

EDUCATING FOR SOCIAL GOOD: PART 1

Mapping children's active civic learning in England

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Introduction

This research project seeks to understand, how do primary school children learn to be active, civically engaged citizens? What opportunities are they afforded to develop their civic learning, how are ideas of good citizenship framed (ie how are they understood, and enacted) and indeed by whom, and is there equity in access to active civic learning opportunities across primary schools in England?

This matters: it matters for education, it matters for society and it matters for democracy. This argument is not new, indeed there are long standing debates about how civic learning should be implemented within schools, with enduring tensions between ideological hopes and what is feasible in practice, drawing attention to a lack of clarity around civic learning and citizenship education¹. The late Professor Bernard Crick, a leading thinker on citizenship education, highlighted throughout his career a concern that all too often active civic engagement in schools was viewed as ‘doing good’ via voluntary action and rarely linked to children’s social and political learning, and democratic participation; as he stated ‘education should not shelter our nation’s children from even the harsher controversies of adult life but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgably, sensibly, tolerantly and morally².’ In agreement, we view citizenship education as an important part of a healthy democratic society. A central facet of democracy should be about improving society for all: it requires more than kindness and voluntary engagement, it requires critical thinking, it requires collective action, and it requires political thinking. It involves engaging in controversial issues, engagement in democratic conversations and working collectively to come together to consider policy responses. Thus, in seeking to explore children’s active civic engagement, we begin to consider some of their first experiences of democratic participation, through the lens of active civic engagement. We want to find out how does this important aspect of learning play out in primary schools across England.

From dressing up for Children in Need, donning a red nose for Comic Relief or participating in local community projects, children regularly contribute towards charity and social issues through giving of their time, such as volunteering and social action; talent, through the sharing of knowledge and skills; and treasure, through donating of goods and/or money. We regard this as ‘active civic engagement’ where children are provided

opportunities to engage in activities intended to improve the quality of life in one’s community by addressing issues of public concern, such as homelessness, food poverty, or climate change, and developing the knowledge and skills needed to address those issues. Active civic engagement involves a wide range of activities such as giving to charity, fundraising, volunteering, social action, advocacy, activism and campaigning.

Active civic learning is important in the civic socialisation of children³. It has as a result begun to receive increasing attention from practitioners, policy makers and researchers over recent years. Of note has been a focus on ‘high quality social action’, defined ‘as young people taking practical action in the service of others to create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young person themselves⁴, which has seen renewed focus on participative social action programmes in schools.

The launch of the #iwill campaign run by Step Up to Serve in 2013, with cross party support, demonstrated a government commitment to increase social action among the younger generations. This campaign aimed to increase the number of young people aged 10-20 taking part in social action by 50% by 2020. OFSTED further promoted this idea, highlighting how they perceived such programmes to have positive impacts on academic standards, create high expectations and support better attendance⁵. This notion was then further strengthened by research from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues which suggested young people who were first involved in youth social action before the age of 10 are more than twice as likely to have an ongoing commitment to social action (a ‘habit of service’) than those who first participate after the age of 16⁶.

In 2018 a House of Lords select committee on citizenship and civic participation presented the idea of the civic journey, as they argued, ‘to try and untangle this complex and sensitive web [of issues, arguments and policies] we have looked at the issue of citizenship and civic engagement through the prism of the civic journey each one of us who lives in Britain will undertake⁷. In this report they concluded that, ‘the process we have called the ‘civic journey’ should be a smooth transition in which central and local government provide individuals with a framework for benefiting from and contributing to society and assist them in overcoming the barriers to engagement.’ Nonetheless, early years and primary education still are very much absent from the discussion.

1 Hayward, J. & Jerome, L., 2009. Crick and teacher education. In National citizen conference. London: London Metropolitan University.

2 Crick, B., (1998). *Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools. Final report*, 22 September 1998.

3 Astuto J, & Ruck MD (2010) Early childhood as a foundation for civic engagement. In: Sherrod L, Torney-Purta J, Flanagan CA (eds) *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 249–275.

4 Tejani, M. & Breeze, H. (2021) *Citizens of Now: High Quality Youth Social Action in Primary Schools*. RSA, London.

5 Ofsted (2016) How social action is being applied to good effect in a selection of schools and colleges.

6 Arthur J, Harrison T, Taylor-Collins E, & Moller F., (2017). *A Habit of Service: The Factors that Sustain Service*. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham Report.

7 House of Lords Select Committee 118. (2018) *The Ties that Bind: Citizenship and Civic Engagement in the Twenty-First Century*, Report of the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, Session 2017-2019, p.4.

Focus, both from research and practice, has heavily favoured adolescents, often overlooking the role of civic learning in early and middle childhood (pre-secondary school). This research project aims to begin to address that gap.

Whilst we have witnessed a growth in the opportunities for active civic engagement across primary and secondary education, there remains a significant gap in research and literature regarding how children learn to become civically engaged citizens and the educational approaches adopted in cultivating active civic learning, particularly among primary school aged children. This is problematic, as a multi-disciplinary review of educational, social and psychology theory and research highlights a child's primary school years as crucial in the development and normalisation of positive civic behaviours⁸.

Furthermore, citizenship literature highlights how pedagogical approaches to citizenship programmes in education has real consequences for the type of civic activities and engagement we encourage, and indeed the type of society we imagine, this requires further investigation. Whilst a review of policy reveals a desire to establish giving and helping behaviours as a 'habit', with the Civil Society Strategy identifying schools as a vital space for cultivating these civic behaviours, there is very little knowledge or research about what is happening in schools or indeed what good practice looks like, especially within the primary school context. Coupled with this, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to calls from the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation to 'commit to strengthen education as a common good', and to 'promote student, youth and children's participation and rights in the co-construction of desirable change'.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to produce a timely, comprehensive study about how, what, and why primary school children are encouraged (or not) to participate in charity, voluntary action, social action, campaigning and advocacy through active civic engagement opportunities. In doing so, it explores what schools are trying to teach children about active civic engagement, how is such learning implemented and to what ends.

This research report documents the findings from the first phase of the three-year research project, Educating for Public Good, which seeks to map active civic engagement opportunities for primary school children across England, gathering data through a large-scale national teacher survey and in-depth questionnaire. The second phase (2023) of the research project actively engages 100 teacher's voices to gather rich data on their lived experiences of delivering active civic engagement opportunities – the Part 2 research report will be published in January 2024. The final phase of research (2024) includes participatory action research with children themselves, to explore their lived experiences of these opportunities – the Part 3 research report will be published in January 2025.

We hope that the benefits of the research are far-reaching: as well as advancing theoretical knowledge, we hope the empirical evidence will support school curriculum development, teacher training and the development of positive civic engagement activities within schools, to benefit children, communities, and democratic participation. We hope the research will also benefit the multiple stakeholders involved in civic learning, including charities delivering philanthropic, citizenship and social action programmes and their funders, by providing rich, valuable and unique data to assist in programme construction and targeting resources.

⁸ Body, A. (2022) *Rapid Research Review into Civic Socialisation Amongst Pre-Secondary School Aged Children*, Institute of Community Studies.

Executive summary

This research project seeks to understand, how is active civic learning encouraged in primary schools in England, and is there equity in access to giving and civic engagement opportunities for children? Across two surveys we asked over 2,000 primary school teachers their views and experiences of active civic learning in primary schools. We found three, overarching key messages:

1

Primary school educators are committed to facilitating children's active civic learning; however, distribution of opportunities is uneven: children from more privileged communities have greater access to opportunities to develop their civic skills and practice their civic-ness. This suggests, from an early age, these children are more likely to be prepared for civic life than those from disadvantaged backgrounds, thus potentially cementing inequalities in civic education from early on. This raises significant challenges for education policy and practice and calls for greater attention to be paid to civic learning for all in early and middle childhood.

2

The majority of civic engagement activities within primary schools are discussed within a contributory, personally responsible approach.

This approach encourages acts of responsibility in the community, such as giving to charity, and assumes solving social and environmental issues requires individualised responses, potentially overlooking the need for active, collective participation and critical challenge of established systems, and risks denying children the opportunity to develop skills to consider more critical pathways to change. We call for greater attention to be paid to participatory and justice orientated approaches to engaging children in civic activities within primary education.

3

Active civic learning does not sit within a vacuum, it reflects lived experiences, situated within an ecosystem of communities, civic actors, civil society and social structures – some of which perpetuate inequality, which children are experiencing in their everyday lives. Teachers are simultaneously encouraging active civic engagement to tackle social issues whilst supporting children with lived experiences of these issues. We call for greater recognition of the importance of teachers as civic leaders and co-producers of active civic learning which is embedded in lived experiences, collectively working with children, families, communities and civil society organisations to co-produce responses to social issues in a democratic way.

We raised four central research questions, here we briefly outline core findings of each:

1 What active civic learning is happening in schools?

- **Active Civic learning is viewed as a priority:** Most primary school teachers feel civic learning activities should be prioritised within the school curriculum.
- **Active Civic learning is embedded in school values:** Whilst we find ideas of charity and civic engagement a deeply embedded norm within school values, these values are shaped by multiple different factors, such as charity, religiosity, character, social justice and enterprise.
- **Giving money is the most common form of active civic learning activity:** Most civic engagement activities within primary schools are situated around the giving of money, such as fundraising for national campaigns, fundraising directly for the school or for local community projects.
- **There are significant regional differences in civic learning activities:** Active civic engagement activities are not equally spread across the country, for example schools situated within the North-west are more likely to engage children in school and community focused activities than all other areas, whereas schools in London are the most likely to offer no active civic engagement opportunities.

2 How are civic learning activities discussed and enacted in schools, and by whom?

- **Civic engagement opportunities are mainly framed within a contributory approach, with little opportunity for critical engagement and debate.** For example, when giving money to charity, only one quarter of children are encouraged to debate issues of inequality and social justice associated with that giving. Justice orientated approaches to civic engagement activities are the least likely pedagogical approach to be adopted in primary schools.
- **External organisations are often relied on to help deliver civic learning opportunities:** Civil society organisations play an important role in supporting schools delivering active civic learning opportunities. Over half of primary schools rely on external organisations to support their active civic engagement opportunities. When schools engage in partnerships with external organisations, they are more likely to report adopting participatory and justice orientated approaches within the classroom.
- **There is little pupil participation in decision making:** Children are frequently informed about giving and issues of social and environmental justice, however participation in decision making is less common and normally limited to spaces such as the school council.

3 What impact do teacher's characteristics have on approaches to civic learning in the classroom?

- **Teachers are civically active, particularly older and more experienced teachers:** Primary school teachers overall are more civically active than the general population, with older teachers (those 50+ years) being the most civically engaged.
- **Teachers civic activities align with school approach:** We find a positive relationship between teachers own civic activities and how teachers identify the schools teaching approach to active civic learning. The more a teacher engages in participatory or justice-orientated activities, the more likely they are to say their school adopts a participatory and/or justice-orientated pedagogical approach to this learning.

4 Is there equity in access to active civic learning opportunities?

- **There are more opportunities for active civic learning in more affluent school communities:** Children within more affluent school communities have significantly more access to active civic engagement opportunities than children within more deprived school communities.
- **Time and financial constraints are a significant barrier, particularly in disadvantaged school communities:** Finding time to fit active civic engagement opportunities into the curriculum and the financial constraints faced by families are the biggest barriers faced by schools in facilitating civic engagement opportunities. The most disadvantaged schools, both by levels of deprivation and OFSTED rating, face the most barriers to engaging children in active civic learning opportunities
- **Private schools are more likely to adopt justice orientated frameworks:** Children attending private school have increased access to active civic engagement opportunities, are more likely to frame these ideas within justice orientated frameworks and teachers report they are significantly less likely to experience barriers to engagement.

Underpinning all of this we find primary school teachers are increasingly concerned about the cost-of-living crisis on children within their school, and in response taking civic action themselves to support the most disadvantaged children and families.

Implications for practice, policy and research

Practice

- Reframe active civic learning within primary schools to embrace participatory and justice orientated approaches.
- Reconceptualise teachers as civic leaders, as co-producers of civic knowledge who work collectively in partnership with children to help create social change.
- Maximise opportunities for civil society organisations and primary schools to co-produce civic learning in schools.

Policy

- Challenge conventional wisdom which suggests adolescence is the phase in which people obtain civic, political, and social orientations and competencies, and reflect this in policy.
- Policy frameworks need to consider how to support and encourage active civic learning opportunities across the primary curriculum in order to help equalise learning before children enter secondary school.

Research

- There is little empirical ground for the sole focus on adolescence, and earlier phases of childhood have been consistently overlooked within civic socialisation research and literature. We suggest greater attention is paid to early and middle childhood as part of the civic journey, including the role of parents, communities and children themselves in cultivating civic journeys, and the implications of early civic socialisation on citizenship behaviours across the life course.

In conclusion, as research and literature tells us, we know increased pro-active civic engagement at a young age leads to propensity to engage in pro-civic behaviours when older, however our data suggests, that unlike adolescents who have access to wider scale and established civic education programmes, opportunities for children's engagement in active civic learning are uncoordinated, unequal, and commonly not rooted in evidence-based practice, with children from lower socio-economic school communities experiencing fewer opportunities for active civic engagement. There is also a lack of common practice in adopting participatory and justice-oriented approaches when engaging children in active civic opportunities which is likely to impact their future citizenship engagement. An active focus by practitioners, policy makers and researchers on addressing these gaps will help improve younger children's frequency to participate in and access to high quality active civic engagement learning opportunities and will likely have positive impact on future civic engagement.

Background

We start by considering previous research which informs ideas of civic learning in primary schools. Here we very briefly summarise a comprehensive review of literature of active civic education among primary aged children⁹.

Active civic engagement: Philanthropic citizenship and civic engagement

It is important to start out by being clear about how we view active civic engagement and how we have defined it within this research. Within the research project overall we focus on the concept of philanthropic citizenship as a part of the civic learning journey. We define philanthropic citizenship as a form of citizenship behaviour, associated with intentions and actions that intend to produce social and/or environmental benefits for example helping others, volunteering, social action, charitable giving, advocacy and activism¹⁰.

Our reason for this focus is children's first engagement with ideas of justice, supporting others and our role as citizens is often through the lens of helping others via charity¹¹ – this is very wide ranging, for example it can be through acts of kindness in the classroom, giving to charity or debating ideas through stories and play. We use this lens of philanthropic citizenship to explore a facet of civic learning in primary schools, and broadly refer to this as active civic engagement activities. We are interested in finding out, how are these acts framed, how are children encouraged and engaged to become active citizens through this lens and what type of citizenship are we encouraging through these activities. We are also interested in which children are benefiting from civic engagement opportunities and who is leading these opportunities.

Westheimer¹³ argues that school programmes which hope to develop the personally responsible citizen, who contributes to society, are commonly framed within an individualised framework, but often fail in increasing children's participation in local and national civic life. Equally, Westheimer's research shows that programmes that emphasise participatory citizenship do not necessarily develop children's skills to critique root causes of social problems. Meanwhile, school programmes which focus on critiquing the root causes of social problems, without participatory involvement, are unlikely to increase civic engagement. Westheimer argues that to increase civic engagement school programmes should focus on participatory action, combined with critiquing root causes of social problems.

