How Student Voice Strengthens a Safeguarding Culture

Hannah Smart: Executive Headteacher

ACE Tiverton Special School

"Students as partners in our safeguarding culture"
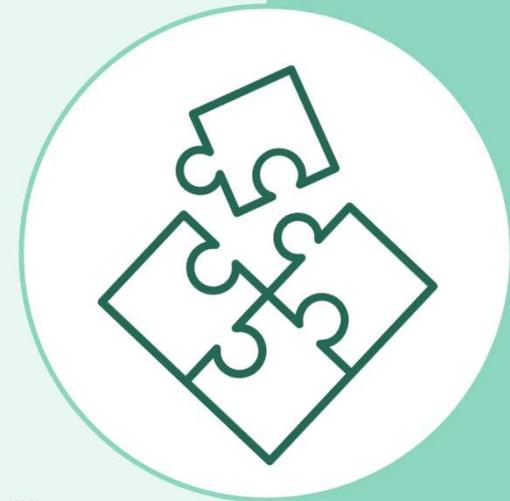
Why Student Voice Matters

Listening is protection.

Students are key stakeholders in safeguarding

A culture of trust is a culture of safety

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KCSIE Says:

- **Create a culture where children feel safe to speak up**: KCSIE stresses that children should feel confident and safe to report concerns, knowing they will be listened to and taken seriously.

- **Ensure children know how to report concerns**: Schools must provide clear information and accessible systems for students to raise issues, whether about themselves or others.

- **Involve students in safeguarding policies**: While not mandatory, involving students in shaping safeguarding approaches (e.g. through surveys, focus groups, or school councils) is considered good practice and aligns with promoting a child-centred approach.

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OfSted Says:

Current Framework (as of 2024)

- Under the Education Inspection Framework (EIF), student voice is considered in several key areas:

  – **Leadership and Management**: Inspectors evaluate how well leaders engage with pupils and take their views into account when planning and reviewing provision.

  – **Personal Development**: Schools are expected to promote pupils' confidence, resilience, and knowledge so that they can keep themselves mentally and physically healthy and safe.

  – **Safeguarding**: Inspectors assess whether pupils feel safe and know how to raise concerns, and whether they are confident that adults will take them seriously.

Proposed Changes (from Autumn 2025)

According to Ofsted's 2025 consultation:

  – The new framework will: Introduce **report cards** with a 5-point grading scale instead of a single overall judgement.

  – Place **greater emphasis on the lived experience of pupils**, especially those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

  – Encourage schools to demonstrate how they **listen to and act on student feedback** as part of leadership and safeguarding evaluations.

  – This shift reflects feedback from Ofsted's "Big Listen" consultation, where learners and professionals called for more nuanced, transparent, and inclusive inspection practices

Student Voice: Direct Quotes

"I know who I can talk to when I'm worried."

"They really listened and something changed."

"It's good to help other students feel safe."

Ultimately, gathering and listening to Student Voice is the right thing to do.

Research: Context

The **Lundy model of child participation**, developed by Professor Laura Lundy, emphasises children's rights to participate in decision-making processes.
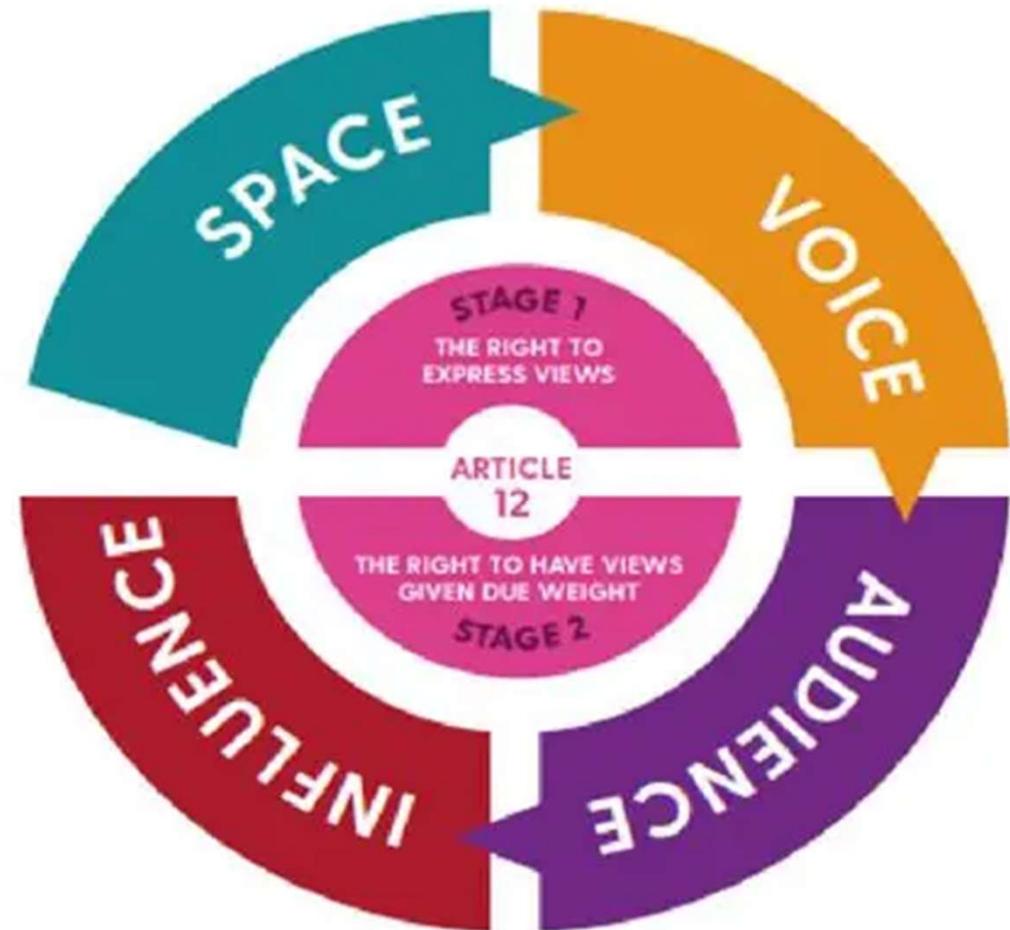
It is based on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and outlines four key elements: **space, voice, audience, and influence**.

