

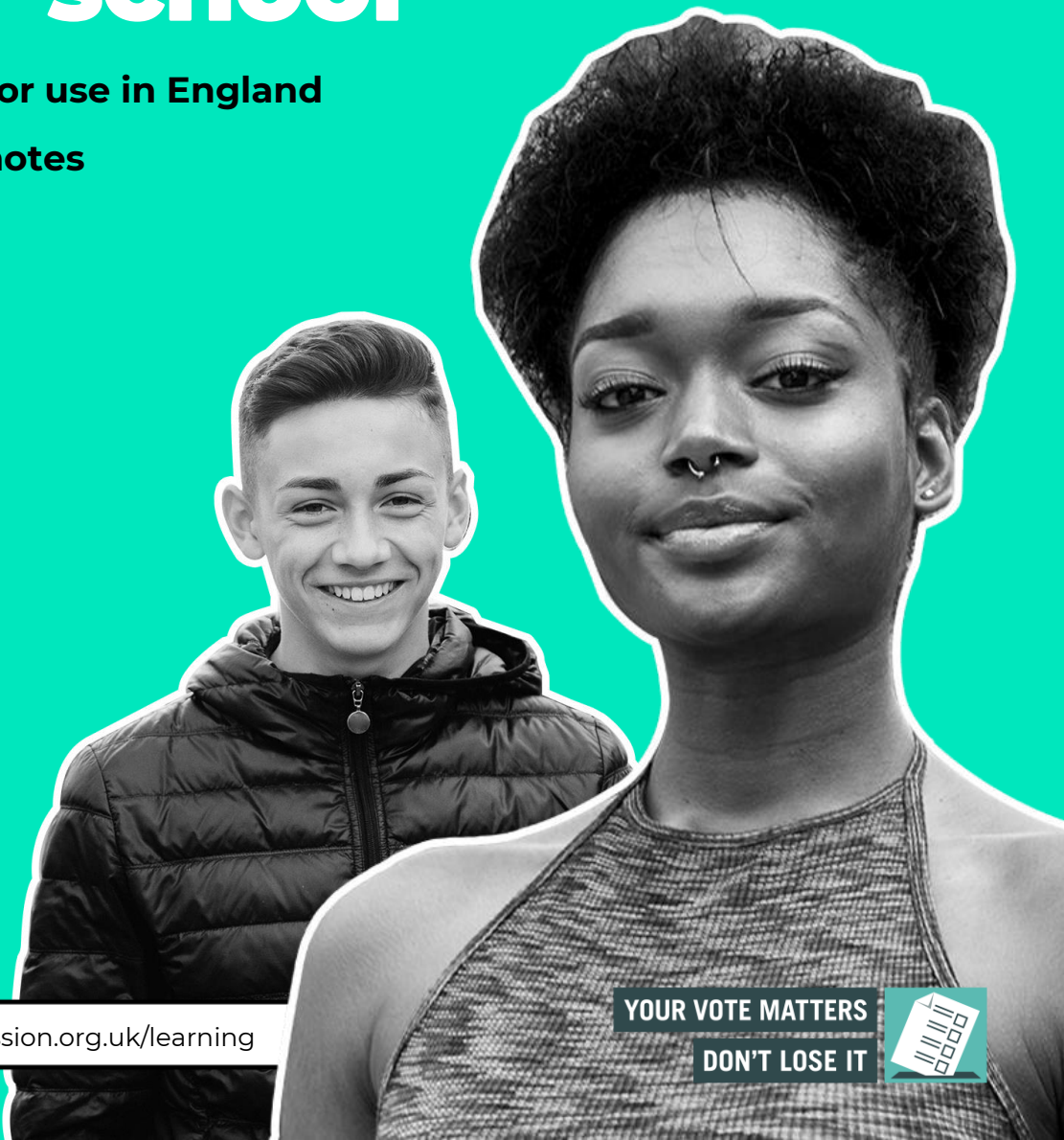
Referendum  
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The  
Electoral  
Commission

# Run a Referendum in your school

A resource for use in England

Educators' notes



[electoralcommission.org.uk/learning](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/learning)

YOUR VOTE MATTERS

DON'T LOSE IT



# 01.

## Introduction

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By the end of the project learners will understand that:

- I have a voice and my vote makes my voice heard
- I have the power, through my vote, to influence decision making

Students will be able to demonstrate this understanding by campaigning for and participating in an authentic school-based referendum.

