

Youth-led Big Education Conversations Engaging Wider School Communities

CASE STUDY



SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED CONVERSATIONS ACROSS ENGLAND

HeadsUp4HTs, a national network of school leaders dedicated to celebrating, supporting, and advocating for the work of educational leaders and their schools, piloted a series of Big Education Conversations (BECs) from 2023 to April 2024. By engaging headteachers, students, and community members in conversations to reimagine education, HeadsUp4HT aimed to:

- support **youth-led dialogue** within school communities,
- reconnect headteachers with their **purpose**
- gather **insights** and encourage commitments to **drive change**.

The pilot involved fifteen schools, encompassing primary, secondary, and special schools in both urban and rural settings. Participants, including headteachers, students, parents, local councillors, community members, and faith leaders, discussed questions such as:

- “**Who gets to choose what young people learn at school?**”
- “**How can a school integrate with its community?**”
- “**Are formal assessments testing the right things?**”

Supported by Ed Finch, an experienced teacher and former headteacher, a diverse group of students stepped into leadership roles. Preparation included detailed planning sessions with headteachers and online preparatory meetings with student facilitators to ensure effective intergenerational collaboration. The young leaders, many of whom might not ordinarily participate in such activities, drove the conversations and engaged with community members, playing an integral role in preparing, running, and reflecting on the conversations.

With over 300 people attending 14 events, and nearly 100 young people from fifteen different schools facilitating conversations, the BECs had inherent and long-term benefits. Participants highlighted the intrinsic value of the conversations. Students reported **increased confidence** in discussing their views, **leading discussions**, and **engaging meaningfully with adults**. Students grew in confidence and realised they could not only debate with their peers but also speak with adults with authority and understanding of the topics.

SNAPSHOT

WHO?

- **Organised & facilitated by:** Students & headteachers from primary, secondary and specialist SEN schools, supported by HU4HTs.
- **Participants:** Students, teachers, headteachers, parents & members of the local community.

WHERE?

- Schools and community spaces across England, from Northumberland to the Isle of Wight

WHY?

- To support youth-led dialogue within school communities
- To reconnect headteachers with their purpose.
- gather insights and encourage commitments to drive change.

HOW MANY?

- Over 300 people including 100 young people, across 14 events

Long-term impacts included stronger community engagement and a shift in school leaders’ approaches to involving students and parents in decision-making processes. Parents and other members of the community felt more connected to the school and offered support reading or career talks in school.

“The BEC enabled me to gain an insight into the vision of both the children and the wider community we serve as to their personal priorities for the future of education”

Headteacher

LOOKING AHEAD:

The success of the pilot highlights the potential of BECs to spark meaningful conversations and actions within school communities. HeadsUp4HTs continues to support schools to host their own BECs, bringing communities together and driving impactful conversations for change.