



## Includem Education Consultation

### The School Experience of Young People: Cover Letter

Includem is thankful for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the future shape of Scotland's education system, and national education agencies. Recently, we undertook research on the School Experience of Young People – Pre & During Covid-19 (published Aug 2021). The children and young people we support live predominantly in Scotland's most deprived communities and face a range of barriers to engaging fully in formal education – and their experiences are central to this study. Too frequently their voices go unheard, and we ask that you consider what their views mean in the larger context of these changes.

Though the focus of this consultation is on assessment and curriculum, in reflection of what they needed from education moving forward, children and young people of this study made clear emphasis on **being supported, understood and listened to** in a learning environment that ensures their **rights are respected and upheld** – underpinned by a **culture of mutual respect**.

While Curriculum for Excellence sets children and young people an entitlement for opportunities to maximise their individual potential, and benefit from appropriate personal support – the accounts in this research make clear that there is considerable work to be done to make this an entitlement for all children and young people in Scotland.

There are a number of relevant points throughout this report, but in particular we want to highlight the following findings:

**Listen to me:** Participants wanted to be heard and respected, to be a part of decision making and play a part in shaping their own learning. This also included accounts of not feeling listened to when overwhelmed and struggling with schoolwork; not feeling safe; and being excluded for retaliation in a way that benefitted the bully or aggressor.

*“Decisions are being made without my insight”*

*“[...] they don't respect you – it's like being in a secure unit for six hours a day. That's not what school should be like...”*

*“Listen to both sides of the story”*



**Understand me:** It is necessary to adapt to different learners' needs, and to embed trauma informed practice across the educational system that consider how events outside of school might impact their behaviours and ability to engage in education. Participants also felt judged for past behaviours and expressed a clear wish for a 'every day is a new leaf' approach.

*"I need you to make adjustments for my learning style because it's not something I can change."*

*"They need to know the way your mind and body reacts to certain things – fight or flight"*

*"One time in Primary, the teachers told me I was going to jail when I was older – teacher said that in front of the whole class."*

*"Give me a chance to start again."*

**Support me:** The children and young people called for greater support, this included both for schoolwork and additional help in the classroom – for example with one-to-one support and a greater role for feedback in class and homework to understand how to improve. Further, when faced with challenging behaviour, participants didn't want to be excluded or punished disproportionately, but to be supported. To enable effective learning, we must bridge the gap between home and school – helping young people to engage more fully in school and build positive relationships with school staff.

*"More help with my work – sometimes I don't understand."*

*"Someone in class to help me if I'm struggling. Struggle to focus, so they could help me focus and then when I focus they could leave as I wouldn't need them there anymore."*

*"Give me feedback in a way that helps me"*

*"suspending me makes me want to go to school even less."*

The establishment of a new Curriculum and Assessment Agency has huge potential to enhance the quality of teaching and learning across the education sector - but if it is to serve all children and young people, it must have at its core a rights respecting approach which seeks genuine change that listens to its learners. Structures should ensure teachers have the time, space, training, and resources to provide the support that young people tell us they need.