- **Space** refers to the opportunity for children to express their views.

- **Voice** emphasizes the importance of children being heard.

- **Audience** ensures that children's views are listened to by those who can act on them.

- **Influence** highlights the need for children's opinions to impact decisions.
  This model aims to ensure that children's rights are respected and that they are actively involved in discussions that affect their lives.

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Lundy Model

This model provides a pathway to help conceptualise Article 12 of the UNCRC. It focuses on four distinct, albeit interrelated, elements. The four elements have a rational chronological order.

Space — Children and young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views

Voice — Children and young people must be facilitated to express their views

Audience — The views must be listened to

Influence — The views must be acted upon, as appropriate

SPACE

VOICE

INFLUENCE

AUDIENCE

STAGE 1
THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS VIEWS

ARTICLE 12

THE RIGHT TO HAVE VIEWS GIVEN DUE WEIGHT
STAGE 2

Research: Evidence

UNICEF (2020):

"Children who feel heard are more likely to speak up about harm"

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How does Student Voice Contribute to a strong Safeguarding Culture?

Builds Trust and Openness:

- When students feel heard, they are more likely to trust adults in the school. This trust:
- Encourages students to report concerns about themselves or others.
- Reduces fear of retaliation or dismissal.
- Promotes a culture where speaking up is normalised.

Enhances Relevance of Safeguarding Policies:

- Students can provide insights into:
- Emerging risks (e.g., online behaviour, peer pressure).
- How policies are perceived and whether they are effective.
- What support systems feel safe and accessible.

Empowers Students as Active Participants: When students are involved in shaping safeguarding practices

- They develop a sense of responsibility for their community.
- Peer-led initiatives (e.g., mentoring, awareness campaigns) become more impactful.
- It fosters leadership and resilience.

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How does Student Voice Contribute to a strong Safeguarding Culture?

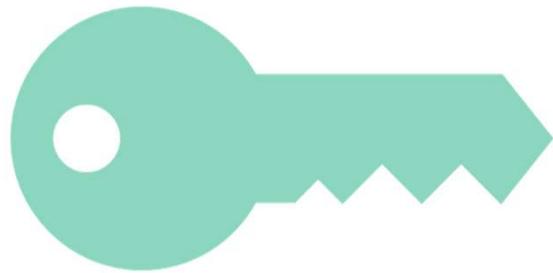## Identifies Hidden Issues, students may highlight:

- Bullying or exclusion that staff may not see.
- Unsafe areas in the school environment.
- Gaps in adult-student communication.

Promotes Inclusivity and Equity: Engaging diverse student voices ensures:

- Marginalised or vulnerable groups are represented.
- Safeguarding approaches are culturally sensitive and inclusive.
- No group feels overlooked or silenced.

Improves Policy Implementation: when students co-create or review policies:

- They are more likely to understand and follow them.
- Peer-to-peer communication reinforces expectations.
- It reduces resistance and increases buy-in

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Key Question

How do you currently engage with students?