Given the evidence, we argue that the choices schools and communities make about the type of civic learning programme offered to children have real and lasting consequences for children's learning opportunities, and ultimately for the type of citizens and society we create. Therefore, within this research we determine the extent to which teachers and schools utilise Westheimer's three models of citizenship education, and whether type of programme adopted differs regionally, and according to local school community.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004)¹² described three models of citizenship and civic engagement for children and young people:

The individualised citizen (contributory)

- Acts responsibly in his/her community.
- Obeys rules and follows laws.
- Recycles, gives to charity, gives blood, etc.
- Volunteers to 'lend a hand' in crisis.
- Gives to a food bank.

The participatory citizen (participatory)

- Active member of community organisations and/or improvement efforts.
- Organises community efforts to care for those in need.
- Engages in collective tasks.
- Organises a food drive.

The justice oriented citizen (justice orientated)

- Critically assess social, political and economic structures to see beyond surface causes.
- Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice.
- Knows about democratic social movements and how to effect systemic change, for example challenge food poverty.

Figure 1: Three models of citizenship adapted from Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

9 Body, A (2022) *Rapid Research Review into Civic Socialisation Amongst Pre-Secondary School Aged Children*, University of Kent.

10 Body A (2021) *Teaching Philanthropic Citizenship. Compact Guide*. London: Chartered College of Teaching.

11 Body, A., Lau, E., & Josephidou, J. (2020). Engaging children in meaningful charity: Opening-up the spaces within which children learn to give. *Children & Society*, 34(3), 189–203

12 Westheimer J, & Kahne J (2004) What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal* 41(2): 237–269.

13 Westheimer, J., (2015). *What kind of citizen?: Educating our children for the common good*. Teachers College Press.

Overview of active civic engagement in England

Whilst well discussed in youth studies, to date, little research has focused on the active civic engagement activities of younger children. In practice, primary aged children regularly engage, to various degrees, in programmes of kindness, giving and social action within schools¹⁴. Civil society organisations often play a crucial part in co-constructing this learning with schools, from developing fundraising packs for schools (eg Children in Need, Comic Relief, NSPCC), to forming partnerships at a local community level to facilitate children doing 'good' in their local community (eg working with the local foodbank); and creating, advocating, facilitating and providing opportunities for children to engage in social action and civic learning programmes (eg RSA, Young Citizens, Linking Network, Kindness UK, First Give etc).

As we witness a groundswell in this activity, often funded by philanthropic foundations, critical examination of what is being taught, why it is being taught and what opportunities are being afforded to whom remains unclear. The known research into children's civic engagement suggests that children are often willing and generous with their time, talents and treasure and supporting others is a 'deeply rooted norm' in younger children¹⁵. Research with young adolescents reveals young people are positive about charity and voluntary action, with high expectations of charities and civil society to solve social ills¹⁶. Theoretical understandings of children's civic behaviours, often concerned with children's pro-sociality, tend to come from two different bodies of research; some assuming that civic behaviours are driven by situational factors whilst others focus on the individual characteristics of children, highlighting intrinsic ideas of kindness and empathy. Importantly research consistently highlights the positive role of giving and social action programmes within schools in increasing children's propensity to give and civically participate¹⁷, with schools providing a vital space for the development of these philanthropic and civic behaviours¹⁸.

A focus on primary schools

While there is a broad and substantial literature on adolescent and adult civic engagement it is widely acknowledged that there is a general lack of research and evidence-based literature relating to children's civic socialisation and learning, especially within the context of England and the wider UK. Conversely however, educational, social and developmental psychology theory and research consistently highlights middle childhood and the primary school years (ages 4–11 years) as crucial in the development and normalisation of civic behaviours¹⁹. This mismatch is concerning and calls for urgent attention to be paid to pre-secondary school aged children's civic socialisation.

There are multiple studies which highlight the early and pre-secondary school years as at least equally important in cultivating children's civic behaviours as that of secondary and higher education²⁰. Within the earliest stages of childhood, considered here as the first five years, researchers tend to agree that the brain undergoes faster growth than any other period in life²¹, thus this period is important in learning and development²². This continues into the primary school years, with research suggesting children are keen to engage in philanthropic and civic behaviours²³. Research investigating children's normative expectations through experiments testing their assumptions around the fair distribution of resources, found ideas of charity and giving are deeply rooted norms within children aged 3 to 6 years old, with older children (5–6 year olds) particularly active in seeking fair distribution of resources, prioritising gifting resources to those in the experiment who were considered to be less wealthy. Such findings are echoed by others²⁴. For example, research suggests prosocial behaviours, that is behaviours that are intended to help others, such as comforting and helping are displayed early in life, and the frequency and the complexity of these behaviours increases during the primary school years; whilst studies looking at sharing tendencies have shown that 3–4- and 7–8-year-olds are willing to share things such as toys and food, the number of children who share and the number of resources they give increases with age²⁵.

14 Body, A (2022) *Rapid Research Review into Civic Socialisation Amongst Pre-Secondary School Aged Children*, University of Kent.

15 Wörle, M., & Paulus, M. (2018). Normative expectations about fairness: The development of a charity norm in preschoolers. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 165, 66–84.

16 Power, S., & Taylor, C. (2018). The mainstreaming of charities into schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 44(6), 702–715.

17 Body, A., Lau, E., & Josephidou, J. (2020). Engaging children in meaningful charity: Opening-up the spaces within which children learn to give. *Children & Society*, 34(3), 189–203

18 Power, S., & Taylor, C. (2018). The mainstreaming of charities into schools. *Oxford Review of Education*, 44(6), 702–715.

19 Taylor-Collins, E., Harrison, T., Thoma, S.J. & Moller, F. (2019). 'A Habit of Social Action: Understanding the Factors Associated with Adolescents Who Have Made a Habit of Helping Others', *Voluntas*, 30(1), pp. 98–114

20 Van Deth, J. W., Abendschon, S., & Vollmar, M. (2011). Children and politics: An empirical reassessment of early political socialization. *Political Psychology*, 32, 147–173.

21 OECD. (2019). *TALIS Starting Strong 2018 Technical Report*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

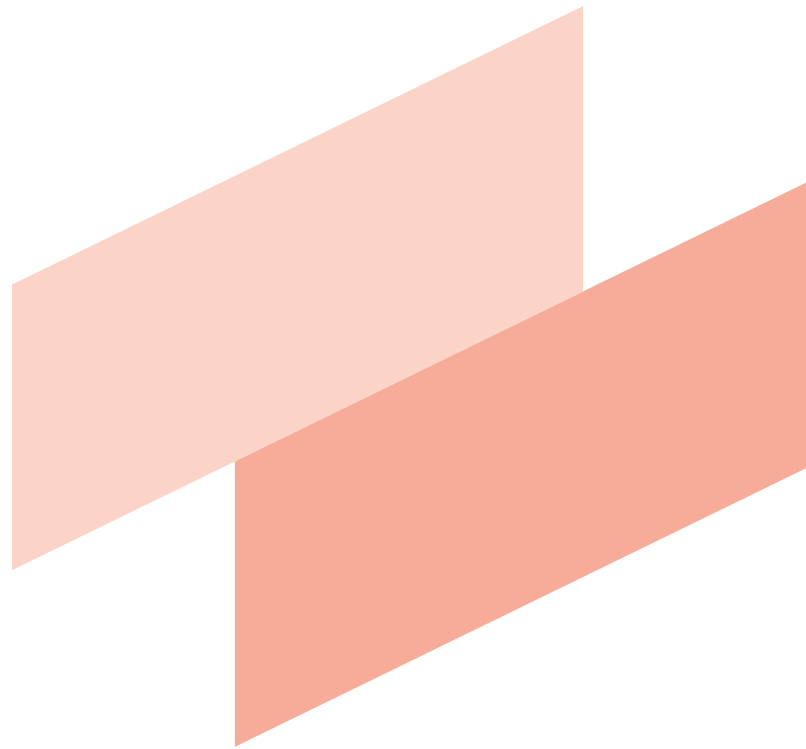
22 Spiteri, J. (2020). "Early Childhood Education for Sustainability." In *Quality Education. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*, edited by W. Leal Filho; A. Azul, L. Brandli, P. Ozuyar, and T. Wall. Cham: Springer

23 Power, S., & Smith, K. (2016). Giving, saving, spending: What would children do with £1 million? *Children & Society*, 30(3), 192–203.

24 Wörle, M., & Paulus, M. (2018). Normative expectations about fairness: The development of a charity norm in preschoolers. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 165, 66–84.

25 Paulus, M. & Moore, C. (2012). Chapter 8 – Producing and understanding prosocial actions in early childhood. In J. B. Benson (Ed.), *Advances in child development and behavior*, JAI (Vol. 42), Elsevier.

In addition, when it comes to political literacy multiple studies highlight younger children as politically knowledgeable. For example, a panel study of 700 children in Germany in their first year of school (age 6-7 years) highlighted young children as capable of expressing political opinions and attitudes, displaying key basic political knowledge and orientations which are considered to be prerequisites of political involvement and participation. Nonetheless they also found that even at this earliest stage 'the basic requirements for political involvement such as political knowledge, competences, and normative orientations are far from equally distributed'²⁶. Children from ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic areas show relatively less developed political orientations, and they do not improve as much over the school year as other children, without specific intervention. These findings are likely to resonate across similar educational contexts and challenge conventional wisdom that adolescence is where children and young people gain political orientations and competencies. Research therefore suggests that the middle childhood period is a critical age for civic learning²⁷.



26 Van Deth, J. W., Abendschon, S., & Vollmar, M. (2011). Children and politics: An empirical reassessment of early political socialization. *Political Psychology, 32*, P.166

27 Van Deth, J. W., Abendschon, S., & Vollmar, M. (2011). Children and politics: An empirical reassessment of early political socialization. *Political Psychology, 32*, 147-173.

Methods

This research report documents the findings from the first phase of a three-year research project. This phase uses data gathered through a large-scale national teacher survey and in-depth questionnaire and seeks to answer the following research question: 'How is active civic learning encouraged in primary schools in England, and is there equity in access to giving and civic engagement opportunities for children?'

Sources of data collection

1 In-depth questionnaire

Between May and July 2022, we received 537 individual questionnaire responses from teachers, support staff and school leaders across England to our 20-minute online questionnaire that mapped out primary school activities and young children's active civic learning experiences. Data consisted of qualitative and quantitative responses. An online, in-depth Qualtrics questionnaire was deemed the most appropriate tool and ethical approval was secured from the University of Kent's Ethics Committee. The survey was designed with a range of multiple choice and open questions with opportunities for follow up. The survey was distributed through social media networks, school emails and through partnership organisations. The survey included questions on the types of civic activities facilitated in schools including fundraising for national charities, social action projects and working in partnership with local charities, the way these activities were facilitated and resourced including partnership work, as well as gathering data about which children participated.

2 Wide-scale survey

In July 2022, informed by the in-depth survey we used the online survey tool Teacher Tapp to collect data around six key questions looking at school approaches and activities related to civic learning opportunities. Teacher Tapp is a daily survey app that asks teachers questions each day and reweights the results to make them representative. Raw data from 1682 primary teachers in England was analysed to gain a wider picture of what civic and philanthropic learning activities were happening across the country, teachers' perceptions on the value of learning about civic activities, barriers and opportunities within the curriculum and wider activities of the school.

Analysing the data

Data analysis was completed by a team of academics, the authors of this report. A range of analytical approaches were adopted including thematic analysis of qualitative data and descriptive statistical analysis using Excel. Statistical analysis of key variables was carried out using the software package R. Data has been analysed alongside socio-economic factors (using Free School Meal (FSM) data as a proxy indicator for socio-economic status of the school community), geographical location at regional-level, and specific school characteristics such as school type, governance and OFSTED rating. Teacher characteristics such as age, experience and civic participation have also been explored alongside the types, variety and number of civic engagement opportunities within schools.

Presentation of data

We utilise and present the in-depth questionnaire and wide-scale survey data under each of the core research questions. Where specific data is cited, we indicate the source of that data via the use of asterisks as follows:

Data source	Asterisks
In-depth questionnaire	*
Wide-scale survey	**

All qualitative data and comments included in the report are directly from teachers as captured in the in-depth anonymised questionnaire.

Caveats

As with all research there are caveats in interpretation of the data. It is important to note throughout this report we are reporting on teachers' perceptions of what happens in their schools, from their perspective. We consider this the most reliable way of gaining access to wide-scale mapping of civic engagement activities but acknowledge that our findings are based on teachers' subjective experiences. Utilisation of separate surveys and questionnaires, each containing multiple, but similar, questions to answer our central research questions helps ensure robustness of the analysis.

Context

Context is always important within research processes. This research data was collected between May and July 2022, asking teachers and school practitioners to reflect back on activities over the past year. This reveals the reality of a very challenging few years for education managing Covid-19 restrictions, alongside a period of economic challenges for many families, communities and schools themselves.

Even in the short few months between data collection and publication of this report, events have led to dramatic increases to living costs and imminent cuts to budgets²⁸. This has caused tremendous precarity and instability for families and communities across England, and as this data presents, this plays out within the walls of Primary School classrooms across England. It has become common, alongside a backdrop of rapid political shifts and alarming forecasts, to see schools included in news headlines that warn of *‘the education crisis looming’*²⁹ where *‘Families who have never required support before are coming to us’*³⁰. This not only has an impact on the opportunities available for children’s active civic learning, the focus of this study, but critically it changes the context in which children experience inequality and associated collective responses.

The landscape of rising costs and reductions in school funding (per pupil) is not a new issue, despite the heightened media attention. The data collected in this research project supports other research collected over the past decade that has shown how primary schools have been faced with the dual challenge of balancing their own school budget while simultaneously facing increasing calls to support their school communities. Research conducted by the University of Kent in 2016 and 2018 showed a dramatic increase in the number of senior leaders within primary schools reporting that they rely on fundraised income to help provide core school services, rising from 28% in 2016 to 47% in 2018³¹. Unfortunately, this trend did not lead to equality across the area, while some schools in Southeast England were able to fundraise as much as £588 per pupil, per year, others were as low as 12p. In short, as schools increasingly fundraise for their own core services, levels of inequality increase, with schools in wealthier areas fundraising substantially more than those in more deprived areas.

Pressure on school funding also leads to difficult decisions about which activities a primary school can still provide. For example, research in this report shows how children who attend schools in areas of higher socio-economic advantage have more opportunities to engage in civic learning and activities, than children from lower socio-economic areas.

Research continues to explore the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and cuts in funding on education as schools are increasingly required to play a larger part in providing ‘basic needs’ help to families such as securing an adequate supply of food or accessing support services. Research collected during the pandemic shows how primary schools are left to support families who are no longer being adequately supported by the UK’s welfare and social services system³².

To summarise, this research was conducted amidst a backdrop of political turmoil, and economic strife, as families, communities, and school struggle to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, amidst the developing cost-of-living crisis, which impacted and continues to impact the opportunities afforded to children, particularly in our most deprived communities. This inevitably will have shaped our teachers’ responses as they themselves, and the schools and communities they work within, face these significant challenges.

28 <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/school-spending-and-costs-coming-crunch> Accessed 4th November 2022

29 <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/teachers-education-funding-cuts-crisis-schools-liz-truss-open-letter-1897542> Accessed 4th November 2022

30 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/oct/22/exclusive-90-of-uk-schools-will-go-bust-next-year-heads-warn2>) Accessed 4th November 2022

31 Body, A. and Hogg, E., (2022). Collective co-production in English public services: the case of voluntary action in primary education. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 13(2), pp.243-259.

