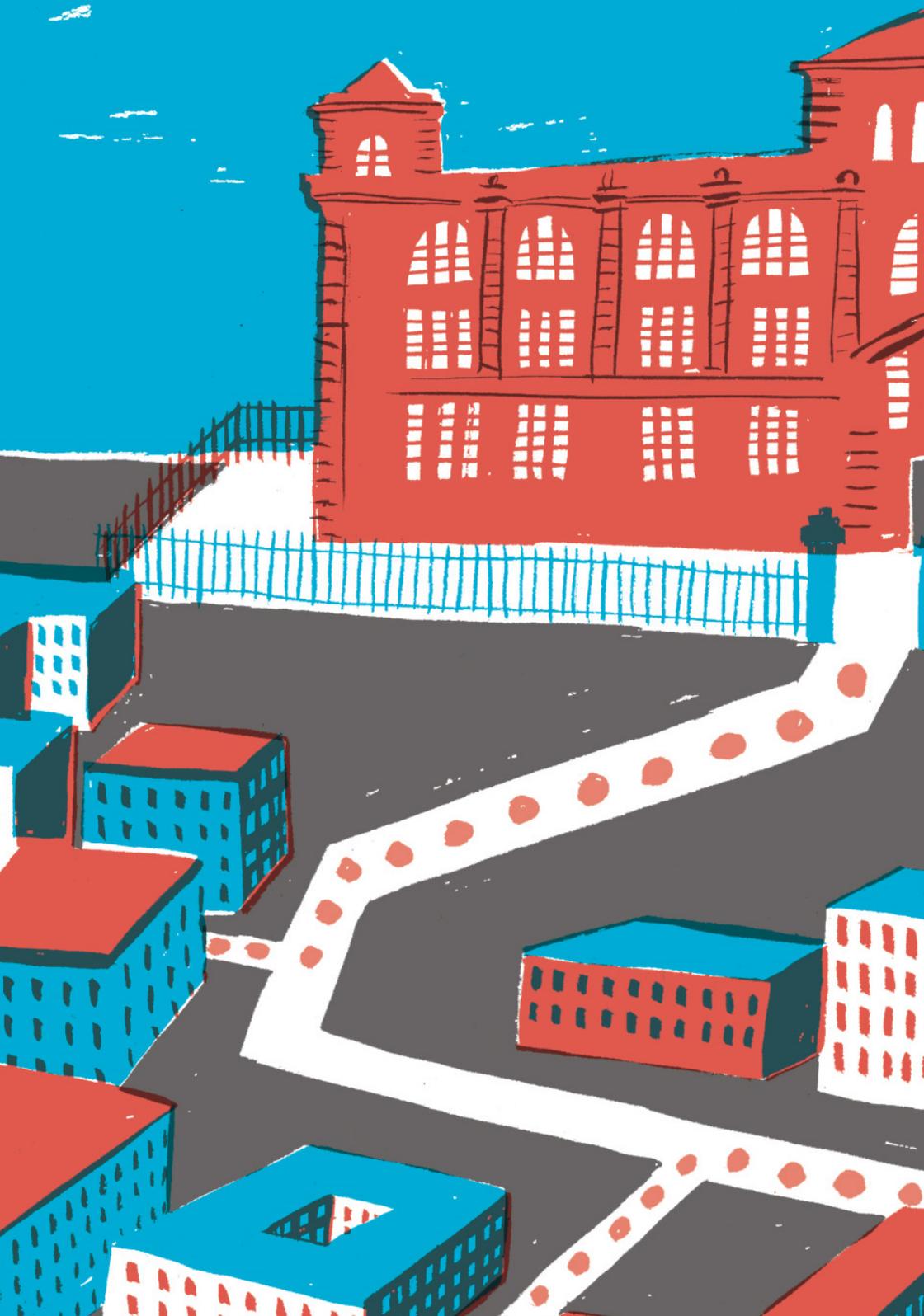




Architecture and Design Scotland
A Guide to Participation:
What we've learnt so far





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The potential impact of participation in school design can be remarkable. It offers excellent educational opportunities, as well as providing a means to unlock ideas and potential of our students in thinking about the environments in which they live and learn.

This short guide takes you through a range of possibilities and routes for participation by bringing together key ideas and lessons learnt from projects led by the Schools Programme at Architecture and Design Scotland.

What is participation?

Participation is the process of involving, engaging and listening to the everyday users of spaces and places so that their experiences can help to inform the decisions and changes that will affect them in the future.

When done well, participation helps to create the conditions for active citizenship by bringing together learning and civic responsibilities. It also fosters a sense of identity and sense of place when communities are invited to help shape changes made to their local environment.

Students, teachers, support staff, parents and community users are experts of the school and its facilities, and they have experience and knowledge about their surroundings and what works for them. Engagement with current and future school users often takes the form of group workshops, where they are encouraged to think about the types of activities they'd like to be able to do and how they would like to feel.

Different users will inevitably have different ways of seeing, experiencing and using the spaces. Engaging in meaningful and authentic conversations, and allowing opportunities for critical analysis, will create a rich and diverse source of insights and ideas about the qualities of future spaces.

Participants are not being asked to redesign their teaching and learning spaces, but to use their insight and experiences to reimagine spaces which allow them to do remarkable things everyday.



Why do we do it?

“Good consultation means better outcomes - engaging with, consulting and involving all the potential users and interests helps to highlight expectations, identify the options and refine the objectives”

Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future

The benefit of participation, from the point of view of a project manager or school headteacher, is that it can act as a tool for change. It gathers evidence of how school users want to learn and teach, and provides a strong mandate for what change can look like. It offers the opportunity to truly build services around the needs of communities, for communities.

In order to create change and, ultimately great spaces for learning and teaching, we must first understand the existing context of a place, how it is used and how it connects with its community and neighbourhood. To wholly understand the spaces within these communities, we must ask and find out about them from the people who use them everyday.

Involvement in an active participation process can also provide a number of educational benefits in its own right. For pupils to identify, explore and record their thoughts and feelings about their environments, and identify ways to improve it, can encourage active citizenship and working in a real life context, amongst other Curriculum for Excellence outcomes. Additionally, there are a number of teaching and learning opportunities which could be developed in conjunction with participation projects.

