



# Citizenship through participation and responsible action

---

Better  
education  
and care

**David Bell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools**

**Speech for the Barclays New Futures Conference, 15 November 2005**

Age group	Published	Reference no.
Secondary	November 2005	

---

---

© Crown copyright 2005

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

I am grateful to the Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and Barclays New Futures for the invitation to join you today. CSV has been working in support of citizenship development for over 40 years, and has been prominent since the introduction of the National Curriculum in supporting schools' work on pupil participation and active citizenship, generously supported by the Barclays New Futures programme.

The recent report from CSV shows the wide range of successful projects which have been carried out in schools, many of them developing or strengthening links with the community through projects that provide services, regenerate and foster understanding. Barclays, the CSV and the schools involved are to be congratulated on this work.

Last month I published alongside my Annual Report a subject report on the development of citizenship in schools. This report celebrates the success of some schools in implementing the citizenship curriculum. It praises the schools where there have been substantial developments in the subject, and which now go a long way towards fulfilling national curriculum requirements. But there is a 'however'. Those of you who have read our reports over the past two or three years will know that we have been critical of schools that have not taken citizenship seriously, either through reluctance or lack of capacity to make appropriate provision in the curriculum. Our report points out that, despite some gains, the provision of citizenship education is unsatisfactory in the curriculum of one fifth of schools; in many others there are elements in place, but there is a far from full programme available to all pupils. In many schools citizenship is less well established in the curriculum than other subjects and less well taught, and some critics have seized on this as a reason for wanting to step back from supporting it.

However, the progress made by the more committed schools confirms that the reasons for introducing citizenship are both very worthwhile and can be fulfilled, given the time and resources. Indeed, those reasons are given added weight by national and global events of the past few months. Citizenship can provide pupils with the knowledge and skills that will help them make informed choices, and develop an awareness of the attitudes and values that they need to consider as they come to terms with a changing world.

The citizenship curriculum has three strands: knowledge and understanding; enquiry and communication; and participation and responsible action. In the context of today's talk, I would like to place emphasis on the latter, particularly the notion of participation and community.

The area of participation has always been problematic. The National Curriculum says that 'pupils should be taught to negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community based activities' and they should 'reflect on the process of participating'. So two good questions that schools have been

wrestling with are 'what do we understand by participation in this context?' and 'what do we mean by community?'

Before addressing these questions, I would like to make the link between 'participation' in citizenship and the 'making a contribution' element of *Every Child Matters*. Making a contribution involves 'asking children and young people what works, what doesn't and what could work better, and involving them on an ongoing basis in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.' The emphasis here is on greater consultation and involvement, so that pupils have a real say in making decisions on matters that affect them.

In citizenship we take participation a step further through the initiation, planning and reflection on school and 'community action'. The definition of participation is somewhat sharper, but there are close parallels. What I can say is that a school providing good citizenship education is also doing well in terms of the *Every Child Matters* agenda of making a contribution.

There are a few things that need to be said about participation in citizenship that are distinctive. First, pupils do helpful things in schools that we would not view as necessarily contributing to their citizenship education as required by the National Curriculum programme of study. These include, for example, some types of peer mentoring activities, such as reading support and giving to charity. John Potter, Director of CSV until 2001, explained that there is a significant difference between a form of citizenship education that simply encourages decency and good behaviour and one that is rooted in political awareness and a commitment to social justice and equal opportunity. John Annette of Birkbeck College puts it more bluntly: 'there is much that is about "doing good", rather than "political good" (that is, being informed, active citizens).'

The second issue is about entitlement. From the outset Ofsted has said that participation should be for all, but I acknowledge that this isn't easy. In our advice and guidance, we have looked at this in a range of ways. We know that numbers can be a problem and that some very high profile citizenship activities involve only a few pupils. Well, that is fine as far as it goes, but there ought to be alternative opportunities for others, adding up to good provision for all. We have sought to be of help to schools which have said that participation beyond the classroom is difficult. In our Update 43, published in 2003, we offered suggestions of the sort of participative activity in which pupils are doing something as change agents within their classroom. These included debates, role play and research, with an emphasis on making recommendations and suggestions about the ways in which citizenship and community issues might be addressed or resolved.