32 Moss, G; Allen, R; Bradbury, A; Duncan, S; Harmey, S; Levy, R; (2020) Primary teachers’ experience of the Covid-19 lockdown – Eight key messages for policymakers going forward. UCL Institute of Education: London, UK.

Findings

Research question 1 – What civic learning is happening in schools?

Do primary schools prioritise active civic learning?*

Using charitable giving, social action and voluntary action as a proxy indicator of active civic engagement activities in schools, we asked primary school teachers to what extent they prioritised civic engagement activities within schools**. We found that 76% of all primary school teachers agreed or strongly agreed that civic engagement activities relating to charity should be embedded within the primary school curriculum. This figure is relatively consistent across all state schools, regardless of OFSTED, FSM data, school governance type or teachers own personal characteristics, such as age, gender and years teaching. This is supported by several other recent research projects, which highlight teachers' commitment to civic learning in schools³³ and that educators care deeply about making a difference to children's lives³⁴.

We also asked teachers where they felt active civic learning sat within the school curriculum*. Responses show there is little consistency in approaches within primary schools, with just over one quarter of teachers viewing active civic learning as part of PSHE. Whilst just over one quarter of teachers view civic learning as something which happens across the curriculum, this activity mainly took place as part of whole school assemblies or collective worship.

Where does civic learning fit within the curriculum?*

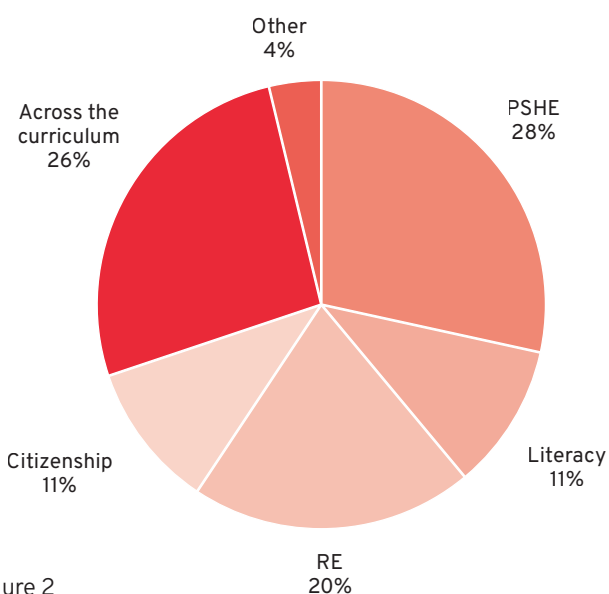


Figure 2

33 Peterson, A., Civil, D., McLoughlin, S. & Moller, F. (2022) Schools, Civic Virtues and the Good Citizen. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham.

34 Breeze, H. (2022) What are educators' experiences supporting youth social action? RSA. <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2022/11/youth-social-action-primary-school-teachers-educators>

Overall, this is great news, as we find a workforce largely committed to facilitating children's active civic learning and nurturing a desire to support others. Nonetheless, we also see a lack of consistency about where this learning sits within the curriculum.

How do charitable actions fit with school values?*

Within our in-depth survey we asked teachers how ideas of civic engagement, such as supporting charity and helping others, fitted within their school values. We found ideas of charity and active civic engagement as deeply embedded norms within school values. However, the reasons for this were often linked to a range of different values, such as ideas of religiosity and faith, alongside ideas of character and enterprise.

For example, over one-third (34%) of the teachers reported that schools root the idea of charity in religiosity and faith:

“We recognise that, as a faith school, it is a central part of our vision to support the marginalised of society.”

“As a church school we link to the gospel values and root giving in the story of the Good Samaritan.”

“The school sees this as an important aspect due to the Islamic ethos of the school, as charity is one of the pillars of Islam.”

“As a school, we are restricted in the charities we choose – (we support) no charities that go against the Catholic Church's teachings.”

Whereas over half of the respondents (53%) frame ideas of teaching charity as an expression of character education and service to others. Given recent government and OFSTED focus on character education this is perhaps unsurprising:

“We have a character based curriculum with neighbourliness being a key part of our curriculum, this focuses on our community and volunteering/charity work etc. We have done focus charity days but this is now more embedded within our curriculum across the year rather than one off events.”

// We have adopted ‘character education’. We have 30-character muscles we encourage the children to exercise. Children learn about their rights and responsibilities. In order to benefit from something you need to give... having equal balance. We have an achievement assembly weekly recognising children’s character strengths. //

// We have a character virtue called ‘service’ where the children organise and complete acts of service for the local area. //

Though rarer, some schools (21%), discussed ideas of teaching charity in terms of social justice and collective action:

// We have tried to move away from charitable giving towards social action. So, for example on Children in Need day we ran a Day of Social Justice in school and tried to help the children to understand that although charity helps, social justice can change things so that charity is no longer needed. //

// We encourage the children to lead and coordinate these events. Children are also part of a crew team across school where they meet once a week to discuss local and global issues or reflect on questions which allows them opportunity to think about being an active citizen and what changes they could make to make a difference. //

// Our curriculum is grounded in social justice and equality. For example, children learn about key figures both in the past and the present who have used their voice to affect social change for good. //

What type of active civic engagement activities do schools facilitate?*

Majority of civic engagement activities are framed around contributing money. Less than half of primary school children have access to opportunities to engage in social action.

We wanted to understand what sort of civic engagement opportunities children are encouraged to participate in within school, under the banner of charitable activities, community engagement, social action, campaigning and advocacy. Looking at national trends through the large-scale survey we observed that 92%** of primary schools engage children in at least one of these at least once a year. As we can see from Figure 3 below, fundraising for school funds (such as school fairs) remains the most common form of charitable engagement, followed closely by engagement in national campaigns (such as Children in Need). This shows us that the majority of active civic engagement activities within primary schools are situated around the idea of giving money. Local community engagement is still popular but somewhat less common, with around half of schools supporting local community projects and charities through fundraising and social action. Campaigning and protesting are the least likely activities to take place in primary schools.

We see similar trends in the in-depth questionnaire, which highlights a particular focus on in-house and internally focused activity. For example, 98%* of teachers report that children frequently engage in acts of helping and giving within the school, such as helping younger students. Whereas externally focused activities, such as writing to a local MP or participating in social action projects is less common, with less than half of the teachers (44%*) surveyed in the in-depth survey reporting that children are often facilitated or encouraged to engage in these activities.

What activities have children participate in at school at least once in the past year?

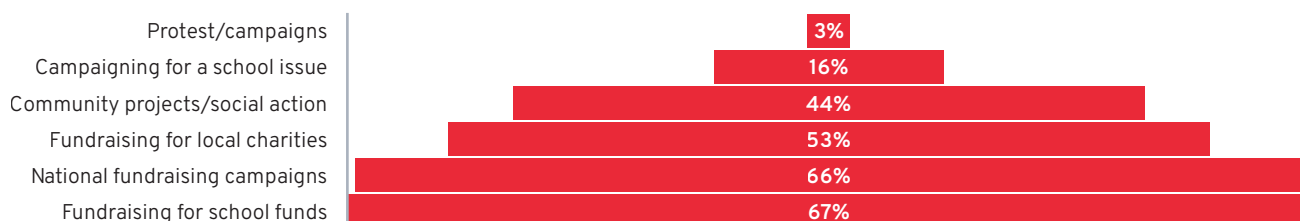


Figure 3

Indeed, when we asked schools to provide examples of active civic engagement activities over two thirds of the schools cite examples of dominant fundraising national campaigns such as Children in Need and Comic Relief. Furthermore, and perhaps most worryingly, in response to the cost-of-living crisis (see pages 27-29 for more detail) around 30% of the teachers cite supporting their local community with activities such as regularly supporting foodbanks, with several teachers stating that their school has established its own fundraising activities and foodbanks to support children and families within their own school community in response to rising costs of living and the challenges faced by children and families:

- // We have free food available to all of our families and often provide bags to get families through the weekend or holiday period. //
- // Food bank collections – we do this more regularly rather than just at harvest now. //
- // Lots of our support goes into supporting our own families in our community. We cannot ask for regular donations as we serve a highly disadvantaged community. //

Are these activities equally spread across the country?*

We now consider the distribution of activities across England. In Figure 4 below we present the responses by teachers to each activity to demonstrate a cumulative effect across areas. What we see here is that, when taking all the activities into account, children attending schools in the East of England are the least likely to have the opportunity to participate in active civic engagement activities, whereas children attending schools in the Northwest are most likely to have opportunities to engage in some form of voluntary action*.

Active civic engagement activities are not equally spread across the country.

When we break this down by specific activities, we see further interesting trends. For example, 52% of teachers in the North-west report engaging children in community projects, compared to just 38% in the East of England. Alongside this schools in East of England are the least likely to fundraise for local charities or for their own school funds. However, schools in North-west, are the most likely to fundraise for school funds, and alongside primary schools in London, are less likely to report that children participate in national fundraising days. Nonetheless teachers in London schools are the most likely to engage children in campaigning and protest.

Did children in your school engage in any of the following activities once during the last school year?

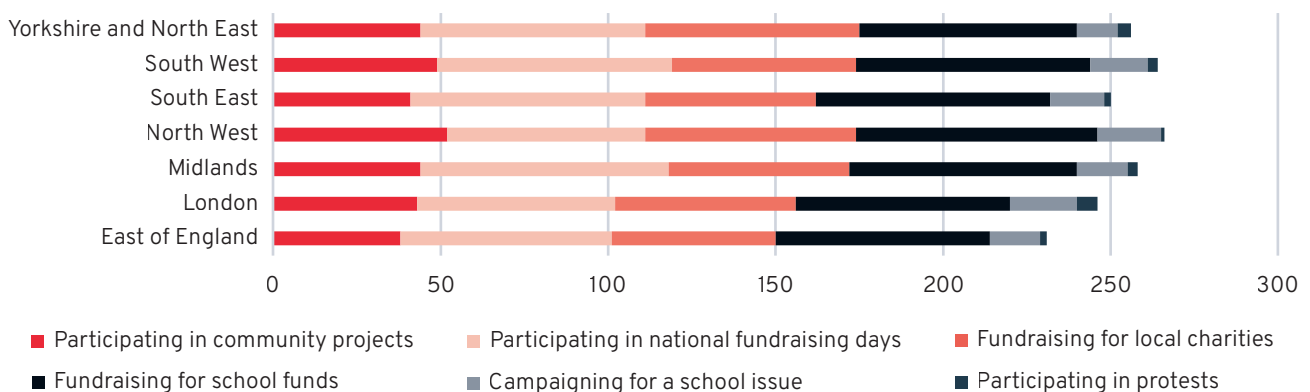


Figure 4

	East of England	London	Midlands	North West	South East	South West	Yorkshire & North East
School focused							
Campaigning for a school issue	15%	20%	15%	19%	16%	17%	12%
Fundraising for school funds	64%	64%	68%	72%	70%	70%	65%
Community focused							
Participating in community projects (social action)	38%	43%	44%	52%	41%	49%	44%
Fundraising for local charities	49%	54%	54%	63%	51%	55%	64%
Beyond local focused							
Participating in protests	2%	6%	3%	1%	2%	3%	4%
Participating in national fundraising days	63%	59%	74%	59%	70%	70%	67%
None of these							
None of these	5%	9%	3%	6%	6%	5%	8%

Grouping these activities by school, community or beyond local focus, we find schools in the North-west, more likely to engage in school focused activities, and community focused activity (this result is also found to be statistically significant). Nonetheless, we also find that schools in the North-west are less likely to engage children in activities which look beyond the school and community. What this suggests is that geographical context matters, however whilst we can observe trends, further research is required to fully understand why these differences occur.

Summary

This first research question seeks to explore what active civic learning is happening in primary schools. In summary this is what we find:

- Most primary school teachers feel civic learning activities should be prioritised within the school's curriculum.
- Whilst we find ideas of charity and civic engagement are deeply embedded norms within school values, these values are shaped by multiple different factors, such as charity, religiosity, character, social justice, collective action and enterprise.
- Most civic engagement activities within primary schools are situated around the giving of money, such as fundraising for national campaigns, fundraising directly for the school or for local community projects.

- Active civic engagement activities are not equally spread across the country, for example schools situated within the North-west are more likely to engage children in school and community focused activities than all other areas, whereas schools in London are the most likely to offer no active civic engagement opportunities.

Research question 2 – How are civic learning activities discussed and enacted in schools, and by whom?

How are ideas of charity as an example of civic engagement framed within primary schools?*

Drawing on Westheimer's framing of citizenship programmes in schools, considering these as contributory, participatory and justice orientated, we now consider what type of active citizenship are we encouraging within primary schools. We presented teachers with a list of potential activities, that map onto the three citizenship education types, and asked teachers to indicate which happened in their schools (see Figure 5 opposite). Teachers could select as many options as they felt were appropriate. Using fundraising as an example of civic engagement (as we know this is one of the most popular activities in primary schools) and an indicator for the type

of citizenship approach within schools, analysis of the large survey data set reveals that 79% of primary schools across England support children to contribute to school fundraising events (we associate this with contributory citizenship programmes), whereas only 52% facilitate children to participate in organising fundraising and campaigning (participatory), and finally just over a quarter, 26%, debate issues of social justice and inequality when engaging children in fundraising (justice orientated)**.

When we compare pedagogical approaches to charity, giving and voluntary action in primary schools, we begin to see certain trends in the way in which schools approach teaching about charity. As Figure 6 below shows, whilst a contributory approach is common in nearly all schools, using Free School Meal³⁵ (FSM) data as a proxy indicator of deprivation, children in the most deprived school communities are consistently less likely to engage in each of the pedagogical approaches than children from more affluent school

communities. Schools could also choose an option of don't know/not relevant, interestingly 16% of teachers in the most deprived school communities selected this option compared to just 6% in the most affluent school communities**.

Engaging in fundraising, as an example of active civic engagement opportunities, is most often framed within a contributory approach, with around just one quarter of children encouraged to debate issues of inequality and social justice when fundraising for charity.

This data suggests that firstly, across the board ideas of charity in school are most commonly framed within a contributory discourse, with less than a third of primary school children encouraged to debate issues of inequality and social justice when engaging in these activities. Children from the most deprived

In our school, our students...

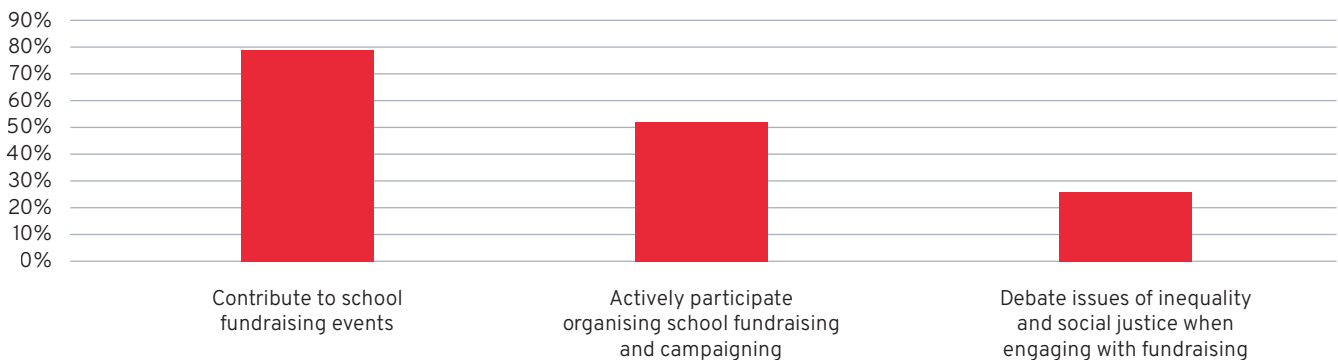


Figure 5

In our school, our students...