When do we do it?

Whatever the scale of change, from a small area in the school grounds to a whole school campus redesign, engaging with users can provide invaluable insight into their experiences and desires for learning spaces. Ideally, it's not a stand alone activity, but a series of conversations which allow meaningful and iterative discussions to take place.

Whilst participation can be initiated at a variety of different scales and timeframes, it is important that there is time for the outcome's to be considered seriously as part of a wider project brief. This is really crucial to ensure that participants feel that their voice is valued and appreciated. It is not a project 'add on', but a valuable and authentic part of the wider story.

Participation is ideally initiated in the preparation stage, before the design of any space has even been considered. It is within this phase, that the potential for developing innovative solutions is greatest. Early involvement enables a wide range of stakeholders to be engaged in conversations about future needs and hopes and promotes collaboration between a diverse group of people to create rich, joined up ideas for better learning spaces and places.

The Re:Imagine - Participation in School Design video takes you through the basics of the participation process and gives you an idea of the sorts of activities and outputs produced in past projects run by the A+DS Schools Programme.



How can we create modern, flexible learning spaces which enable the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence?

This question is significant for schools when considering the delivery of the Curriculum, and applies to all types of schools – whether in the process of getting a new building, undergoing refurbishment or just thinking about their current set up. To really understand the kinds of spaces learners and teachers need, participation can act as a tool to open up this conversation. One approach to testing out ideas would be to run a series of workshops, develop a brief, and then test these out.

Campbeltown Grammar School identified a space within their existing school to try out a range of settings for learning which would help to inform the design for their new school. The idea was to create a 'Try Before You Buy' exhibition space.

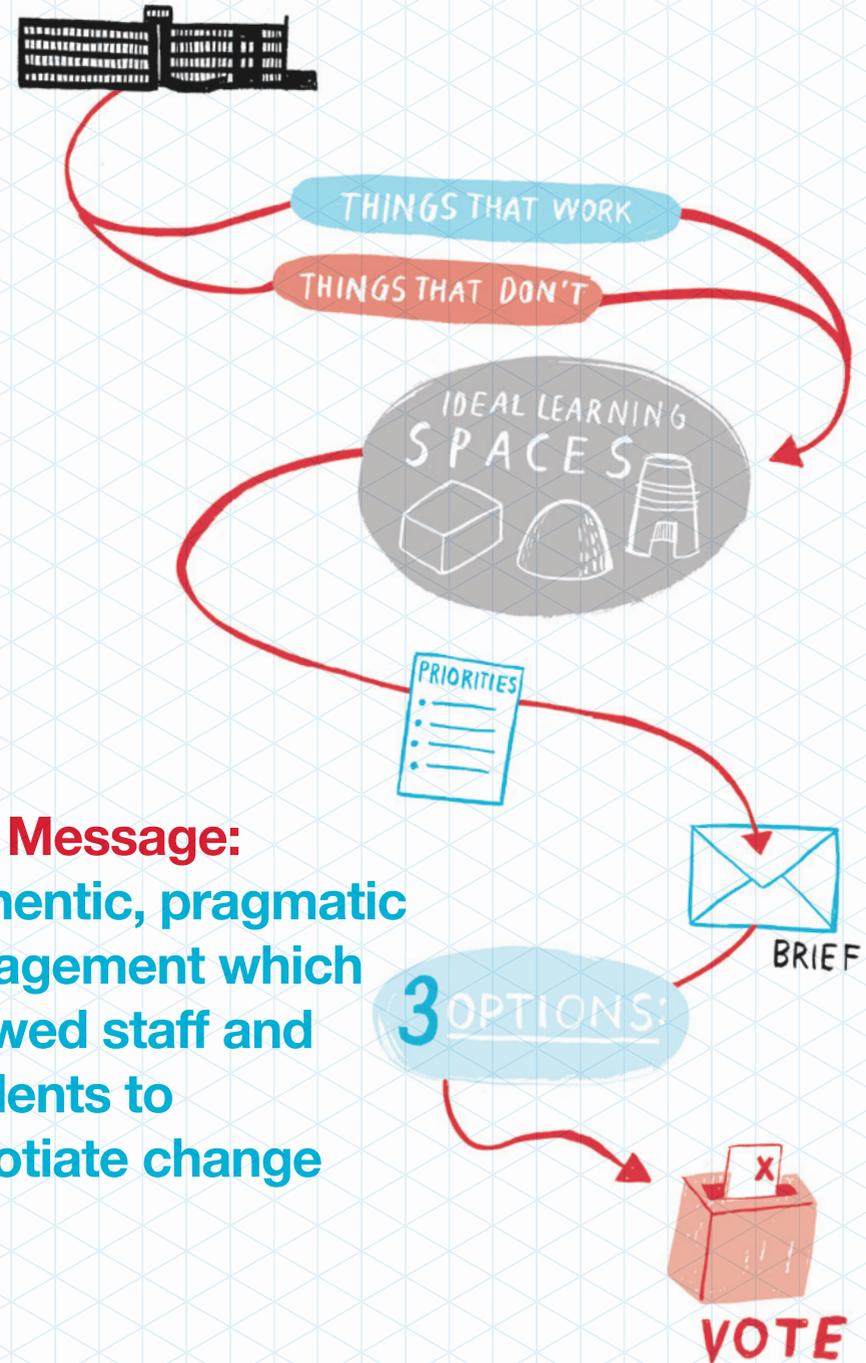
Through a series of participation workshops, staff and students were engaged in thinking about how they currently utilise classrooms and the spaces between. They also started to investigate new approaches to learning and teaching through changing educational settings and considering different types of activities, layouts and furniture.

A user brief was generated, from which a range of interior design ideas for the space were explored.

Students and staff were presented with these ideas and were asked to vote for their preferred option. Upon the development of the design and specification, it became clear that some compromises needed to be made. Instead of these being decided by the local authority or designer, the decision was made by the students and staff. This demonstrates the ability of the user as client to make pragmatic decisions.