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Embedding Voice in Policy

Co-written policies with students

Safeguarding Information in Student Friendly Language

Student Surveys with tangible impact

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Embedding Student Voice: Actions
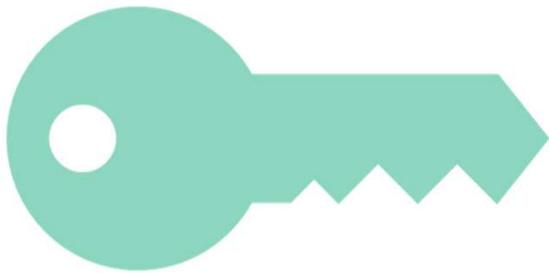
Student Forums

(Anonymous) Reporting Tools

Peer-led Initiatives

Curriculum Co-design

Safeguarding Ambassadors
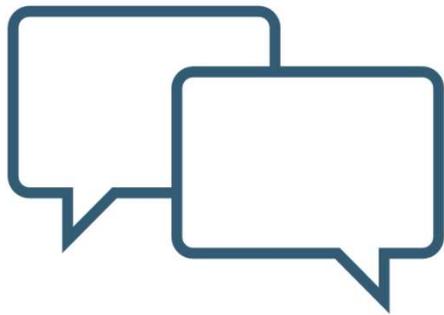
Key Question

What are the enablers to these?

What may be the barriers?

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Practical Example: The ACE Tiverton Way

Opportunities to Listen: Student Surveys	Opportunities to Talk: Peer Ambassadors & Mediators
Opportunities to Represent: Student Advocates	See the impact: 'You said, we did' feedback
Engagement: Student Led Safety Audit	Engagement: Co-construct consistent vocabulary

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Longitudinal v Temperature Check

Student Surveys: Consistent questions, timing and feedback.

Key cohort tracking: regular opportunities for student voice.

Instant Responses: Information sharing based upon local and national trends

Check Ins: 'Tap' answers, digital feedback tools, Q&A at unstructured times.

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Making it Work: Practical Strategies

Student Safeguarding Surveys

- **What**: Anonymous surveys asking students how safe they feel in different areas of the school, and whether they know how to report concerns.
- **Impact**: Helps identify hidden issues like bullying hotspots or gaps in awareness about reporting systems.

Student Safeguarding Ambassadors

- **What**: Appoint trained students to act as peer advocates or liaisons between students and staff.
- **Impact**: Encourages peer-to-peer support and makes it easier for students to raise concerns informally.

Involving Students in Policy Reviews

- **What**: Include student representatives in reviewing or co-creating safeguarding policies or anti-bullying strategies.
- **Impact**: Ensures policies are relevant, accessible, and reflect real student experiences.

Safe Spaces and Drop-In Sessions

- **What:** Create regular opportunities for students to speak with trusted adults or safeguarding leads in a relaxed setting.
- **Impact**: Builds trust and normalises conversations about wellbeing and safety.

Drama, Role Play, or Assemblies

- **What:** Use student-led performances or presentations to explore safeguarding themes like online safety, consent, or mental health.
- **Impact**: Engages students creatively and reinforces key messages in a relatable way.

Digital Feedback Tools

- **What:** Use apps or online forms where students can report concerns give feedback on how safe they feel.
- **Impact:** Offers a discreet and accessible way for students to speak u

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SCHOOL SAFEGUARDING CULTURE
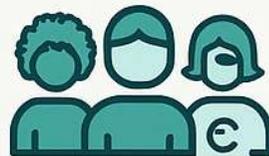
BUILDS TRUST AND OPENNESS

ENHANCES RELEVANCE OF SAFEGUARDING POLICIES

EMPOWERS STUDENTS AS ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

IDENTIFIES HIDDEN ISSUES

PROMOTES INCLUSIVITY AND EQUITY

IMPROVES POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Reflections:

How do you engage with student voice currently?

→

What would increase opportunities for student voice in your setting?

↓

What are the enablers for deeper engagement with students around safeguarding?

←

What opportunities are there for student-led safeguarding engagement?

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Thank You!

"When students speak up, safeguarding grows stronger."

KCSIE 2023

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Further Reading

- Core Safeguarding Guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) – DfE (Updated annually) www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education—2

- Working Together to Safeguard Children – HM Government www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children—2

- Research & Theory Lundy, L. (2007). "Voice is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child." British Educational Research Journal https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701657033 UNICEF (2020)

- The Right to Be Heard: Exploring Children's Right to Participation https://www.unicef.org/eca/reports/right-be-heard

- Ofsted's Big Listen (2024) – Feedback and proposals for reform www.gov.uk/government/consultations/ofsteds-big-listen

- Student Participation & Safeguarding Practice NSPCC Learning – Resources on pupil voice and safeguarding learning.nspcc.org.uk

- Children's Commissioner for England – Reports on children's experiences and rights www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

- Childnet International – Resources for online safety and digital safeguarding www.childnet.com

- The Anti-Bullying Alliance – Student-led approaches to safer school environments www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

- Wider Links and Resources

- Transforming Futures Trust – www.transformingfutures.org.uk ACE Tiverton Special School – https://www.acetiverton.org.uk

- The Participation People – Experts in co-producing services with young people www.theparticipationpeople.co.uk

- YoungMinds – Mental health and safeguarding advocacy by young people www.youngminds.org.uk

- The Diana Award Anti-Bullying Programme – Peer-led safeguarding diana-award.org.uk/anti-bullying