Case Studies of the MSPs in Schools project

MSPs in Schools can be run in many ways, as the numerous different methods adopted by schools participating in 2005/6 showed. Below are a selection of case studies that may help in deciding how to approach the topic, project and MSP visit.

In addition to the methods outlined below, most schools have also either started or finished their session with a general question and answer session.

Exploring issues through drama

Primary 7

The pupils chose a selection of issues of local and national interest. Each class staged four short dramas, exploring these issues in different ways, including:

- A current affairs programme, with a presenter interviewing an MSP, and members of the public encouraged to ‘phone in’.
- A TV news presenter giving an outside broadcast from the scene of a protest outside a local hospital.
- A debate on provision of schools with integrated teaching of deaf students, outlining the benefits of this approach for deaf and hearing students.

The pupils performed their dramas for MSPs, and asked for them to comment on the issues, including any action they were taking or would consider taking.

Primary 7

Pupils prepared a short drama illustrating the main events in the history of the Scottish Parliament, from the Union of the Crowns, through the Union of the Parliaments, to the creation of the devolved parliament in 1999. It included a mock debate. The drama had the benefits of being enjoyable for the MSPs, but also broke complex issues down into simple, memorable ideas and images.
Integrating the Scottish Parliament topic into existing curriculum areas

Primary 7

The pupils were studying two main projects at the time of their session – an environmental studies topic on energy, and a PSE topic on health. The teachers decided to integrate these two topics, and based the children's presentations around these two areas: gas, renewable energy and nuclear power; and smoking.

The energy presentation included:
Pupils taking turns to explain points including:
- The origins of gas and coal, and why they are a finite resource;
- Renewables vs nuclear power
- The consequences of climate change
- News articles on water shortages and extreme weather

This was followed by a performance of a song the pupils had been working on, about environmental issues.

The smoking presentation included short dramas on issues such as:
- Peer pressure
- Children’s exposure to smoking at home
- Shops selling cigarettes to underage people

These dramas were interspersed with facts and figures on smoking in Scotland and worldwide.

The MSPs were then asked to respond to the pupils points, and their ideas about what should be done on there issues.
This is a good example of how MSPs in Schools can be integrated into a project or topic being studied at the time.

Several schools have taken this approach and have built MSPs in Schools into Law and Order, democracy and representation, projects on Scottish history and life etc.

Mock Elections

Primary 6

In the weeks running up to the MSP visit, the class split themselves into ‘parties’, each choosing a local issue to develop. They created manifestos, outlining their ideas, and produced various campaign materials which were displayed around the room.

For the MSP visit, the pupils organised a ‘hustings’ where each of their parties outlined their manifesto, and the rest of the class and MSPs were able to become involved by asking the candidates about the reasons for their proposals.

The pupils and MSPs were then given ballot papers to vote, in a secret ballot, for the party who had made the best case.

Debates

Small rural school: whole school mixed age group

The pupils at several schools staged debates, involving the MSPs in discussion and voting. The pupils had prepared voting cards which duplicated the voting options in the parliament chamber. The proposals being debated were:

- Maximum class sizes of 20; and
- School to be reduced to four days a week

These debates were particularly useful as the pupils were encouraged to speak and vote alongside MSPs as peers.

Petitions and campaigns
**Primary 6/7**

The pupils generated ideas about things that they felt were of importance to them, parks and on streets and paths, and the injuries that this causes, emerged as a topic most of the class could agree on.

Having looked at the Public Petitions Committee during the initial session, the children decided to suggest an idea to the parliament about how to deal with the issue.

For the session with MSPs, the class prepared an extensive presentation, including the results of a survey on incidence of and injuries caused by broken glass, conducted with each class in the school. The pupils then asked the MSPs about the issue, their suggested solution, their ideas, and how they could go about submitting a petition on the issue.

The MSPs were very supportive, helping the class focus on how to gain support for their petition, and to think about alternative views and ideas.

**Primary 7**

The class made a model of their ideal under-14 youth café/activity centre, which they would like in their area. They had also researched various empty buildings and spaces in the local area where this could be located.

The MSP agreed to help the class follow this up by taking a group of the pupils to the local council to make their presentation to councillors.

**Mixed sessions**
**Rural school: Primary 7**

With a number of MSPs attending the session, the classes split into smaller groups to prepare different short activities, which each individual MSP would engage in turn.

Similarly to other schools mentioned above, one of the activities was a debate, with the MSP acting as the Presiding Officer.

There were also short dramas highlighting issues such as anti-social behaviour, underage drinking, drugs and animal cruelty. These ‘incidents’ were followed up with an MSP surgery, where the MSP was expected to respond to the pupils as if it was a real surgery.

There was also videoed ‘press conference’, where pupils asked MSPs about themselves. This allowed pupils to write short biographies of their MSPs.

Some pupils researched and developed a campaign to build a new sporting facility in the town, presenting their plans and asking for ideas and support.

Finally a ‘mastermind’ game show involved pupils in researching the parliament in order to pose challenging questions to their MSPs.

This method had the benefit of allowing pupils to play to their strengths, and was a good way to have large numbers of MSPs present without the pupils losing interest.

It required very tight time management, but was highly successful.

**Primary 4/5**

A mixed media presentation on anti-social behaviour illustrated via power point which included photos of vandalism in the local community.

The class then demonstrated through short dramas how drink and drugs led to anti social behaviour.

The class also raised the issue of the threatened closure of a local youth centre, which they felt would be counter-productive in terms of anti-social behaviour, as teenagers would be bored.

**Sessions with a curriculum focus**

**Modern Studies**

The Modern Studies classes participating in the project used the MSP visit as an opportunity to gather *primary evidence* from MSPs that would be relevant to the curriculum content. They asked the MSPs questions about how they use parliament to represent people, through First Minister’s Questions, written questions, petitions, motions and bills.
The session was videoed for future classes to use.

In 2006, MSPs George Reid, Andrew Arbuckle and Murdo Fraser met pupils from Dollar Academy for a Question Time session

**Other suggestions for the MSP session**

*Primary 4 – Secondary 6*

Researching issues leading to preparing and delivering presentations (Powerpoint or posters) has been the most popular method of engaging MSPs in the work of the class.

Issues pupils have chosen to discuss with their MSPs include:

- Road safety – 20s plenty zones and crossing points near schools
- Animal welfare
- Renewable energy
- Under-age drinking
- Access to facilities for disabled people
- Special needs education
- Sectarianism
- Supporting the Commonwealth Games bid
- CCTV and anti-social behaviour
- Local public and road transport
- Smoking and the smoking ban
- Litter and vandalism
- Provision of NHS dentists
- Hospital closures
- Preservation of castles and historical monuments
- Financial implications of the smoking ban on private and public sectors