Classes have been taking place in the new classroom, pictures of which can be seen in a short slideshow of images. An evaluation report and film share the lessons learnt from these new settings, which will go on to inform the design of the new school and illustrate new possibilities for the wider school estate. In addition, the project and its process have been captured in a short animation which details the story so far.

All Campbeltown Grammar outputs can be viewed on the [New Ideas for Old Buildings](#) website.





How can we improve our school grounds to provide stimulating learning and social environments?

It is widely recognised that pupils benefit from learning outdoors, and it is an embedded element of the Curriculum for Excellence. Learning outdoors offers enriching experiences which can support positive cognitive, emotional and social development. So, how can we develop our outdoor spaces to support learning?

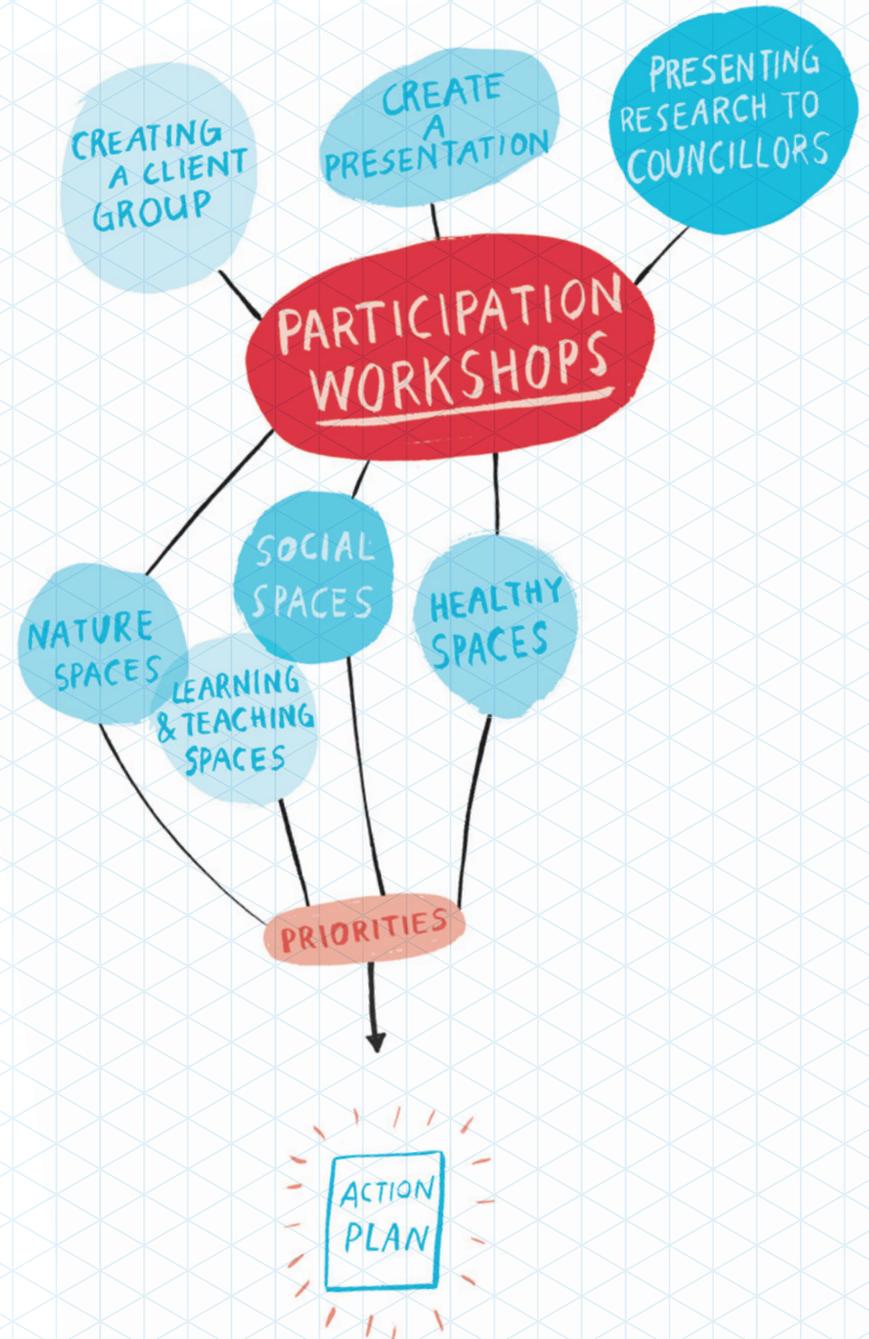
Staff and students at St Margaret's Academy in Livingston took part in a series of workshops over two years, exploring the potential improvements and redesign of the school's grounds.

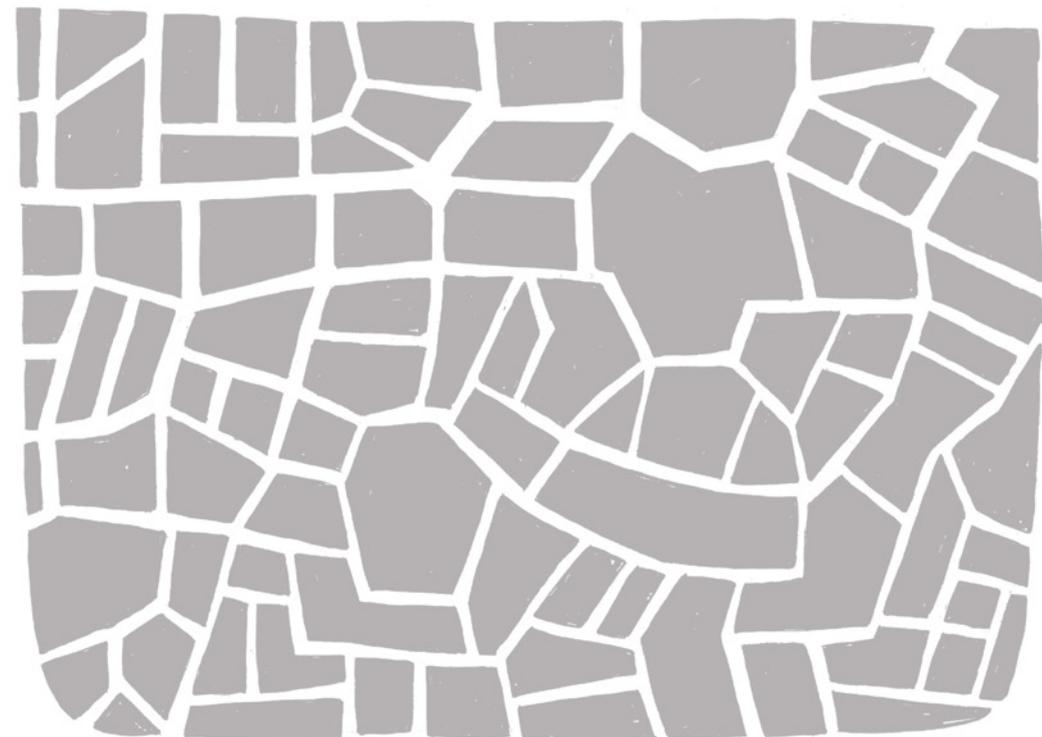
Working with students from a number of different year groups, as well as staff from different departments, workshops took place to record a rich picture of the varied demands on their outdoor spaces. Using mapping techniques and engaging in extended discussion, participants had the opportunity to critically reflect on the role of outside spaces. In addition, by looking at inspirational spaces outwith their own school setting, participants were able to creatively reinterpret the spaces around them and begin to negotiate priorities with other users.