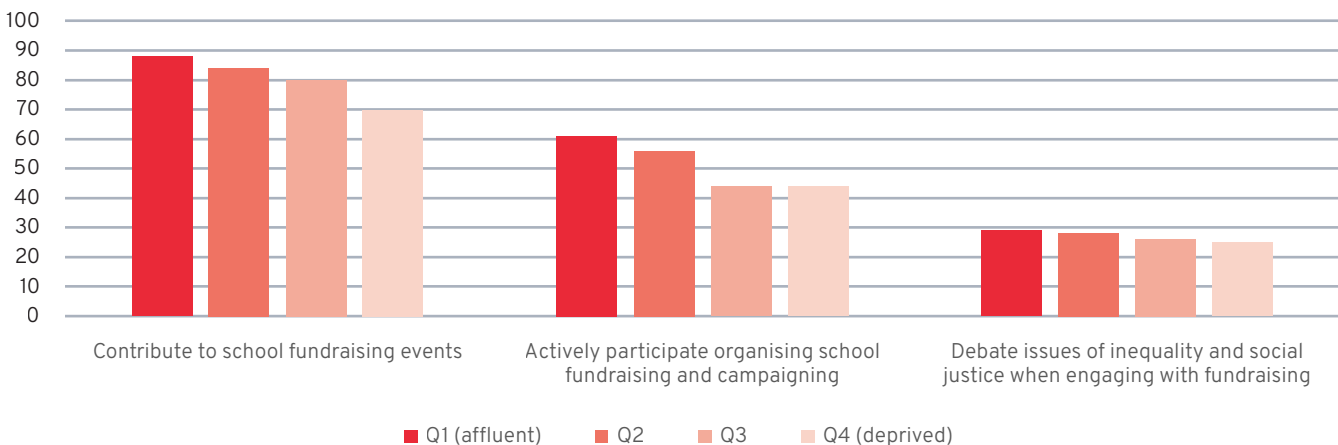


Figure 6

³⁵ FSM data is divided into quartiles – Q1, refers to the 25% of schools with the lowest % of FSM, whereas Q4 refers to the 25% of schools with the highest levels of FSM. This is a useful proxy indicator of deprivation within the school community.

school communities, are the least likely to be asked to contribute, and if asked to contribute are the least likely to be given the opportunity to debate issues related to the charitable cause (statistical analysis of the data shows this finding as significant). Given latter findings discussed in the report detailing teachers concerns about families' financial situations, it is unsurprising that children from the most deprived school communities are less likely to be asked to contribute towards school fundraising events.

Within the in-depth questionnaire, we further probed this question, asking teachers to select one of the descriptors below which they felt best described their school and its activities. Whilst accepting some overlap, teachers were asked to carefully consider and choose the option that most aligned overall with their school's approach. As the table below shows when thinking more broadly about civic engagement activities, when asked to select only one descriptor, primary school teachers report schools adopting a more participatory approach, with only 15% of schools predominantly adopting a justice-orientated approach*.

Descriptors	% of schools
<p>Contributory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are encouraged to recognise their responsibility to their community and society through our school values and teaching. Children are asked to donate time, money or resources at fundraising and community events. Children are rewarded for positive contributions and the positive impact their actions have. 	33
<p>Participatory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children participate when our school plans events and chooses charitable causes. Children are involved in organising fundraising events and the activities. Children are encouraged to think about local and global issues and the ways they could be part of leading long-term change. 	52
<p>Justice-orientated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children have a chance to reflect and debate our school values and the social problems behind some of the causes they support. Children look at the social inequalities behind the issues and we invite organisations in to explain about the impact of their work. Children choose the charities we work with and lead our school's charitable giving. 	15

Overall, this highlights two main things, that just over half of teachers feel their school offers participatory approaches within their civic engagement activities, whilst justice-orientated approaches, which support children to reflect and debate social issues, remain the least likely pedagogical approach adopted within primary schools.

Who is providing the resources for these opportunities?

Within this research we were interested in which resources are being used within primary schools to deliver active civic engagement opportunities. Analysis revealed that over half the teachers (53%) report that their school engages with partners to deliver charitable related civic engagement activities, either through using externally provided resources or working in partnership with external organisations. Just under a quarter use no set resources at all, and just 13% create their own resources**. Examination of the in-depth questionnaires* reveals that these external organisations, whether providing the resources or as working in partnership with schools, are almost exclusively civil society, charitable organisations such as Young Citizens and UNICEF (Rights Respecting Schools) and fundraising organisations. What this suggests is that civil society organisations have an important role to play in supporting schools engaging in these topics and help shape how children are experiencing active civic learning opportunities.

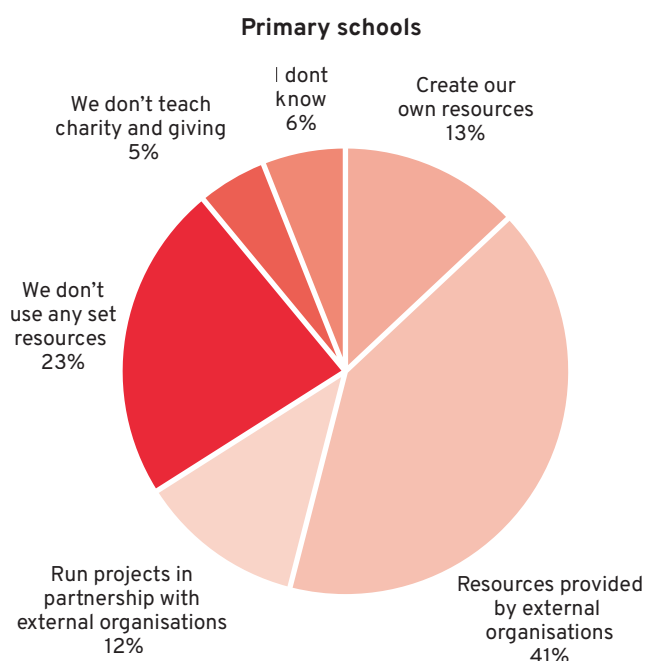


Figure 7

When we break the data down however, we find the use of different resources is not consistent across schools. For example, if we consider OFSTED rating and schools creating their own resources, 16% of schools rated as outstanding reported creating their own resources, versus just 11% of schools rated as requiring improvement or inadequate. Equally 19% of outstanding schools will work in partnership with external organisations to deliver charitable/ social action projects, versus just 11% of schools rated as requiring improvement or inadequate. Conversely, requiring improvement or inadequate schools are more likely (49%) to rely on external organisations to provide teaching resources, when compared with outstanding schools (35%). We also see disparity based on their FSM quartile. Whilst there is little difference between schools which create their own resources and/or run projects in partnership with external organisations based on school's levels of deprivation, we do find that more affluent school communities (Q1 FSM) are more likely to use resources provided by external organisations than the most deprived school communities (Q4 FSM), at 48% versus 37%, this may be due to the fact most resources come at a cost to schools.

Within the in-depth data*, we asked teachers to expand on their relationships with external organisations, providing details on what sort of support external organisations may provide within the school. First, we note that when asking what teacher's feel is most helpful in terms of cultivating civic engagement, 44% of teachers highlighted resources, such as power-points for assemblies, as the most useful support external organisations could provide, whereas 21% valued more active partnerships, such as staff training and support, whilst 14% particularly valued advice and dedicated support from external organisations, such as co-delivery of activities. From this we suggest that external civil society organisations play an important role in supporting schools to deliver active civic engagement opportunities for children.

What role do external organisations play?***

Civil society organisations play an important role in supporting schools delivering active civic learning opportunities. Over half of primary schools rely on external organisations to support their active civic engagement opportunities.

The data highlights that working in partnership with external organisations, such as receiving support in-house and/or staff visits from external organisations or engaging in a set programme of learning activities, as the most significant area of support which helps schools shift from encouraging a contributory approach to more active forms of civic engagement, such as participatory and justice orientated approaches. In Figure 8 below we see some interesting trends in how teachers describe the pedagogy of activities within their schools and the resources used. Here we see where schools work in an active partnership with external organisations, teachers are both more likely to say they offer students the opportunity to actively participate in civic engagement activities, as well as being more likely to offer children the chance to debate the causes which sit behind issues. Interestingly simply using external resources, such as pre-made power-points, shows little difference in schools encouraging participatory approaches than when schools use their own resources, and suggests schools are even less likely to engage children in debate. Using no resources at all is associated with lower levels of participatory and justice orientated engagement.

This suggests an important relationship between civil society organisations and schools in encouraging children's civic engagement when they work in partnership with one another.

Resources used within schools versus pedagogical approaches



Figure 8

Examples of this partnership work ranged from schools engaging in prolonged programmes of activities with organisations, staff training and development support, alongside civil society organisations visiting schools and delivering or co-delivering activities.

Whilst recognising a relationship between these partnerships and the pedagogy adopted within schools, it is however important we do not suggest a causal relationship. It is likely schools who are more willing to explore participatory and justice orientated approaches in civic engagement, will actively seek external partnerships. Equally civil society organisations actively seeking partnerships with schools are more likely to invest in developing materials to allow children to participate and debate social and environmental issues. Furthermore, the lack of relationship between the use of external resources, where teachers cited examples such as assembly power-points, PDF's and most commonly fundraising packs sent as part of large fundraising campaigns, and participatory or justice-orientated approaches is also unsurprising. As explored elsewhere, fundraising campaigns most commonly adopt a contributory approach. Nonetheless, this finding highlights the importance and potential significance of the relationship between civil society organisations and schools in encouraging children's civic engagement.

When schools engage in partnerships with external organisations, they are more likely to report adopting participatory and justice orientated approaches within the classroom.

Are children active participants in giving and civic engagement decisions?*

Exploring the participation of children within active civic engagement, we see that the majority of children are engaged in discussions regarding charitable giving and civic engagement but the frequency of this engagement varies significantly across activity type. For example, when supporting charity, children are commonly made aware of the charitable cause and why it exists, but are less frequently engaged in deciding if they support any particular charity or in critically considering the charitable cause before they decide to support it.

Children are frequently informed about giving and issues of social and environmental justice, however participation in decision making is less common.

It is positive that most children, from the teacher's perspectives, are made aware of who they are giving too, and issues of environmental and social justice are commonly discussed. However only around half of children are frequently engaged in deciding which charities they support. This suggests that whilst children are commonly informed when engaged in giving, a participative role in decision making is less common. Furthermore, previous research directly with children suggests that less than 20% of children are aware of the charitable cause area that sits behind the campaign they are being asked to support, and even less children are afforded decision-making in this giving. This includes a lack of discussion about which causes they support, how they support those causes and why³⁶.

When we engage children in giving...

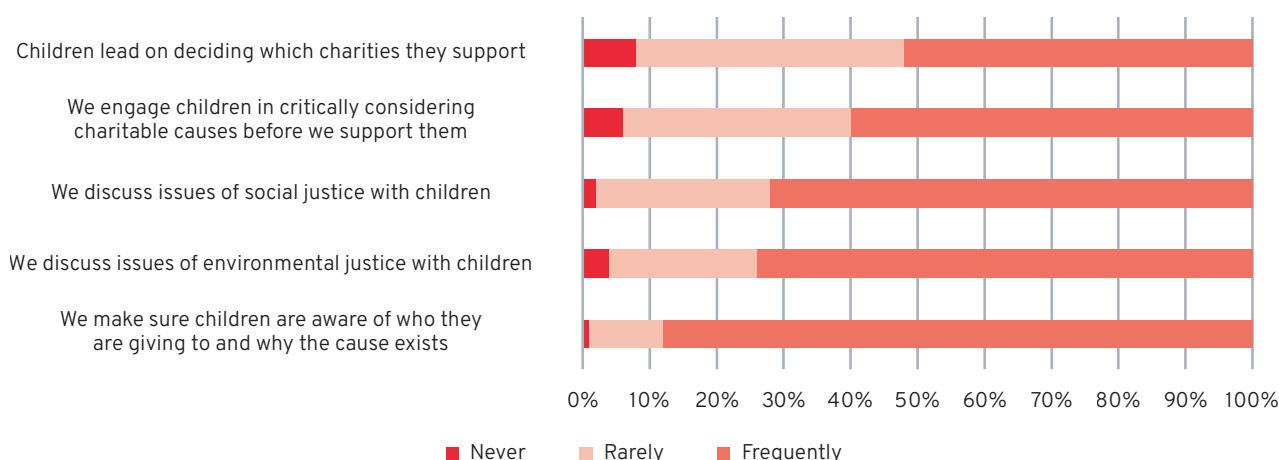


Figure 9

36 Body, A., Lau, E., & Josephidou, J. (2020). Engaging children in meaningful charity: Opening-up the spaces within which children learn to give. *Children & Society*, 34(3), 189–203

Thus, this is an area of research which requires further investigation and raises questions about the quality and meaningfulness of the children's participation in this decision making, as teachers and children's perceptions in research appear to vary.

Interestingly, when asked about rates of active participation in civic engagement activities, whilst 75%* of teachers felt that all children in their school are able to contribute and participate equally in activities involving fundraising, social action and/or advocacy; only around 51% of teachers agreed that *all* children have equal access to decision-making concerning these activities. Furthermore 40% of the teachers felt it was often the same children who were afforded these decision-making opportunities, with around one third of schools purposefully targeting under-represented groups to ensure greater equity in participation. This is likely partly due to the system and structures for participation within the school, such as school councils which were cited as the most common form of participative engagement within the schools and where child-led decision making most commonly takes place. What we find very little evidence of is child-led decision making as part of a wider approach to active civic learning within the curriculum, by this we mean there is little evidence of children setting the agenda in terms of what issues are addressed and why.

Summary

This second research question seeks to explore how active civic learning opportunities are framed within primary schools and by whom. In summary this is what we find:

- Engaging in fundraising, as an example of active civic engagement opportunities, is most commonly framed within a contributory discourse, with around just one quarter of children encouraged to debate issues of inequality and social justice when fundraising.
- Justice orientated approaches to active civic engagement activities are the least likely pedagogical approaches to be adopted in primary schools, with children from the most deprived school communities the least likely to be engaged in participatory and justice-orientated approaches.
- Civil Society organisations play an important role in supporting schools delivering active civic learning opportunities. Over half of primary schools rely on external organisations to support their active civic engagement opportunities. More affluent school communities are more likely to use resources provided by external organisations (most likely as many of these do come at a cost to schools) than more deprived school communities.

- Whilst there is no clear differentiation between favoured pedagogical approaches when schools use resources provided by external organisations versus their own, when schools engage in partnerships with external organisations, they are more likely to report adopting participatory and justice orientated approaches within the classroom.
- According to teachers, in the main children are frequently informed about giving and issues of social and environmental justice, however participation in decision making is less common and normally limited to spaces such as the school council.