As part of this project, it is important that students can take part in a meaningful and authentic vote within their class or year group, or across the whole school.

This project could be delivered in one or a number of lessons, or in a series of assemblies. Use the accompanying PowerPoint slides, making relevant updates where highlighted.

It is for the school to agree what the referendum issue or decision will be. This can be small or large scale, and the remit of the referendum is the school's decision.

Options could include:

- A change in uniform, including relaxation of uniform at break times or on particularly hot or cold days
- A charity to donate funds from a school charity day or event
- Rearrangement of classroom furniture
- Where to visit on an end of year trip
- Options for sports day events
- Choice of school play or production

Whatever issue or decision your school chooses, it is important that the result of the vote is committed to, so that students can see the impact their voice has made. Please ensure you have the relevant conversations in your school to be able to make this commitment.

This resource includes guidance on how to run a referendum in your school.



## 02.

# Curriculum links

Developing students' understanding of democratic processes contribute to the subject specific knowledge required for citizenship at KS4 and also provides a solid foundation for subjects such as history and politics.

In addition, the outlined content and activities contribute to cross-curricular requirements such as SMSC and language and literacy.

KS4 Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliamentary democracy and the key elements of the constitution of the United Kingdom, including the power of government, the role of citizens and Parliament in holding those in power to account, and the different roles of the executive, legislature and judiciary and a free press</li> <li>• the different electoral systems used in and beyond the United Kingdom and actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond</li> </ul>
SMSC	<p>Social: engagement with democracy</p> <p>Cultural: knowledge of Britain's democratic parliamentary system and its central role in shaping our history and values, and in continuing to develop Britain</p>
Spoken language	<p>Pupils should learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• justify ideas with reasons</li> <li>• ask questions to check understanding</li> <li>• develop vocabulary and build knowledge</li> <li>• negotiate; evaluate and build on the ideas of others;</li> <li>• select the appropriate register for effective communication.</li> </ul>



## 03.

# Learning sequence

## Having your say – setting ground rules (slide 2)

Before moving on to the sharing of students' views and opinions, it can be helpful to have a set of rules for discussion to ensure safe, respectful and orderly participation.

This is a suggestion of five rules. Encourage students to agree a sixth rule and use your own classroom rules if appropriate.

Remember:

- to be respectful of other views
- having a free-flowing discussion is great, and it's ok to try and persuade someone to your way of thinking
- to respect the person you're speaking to, and listen to what they have to say too
- it's good to feel passionately about something, but remember to treat people fairly
- be brave - this is your opportunity to speak up and be heard

Ask students:

- Why is it important to be able to give your opinion?
- How does it feel when your opinion persuades others? How does it feel when it doesn't?

These questions are intended to engage students with the importance and value of having a voice. Initially students are asked to consider matters they are familiar with, but this is laying the foundations to connect to wider politics and democracy.



# 04.

## Power

Ask students **(slide 3)**:

### Do you feel listened to?

Ask for examples of when they have shared their opinions and views and what happened, or didn't happen, because of this. Examples may include at school, at home, in school and youth councils, or in youth groups and clubs outside of school.

Show students the four images on **slide 4**.

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the possible link between the four images. Reveal each image one by one and pause between each image so students can discuss the possible link and refine their thinking. After revealing the fourth image, ask each group to hold up a whiteboard or piece of paper with their answer.

### The answer is power.

Discuss how power might be defined on these images. What types of power are illustrated in these pictures?

Power can be seen as an ability to do something. Think of superheroes – each has their own power.

Show students the four images on **slide 5**.

Transfer learners understanding of the concept of power to these images and discuss what power can be seen here.

What do these people, positions or organisations have the power to do?

- The military have the power to support and defend their country.
- Protesters and campaigners have the power to highlight an issue important to them and potentially change people's minds about it.
- The Prime Minister has the power to make decisions as the leader of the UK.
- Voters have the power to choose who represents them and makes decisions on their behalf in their council and UK Parliament.



## 05.

# Power

### Who has power in your school? (slide 6)

Power in a school comes in different forms and is held by different types of people.

Do students know who holds different types of power in their school? Who makes decisions?

- Who has the power to decide which staff to hire? Answer: Ultimately, this is usually the headteacher but other senior staff will make this decision too.
- Who has the power to decide to fire and hire the headteacher? Answer: Most schools will have a board of governors who appoint the headteacher.
- Who has the power to decide what is taught in every science lesson? Answer: the curriculum is decided by UK Government, but it is in each teacher's power to decide what every lesson looks like.
- Who has the power to decide if the school opens in extreme weather? Answer: the headteacher will usually make this decision, based on advice from the local council.
- Who has the power to decide whether the students work hard and succeed? Answer: Students have this power.