Outputs from the project include a written brief and set of priorities for the grounds, a presentation of their findings to the council's Education Executive and the creation of an Action Plan document for their school grounds. The Schools Programme also commissioned a short animation illustrating the process and helping to bring the Action Plan to life.

Key Message:

Students know their school grounds well. Ask them to critically analyse what they have and what they want to be able to do by linking this with CfE.





How can schools contribute to transforming the wider streetscape and town regeneration?

Schools often sit at the heart of communities, and are a prominent landmark in their areas. As a catalyst for regeneration, they can be a good place to start. Shawlands Academy in collaboration with Glasgow City Council worked with students over a series of workshops with the aim of engaging them in the design of future improvements to their school's façade.

The participation workshops formed part of the wider Shawlands Gate Project, which aims to promote a greater role for students in the community and in regenerating Shawlands Town Centre as the heart of the Southside of Glasgow.

Working with local artists, designers and architects, students explored ideas of using public art or lighting to improve the current façade, and the school’s relationship with its surrounding environment.

The school’s elongated façade presented an excellent opportunity to use light creatively to transform the space in front of the school. In addition, lighting as a tool offers a quick and relatively affordable method to dramatically change the look and feel of the façade. Using a large-scale projection, students curated a light show which presented their artwork, photography and animation across the building.

As well as giving the school a public gallery through which to share the students’ creativity and success, the light show also helps to create a more welcoming and colourful route into Shawlands town centre. A short animation illustrating the projects key points has been produced, as well as a detailed activity pack to help teachers and facilitators to make the most of an existing school façade or as part of a larger school redesign and build project.

Key Message:
 Use changes to the environment as a learning opportunity, and tap into the creativity and ideas of pupils





How can the urban environment around our school best be used for active play and learning?

When a school sits in a tight urban site, there may be restrictions on space for outdoor activities. However, if we considered developing and investing in the streetscape and urban features, could these go some way to support play and learning?

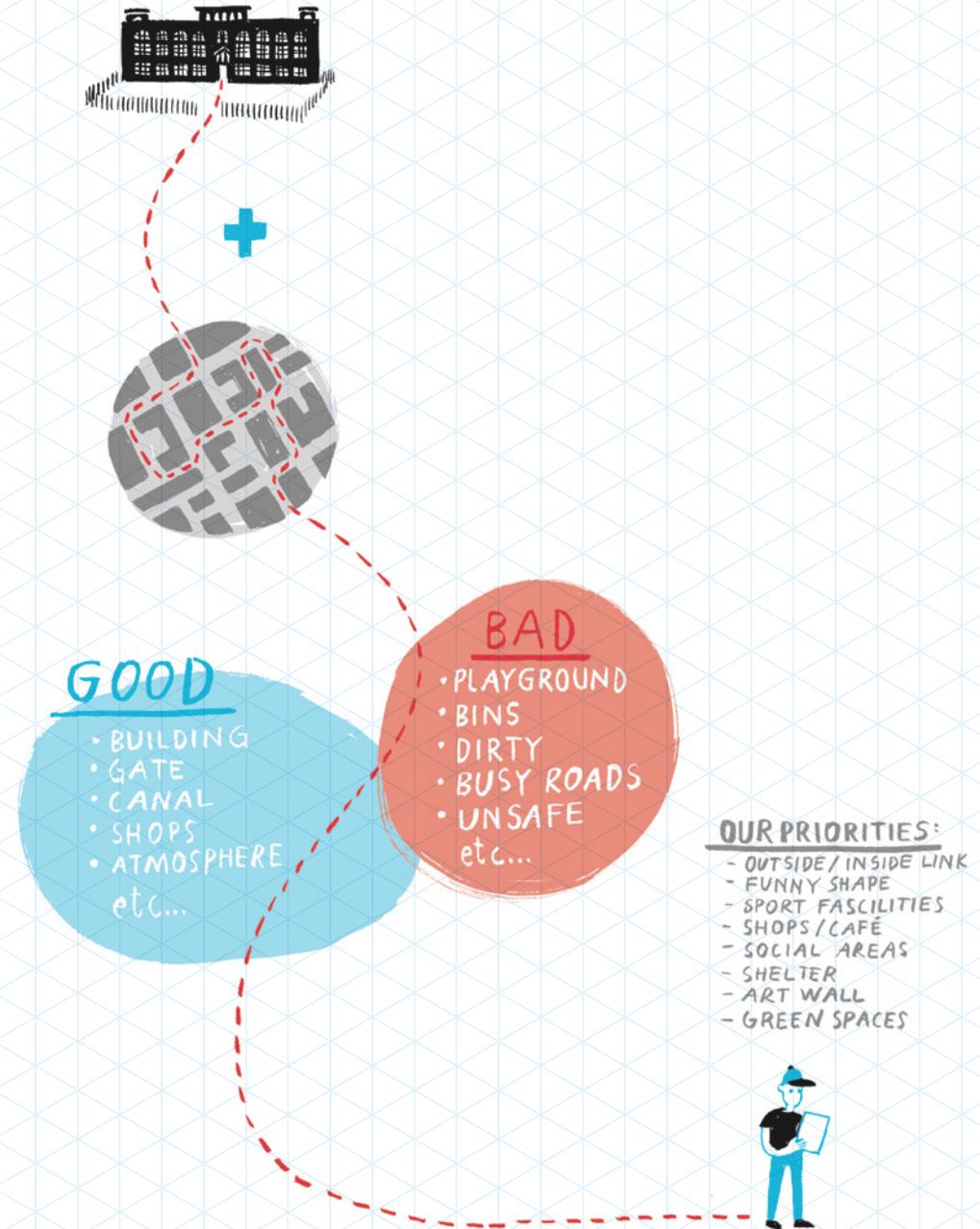
One school which explored these themes was Boroughmuir High School in Edinburgh.