Research question 3 – What impact do teacher's own characteristics have on approaches to civic learning in the classroom?

Are primary school teachers civically active?*

Primary school teachers are more civically active than the general population.

As highlighted in research question 1 (page 11), primary school teachers care deeply about supporting children and young people to engage in active civic learning opportunities to help promote social change and improve communities. Recent research by the RSA highlights the importance educators have in their professional role in civil society to help shape children's civic agency alongside educators being agents for change themselves³⁷.

In this set of research questions, we aimed to determine to what extent teachers are civically engaged, and to what extent this and other characteristics (eg age, years' experience and gender) are related to teacher's approaches to civic learning in the classroom.

Our first finding is that primary school teachers are largely a very civically engaged group of individuals, engaging in several active civic behaviours**. To better understand these responses, we can broadly compare some of our teacher data to annual national trends identified in the Charities Aid Foundation 2022 UK Giving Report³⁸, which reports on civic engagement activities across the general UK population³⁹. 86% of primary school teachers report donating money to charity within the last year, compared to 57% of the general population, whilst 34% of teachers reported raising money for charity, compared to 27% of the general population**. Similarly, 5% of teachers report engaging with protests, compared to 4% of the general population**.

37 Breeze, H. (2022) What are educators' experiences supporting youth social action? RSA. <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2022/11/youth-social-action-primary-school-teachers-educators>

38 CAF (2022) *Charitable Giving Research UK Giving Report 2022*. Charities Aid Foundation

39 It should be noted that this does come with the caveat that the questions asked were worded slightly differently and did not cover the exact same geographic areas, so comparisons are proxy indicators of behaviours at best rather than absolutes.

% of Teachers who have engaged in civic activities within the last year

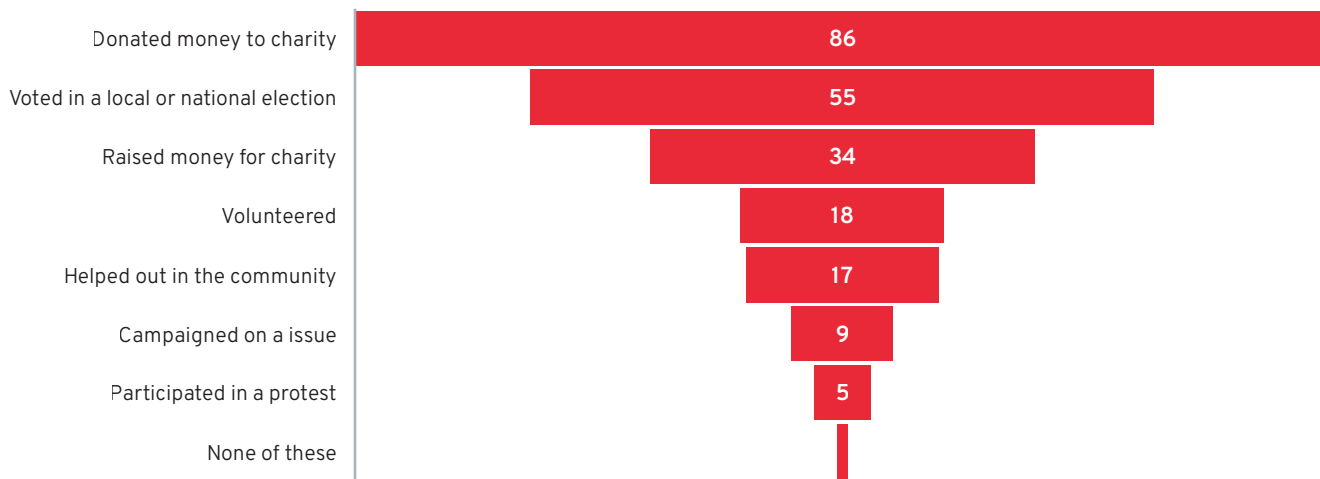


Figure 10

This suggests teachers are a core group in civil society, and potentially well equipped to help support children’s civic learning.

Interestingly however only 18%** of teachers said they had volunteered in the past year, compared to 37% of the general population (see Figure 10 above). We find this somewhat a surprising figure as some of our own previous research⁴⁰ found teachers to be one of the most common volunteers within their own schools, with over a third regularly giving their free time up to undertake additional activities, beyond their teaching role, within schools, nonetheless rarely recognising this as volunteering, therefore we suggest this figure is lower than the reality. However, this also may be due to time constraints given rising pressure on teacher’s workloads, and restrictions due to Covid-19.

We also find age matters, consistent with the statistics on the wider population, older teachers (those aged 50+ years) are more likely to donate to charity, volunteer and participate in protests and campaigns than their younger colleagues.

Do teacher’s own civic activities impact what happens in the classroom?***

We sought to develop an understanding of whether teacher’s individual activities related to civic engagement including donating to charity and voting in elections (which we classify as a contributory approach); volunteering (participatory approach); and campaigning and advocating for causes (justice orientated approach) were related to the pedagogical approaches adopted in the classroom.

The more a teacher engages in participatory or justice-orientated activities in their own personal life, the more likely they are to say their school adopts a participatory and/or justice-orientated pedagogical approach.

Our main finding here is that the more civically engaged a teacher is in their own life, the more likely they are to report that they adopt participatory, or justice orientated approaches within the classroom. For example, when teachers regularly engage in more participatory approaches, such as volunteering, they are 14% more likely to report adopting participatory approaches in their schools, and 12% more likely to adopt justice orientated approaches than teachers who do not engage in these activities. Similarly, teachers who engage in justice orientated civic activities within their own lives, such as campaigning, are also 14% more likely to report adopting participatory approaches in their schools, and 17% more likely to adopt justice orientated approaches than teachers who do not engage in these activities.

Overall, this finding is important as it suggests a relationship between teachers own civic activities, and what they experience within their schools, and potentially could be an important driver of supporting more participatory and justice-orientated approaches within schools.

40 Body, A., Holman, K. and Hogg, E. (2017) ‘To bridge the gap? Voluntary action in primary schools’. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 8(3), pp.251-271

Does a teacher's age and/or experience impact their views on civic learning?*

We explored various individual teacher characteristics and aspects of civic engagement. When we consider the importance teachers place on prioritising engagement in ideas of charity and civic learning in schools, we find that younger teachers (under 30 years) are *slightly* more likely to agree or strongly agree that civic engagement activities relating to charity should be embedded within the primary school curriculum, than older teachers (50 years +) – 79% versus 74% respectively. We equally find similar trends when we consider teachers years of experience, with 81% of teachers with less than 5 years' experience agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement versus 76% of teachers who have been teaching for 20 years or more.

Whilst older and more experienced teachers may prioritise civic engagement *slightly* less than their younger colleagues, when examining what influences the pedagogical approach adopted within civic engagement activities, we find the more experienced teachers (those with 15 years' experience or more) are more than three times as likely to adopt a justice orientated approach than less experienced teachers (those with less than or up to 5 years' experience). Equally the more experienced teachers are more likely to adopt a more participatory approach, and significantly less likely to adopt a contributory approach to civic engagement activities than less experienced teachers. What is particularly interesting here is that teachers are quite similar in how much importance they place on supporting active civic engagement in schools, with only small differences highlighted, regardless of age and experience, but where they differ is in the approach they adopt in the classroom (as shown in Figure 11 below). This may be due to a variety of reasons, from confidence to changes in teacher training, but does suggest drawing on more experienced teacher's skills to support younger, less experienced teachers may be beneficial in the classroom.

Older (50+ years) and more experienced teachers (those who have been teaching more than 15 years) are more likely to report adopting participatory and justice orientated approaches to civic engagement within the classroom, than their younger colleagues.

Finally, we find older teachers and those who are more experienced are much less likely to report experiencing barriers (discussed further in research question 4) to civic engagement activities. In particular they are half as likely to see parental attitudes as a barrier to civic engagement activities than teachers in their 20s. We find very little discernible differences between male and female teachers in terms of approaches taken in the classroom and/or barriers experienced.

The findings within this section indicate that age, years of experience, and personal active engagement in participatory and justice-orientated civic behaviours all potentially impact on the learning that happens at schools. A final interesting finding in this study is the link between those that remembered participating in charity and giving as children, and their ongoing higher levels of civic activities. The link between participating in civic behaviours as a child, and ongoing civic behaviours or as 'habits of service'⁴¹ was highlighted in a research project at the University of Birmingham where it was suggested that those that engaged in voluntary action and giving before the age of 10 were twice as likely to still be participating as an adult than if they began between the ages of 16 – 18. The link between teacher's participation as children and their active civic behaviours as adults potentially supports the suggestion that beginning the civic learning journey in the middle childhood period is important.

Teachers years in practice versus pedagogical approach

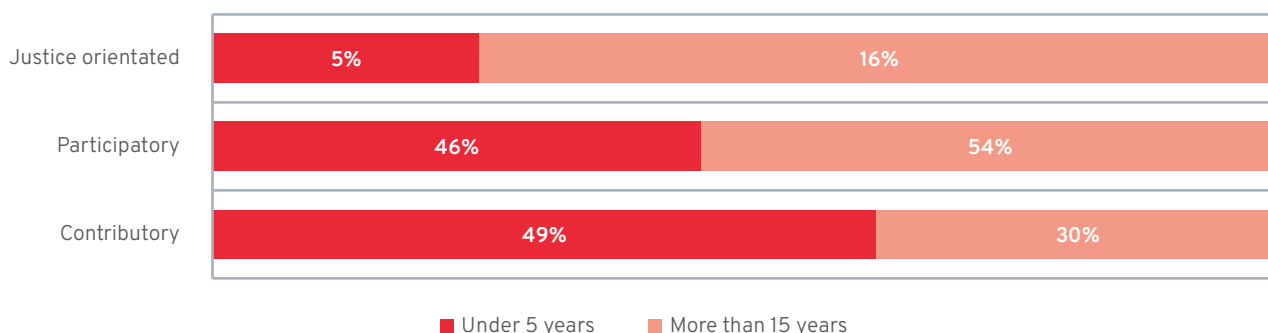


Figure 11

41 Arthur J, Harrison T, Taylor-Collins E, & Moller F., (2017). A Habit of Service: The Factors that Sustain Service. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham Report.

Summary

This third research question seeks to explore the impact of teachers own civic engagement activities on approaches to civic learning in the classroom. In summary this is what we find:

- Primary school teachers on the whole are more civically active than the general population, with older teachers (those 50+ years) being the most civically engaged.
- We find a positive relationship between teachers own civic activities and how teachers experience their schools teaching approach to civic learning. The more a teacher engages in participatory or justice-orientated activities, the more likely they are to say their school adopts a participatory and/or justice-orientated pedagogical approach.
- Older (50+ years) and more experienced teachers (those who have been teaching more than 15 years) are more likely to report adopting participatory and justice orientated approaches to civic engagement within the classroom, than their younger colleagues.

Research question 4 – Is there equity of access to civic learning opportunities?

Are active civic engagement activities equally distributed across schools?*

The simple answer to this is, no, access and opportunity to participate in active civic learning is not equally distributed across primary schools. We find this particularly interesting, as we already know that teachers are committed to delivering these activities in equal distribution across schools, regardless of levels of deprivation, OFSTED and school type, and thus other factors must be at play which are causing this unequal distribution.

As illustrated in Figure 12, our large-scale survey responses show that whilst most children have some opportunity to regularly participate in civic activities, schools with the most affluent

communities are more likely to provide opportunities to participate in community projects, national fundraising days, supporting local charities and fundraising for school funds. Whilst campaigning for school issues only appears to happen in 16-18% of schools, this appears to be relatively equally spread across schools, based on FSM quartiles. Furthermore, whilst the least likely activity to take place in schools, only 2% of the schools in the wealthiest quartile report engaging children in protests, whereas this doubled, albeit only to 4%, in schools on the other three quartiles.

Children within more affluent school communities have significantly more access to active civic engagement opportunities than children within more deprived school communities.

Statistical analysis of this data also reveals the links to deprivation are statistically significant: using FSM as a proxy indicator of deprivation, analysis showed that the more deprived a school community is the more likely the school is to do 'none of these' things (3% in Quartile 1 versus 9% in Quartile 4).

Similarly, as shown in Figure 13, if we look at trends in school activities across schools comparing those with 'outstanding' versus 'requiring improvement' and 'inadequate' OFSTED ratings, we see some interesting trends. Schools that are considered outstanding are more likely to report children participating in community projects (52% versus 34% in requiring improvement or inadequate schools). With regards fundraising for local charities, this was also higher among schools considered outstanding (57% versus 44%). It is notable that participating in national fundraising days and fundraising for school funds is similarly common across schools regardless of OFSTED rating, with a *slight* increased likelihood in good and requiring improvement or inadequate schools. Schools rated as

Did children in your school engage in any of the following activities once during the last school year?

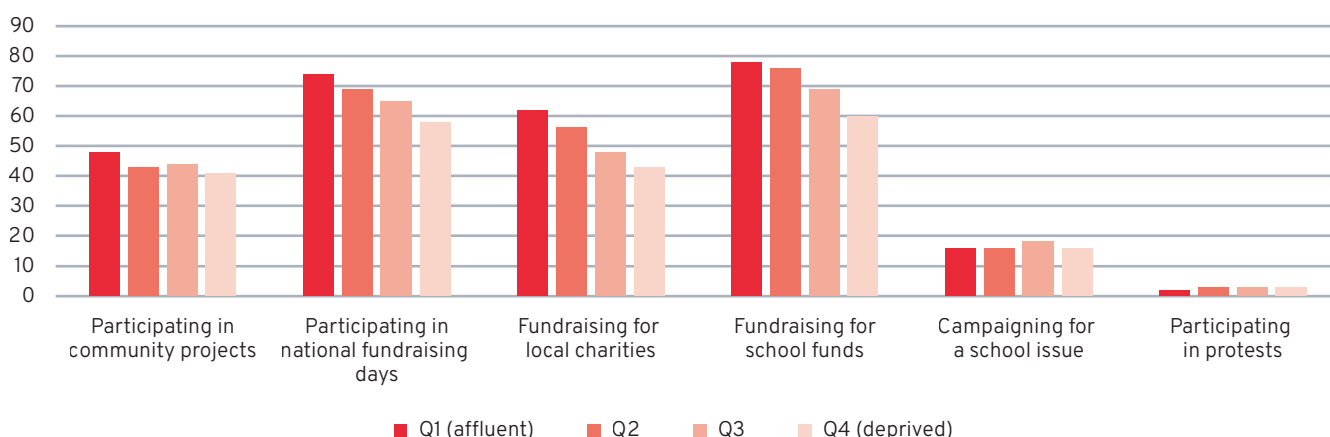


Figure 12

Did children in your school engage in any of the following activities once during the last school year?

