

# Pupil Voice for Promoting Inclusion in Schools (PVPI)



Expanding children's future job aspirations: An account of practice from collaborative action research in St. Mary's CE Primary School



## The project

The project (**funded by Research England – Participatory Research Fund, UKRI**) addresses the question: “**How can we promote inclusion in schools through an engagement with pupils’ voices?**” It involved a group of primary schools in the city of Southampton that carried out collaborative action research, to find ways that will ensure that all children’s voices are heard in order to promote greater inclusion in learning processes. The study employed participatory research methods. Each school developed their own research focus based on an area of concern for them, or an area that they wanted to explore in more detail, through the lens of pupil voice.

## The school

St. Mary’s CE Primary school is much larger than the average-sized primary school with 599 students. The school’s work is underpinned by the motto – ‘Be the best version of yourself’ and the ‘Values of Virtue’ – Tolerance, Respect, Hope and Belonging.

There are three classes in each year group from Reception to Year 6 and the school has a nursery within the early years provision. There are 43 teachers and 6 support staff members in the school. ‘Setting’, which involves grouping pupils in a given year group into classes for Maths and English, happens from Year 1 in the school.

There is great diversity amongst the students in St. Mary’s, with 14 ethnic groups and 21 languages spoken. 78.60% students speak English as an additional language (EAL). The proportion of pupils who have Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEND) is broadly average. Attendance issues are faced especially due to several children travelling to their native places for long durations. Attendance is celebrated for individual attendance as well as 100% class attendance. The focus of the school is to encourage the desired behaviours in every pupil, within an environment where they feel safe to take risks and strive to be better in their learning.

## Research focus and process

Four members of staff were involved in the study: the Deputy Headteacher and three Year 3 teachers. The four teachers participated in a workshop at the university where the purposes of the project were discussed and the use of various participatory methods to involve children in research in schools were explored, including the idea of children becoming researchers. Amongst the five schools that participated in this meeting, there were two schools with the same Executive Headteacher: Mason Moor and St. Mary’s. Both schools decided to focus on the same overall agenda, that would allow them to make comparisons between the two contexts.

The school chose the theme of looking at aspirations of the children in Year 3 and how their teaching can impact those aspirations. This theme also linked with the school’s wide program of looking at aspirations and careers. The purpose was to widen children’s understanding of possibilities for future jobs, as well as their own aspirations, feelings and desires. The research question for the school was:

- **How do children’s aspirations change and how does our teaching affect their aspirations?**

All students in the three Year 3 classes were participants in this study. The process started by each class using a baseline activity with the whole class, to identify children's aspirations, what jobs they would like to do and how well they understood what skills would be needed for those jobs.

The children detailed what they wanted to be through drawings. The teachers spoke about the different skills they might need for various jobs and the children worked to identify what would be needed for each job. The teachers felt that the children's responses were quite generic at that stage.

boys could also be dancers, if they wished. This realisation then determined teachers' decisions for ensuring that children can see that there are multiple job options and that these are not restricted to a specific gender.



The Year 3 children responding in the lesson

In one lesson, they did this through the introduction of an interactive activity. The teachers had in mind one job that they did not disclose to the children. They told the children the skills that they needed for this job, such as teamwork, communication skills etc. They asked the children to stand up if they felt that they had each of these skills, or to sit down if they did not have these skills. At the end, they asked them to guess what the job was, which was a scientist. This allowed them to see that there were both boys and girls still standing, which reinforced the idea that all jobs can be carried out by either boys or girls.



Examples of student responses from the first lesson

The teachers then did some more lessons exploring various jobs and thinking about the skills that they would need for each job. In addition, in one lesson they focused on exploring how specific school subjects could help them realise their aspirations and how teaching in the school, through specific subjects, could impact their aspirations.

The teachers had another touch point with the children as to what they wanted to be. This time the teachers observed that the children were more adventurous with their job choices, but they found that overall, apart from a few exceptions, most children were suggesting 'gender typical' jobs. For example, girls liked jobs like dancers, whereas boys liked jobs such as football players. However, teachers wanted to make sure that children understood that

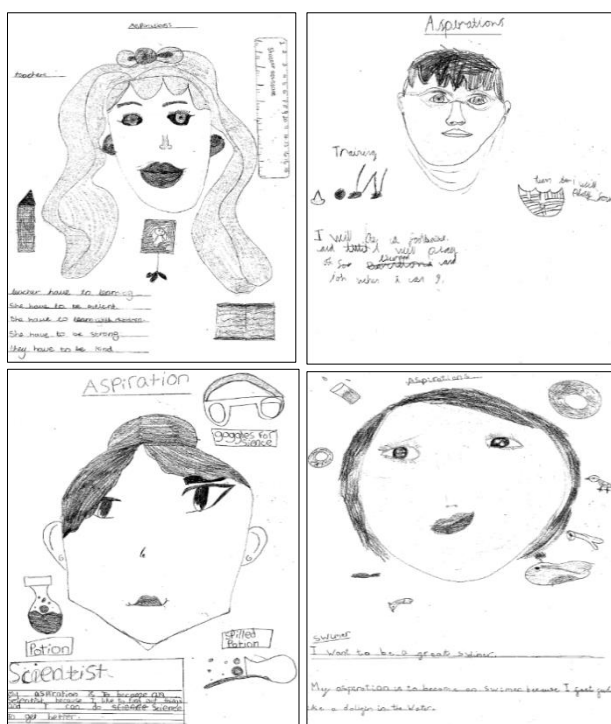


Students' worksheets with their drawings of four jobs and indicating whether the jobs can be done by girls and boys

In the last lesson, having explored various jobs, they asked children to draw four jobs and indicate whether those jobs could be done by either boys, girls or by both.