Boroughmuir High School is being relocated within a masterplan site in Fountainbridge, next to the Union Canal. Through a series of workshops with the school, pupils mapped and critically analysed the current and future provision for outdoor learning opportunities within their neighbourhood. They looked initially at the features of their current school site, noting the positive and negative features before moving to the location of their new building. Pupils came up with a range of suggestions of how the move to being beside the canal could be of benefit to them for social and learning purposes.

When schools are replaced, or are relocated to new sites, this will inevitably mean a different set of surroundings; new routes to and from the building, and new facilities and infrastructure. It is a useful way to start to bridge the move to a new site by working with staff and students to share and document their views and opinions, hopes and concerns. This can create an authentic story for what might be possible.

The outcomes of the workshops were recorded in a report and video which was presented to the pupils, the rest of the school, the local community, Edinburgh City Council and the Project Design Team.

Key Message:
Unlocking the potential of the urban environment can happen through participation, but it needs to be valued as part of the wider offer of education.





How can we engage students in enhancing an aspect of the local environment, an existing facility or a landscape feature for the benefit of learning?

Participation projects don't have to solely investigate school buildings and grounds. Most schools sit within a settlement or area which has a number of interesting local natural features, e.g. rivers, hills, lochs.

What happens if you consider that feature as a potential learning resource? How would that affect developments and plans which may happen in its vicinity?

One example of pupils getting involved in changes to the natural environment is in Inverness, where major changes to the River Ness will be taking place over the next few years. As part of an arts investment project, a series of participation workshops were held with groups of students from Culloden Academy and Inverness High School. The idea was to get them to explore and map areas and routes around the river.

The students created a dialogue about the spaces and places of importance to them and the potential opportunities for changes they would like to see along the banks of the river. They came up with a range of ideas for enhancing and enlivening the area, which included creating places for holding events, cycle and skate parks, and places where they could come together with local primary schools to create collaborative art works.

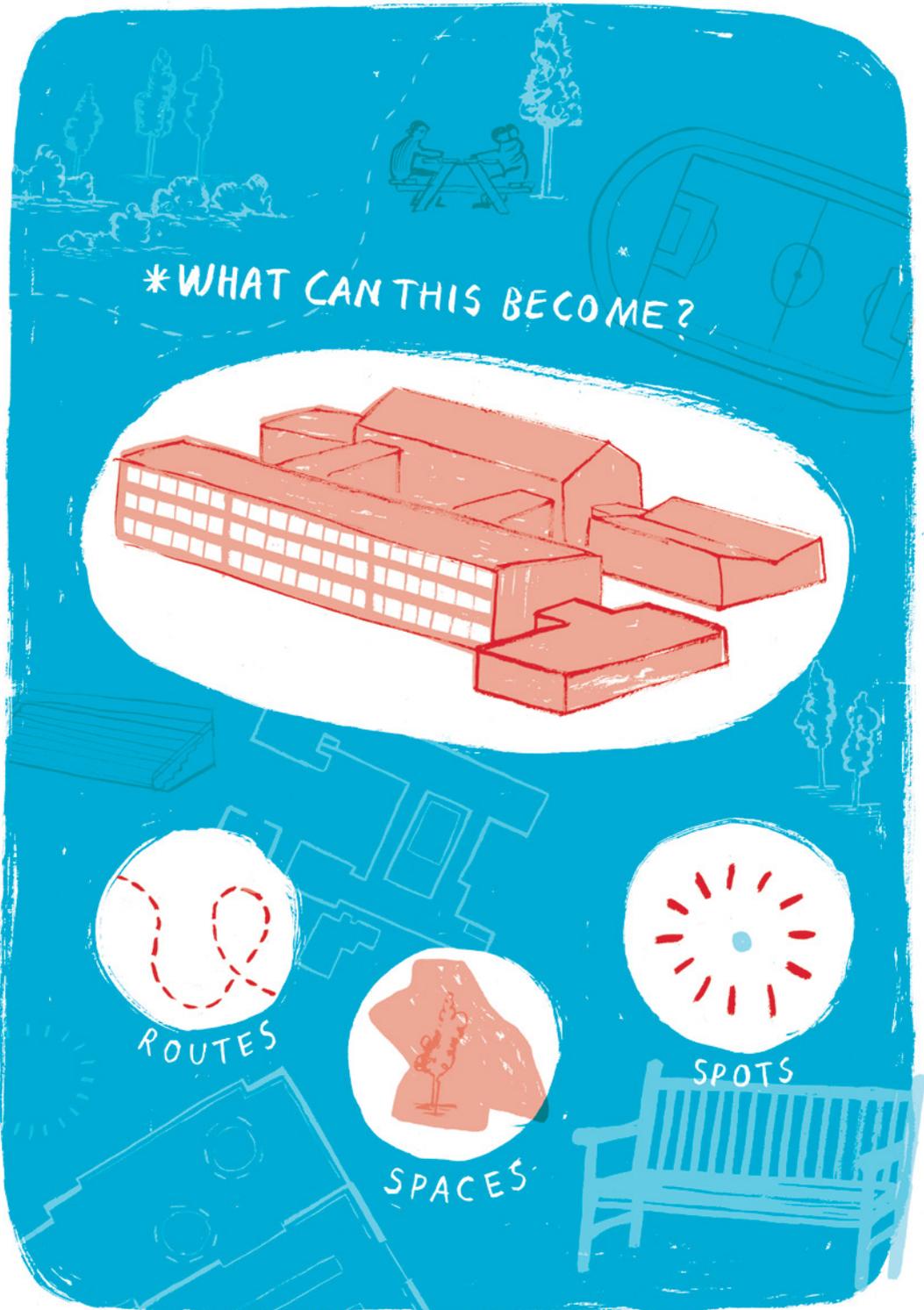
Working with the students helped to understand the meaning and value of the place for young people, but also helps to see the scope and opportunity for change through their eyes. The activities themselves contributed to cross-curricular learning, but also opened up a range of potential ongoing curricular activities which could be developed, including taking an active role in the future changes of the riverside.