So how does a school reach a situation where there is good provision for all? Let me illustrate this point, and in doing so pay tribute to the sorts of projects

supported by CSV and Barclays Futures that have involved all or most pupils in community action. For example, the latest CSV report highlights work done at Batley Business and Enterprise College, which is represented here today. One part of their citizenship programme was a project 'to release tensions and increase awareness of the rich history of their multicultural community'. All pupils in Year 8 were involved in this six-week project. In partnership with other schools and societies, the pupils created a multi-media heritage library, at the same time addressing directly the National Curriculum requirement to learn about the diversity of Britain's society. A result is a book they have produced for other pupils, with an accompanying CD-ROM, and their continuing work in primary schools. Ofsted's report on the school in 2003 commented upon the very good leadership of citizenship in the school, and the unusually wide range of opportunities available to pupils. These include a thriving school council. Pupils are consulted on policies and plans and attend interviews for schools staff. Through this breadth of activities the school has demonstrated very well how to fulfil an entitlement to participation.

This takes me on to my third point about participation and the place of school councils. It is always a pleasure to see my own organisation getting due praise, so let me refer first to a news release from School Councils UK.

*The national education charity School Councils UK today praised the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) for its new inspection guidelines which recognise the role pupils play as partners in school improvement. Framework 2005 will require inspectors to go further than in previous guidelines towards seeking the views of pupils. This will involve pupil questionnaires and meetings with the elected school council.*

Indeed, schools that have experienced inspections since September will recognise this new emphasis in the inspection methodology and in our reporting, which now includes a letter to pupils about their schools.

Ofsted has been consistent in the encouragement of school councils, and School Councils UK contributed to our conference on citizenship in 2004. A school council should be a key indicator of a successful and democratic school. However, it is still the case that some schools have councils that are not run democratically and can be the preserve of a small, sometimes elite, group.

The School Councils UK website offers support to schools, including a checklist for the improvement of school council activity. They put straightforward questions, but they are ones that some schools might still be unable to respond to affirmatively. For example:

- Are the class representatives elected democratically?
- Do all the class representatives have a chance to tell their class what happened at the school council meeting?
- Is the school council executive (i.e. chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, treasurer) elected annually?

- Does the school council have a budget and a bank account?
- Have the class representatives and the school council executive been trained?

Ofsted inspectors look in particular at the extent to which the school council is a genuine representative body, so that all pupils in the school are involved as either executive members, pupil representatives or the electorate who vote for them and hold them to account.

Two further brief points on participation. Some schools have addressed the problem of pupil entitlement by introducing periodic off-timetable days. These can be excellent in addressing the participation element of National Curriculum citizenship, although there is a health warning that without a core programme that ensures they are taught the knowledge they need to become informed citizens these one-off events are most unlikely to be sufficient to meet the requirements.

We have also been looking at enrichment programmes of citizenship for students post-16 in a range of settings, and I refer you to our recent report on post-16 citizenship pilot projects as an excellent example of the way in which the curriculum can be extended. And I would say again, there is every good sense in taking citizenship forward post-16 just at the time when, arguably, young people need further development of their citizenship knowledge, understanding and skills as they prepare to join the electorate. For example, the report mentions Egguckland School, where all sixth formers undertake a citizenship challenge as a timetabled part of their curriculum.