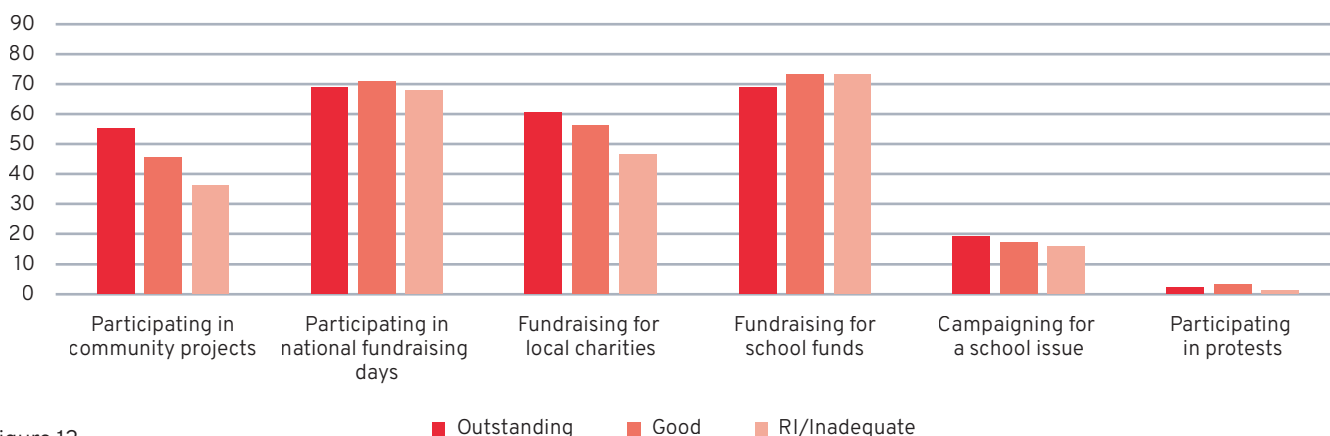


Figure 13

outstanding are more likely to engage children in their local community, through projects (eg social action) and local fundraising, and campaigning for school issues, whereas schools rated as good or requiring improvement or inadequate are more likely to engage children in fundraising for school funds.

Do all children have access to the same opportunities?*

Our findings have already highlighted that children in the most deprived school communities have access to the least opportunities when it comes to active civic engagement. We are also interested in how activities may be distributed based on the ethnic diversity of the participating teacher’s schools⁴². Here we see some interesting trends as demonstrated below.

	Frequently (%)		Sometimes (%)		Never (%)	
	Primarily from white British background	Ethnically diverse	Primarily from white British background	Ethnically diverse	Primarily from white British background	Ethnically diverse
Children are encouraged to give to charity	64	59	34	28	2	3
Children are encouraged to engage in acts of kindness and giving in the local community	58	72	40	25	2	3
Children engage in acts of helping and giving within school	77	80	22	18	1	2
Children engage in social action projects within school and/or the local community	44	31	50	50	6	9
Children are facilitated to advocate for causes they care about	39	44	53	51	8	5

⁴² Teachers’ were asked to select whether their school community was primarily made up of children from a white British background, children from ethnic minority backgrounds, or both. We combined ‘both’ and ‘primarily from ethnic minority backgrounds’ to create an overarching category ‘ethnically diverse’.

Here we examine the trends of active civic engagement within schools according to ethnic diversity of the school. We find teachers report that schools, where the children are from primarily white British backgrounds, they are slightly more likely to frequently engage children in giving to charity and social action projects, whereas schools with more ethnically diverse populations are more likely to frequently encourage children in acts of kindness and giving, acts of helping and giving within schools and to advocate for causes they care about. Engagement in social action projects is probably the most striking differentiation here, as can be seen in the table above, with children from schools where the community is made up of children from primarily white British backgrounds, teachers are more likely to report they engage in social action, than schools where the population is more diverse (44% versus 31%). This may be due to definitions of activity and likely requires further exploration.

What are the barriers to engaging children in active civic engagement opportunities?*

We are particularly interested in the barriers faced by schools in terms of engaging children in active civic learning. We asked teachers to report the barriers they felt they faced as a school in undertaking civic learning. Teachers could select as many options as they liked. When we analyse the responses by Free School Meal (FSM) data we quickly identify problematic trends which suggest schools with the highest levels of FSM (Quartile 4), which we take as a proxy indicator of the most deprived school communities, face considerably more barriers than schools with the lowest levels of FSM (Quartile 1), ie those we assume as those schools with the most affluent communities. For example, schools in FSM Quartile 1 are two and a half times more likely to report that they face no barriers to engaging children in active civic engagement than schools in Quartile 4. Furthermore, the

most affluent school communities (FSM Quartile 1 and Quartile 2) are on average 50% less likely to report parental attitudes as a barrier to active civic engagement, than the less affluent school communities (FSM Quartile 3 and Quartile 4).

// Many of our children and families use food banks themselves so feel unable to give to others. //

The most disadvantaged schools, both by levels of deprivation and OFSTED rating, face the most barriers to engaging children in active civic learning opportunities.

Perhaps most concerningly overall though is that 57% of teachers within the most affluent school communities report concerns about financial constraints of families as a barrier to children's active civic engagement. This rises sharply to 75% of teachers in the most deprived school communities. We find this result statistically significant. Furthermore, whilst teachers report being concerned about children being beneficiaries of charities such as foodbanks is around 17% in the wealthiest three-quarters of schools (FSM Quartiles 1, 2 and 3), we find this figure more than doubles in the least affluent quartile of schools (FSM Quartile 4).

// Parental engagement is a barrier – we have a lot of parents who are struggling with mental health issues and just getting their children to school is an achievement some days. They may be overloaded and can't cope with anything extra on top of an already hard life. They are surviving. //

Barriers Faced by Schools by FSM Quartile

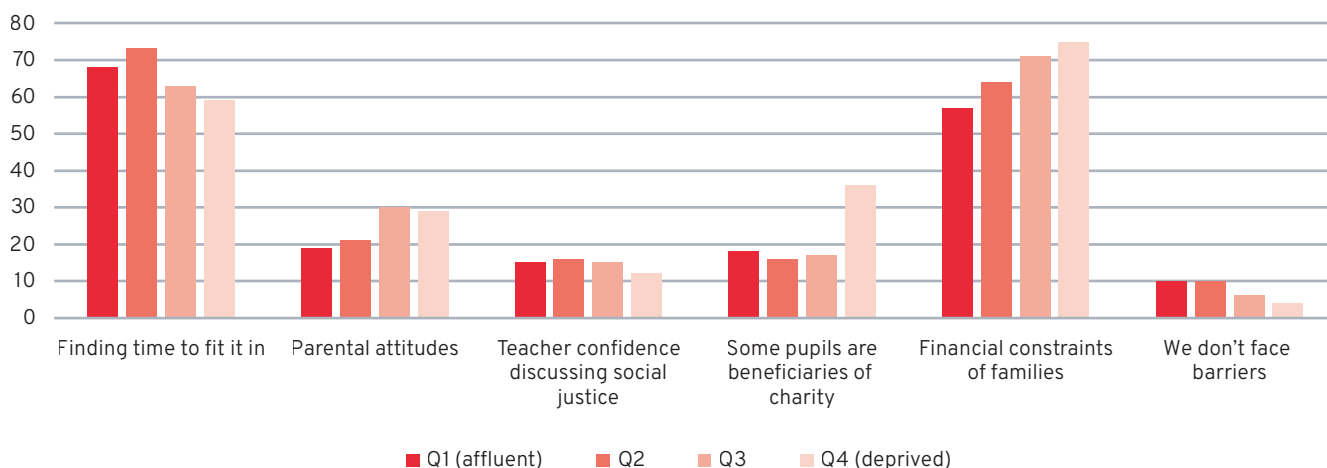


Figure 14

We see similar patterns across schools in terms of OFSTED rating, with schools rated as outstanding over twice as likely to say they face no barriers to active civic engagement than schools rated as either good or requiring improvement/inadequate. Schools rated as requiring improvement or inadequate are much more likely to identify financial constraints and pupils as beneficiaries of charity as a greater barrier to civic engagement, than schools rated as outstanding.

Nonetheless, bucking this trend schools with the most deprived communities are both the least likely to report struggling to find the time to fit civic engagement into the curriculum, alongside the least likely to see teacher confidence in discussing issues of social justice as a barrier to children’s active civic engagement. It is schools rated as ‘good’ who are most likely to report teacher confidence and finding time to fit activities in as barriers to active civic engagement.

Do you face any of the following barriers related to supporting civic engagement through charitable and voluntary action at your school?	Outstanding (%)		
	Good (%)	RI/Inadequate (%)	
Financial constraints of families	51	66	71
Finding time to fit it in	59	65	61
Parental attitudes/ engagement	14	24	31
Some pupils are beneficiaries of charity	14	19	30
Teacher confidence discussing social justice	11	16	11
We don't face barriers	19	8	9

Reflecting further on the analysis of teacher’s comments, parental/carer attitudes is identified as a significant barrier in some schools, particularly among teachers in more disadvantaged school communities. Teachers cited issues around lack of parental/carer engagement in the school, apathy amongst parents, and concern about parents/carers political and cultural views considering the curriculum. This is an area which requires further research and investigation.

In summary, the most disadvantaged schools, both by levels of deprivation and OFSTED rating, face the most barriers to engaging children in active civic learning opportunities, whilst those in the most privileged positions overall face the least barriers.

Are all topics approached equally in the classroom?*

We find over half of teachers surveyed purposefully avoid discussing one or more topics in the classroom. As shown below, food poverty is the most avoided discussion, with around 17% of teachers avoiding this topic, and around 11% avoiding discussing climate change in the classroom.

// Very concerned that the government are trying to limit schools in discussing some topics, stating we are being political. //

Whilst the reasons for avoiding certain topics are wide ranging, themes emerging from teachers responses included the values of the school eg, ‘We are a catholic school so avoid any issues which don’t fit well into our faith’; parental attitudes, eg, ‘Parents lack of engagement with wider society and certain views they hold can be a real issue’; and concerns over lived experiences of children, eg, ‘Children are experiencing poverty and food hunger at home, I don’t then want to ask them to think about this in the classroom.’

Nonetheless, as we show in the findings we have already discussed, we find that just under three quarters of teachers say children are regularly involved in discussing issues concerning

Percentage of teachers who avoid discussing certain issues in the classroom

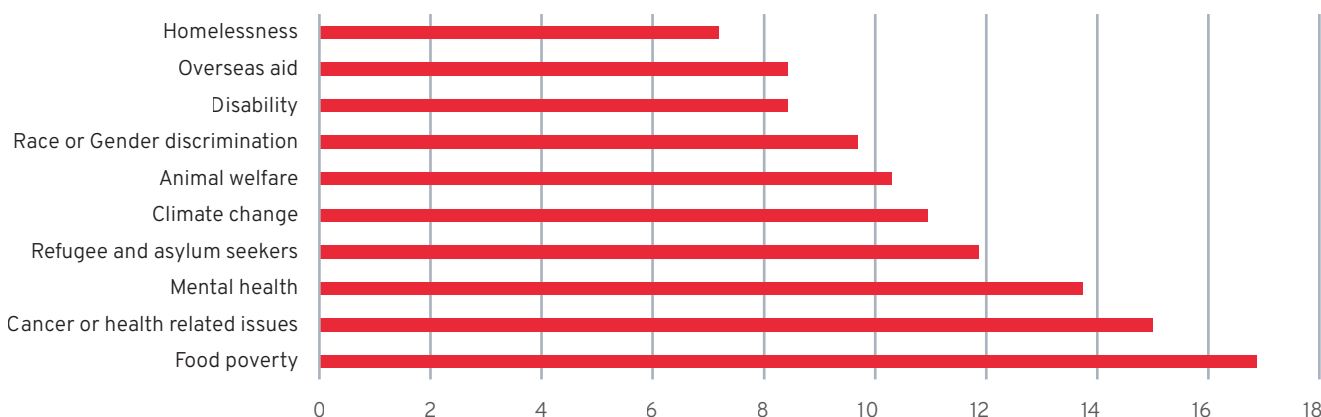


Figure 15

social and environmental justice. However, conversely, when engaged in ideas of charitable action, only around one quarter report engaging children in critically debating the issues behind the giving they are directly engaged in, such as food poverty. This potentially suggests a disconnect in the classroom, where children are regularly engaged in debating issues but less likely to connect these conversations to any specific action or response. The issues therefore are not so much the avoidance of certain conversations in the classroom, but moreover the connection between these issues and the actions we may take in response to these issues.

Are there any differences between state and private schools?*

According to the Private School Policy Forum approximately 5% of primary school children attend private or independent school, with the vast majority of these children coming from wealthier households than the average child in England. Whilst this report focuses on state primary schools, 5% of the sample from the wide-scale survey represents teachers who are working within private schools, allowing us to examine distinctive characteristics within the data concerning private, fee-paying primary schools. We briefly summarise these characteristics here.

To start, when asking schools to rate how much they agree (or disagree) with the statement, 'Teaching children about charity should be embedded in the school curriculum', we find private schools are *slightly* more likely to agree or strongly agree with this, at 79% compared to 76% of teachers from state primary schools, though the difference is very small.

Furthermore, in examining the pedagogical approaches adopted to active civic engagement, we find that whilst relatively similar in provision of contributory opportunities for children to engage in civic activities such as fundraising, with around 80% of all schools offering these opportunities, private schools are more

likely to offer participatory forms of engagement. For example, 70% of private schools engage children in organising school fundraising and campaigning, compared to just 50% of state-funded schools. Equally 32% of private school teachers report engaging children in debating issues of inequality and social justice when engaging with fundraising, compared to just 26% of state funded schools.

Overall, children attending private school have increased access to active civic engagement opportunities and are more likely to frame these ideas within justice orientated frameworks.

We also find that when it comes to resources used to engage children in civic learning private schools are less likely to use resources provided by external organisations, with 42% of state-funded schools using these resources, versus 35% of private primary schools. However, private schools are more likely to run projects in partnership with external organisations, with 19% of private schools engaged in these partnerships, versus 11% of state-funded schools.

We also see differences in the types of civic engagement activities children engage in at school. We asked all schools, 'Did your students engage in any of the following at least once during this school year?' (see Figure 16 below for response options). Here we see private schools are more likely to facilitate opportunities which are external to the school such as participating in protests, fundraising for local charities and participating in community projects, than state funded schools which are much more likely to engage children in fundraising for school funds and slightly more likely to engage children in campaigning for a school issue and national fundraising days. Equally, whilst relatively low for both groups, state funded schools are twice as likely to offer none of these activities than private schools.