A report and video document the workshops and describes in the words of the young people what the river means to them, and how they could see ways to improve their experience of the river for the future.

UNDERSTANDING THE TOWN THROUGH OUR EYES



Key Message:
Change can throw up a number of opportunities for participation. The key is to ensure that the messages from those participants are viewed as an integral part of the project.



How can we use our school and its connections with the surrounding landscape to help reveal the hidden potential in our school estate?

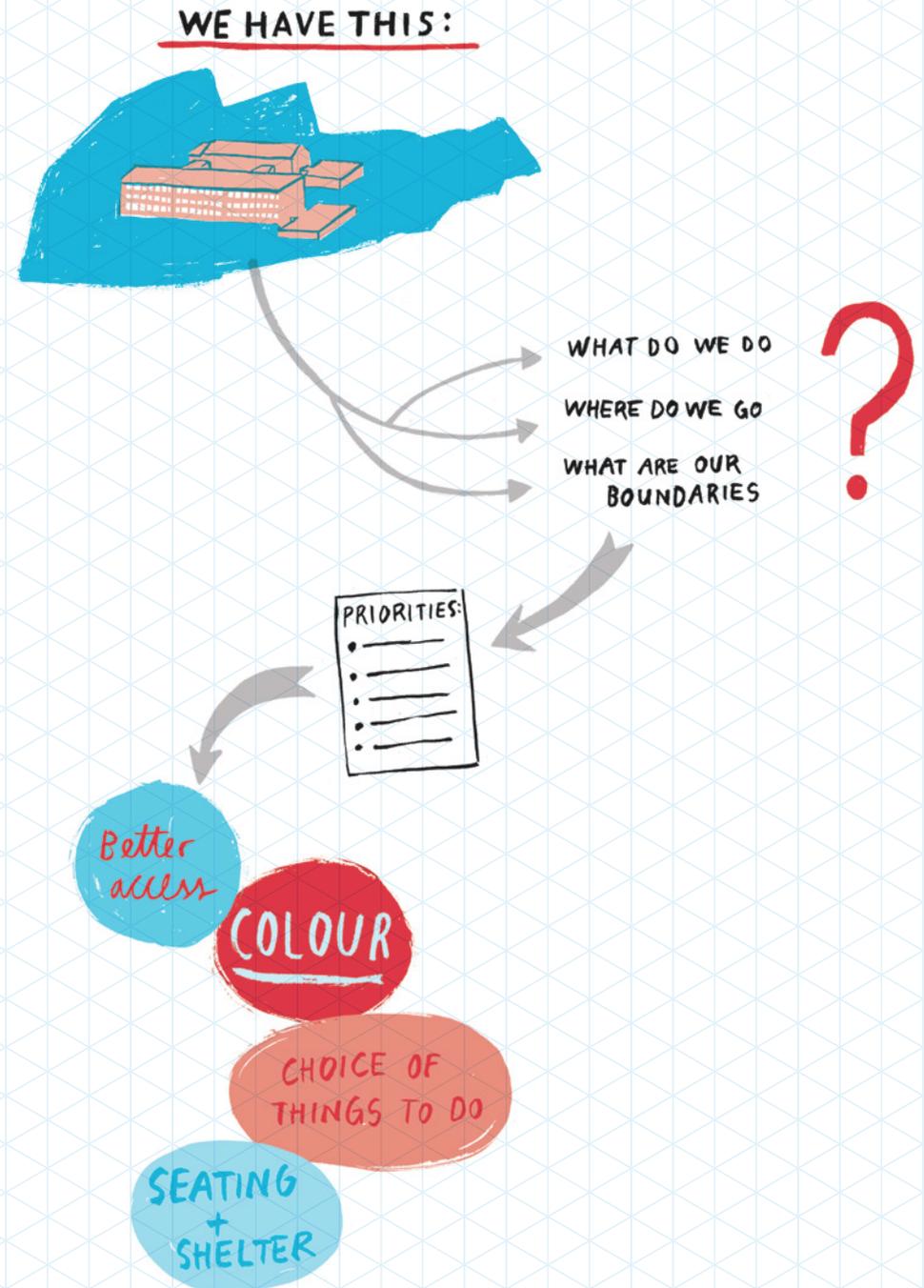
Examining a whole school campus and its connections to the surrounding landscape can generate ideas that could be used in the redesign of a whole school building as well as for smaller changes that can be implemented within existing schools and grounds.

Students and staff at Galashiels Academy were involved in a number of workshop days where they took part in investigating both landscape connections as well as mapping the context and relationship between the school and its wider community. Their ideas unlocked the potential for making better use of adjacent spaces next to the school for social and learning activities, as well as creating a wider variety of areas to provide a choice of things to do.

A summary document explains the process, findings and landscape strategy for the school grounds.

Furthermore, A+DS commissioned a mixed group of architects, teachers and local authority representatives to consider ideas for remodelling the school which might help to radically transform its functionality. The report and supporting [video](#) are both on the [Re:Design Option website](#).

Key Message:
Having conversations with staff and students about the places they live and learn can uncover a wide range of simple and practical options for developing the campus.





How can we involve and engage a mixed and wide range of stakeholders in a campus redesign project?

Schools with community facilities have a variety of users, needs and requirements. If a community school is being replaced or refurbished, there are a number of different voices which need to be listened to and scenarios which need to be explored.