Now I would like to turn to my second question: what do we mean by community in the context of citizenship? In a very interesting article on the CitizEd website (for those who do not know about this, CitizEd is the project supported by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) and run by and for citizenship teacher trainers), Lee Jackson helpfully discussed the notion of community participation. He questions whether the view of community should be narrow – as neighbourhood – or a much more expansive notion of a 'political ideal linked to participation, involvement and citizenship'. He interprets the National Curriculum as leaning towards the first model, with community defined as local area. Whether or not this is the case, we join him in the view that community should be regarded flexibly as local, national and even international, and that through identity and interest, pupils will want to participate and become involved in a range of ways. Such a broad view encompasses the local dimension, as exemplified by much of the work undertaken by CSV.

But it also takes us in to other areas where pupils can and should participate and make a difference. The Batley school project sought to establish the heritage and identity of different ethnic groups in the local community, and this

raises the question of the different identities of the United Kingdom and, indeed, what it means to be British.

So much has been written and said about this, especially since the events of 7 July 2005, which brought home to us the dangers of division in society, but I would like to refer to the speech made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, on the same day a year earlier. The Chancellor traced some of the reasons for the prominence of Britain in world history before the twentieth century, and the loss of confidence since the Second World War. He put the question, 'have the factors that forged the British nation now ceased to operate?' Having surveyed the debate, right and left, he finds common ground in 'the need to celebrate and entrench a Britishness defined by shared values strong enough to overcome discordant claims of separatism and disintegration.'

What are these shared values? Well, Gordon Brown argues for 'a passion for liberty anchored in a sense of duty and a commitment to tolerance and fair play'. Alongside these values he also places 'essentially British qualities: an ability to adapt, an openness to new ideas and influences which have made us, as a country, both creative and internationalist in our outlook'.

Finally, and what I think makes these characteristic values and qualities so apposite for today's context, the Chancellor talks about the agenda: to encourage and enhance the status of voluntary and community organisations; to strengthen local institutions of government; and to take citizenship seriously; as the Chancellor puts it: 'I believe strongly in the case for citizenship lessons in our schools, and the need for an extensive debate about what Britishness means.'

One of the key issues in this debate is about ethnicity. Britain's ethnic minorities have for decades, even centuries, made a significant and distinctive contribution to British culture, but attitudes towards ethnicity and Britishness still vary considerably, both between black and white, western and eastern European, Christian and Muslim, the English and the Scottish, rural and urban dwellers, to name just a few. The Chancellor argues that practical measures, such as the promotion of the English language, are something that will bind together the British. But additionally, it is the promotion of shared values and qualities that will improve our local communities, our country, and our global influence.

So let me return for a moment to Batley Business and Enterprise College. Pupils at the college have undertaken a project which fulfils the letter and spirit of the citizenship curriculum: pupils should know about the origins and implications of diverse identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding. They have also given thought to how this model might be communicated to other schools. This meets in full the requirement for communication and participation in the citizenship curriculum.

So why are not all schools rising to meet this challenge? In the context of our communities, our nation and our world in 2005, it is hard to see how much that is currently taught in schools can be more important than the issues I have raised today.

I urge the Department for Education and Skills to maintain the excellent support it has given to citizenship development by expanding the inservice training programme for teachers of citizenship, the pilot of which we inspected this year. As yet, these courses are reaching only a few teachers, but they offer different models for future wide-scale CPD provision with the added bonus of accreditation at Diploma and Masters levels. I urge the TDA to consider whether the numbers of new citizenship teachers entering the profession each year is sufficient. We know from our inspections of citizenship PGCE courses that they attract highly qualified, experienced and committed new teachers who have a great deal to offer to the development of the subject. I urge schools that have been slow or complacent in their citizenship development to return to first principles and think radically about their curriculum. I urge teachers of citizenship to sharpen their expertise by all the means available, to draw on the excellent resources produced by non-governmental organisations, the voluntary sector, and the media; to make citizenship compelling, controversial and informing. And finally, I urge those pupils who feel that their school is providing an inadequate level of citizenship education to point out that the opportunity to learn citizenship is not only their statutory entitlement but a vital part of the education that they deserve.