Civic engagement activities children participate in

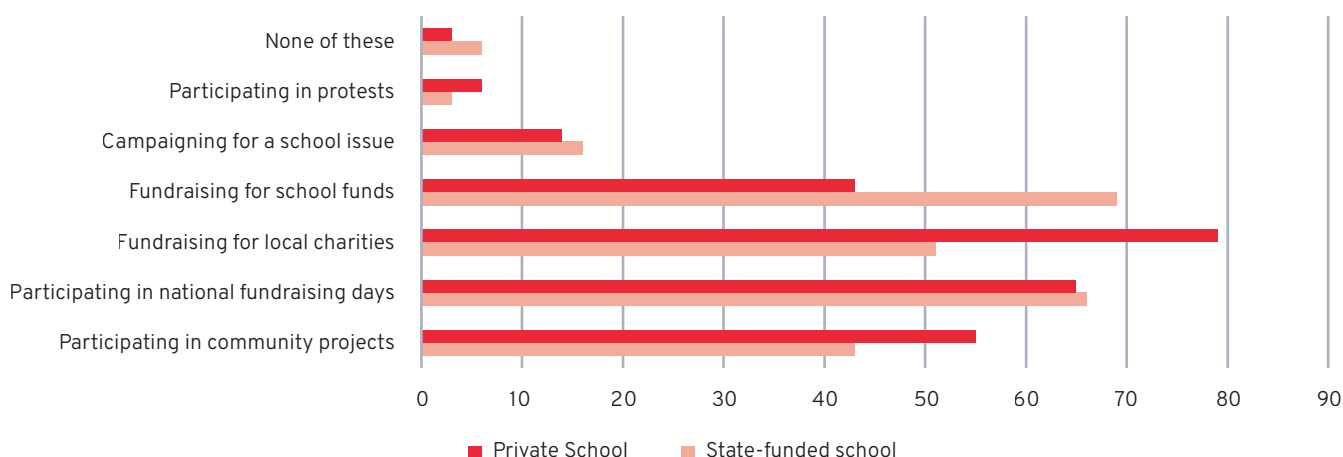


Figure 16

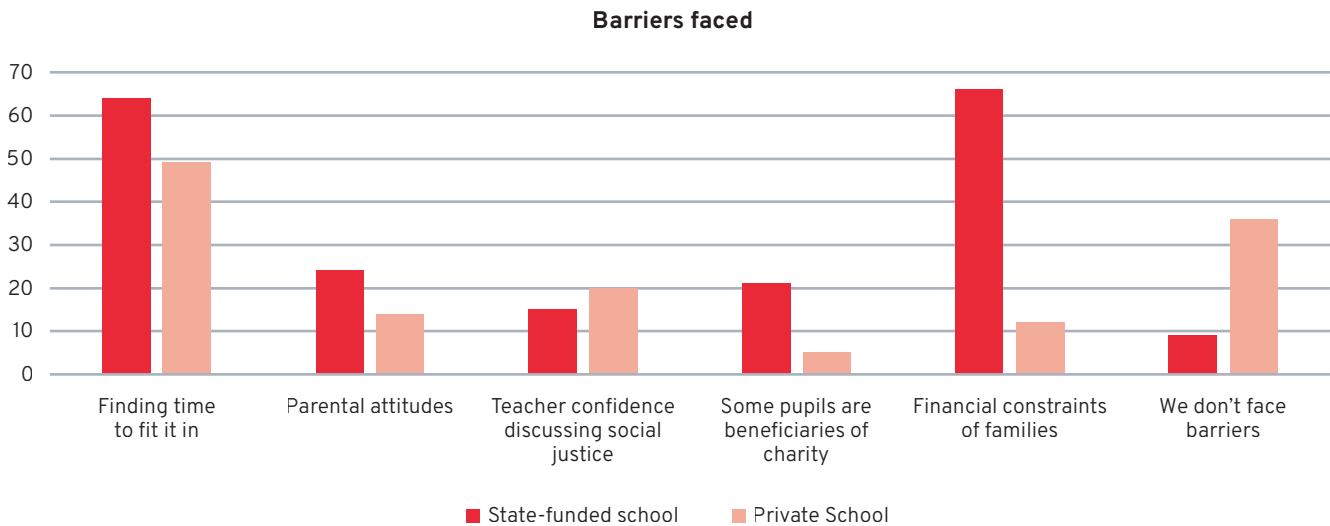


Figure 17

Perhaps the most significant difference between the private and state-funded schools is in the barriers they face in terms of engaging children in active civic engagement opportunities. As demonstrated in Figure 17 above, private schools face statistically significant less barriers than state-funded schools, except interestingly in 'teacher confidence in discussing social justice'. Particularly striking, though perhaps unsurprising, private schools are significantly less worried than state schools about some pupils being beneficiaries of charity (5% versus 21%) and the financial constraints of families (12% versus 66%) when engaging children in charitable activities. Therefore, it is also unsurprising that private schools are four times more likely to say they do not face any barriers, compared to state funded schools.

Finally, as highlighted in this report, we have been particularly interested in teachers own civic engagement and how this relates to the opportunities within primary schools. We find very little differentiation between civic activities of state-funded and private school teachers, therefore we can assume that the differences we discuss within this section relates more to the financial, cultural and governance situation of the schools, than any other factors.

Summary

This fourth research question seeks to explore equity of opportunities for children to engage in civic engagement activities and the approaches to civic learning in the classroom. In summary this is what we find:

- Children within more affluent school communities have significantly more access to active civic engagement opportunities than children within more deprived school communities.

- Schools rated as outstanding are more likely to engage children in their local community, through projects and local fundraising, and campaigning for school issues, whereas schools rated as good or requiring improvement or inadequate schools are more likely to engage children in fundraising for school funds.
- Finding time to fit active civic engagement opportunities into the curriculum and the financial constraints faced by families are the biggest barriers faced by schools in facilitating civic engagement opportunities.
- The most disadvantaged schools, both by levels of deprivation and OFSTED rating, face the most barriers to engaging children in active civic learning opportunities.
- Children attending private school have increased access to active civic engagement opportunities and are more likely to frame these ideas within justice orientated frameworks. Private school teachers report they are significantly less likely to experience barriers to engagement.

Expanding the discussion – The impact of the cost-of-living crisis and Covid-19

Cost-of-living crisis**

Within this research, whilst we used FSM as a proxy indicator of deprivation as a variable for analysis, we did not specifically focus on the economic crisis which has gripped the country in 2022 and into 2023. Nonetheless, when asked about aspects around charity, social action and giving, teachers consistently raised concerns about financial pressures on families and the impact this was having on children.

// Many of our families struggle daily and cannot afford to give even a little to charity. They're actually the ones we're supposed to be collecting for! //

In the current context framing civic engagement around the contributions of money is extremely problematic. Yet, most active civic engagement activities in primary schools involve fundraising for the school, participating in large fundraising campaigns and/or funding for local charities⁴³. Across state primary schools, around two thirds of teachers consider families own economic circumstances as a significant barrier to children engaging in active civic learning, and 21% view the fact that some of their children are beneficiaries of charity, such as foodbanks, also as a barrier to engagement. Furthermore, when we analyse the qualitative data, we find primary school staff are increasingly worried about engaging children in fundraising activities.

// We have also found that a lot of our families are now financially very vulnerable so through our work on poverty proofing we have reduced our requests to parents for money. //

// We have been less comfortable asking those already struggling to find money for others. We ask for 5p now rather than 50p. //

// Some of our families struggle financially themselves so are unable to make donations. We are moving away from asking for donations as part of our poverty proofing agenda so no child feels left out. //

Equally, there is considerable concern expressed by many teachers about how ideas of charity are discussed within the current cost of living crisis. Here we see teacher's expressing concerns about how ideas of charity, benevolence and justice are framed within these discussions, for example:

// Our children come from deprived backgrounds. We want to ensure that our values are seen as 'regardless' of socioeconomic status and choose charities that work to better the lives of all. //

We have tried to move away from charitable giving towards social action. So, for example on Children in Need day we ran a Day of Social Justice in School and tried to help the children to understand that although charity helps, social justice can change things so that charity is no longer needed.

We also find a significant number of schools establishing their own food banks to support their own school community. Again, this was not data we specifically asked for, but we find around 5% of the teachers directly refer to supporting children and families within their school community with food poverty. Given this data was not explicitly requested, it is likely that the actual figure is significantly higher.

Indeed, staggering data published by the Sutton Trust⁴⁴ shows that we are not alone in these findings. During the Autumn term of 2022/23 polling of over 1900 state primary school teachers suggested that 75% felt there was a noticeable increase in the number of children unable to concentrate in class, 62% felt there was an increase in behavioural problems, 44% felt an increased number of children were coming to school hungry, whilst 57% felt there were increases in children having inadequate winter clothing. In addition, 44% of primary teachers reported an increase in the number of families asking for additional support, whilst 21% felt there were noticeable increases in the number of families requesting referrals to foodbanks. When asked about what proportion of pupils are living in families/ households facing considerable financial pressures, 17% of teachers reported more than half, whilst 23% of teachers said between one third and half of all their families are facing considerable financial pressure. And finally, 64% of primary teachers felt this was likely to increase the attainment gap between more disadvantaged and advantaged pupils in their schools.

Additional research in December 2022 by the Commission on Teacher Retention⁴⁵ highlighted that nearly three quarters (74%) of secondary school teachers often help pupils with personal matters beyond their academic work. 72% of respondents said that they are helping pupils more with non-academic matters than they did 5 years ago. This increased to 82% of teachers in schools in Education Investment Areas. 41% reported having bought students key supplies such as stationery or school bags. More than a quarter (26%) of teachers have prepared food for their pupils. More than a quarter (26%) had signposted a family in their school to local support services (such as social housing). One in ten had paid for parts of their students school uniform; and 13% said they have cleaned their students' clothes.

43 https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/The_Cost_of_Having_Fun_at_School.pdf

44 <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Cost-of-Living-polling-December-2022.pdf>

45 <https://www.publicfirst.co.uk/the-commission-on-teacher-retention.html>

The cost-of-living crisis and associated financial pressures are having a profound impact on our schools. Whilst we write this report with the wish to help support schools increasing the quantity and quality of active civic engagement activities within primary education, it is hard to imagine how this may be achieved when schools and families are working so hard to just meet basic needs.

Impact of Covid-19*

We specifically asked teachers about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent periods of lockdown in 2020 and 2021 on children's opportunities for active civic engagement activities. Unsurprisingly around 90% of teachers felt that Covid-19, and the subsequent lockdowns, had negatively impacted civic engagement activities within primary schools. Some reasons for this were cited as, lack of visitors in school, reduction in the fundraising days, a focus on curriculum activities, tightening economic circumstances of families, all fundraising moving online, etc. For example, teachers said:

// We had to focus on our own children and their families. //

// We could not come together as a community. Without that link fundraising and general engagement activities were difficult. //

Nonetheless, a minority of schools felt that the Covid-19 lockdowns had helped them reframe and reconceptualise ideas of citizenship and community engagement and consider these central to school activities. As some teachers told us:

// If anything, it brought us closer together as a community particularly in terms of charity within our own community. //

// It was special that children and families still took part in events such as Children in Need and Odd Socks Day and put photos on the school communication system to share with the rest of the school community. //

// It increased our ability to engage with new projects emerging and new needs identified. //

// During this time, more than ever, our school community came together to help those most in need within the community. Food was hand delivered to those that needed it the most and children were encouraged through online learning to help their community, whether this was through litter picking, dress up days, making posters to put up in their windows or donating to support local charities. //

Summary

In this final section we sought to draw together thematic findings exploring the impact of external factors on children's civic engagement:

- We find primary school teachers are increasingly concerned about the cost-of-living crisis on children within their school, and in response taking action themselves to support the most disadvantaged children and families.
- Given most civic engagement activities are framed around monetary donations, this gives rise to a concern that fundraising in schools is placing additional pressure on families.
- Whilst Covid-19 was considered to have an overall negative impact on civic engagement opportunities, within some schools it gave rise to new and different ways of working, largely around ideas of mutual aid.

What does this tell us about children's active civic learning?

After identifying key trends in data, researchers are then posed with perhaps the most important question of all – so what? What does this data tell us, what does it mean to practice and policy, what does it mean for schools, teachers and most importantly, children, and why does it matter?

Within this project we set out to map active civic engagement activities across England. Our research draws on data from a large-scale survey and an in-depth questionnaire. In total we include well over 2000 teachers within this process and draw on schools from across the country. In doing so we uncover some important findings regarding active civic engagement and learning within primary education.

What kind of active citizen

As we see from this research almost all schools teach and facilitate some sort of active citizenship education, engaging children in some form of giving, volunteering, social action and/or advocacy. However, what we argue here is not so much 'if' they are teaching active citizenship, but moreover what kind of active citizenship is being promoted within primary education. One of the most dominant themes we uncover is that primary school teachers prioritise active civic engagement as an important part of the curriculum. Nonetheless, this is normally and most commonly limited to engagement in fundraising activities, centred around gifting of money to national campaigns, school fundraising projects and local charities, framed within a discourse of contributory acts and personal responsibility, with many children lacking opportunities for participative and/or critical engagement with the cause which sits behind the charitable need. Drawing on arguments established in research and literature, this limited approach to active civic engagement within primary schools' risks teaching it, particularly in terms of helping or supporting others, as a tokenistic and transactional act, and misses a key opportunity for deeper, more meaningful active civic engagement opportunities to connect ideas of social good with key social and environmental concerns and appropriate action.

Whilst we do see around half of the schools seemingly developing participative active civic engagement, we recognise that these programmes do not necessarily seek to develop children's ability to analyse and critique root causes of social problems. Indeed, the in-depth survey, which allowed for a more detailed response by teachers to the type of active civic engagement opportunities reveals that only around 15% of primary school teachers felt children have a chance to critique the social problems behind some of the causes they support.

Simultaneously we see teachers increasingly concerned about the cost-of-living crisis and families facing financial hardship and raising growing concerns about asking families for money. Thus, this narrow focus on charitable giving as a pathway to active civic engagement opportunities becomes increasingly problematic as teachers and schools are ever more focused on 'poverty proofing' their schools. Agreeing with the Child Poverty Action Group's recent recommendations, findings from this research suggest that schools could explore alternative funding and fundraising options, only requesting parental/ family support and contributions when absolutely necessary⁴⁶, ensuring contributions, when absolutely required, are voluntary and anonymous where possible.

This, however, does not need to limit active civic engagement activities in schools, instead schools can consider widening their definition of activities and adopting more participatory and justice orientated approaches, engaging more in collective and voluntary action which is more accessible to all pupils, than contributing to charity and school fundraising campaigns. This will also likely have increased impact on children's civic journeys into the future. As Westheimer argues, teaching children how to think critically should be a priority within any democratic society. Thus, we should help children think critically, ask questions, evaluate policy and work with others to bring about change that moves democracy and society forwards.

Equality, equity and democracy

Our research shows substantive differences in children's access to civic engagement opportunities, particularly in relation to socio-economic status. This is perhaps most exaggerated when we look at private schools versus state schools, nonetheless we also see stark differences based on the most affluent versus the least affluent school communities. Schools with the most disadvantaged communities are not only most likely to report experiencing multiple barriers to active civic engagement opportunities, and therefore unsurprisingly offer fewer opportunities as a result, but they are also least likely to offer children the chance to engage in participatory and justice orientated approaches. Given the multiple issues facing these schools and their communities, this is hardly surprising and should not be taken in any way as criticism of these schools, instead, if we really value children's civic education, additional efforts need to be made to support *all* schools facilitating active civic engagement opportunities.

⁴⁶ https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Supporting_families_financial_hardship_schools_resource.pdf

We could argue this is not just an issue for education, but also for societal equality and democracy, both now and in the future. Children from the most privileged backgrounds are most likely to have early access to active civic engagement opportunities, and thus are most likely to be equipped with the skills for active civic engagement pre-secondary school. The potential implications of this are that certain socio-economic groups are readied for participative civic engagement more than others, increasing the likelihood of these voices being more dominant, reproducing societal inequalities in citizenship engagement rather than seeking to redress them.