Programmes of participation for such projects will need to be far reaching in terms of current and potential users - students, staff, parents, school management and estates as well as representatives from the local community and council departments will need to be involved.

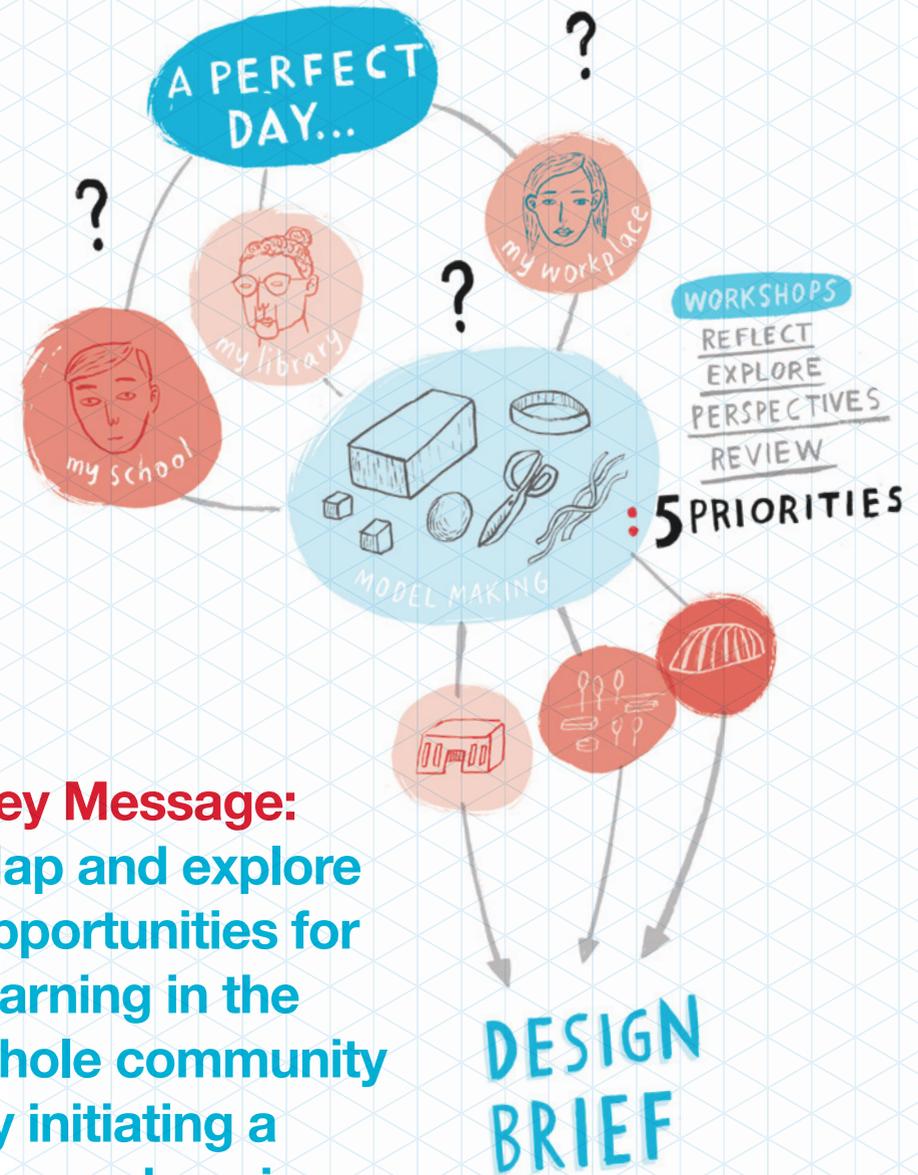
With different user groups to consider, the school and its facilities need to be understood within the wider backdrop of its historical, cultural and social contexts. Participation opens up dialogues about the value placed on the culture and community surrounding the school and start conversations about a vision which captures the aspirations and qualities that users would like to experience as part of the new campus.

Aberdeenshire Council embarked on the process of designing and developing a new community school campus for the residents of Alford and the 500 square mile catchment area that the school serves. The future campus would comprise a new nursery, primary and academy, and house numerous new community facilities. The participation programme involved a wide group of users of the current school and community facilities with the aim of engaging them in the design of the new Alford campus and enabling them to have a considered and meaningful input into the participation process.

Outputs included a priorities document, a 'perfect day' brief, an activities storyboard and a number of short films detailing participants perfect learning spaces.

In another case study example, students from Newbattle Community High School in Midlothian took part in two days of workshops, with the aim of exploring the school in its wider context and its relationship with the wider community through mapping and analysis exercises. A summary document brings together students' observations and ideas about their neighbourhood and for a new school building.

Key Message:
Map and explore opportunities for learning in the whole community by initiating a comprehensive and well planned programme of participation.



Developing your participation project
Participation projects often excel with the presence of an individual or group of experts driving the aims of the project forward with enthusiasm and commitment. Having developed a project brief, as in the previous case study examples, the following may give you ideas about how your project could be taken forward.

Project champion

A project champion may be someone that has been formally chosen to drive the project forward or may be an individual with a keen interest in the project and takes on the role as their responsibility. Either way, they will often provide inspiration, leadership and commitment to achieving the project aims.

Project steering group

A project steering group, with representatives from all key stakeholder groups can be a useful and effective channel for communication. Representatives might include parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils from the School Council, council members and local residents. The Shawlands Academy project greatly benefitted from establishing a steering group as the lighting project formed one of a number of strands within the wider project which aimed to involve students in the regeneration of the Shawlands area. The group met regularly at the school and helped to communicate project news and generate ideas for taking the project forward.

Key agencies and local authority departments

Relevant local and national organisations may be able to provide help and support for your project. From providing access to image banks to giving a presentation or even running a set of workshops, their involvement may vary but it is well worth contacting agencies to see what expertise and resources they have to offer.

Key considerations for participation projects

Meaningful participation can enhance community ownership over important local decisions, as well as providing a solid grounding for developing a brief. The following considerations are key lessons that will help develop an authentic, well managed and successful participation project.

