

## Media Release

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### **New comic book an ‘out of this world’ way to understand pupil council research findings**

An alien starship crew has been enlisted to communicate new research findings on pupil councils to children and young people across Scotland.

Every school in Scotland will receive copies of an innovative comic book this week that shares the findings of *Having a Say at School* (HASAS), the largest Scottish study of pupil councils ever undertaken, conducted by Children in Scotland and the University of Edinburgh (see Notes to Editors 1).

A cartoon format answers the question of how to communicate relevant but dry facts and research findings to primary and secondary school pupils in an engaging way through a team from the planet Didactica, who arrive in Scotland to study democracy in other worlds. The alien crew highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the pupil councils they find and what the councils need – including two-way communication, the right tools and enough time – to make sure they can work properly. Sample panels are below.

Jonathan Sher, Children in Scotland’s Director of Research, said: “Too often, the results of research done about students is not shared with them. And when it is, it tends to be boring and therefore ignored. We created this comic book because we are keen for students to enjoy the experience of learning the lessons from *Having a Say at School*.”

The book is the work of illustrator and lead author Toby Cook, who graduated from Edinburgh College of Art last summer. He said: “A dry communication of facts easily loses its edge and this needed to be informative but also exciting. The balance between text and pictures means younger pupils can enjoy the characters while older pupils engage more with the story. We’ve been careful to use characters pupils can identify with.”

The research has been welcomed as a significant contribution to boosting effective participation for children and young people in issues and decisions that affect them.

Cathy McCulloch of Scotland’s Children’s Parliament said: “These findings reflect what children have told us about their own pupil council experiences. Where relationships between teachers and children are based on mutual respect and understanding, the pupil council has the potential to make a significant contribution to the life of the whole school. This research will hopefully ignite a constructive conversation in Scotland about what we need to do to ensure pupil councils are truly effective places where children set the agenda and are central to making a difference in the life of their schools.”

Derek Couper, Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament, said: “Young people have told us it's important every high school in Scotland should have a strong pupil council, and we think they can have a huge role in teaching young people about the exciting possibilities of having their voice heard at school and in the wider community. The Scottish Youth Parliament welcomes the launch of *Having a Say at School* and is looking forward to working with others to take forward its findings and ensure Scotland's pupil councils become powerful laboratories of democracy.”

### **Notes to Editors**

1. *Having a Say at School* is based on more than 1000 responses including separate questionnaires to pupil councils, schools and education authorities. Six diverse pupil councils were also examined more closely through observation, interviews and additional surveys. The research was funded by the Big Lottery Research Fund and conducted between 2007 and 2009 by Kay Tisdall and Sue Milne at the University of Edinburgh and Fungi Gwanzura-Ottmoller and Jonathan Sher at Children in Scotland. The results were published on 28 April. More information about *Having a Say at School*, including five briefing documents on the research, can be found at [www.havingasayatschool.org.uk](http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk) or by calling Lynn Gilmour on 0131 222 2443.
2. **The following lessons emerged on what effective highly regarded pupil councils have in common:**
  - The process by which students become pupil councillors is widely viewed as fair and reasonable
  - Adequate training and preparation are provided to pupil councillors and their adult advisors
  - Adult advisors engage with, and support, pupil councillors, but do not dominate
  - Good communication and collaboration exists between the pupil council and the headteacher or other adult decision-makers
  - Pupil councillors see themselves, and act, as representatives for their fellow students
  - Effective two-way communication is routine between council members and classmates
  - Pupil councillors work well together to set significant but realistic goals, decide priorities, make plans and take action
  - Adequate tools and resources (including funds) are available to conduct their work
  - They meet enough and for long enough periods to be able to deliver on all of the above; and
  - There is continuity and/or effective handover from year to year, instead of each pupil council having to start from scratch.
3. **Children in Scotland** is the longstanding national agency for the whole of the children's sector, reaching over 250,000 individuals through our extensive membership of more than 450 statutory agencies, voluntary sector organisations, professional associations and community groups. For further information visit [www.childreninScotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk).

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