Engagement with external civil society organisations matters

Our data shows that external organisations, specifically charities working in the civic learning arena, have the potential to make a positive impact on children's civic learning journeys. Partnership working between schools and civil society organisations, in particular, is more likely to be associated with schools adopting a more participatory and/or justice orientated approach, than external organisations simply providing resources for schools to use. We find this unsurprising as some of our previous research has pointed towards the fact that when schools participate in large scale (fundraising) campaigns, which are children's most common form of active civic engagement within primary schools, they are often with the simple aim to raise as much funding or goods as possible. As a result, children are less often engaged in the reason behind the giving⁴⁷. Whereas partnership programmes are more often longer-term programmes of activity, which are more commonly situated around a children's rights approach. Indeed, examination of online resources provided by charities for schools to use during Covid-19 revealed similar trends⁴⁸.

From a children's rights perspective, the way we foster active civic engagement should extend their support beyond a mere financial focus. Thus, we suggest organisations wishing to work with schools, engaging them in fundraising, social action, campaigning, etc., have an ethical duty to critically engage children in action and debate which helps them understand and critically consider the moral justification for intervention. To properly engage children in active civic engagement, ideally activities in schools should be a co-creation process between civil society organisations and/or communities, the school/teachers and the children themselves. Through this approach, the active civic engagement activities become a conscious vehicle to expand the context and address societal issues. Therefore, we contend that external organisations, including those focused on fundraising, should provide a framework to facilitate schools in

critically engaging children around the motive behind the need for help and the alternative ways it can be tackled beyond just collecting money for the cause itself.

Children's rights and voices are overlooked

The data highlights that whilst children are commonly informed about acts of giving, voluntary action and social action, they are less likely to be involved in researching and decision making about their own responses to social and environmental concerns. As research tells us, adopting a children's rights approach to this participation means we acknowledge children and young people as capable, social actors who are experts of their own lives and their own experiences – as current citizens who should be facilitated to help shape the world they are part of and not simply viewed as future citizens to mould into existing systems and structures. Engaging children and young people in active civic decision-making should not simply be about developing a rhetoric about how to grow children as future participants, volunteers and donors within these current systems and structures, but instead should question how we can support and facilitate children and young people to critically question these systems and structures and consider different ways of being; ways of being which foster ideas of equity and social justice, and promote ideas of the interdependence of all parts of the civic ecosystem in achieving social change, including the role of volunteering, advocacy, campaigning and lobbying governments⁴⁹.

Teachers as civic leaders

Our research suggests that teachers' own civic engagement matters in terms of what happens in the classroom. First, we find that on the whole teachers are a relatively well engaged group of citizens, who are passionate about supporting children's active civic engagement. Second, the more civically engaged teachers report to be in their personal life, the more likely they are to say their school adopts a participatory and/or justice orientated approach to active civic learning. Third, we find a positive relationship between teachers own engagement as civic actors when they were children in school, and their subsequent engagement in participatory and justice orientated citizenship activities as an adult.

Nonetheless, we also find teachers experience multiple barriers to delivering active civic engagement opportunities within the classroom, including time to fit such activities in, parental/ carer engagement, and the financial circumstances of families. This is an area which requires further research and will be further followed up in part two of this research project, but in the meantime, we suggest, along with others⁵⁰, that primary school

47 Body, A., Lau, E., Cameron, L. and Ali, S., (2021). Developing a children's rights approach to fundraising with children in primary schools and the ethics of cultivating philanthropic citizenship. *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, p.e1730.

48 Body, A. (2020) Learning to Give in Lockdown, VSSN conference paper – <https://www.vssn.org.uk/2020-vs-vr-online-conference-session-videos>

49 Body, A., Lau, E., Cameron, L. and Ali, S., (2021). Developing a children's rights approach to fundraising with children in primary schools and the ethics of cultivating philanthropic citizenship. *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, p.e1730.

50 Breeze, H. (2022) What are educators' experiences supporting youth social action? RSA. <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2022/11/youth-social-action-primary-school-teachers-educators>

teachers do not only need to be recognised as civic educators, but more attention needs to be paid to their role as civic leaders and agents⁵¹. When teachers consider civic engagement and political participation as an important part of their own civic life, there is a higher likelihood they are to promote such learning in their classrooms. This also suggests the importance of promoting lifelong citizenship education and learning amongst teachers themselves, as a way of creating inclusive and democratic spaces within the classroom. By reconceptualising teachers as civic leaders, we can consider a shift in how schools engage with local communities, considering teachers themselves as co-producers of civic knowledge who work collectively in partnership with children to help create social change.

Moral tensions

The significant issues raised in this report with regards to the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on children's civic learning opportunities are not new, nonetheless they have been exacerbated in recent times in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and as the cost-of-living crisis takes hold. As a result, we suggest that a tension is created as schools increasingly take on the role of welfare providers, whilst simultaneously trying to encourage children to give to others less fortunate. Focusing on civic learning within schools means discussing issues of poverty, inequality, civic responsibility and social justice. In a context where significant numbers of children are directly and increasingly experiencing these issues in their home lives, many teachers raise concerns around the moral responsibility of bringing these discussions into the learning space. As the data shows this potentially has impact on children's access to active civic learning as it leads to an avoidance of some discussions in the classroom and an identification of some significant barriers to active civic learning in the classroom, with schools within the highest areas of deprivation disproportionately feeling this impact the most.

We also raise further concern that such a framing of active civic engagement also risks marginalising and diminishing disadvantaged communities' voices, 'otherising' their own experiences and presenting them as objects of charity. Finally, we raise concern that most active civic engagement opportunities are framed around monetary giving and giving to charity as a response to social need, this potentially teaches children that charity is the response to social ills, rather than consideration of wider societal changes and governmental responses. Considering this, we suggest this is an additional call for re-definition of active civic engagement in schools, from one which focuses on acts of benevolence, to a participatory and justice orientated approach which leads to more collective solutions, empowering children within their own communities and their own lives⁵².

51 Peterson, A., Civil, D., McLoughlin, S. & Moller, F. (2022) Schools, Civic Virtues and the Good Citizen. Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, University of Birmingham.

52 Body, A., Lau, E., Cameron, L. and Ali, S., (2021). Developing a children's rights approach to fundraising with children in primary schools and the ethics of cultivating philanthropic citizenship. *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing*, p.e1730.

Levers of change: implications for practice, policy and research

In this final section of the report, we begin to consider the potential levers of change. These levers aim to build on much of the excellent active civic engagement opportunities already taking place in schools, to increase access to opportunities for ALL children, whilst simultaneously seeking to increase the likelihood of children being provided with opportunities to participate and critically engage in issues of social and environmental justice.

In practice (schools)

Lever 1 – Reframing civic engagement activities in primary schools

Our first lever of change requires redefining and reframing active civic engagement in primary schools. Currently the majority of this activity focuses on national fundraising days, alongside fundraising for school and charitable organisations. We suggest a greater focus on participatory social and voluntary action, framed within a critical justice discourse, where children are facilitated to actively research and consider social and environmental issues. This is both more inclusive for all children and likely to lead to better outcomes for children's engagement and deeper learning, across their civic journey. In doing so, we should facilitate and encourage children to ask questions, expose children to multiple different viewpoints on important issues which affect everyday lives, analyse and discuss these viewpoints and engage in controversial issues. This isn't necessarily just about 'doing more', but instead, with the support of all stakeholders, supporting schools and teachers to maximise the value of existing activities, such as voluntary action or community participation, and formalised programmes to avoid 'missed opportunities'.

Lever 2 – Celebrate teachers as civic actors and civic leaders

We find teachers a highly engaged, passionate and committed group of civic actors, who recognise the power of active civic engagement both in their own lives and the classroom. We suggest schools seek ways to unleash this potential, encourage this activity and free teachers from the multiple barriers commonly experienced, including time for civic activities and room within the curriculum. Here we can consider a shift in how schools engage with local communities, considering teachers themselves as co-producers of civic knowledge who work collectively in partnership with children to help create social change. Furthermore, greater partnership work with parents/carers and communities in constructing active civic engagement opportunities may also help teachers practically

overcome issues associated with concerns about parental/carer engagement. Additional practical levers for change can include establishing civic education mentoring programmes within and across schools to support less experienced teachers' development.

In practice (Civil society organisations)

Lever 3 – Maximising partnerships between schools and civil society organisations

Children's civic learning is not the sole responsibility of schools – families, communities, and civil society organisations all have roles to play. Nonetheless, schools are ideally placed to encourage and cultivate children's civic socialisation. Civil society organisations have a potentially important role to play here in supporting schools and perhaps, with schools, need to consider their moral obligations in supporting children's active civic journeys for the collective good. This includes focusing activities on increasing children's active civic engagement opportunities, ensuring space for critical engagement and debate and ensuring children actively lead on decision making. Furthermore, targeting of resources on the most disadvantaged schools will likely reap the greatest rewards.

In policy

Lever 4 – Recognise the importance of younger children's experiences as part of the civic journey

Drawing together the findings from this research and wider literature, we must challenge conventional wisdom which suggests adolescence is the phase in which people obtain civic, political, and social orientations and competencies. To date policy has largely focused on secondary school aged children and above, we suggest greater focus on early and middle childhood is important in supporting children's active civic journeys and this should be recognised in policy.

Lever 5 – Prioritise active civic learning within the curriculum and teacher training

In 2016 OFSTED published a report stating that social action was often interwoven distinctly within the curriculum, especially in primary schools⁵³. Our findings dispute this claim, when we look at what is happening across primary schools in England we find approaches to active civic learning are inconsistent and participatory and justice orientated approaches to active civic learning are patchy across the country at best. We suggest in response policy frameworks consider how to support and encourage active civic learning opportunities across the primary curriculum. This will most likely be effective through further

⁵³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/540766/How_social_action_is_being_applied_to_good_effect_in_a_selection_of_schools_and_colleges.pdf

support, guidance and/or teacher training programmes. We note and support similar suggestions made for secondary education and likewise call for strategic investment in teacher training,⁵⁴ extending such recommendations to primary school teacher training and support.

In research

Lever 6 – Further research needed

As argued, there is little empirical ground for the sole focus on adolescence, and earlier phases of childhood have been consistently overlooked within citizenship and civic socialisation research and literature. We call for greater attention to be paid to early and middle childhood as part of the civic journey, including the role of parents, communities and children themselves in cultivating civic journeys, and the implications of early civic socialisation on citizenship behaviours across the life course.



⁵⁴ Weinberg, J., (2021). The missing link: an updated evaluation of the provision, practice and politics of democratic education in English secondary schools. APPG Political Literacy.

Conclusion

We know increased pro-active civic engagement at a young age leads to increased propensity to engage in pro-civic behaviours when older, however our data suggests, that unlike adolescents who have wider scale programmes, opportunities for children's engagement in active civic learning are uncoordinated, unequal, and commonly not rooted in evidence-based practice, with children from lower socio-economic areas experiencing fewer opportunities for active civic engagement. There is also a lack of common practice in adopting participatory and justice-oriented approaches when engaging children in active citizenship which is likely to impact their future civic engagement.

There is a need for increased recognition of the importance of civic socialisation within primary school years throughout early years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Previous research suggests programmes in early years and Key Stage 1 could focus on developing children civic and political literacies, whilst developing and practicing their every-day civic-ness. Towards Key Stage 2 priority should be given to putting this civic-ness into action through participatory, justice-orientated, social action type programmes which are underpinned by critical, reflective conversations and discussions. Schools and civil society organisations should also take into consideration equality, diversity, and inclusion, particularly in terms of supporting schools in disadvantaged areas – thus facilitating activity designed to reduce inequality rather than reproduce or exacerbate it.

We celebrate much of the activity which is already taking place and recognise that teachers and schools are crucial in encouraging inclusive participation. Nonetheless, we suggest all primary schools should be encouraged to support active civic engagement of children and afford greater opportunities to children to develop their civic-ness. Many activities such as engagement in charitable giving, community participation, civic story-telling and development of civic literacies are already happening within schools, so instead of encouraging lots of 'new' activity, supporting schools to maximise the value of existing activities, such as reframing fundraising days, voluntary action or community participation, and formalised programmes to avoid 'missed opportunities' may prove fruitful. The research encourages teachers and other related stakeholders, such as fundraising charities, to move away from encouraging transactional engagement, often framed around monetary contributions, and neutral consensus attitudes even at an early age, and instead nurture children's voices within the debates and complexities of active citizenship. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to supporting the engagement of schools within disadvantaged areas to facilitate active civic learning activities.

We also argue children should have an active role in shaping civic learning programmes, and programmes should be used as an opportunity to explore ideas and foster social and political discussion. We suggest children should be facilitated to lead in setting the agenda for activities through the provision of opportunities to take action in response to issues they feel passionate about.

In conclusion we highlight three key messages from this research.

Equity in opportunities for active civic learning

First, primary school educators are committed to facilitating children's active civic learning; however, distribution of opportunities is uneven: children from more privileged communities have greater access to opportunities to develop their civic skills and practice their civic-ness. This suggests, from an early age, these children are more likely to be prepared for civic life than those from disadvantaged backgrounds, thus potentially cementing inequalities in civic education from early on. This raises significant challenges for education policy and practice and calls for greater attention to be paid to civic learning for all children in early and middle childhood.

Reframe civic engagement around participatory and social justice orientations

Second, the majority of civic engagement activities within primary schools are discussed within a contributory, personally responsible approach. This approach encourages acts of responsibility in the community, such as giving to charity, and assumes solving social and environmental issues requires personal responsibility, potentially overlooking the need for active, collective participation and critical challenge of established systems, and potentially denies children the opportunity to develop skills to consider more critical pathways to change. We call for greater attention to be paid to participatory and justice orientated approaches to engaging children in civic activities within primary education.

Recognition of teachers as civic leaders

Third, active civic learning does not sit within a vacuum, it reflects lived experiences, situated within an ecosystem of communities, civic actors, civil society and social structures – some of which perpetuate inequality, which children are experiencing in their everyday lives. Teachers are simultaneously encouraging active civic engagement to tackle social issues whilst supporting children with lived experiences of these issues. We call for greater recognition of the importance of teachers as civic leaders and co-producers of active civic learning which is embedded in lived experiences, collectively working with children, communities and civil society organisations to co-produce responses to social issues in a democratic way.

What next

This research report documents the findings from the first phase of our research project, which seeks to map active civic engagement opportunities for primary school children across England, gathering data through a national survey and in-depth questionnaire. We seek to pick up the themes developed in this report further in the second and third phase of the research.

The second phase (2023) of the research actively engages 100 teacher's voices and case study schools, to explore their lived experiences of delivering civic engagement opportunities – the Part 2 research report will be published in January 2024. The second phase of the research seeks to further understand the various pedagogical approaches which inform how active civic engagement is encouraged. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews examining teachers' perceptions, views, barriers and opportunities on teaching active civic education, the extent to which citizenship education activities are shaped by teacher's own characteristics, views, experiences and knowledge will be examined. It will also explore to what extent these programmes are shaped more widely by overall school philosophies, the local community, community organisations and larger charities.

The final phase of research (2024) includes participatory action research with children themselves across ten case study schools, to explore their lived experiences of these opportunities – the Part 3 research report will be published in January 2025. Within this final stage of the research, we seek to explore what the perceived effects of different types of active civic engagement activities and citizenship education are on children's perceptions of civic engagement and seek to produce detailed understanding of children's lived experiences of voluntary action, charitable giving and citizenship in primary education.



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All details about this project, Educating for Public Good,

can be found on the project website

<https://research.kent.ac.uk/children-as-philanthropic-citizens>



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