- Involve a range of students at different ages and stages, as well as staff from different departments - this will help to bring together a wealth of experiences and ideas related to personal learning choices.
- The scope, scale and theme of each participation project will vary, and workshops need to be tailored to suit each project. However, there is a set of core activities that we follow and find to be a successful support for workshops:
 1. **Context:** think about the context of the project and school
 2. **Explore:** map and record the current surroundings and/or local area
 3. **Recording:** participants analyse their exploratory findings and report back to wider group
 4. **Inspiration:** thinking creatively about opportunities for change and where they might take place
 5. **Priorities:** negotiating key ideas and prioritising the most important
- Use a range of approaches and activities to inspire, motivate and challenge participants. Within each activity, stay outcome focused, ensuring a clear purpose and result from each task.

- Have clear, realistic expectations for your project, and manage the expectations of participants by being transparent about project constraints and opportunities. Clearly communicate this at the beginning of workshops.
- The process of developing and building new school buildings takes years. Consider how small scale, shorter-term interventions could be implemented to allow the current participants to see, try out and evaluate changes, feeding back their ideas into the brief for the new school.
- Learn from others' experiences and share your own findings. Visit other schools, spaces and places where similar (or contrasting) things have happened.
- Once the workshops have finished, be sure to feedback any outputs from the workshop back to the participants and remain close to the group, keeping them updated with any developments or project progress. Participation works best as an on-going, iterative process rather than a token one off set of workshops. This will help to build and maintain relationships allowing for long and valued participation.

Resources

The following section of the guide details a collection of tools, websites, reports and videos which will help you to deliver successful participation projects.

Methods and techniques

These resources are non-project specific and have been designed to support your participation project.

[The Big Picture](#) - gives an overview of what design participation is, why it is important school users are involved and the role they play within the design of a new school. It can be used by facilitators to introduce the topic to a group about to embark on the design of a new school or by individuals to understand why they are being asked to be involved.

[Re:Imagine - Participation in School Design](#) - this short video details how you can reimagine places through working closely with those who use it.

[Setting Priorities](#) - this short film details one approach facilitators can use to help a group of school users reach consensus. It describes a four-part process that allows a group to identify the important issues and use weighted voting to generate a list of its top priorities.

[Activity Pack](#) - based on sessions carried out with Shawlands Academy, the pack comprises five workshops which aim to enable a group of participants to investigate and analyse their school's façade, generate a visual brief and come up with a set of considered ideas to take forward for the improvement of the school's frontage.

[A+DS websites](#) - The A+DS Smarter Places website is a hub for all those involved in school design. It provides a round up of relevant news and features projects we've been working on. It also houses the SPARK tool which is a unique resource designed to be a catalyst for school design and provide everyone who wants to participate in school design with the means to explore and share their ideas.

Additional web resources are;
www.learningtowns.org
www.newideasfornewbuildings.org
www.theredesignoption.org
www.vimeo.com/schoolsads
www.issuu.com/schools.ads

A+DS related case studies and videos

The following case studies and videos, (all available via Smarter Places, Issuu and Vimeo) are not directly linked with participation projects but would be helpful and informative to the school design process:

[Graphic Identity and Interior Design](#) – explore how interior design and graphics can add significant benefit to a project.

[Small Schools](#) – looking at the design and key features of 'small schools'

[Talking Heads](#) – short videos capturing good experiences and good practice in the design of learning environments.

Award Winning Schools

[Outdoor Design](#) – case studies of Berlin playgrounds, focussing on the transformation and benefits of the of play spaces in schools, kindergartens and public parks.

External organisations

[Grounds for Learning](#) – a charity dedicated to support outdoor learning and play for children

[OECD](#) - The OECD's Centre for Effective Learning Environments brings together and shares research conducted by leading experts in the field of learning environments, from around the world.

[Scottish Government Schools Estate case studies](#) - these case studies aim to highlight good practice and demonstrate different approaches to school design issues.

Other publications

[Involving Pupils in School Design: A Guide for Schools \(Coventry University, 2009\)](#) - provides guidelines for schools, teachers and pupils on how to involve school users in the redesign of schools

[Being Involved In School Design \(CABE, 2004\)](#) - demonstrates the importance of carefully planned collaboration in order to achieve the best buildings and grounds possible.

[Thinking Space \(Futurelab, CABE, Portsmouth City Council, 2009\)](#) - a resource to support visioning of learning spaces for the future.

[Senses of Place: Building Excellence \(The Lighthouse\)](#) - seeks to explore the implications of Curriculum for Excellence for the design of new or refurbished schools and for the design and use of space in existing schools

[Changing Classrooms \(The Lighthouse\)](#) - illustrates the important links between space and learning and highlights 8 examples of innovative use of space in schools

[Designs On My Learning \(The Lighthouse, 2005\)](#) - helps to design strategies for future learning and teaching environments

[Our School Building Matters \(CABE, 2010\)](#) - a toolkit for teachers to help make the most of the learning opportunities created by building a new school or refurbishing an existing one

Participation is a means by which we can deliver a responsive learning estate, and a civic environment which meets the needs of local communities.

The Scottish Government supports participation of communities in the widest sense, to take ownership of changes that may affect them. This is set out in the National Outcomes;

“We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”

The Learning for Sustainability agenda, an initiative supported by the Scottish Government, is committed to ensuring a whole school approach – one which enables the school and its wider community to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society. Participation with pupils can act as a key driver in delivering this.

Much work has already been done looking at the benefits of participating with young people, and this work has been reinforced by the policy and guidelines set out by the Scottish Government, and Education Scotland. The first guiding principle

of ‘Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland’s Future’ (The Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2009) relates the importance of initiating participation where changes to the school estate are made. It states that;

“Good consultation means better outcomes – engaging with, consulting and involving all the potential users and interests helps to highlight expectations, identify the options and refine the objectives.”

Education Scotland also support greater pupil participation, as laid out in “Positive about Pupil Participation” (Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2006). This guide advocates the benefits of participation in school life and decision-making, saying that “pupils of all ages and abilities can be sources of ideas and positive contributions to their peers, school and community”.

Participation has the potential to not only be a way of inviting input and involvement of pupils in changes which affect them, it can also be a positive tool for delivering Curriculum for Excellence.



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