private.