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## 06.

# What influences decision making?

## (slide 7)

Everyone makes decisions every day. Whether these are big or small decisions, there are lots of factors which influence decision making.

Ask students to think about:

- What influences the decisions we make every day?
- What influences what you watch on TV or do at the weekend?

Ask students to imagine they have a decision to make about their future. Suggestions could be what to do after they've finished school, where to go to university or college, or where to go on holiday.

Ask: what would be important to you when making this decision?

Share the examples on **slide 8**. Discuss and decide what the student think are the few most important.

- The views of my friends
- What I have seen on TV
- My personal experience
- What I have seen on social media
- What I have read on online news sites
- What I have read in newspapers
- Opinions of political figures
- Money and finances
- Where I went to school
- My gender
- Celebrities or influencers
- Where I grew up
- Where I live now
- My job
- Opinions of an expert
- My age
- The views of adults at home
- What else?





# 07.

## Decision making

### How to have your say (slide 9)

Ask students why they think it is important to be able to give their opinion in decision making. Start to engage them with the importance and value of having a voice.

Initially students are asked to consider matters they are familiar with, but this will lay the foundations to connect to wider politics and democracy.

Start to introduce examples of how young people can have their say.

- **Speak to decision makers** – share your opinions with people who make decisions (like your headteacher)
- **Start a petition** – if there's a change you'd like to make, you can gather support through signatures and share this with decision makers
- **Vote** – you can vote when your turn 18

### Decision making (slide 10)

Begin to introduce the idea that you will be holding an activity to make a decision about your chosen issue for your school.

Explain that the school is interested in the students' opinions and wants them to have the power to make a decision about your chosen issue. Emphasise that the decision they make will be followed.

Students need to be given an issue that is authentic and meaningful to make a decision about.

Students need to be supported to participate in a decision making process which is fair and allows everyone to participate if they want to.

It is likely that students will suggest a vote. In this context, this type of vote is called a referendum.

#### Referendum

A vote which makes a decision on a single issue.





# 08.

## Referendum

Share a timeframe with students for next steps ([slide 11](#)).

Next steps are:

- Agree on a question (optional)
- Campaigning
- Deadline to register to vote
- Hold the referendum

### Agree on a question ([slide 12 - optional](#))

Decide on your referendum question as a group. Alternatively, you may wish to make this decision prior to delivery.

The question must be:

- Fair – the question shouldn't lead a voter to make a decision one way or another
- Easy to understand – language should be clear
- Have two or more choices – voters should mark 'X' next to their choice, rather than write their decision

### Campaigning ([slide 13](#))

You may wish to organise time in

which students can make presentations, design posters, or create other campaign resources, in support of the different arguments for your issue.

See '[lesson plan 5](#)' in our six week scheme of work.

### Registering to vote ([slide 14](#))

Before voting in UK elections, you must register to vote.

Organise a process for students to register to vote before your referendum. Set a deadline for when registration closes to add an element of responsibility. The process could be:

- a sign-up register in a classroom or shared space
- asking students to write their name on a piece of paper and placing it into a box in the classroom

Discuss who should be allowed to vote in your referendum. For example, if your decision only impacts one year group, you may not want other year groups to be able to vote. Discuss the reasons for the decision on eligibility.



## 09.

# Holding the referendum

## (slide 16)

Decide a date and a venue to hold your referendum. You may choose to hold it in a usual lesson period, in an assembly, a break time, or over an entire school day.

Options for your polling station could be a classroom, the school hall, or other shared space.

### Creating the polling station

You may be able to borrow real election equipment, including polling booths and ballot boxes, from your local elections team. You can find their contact details by entering your school's [postcode on our website](#).

If this isn't possible, create a secure ballot box from classroom equipment and ensure that students are able to cast their vote in secret by having space between voting areas.

Set up a sign-in desk where voters are given their ballot papers. This ensures that only registered voters will be able to vote.

Below is an example ballot paper. Make sure you print at least one per voter, with a few spares in case of mistakes.

Once the vote has closed, it's up to you to count the votes and decide how the result will be announced.

### [Example ballot paper]

Should students at High Street School wear blazers on Fridays?

Mark 'X' next to your answer.

Yes

No

Voters should mark their vote with an 'X', fold their paper, and place it in the ballot box.

