

## Case study: Swansea Partnership and Involvement Team and Ysgol Pen y Bryn

### Partnership approach

Swansea local authority Partnership and Involvement team and Penybryn School in Swansea established a partnership to share skills and help develop children's rights approaches across the authority. The local authority team worked with the school to embed a children's rights approach, developing training around the principles of The Right Way Education, and supporting staff at the school to self-assess their children's rights approach.

Self-assessment identified that participation is strong in the school, which offered the local authority team an opportunity to develop their own skills in supporting the effective participation of children with Additional Learning Needs.

### Developing participation practice

Over a number of months the local authority team visited the school once a week to observe participation practice in the school, including non-verbal participation activities, learning activities in lessons and the school council.

Katie Spendiff, Children's Rights Coordinator, explains, 'initially the observation felt a little uncomfortable because the children and young people didn't really know who we were. The school hold breakfast sessions every day and we arranged that we would come to one of these every week. There was one rule – we couldn't do any formal consultation or engagement in this session. The whole point was to spend time with the children in an informal way – we shared breakfast together and chatted.'

'Through this incidental conversation children got to know us and opened up about some of their aspirations and anxieties. They told us they were worried about the long summer holidays as they miss their school routine, their friends and peer support. Because children travel from all across the authority to the school they often don't live near to friends. Another area of worry for older young people was about their planning for their future, they wanted more experiences and information to make meaningful decisions about their next steps.'

### Local authority summer programme

'This informed our thinking about the summer activity we offer across the county. Using authority level funding we will plan to hold activities in the school for one day a week over the summer holidays. Activities will focus on future plans and have been directly chosen by the young people, some have chosen activities related to careers and others activities for their wider life, such as cooking or gardening. We're piloting this over this summer, working with the community to do so, and could extend more widely if it's a success.'

'This project has changed the way that our team looks at participation, we've reflected that we need to have more space for social participation and reducing isolation, particularly after the pandemic. Taking time to build relationships and create safe spaces with children and young people is really critical. We need to value time to be with, and be there for children and young people, and we're looking at doing more project participation work where relationship building is the focus, rather than one off engagement events. This will then give us a stronger base for civic participation work too.'