## Participatory methods used

**Drawings:** The school used drawings to explore children’s aspirations for the baseline activity, which seemed like an appropriate activity, especially given the age of the children. Children liked the idea of drawing themselves demonstrating how they saw themselves in the future. The drawings allowed children to talk in more detail about their thoughts.



Examples of students’ drawings

**Video:** A video with children talking about what they wanted to be when they were older, was shown to all the Year 3 students. This was used to facilitate discussions with children, exploring in more detail what they wanted to be in the future. Videos were also used to introduce various ‘case studies’ of jobs, such as an architect and sports persons.

**Stand up/sit down activity:** As described above, this was an active way of gathering students’ thoughts about the skills that they considered having, or not having, and that they needed for the various jobs.

## Outcomes

The school chose to focus on expanding students’ aspirations and knowledge around the various existing jobs. The teachers felt that originally the children’s aspirations were rather traditional, linking to the various cultural backgrounds of their families. At the same time, as it evolved through the analysis of children’s drawings and thoughts many of them appeared to hold stereotypical views about certain professions. As a result of the project, the teachers were able to challenge these stereotypes and helped children realise that they had a range of options in terms of future jobs, whilst at the same time understand that the school subjects and what they learn in school could help with developing the skills needed for realising their aspirations.

Teachers also became more sensitive towards children’s various aspirations, as well as of the need to be making more direct links within lessons in relation to skills and how these relate to real life occupations.

### What is a job?

There are so many different jobs around the world!

A job is work that people do in exchange for money.

**In Groups:** How many different jobs can you think of in 3 minutes?

### Let's find out how many jobs the class could think of all together!

Look at how many jobs there are!

### What school subjects do you need to learn for these jobs?

Can you match which school subjects you need to learn for the jobs in your list?

### What school subjects do you need to learn for this job?

PSHE KS1 / KS2: Proud to be an architect

Would you like to do this job?

Why?

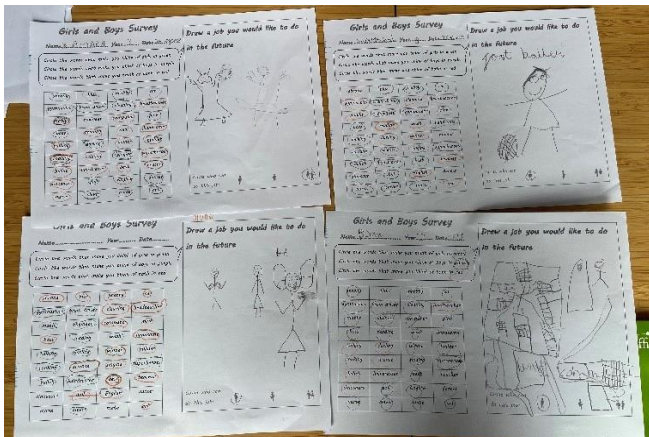
PSHE KS1 / KS2: Proud to be an architect

Slides presented by one Year 3 teacher while discussing the link between different jobs and the school subjects



## Key ideas emerging

**Bringing students’ ideas to the surface:** This approach allowed for students’ thoughts to come to the surface, in a very concrete way, through their drawings.



Examples of students’ drawings and selection of jobs done by boys, girls or both

**Teachers reflecting and agreeing next plans:** Both the drawings and the discussions that followed, allowed teachers to understand children’s thinking better and to plan in more specific details the next steps of the project.

**Student engagement:** During all these lessons all students were engaged, including children that are quite passive in lessons and ones who have very low confidence to speak in front of the whole class, as the teachers explained. This was because of the personalised approach of these lessons, and the fact that there were no right or wrong answers, as it may be the case in other lessons.

**Linking to the school’s priorities:** Linking the project directly to the school’s priorities, allowed it to become easily embedded within the school’s lessons. At the same time, what emerged from the project could potentially enhance the school’s work. For example, hearing from children that they are interested in dance, but expressing concerns that their parents may not be in a position to pay for dance lessons, allowed the school to think about the clubs on offer, to support children’s aspirations.

## Teachers’ thoughts

This process could be used maybe like a whole school project. And you could do like a jobs fair at the end ...across the whole school. To give all the children that wider perspective.

Year 3 Class Teacher

Children need at least one thing per week, or throughout the week, that is personal to them, to keep that engagement going. That's maybe something that it hadn't crossed my mind, that would make such an impact.

Year 3 Class Teacher

I think what I've got from this is that the more personal topic is to a child, the more likely they will voice their opinions.

Year 3 Class Teacher

## Teacher team

- Faye Bauck (Deputy Headteacher)
- Ronen Buchalter (Year 3 teacher)
- Tasmin Choudhury (Year 3 teacher)
- Rhiannon Frappe (Year 3 teacher)

**Executive Headteacher:** Daniel Constable-Phelps

## Research team

- Professor Kiki Messiou
- Dr Jay de los Reyes
- Chinmaya Potnis
- Ping Dong
- Dr Vivienne Rwang

We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of many children and other staff in the school who have contributed to this work in various ways.