

Advice Sheet 11

CHOICE FOR PUPILS

All of us like to have choices – in what we wear, what we eat, what TV programmes we watch, how we socialise etc. If we have no choice in our lives then we can become rebellious and resentful. Where we offer choice to our pupils (in a structured, limited way) it can have a positive effect on their sense of belonging and engagement with school. It's not always possible to offer choices to our pupils, but where we can, it can help to alleviate tension and negative attitudes towards school.

Consider the following ways of offering choices to pupils:

1. **Choice of subject:** is there an opportunity for a slot or two on your timetable where pupils can choose between two or three subjects? At second-level pupils will have to choose between options, but perhaps we can build it into primary timetabling also. Maybe one session can be an 'Activities / Golden Time' slot where all pupils in the school can choose between a range of activities for a full term.
2. **Choice of activity / work in a lesson:** perhaps there are times when pupils can choose a work in a particular subject e.g. pick a particular book to read, pick a specific maths work-card from a folder etc. It may also be used where pupils are given a choice to pick five questions out of 10 on a page / worksheet, or can choose whether to research something through a book / software / the Internet.
3. **Choice of task in a lesson:** perhaps you can set different tasks for different groups (jigsawing) and pupils can choose which task they wish to do e.g. in SESE / Social Education one group may wish to draw a map of France, another group finds out about the history, another researches famous French people, another group investigates sport / music / culture in France etc. Each group then can report back to the whole class about what they have learnt.
4. **Choice of seating / partner(s):** This would be dependent on the level of responsibility and trust that you can place in the pupils – if a particular pair of pupils wish to sit beside one another and agree to work together without distracting each other it can work as a positive. Alternatively pupils may wish to select their own partner(s) in doing pairs / trios work. Be careful here that no-one gets 'excluded' from groups or cliques – it may be more appropriate to allocate groups. Within groups one can also offer a choice of role: recorder, observer, reader, checker, etc.
5. **Choice of presentation:** This is related to Nos. 2 and 3 – can pupils present their work orally or on tape, in handwritten or in typed format, or graphically (e.g. diagrams, mind maps, pictures etc.) They may also like embellishing project work in different ways – artwork, borders, collages, 3-dimensional, etc. Encourage creativity as much as possible so that not everyone copies a formulaic approach.