

Democratic Governance of Schools

TOOL No. 2 of the EDC/HRE PACK

Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights

EDC for short, is a matter of paramount importance to the Council of Europe if the 46 member states are truly to progress together along the path of democracy: it lies at the heart of ensuring that the next generation of young citizens are prepared and equipped to play their democratic part - in their own communities, in their wider societies and in the framework of Europe as a whole.

Democratic Governance of Schools is part of a series, collectively a 'tool kit', produced by the Council of Europe to help educational institutions to promote and develop Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights. The book can be used both as a practical handbook for the daily work in schools and as a source of inspiration and personal/professional development for all involved in the governance of schools.

As a manual it is of use to all who wish to explore the possibilities, benefits and techniques of spreading democracy (and thus of learning for democratic citizenship) in schools. School leaders, whether this is a new concept to them or whether they are already a long way down the democratic path, will find it of great value: they may use it to chart first steps, or to analyse their current position and plan the next stage. Since democracy inevitably involves all stakeholders in education, the manual will be of value as much to those who make education policy – from government ministers down – as to parents, teachers and students. All will find information, analysis and planning tools to help them take democracy further in their schools.



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"Democracy is not a goal, it is a path; it is not attainment, but a process... When we grasp this and begin to live democracy, then only shall we have democracy."

(Mary Parker Follett
The New State [1918] p. 58)

What is democratic school governance?

European school leaders today tend to work in increasingly decentralised systems based on a complex interplay of many autonomous partners. The term *school governance* is used throughout the manual as a wide definition of school leadership, including both instrumental and ideological aspects (management and ethos/vision). *Democratic* indicates that school governance is based on human rights values and on the empowerment and involvement of students, staff and stakeholders in all important decisions in the school.

Why?

School leaders have to take into account many powerful factors in their operational and strategic work: legislation, curriculum, local authorities, parents, pupils, financial resources, socio-economic environment, competition. Many of these factors are constantly changing and beyond the school leader's control. Good management is not enough. If schools are to meet the needs of their students and of their communities (local and national) in a dynamic, constantly changing environment, their leaders need to bring all the partners in the educational process into a participative, *democratic* process.

If the member states of the Council of Europe want young people to become active democratic citizens of tomorrow, they have to ensure that schools follow and promote the democratic values that they wish their students to espouse. Where democratic practice spreads in a school, this brings other benefits too. Research demonstrates that democratic governance

- improves discipline
- enhances learning
- reduces conflict
- makes the school more effective and more competitive as well as helping to ensure the future existence of sustainable democracies.



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Democratic School Governance

How the book works

Both the analytical and the future planning sections of the manual are based on the Three Principles for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE):

- Rights and Responsibilities
- Active Participation
- Valuing Diversity

In the analysis that helps readers to gauge how far their school or education system has progressed along the democratic path, the authors identify four Key Areas of crucial importance (and of probable concern to readers), and relate progress in them to the Three Principles:

- Governance, leadership and public accountability
- Value-centred education
- Cooperation, communication and involvement: competitiveness and school self-determination
- Student discipline

That is the first stage of a process. After making that assessment of their school's current position in relation to a series of stages of development, readers are helped to unpack the concepts and issues that emerge and to explore the values that underlie the modes of operation and forms of behaviour that stem from them. There follows what the authors hope is a wealth of ideas and strategies for planning and taking the steps from one stage to another.

The last section of the manual contains answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), positive alternatives to commonly held fears and anxieties, lists of resources and examples of good practice from around Europe - as well as some indicators of traits and patterns that are likely to be found in a school that has made significant strides towards developing democratic practice.



EDC/HRE in practice:

- Respect for rights
- Rights accorded and accepted
- Responsibilities accepted and exercised
- Active participation
- Valuing diversity...

...real, active democratic citizenship learned and lived in school

Some FAQs:

In a democratically governed school, what happens to

- academic results?
- student discipline?
- order?
- respect for authority?

These and other questions are dealt with in the manual

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The Road to Democratic School Governance

Spreading democracy in a school can be stressful. By its very nature democracy challenges old hierarchies and authorities, and the conflicts that may emerge can be hurtful and wearing.

But you will not be on your own. Democracy involves partnerships – so work with your partners and lean on them when you need to. Democracy is still growing throughout Europe, and you are part of a large and increasing group in which you can find friends and allies.

Every step forward in the school will bring rewards, both personal and institutional, which will certainly serve to encourage you and spur you on to further efforts. The improvements in the school and its ethos will be tangible. So you can look forward to fun and a degree of satisfaction which will far outweigh the challenging times.

The difficulties are significant, but the rewards are immense. We hope this manual will help you on that journey, and we wish you both the courage that will be needed and the success that will surely come.

Good luck!

Bernard Trafford and Elisabeth Bäckman

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Photo: Bernard Trafford



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