



## **Global Citizenship Education and Active Citizenship in Educate Together Primary Schools**

### ***Submission to the National Conversation on Education by Global Citizenship Education Officer for Educate Together***

The National Conversation on Education presents a timely opportunity to place high-quality Global Citizenship Education at the centre of Ireland's long-term educational strategy. It has the opportunity to explicitly recognise the importance of embedding critical, justice-oriented Global Citizenship Education (GCE) across all schools, ensuring that every child can develop as an active, informed and compassionate citizen.

As Ireland faces rising inequality, climate instability and increasing social diversity, learners need opportunities to think critically, collaborate and engage as active citizens, as outlined in the Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2023). Educate Together has initiated a three-year Global Citizenship Education (GCE) project, funded by Irish Aid, strengthening links between Ireland's international development and national education policy.

The project supports teachers to facilitate student activism by enabling students to identify issues that matter to them, examine these through a global citizenship lens and design actions for positive change. It bridges curriculum aims and classroom practice, strengthening student voice, agency and democratic participation, and reflects Educate Together's commitment to equality and social awareness.

Through this work, Educate Together's Global Citizenship Education Officer collaborates with Irish Aid strategic partners Global Village and the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA), and other NGOs, to promote coherence and shared learning across the development education sector.

#### **A critical- approach to Global Citizenship Education**

Research (Cotter et al., 2022; Pashby, 2024) highlights the need for a justice-oriented approach to GCE. While many schools engage with global themes, activities can remain superficial and fail to address structural inequalities shaping local and global realities. Learners need support to question power, recognise injustice and understand interconnected systems.

Educate Together's Activism Project responds by moving beyond awareness-raising towards deeper engagement. Students explore root causes, consider multiple perspectives and collaborate on meaningful action. Achieving this requires sustained

teacher support, leadership structures that embed democratic participation and national alignment between curriculum and professional development.

### Education rooted in local communities

Active citizenship is strongest when connected to local contexts. Schools build partnerships with environmental groups, migrant support services, disability advocates, community organisations and local representatives. For example, a class in Carrigaline Educate Together NS joined a grassroots environmental campaign advocating sustainable solutions in their town. These partnerships deepen learning and show how collective action can influence change.

### Recognising and sharing good practice

Schools across the network are embedding GCE through climate initiatives, anti-discrimination campaigns and community partnerships. Students in Claregalway Educate Together NS organised toy swaps to reduce plastic pollution and overconsumption. Students in Bray School Project NS contributed to decisions about their hot-meals supplier, raising concerns about packaging, food waste and sourcing.

The Activism Project, alongside Educate Together's wider GCE work, is developing case studies, supporting a Community of Practice and providing ongoing training to analyse enabling conditions and share effective approaches across the network.

### Developing meaningful resources

A national survey carried out by DCU in 2023 identified teacher confidence as one of the main barriers to implementing GCE in Ireland. In Educate Together schools, activism was highlighted as a particular area where support is needed. In response, Educate Together's Global Citizenship Education Officer is developing resources that:

- build teacher confidence through clear, accessible guidance
- provide step-by-step support for facilitating activism projects
- align with curriculum aims and whole-school ethos
- include real examples from classrooms
- centre student voice and agency

These resources are being informed by teachers, school leaders and students to ensure they are practical, relevant and grounded in classroom realities.

### The need for national support and investment

The National Conversation of Education should consider the importance of high-quality GCE to benefit all children in all schools. Schools require sustained support to cultivate GCE competencies in meaningful ways.

This could be achieved through the following:

1. Strengthened teacher education and sustained professional development

Teachers need structured, ongoing support to deliver critical, justice-oriented GCE. This includes initial teacher education, continuous professional learning and access to

specialist guidance that helps them facilitate complex discussions on global justice matters.

## 2. Investment in high-quality, curriculum-aligned resources

Schools require coherent, accessible and age-appropriate materials that support deep learning and reflect the aims of the Primary Curriculum Framework. National investment would ensure consistency and reduce the burden on individual schools to source or create materials independently.

## 3. Specific funding on GCE for schools

Educate Together is currently the only patron in Ireland employing a dedicated Global Citizenship Education Officer at primary level. This role provides specialist, system-level guidance to schools in embedding the knowledge, skills and dispositions associated with active citizenship, sharing a workload that would otherwise fall entirely on teachers and limit implementation. However, the role is part-time and funded only through a short-term project. Sustained national investment is needed to ensure that all patron bodies can access similar expertise and that GCE can be embedded in a consistent, equitable and long-term way.

## Conclusion

Global Citizenship Education is essential to preparing children and young people for life in an interconnected and rapidly changing world. Educate Together's Activism Project demonstrates the feasibility and the impact of this work. With appropriate investment in teacher education and resource development, Ireland can ensure that every child has the opportunity to become an active, informed and compassionate citizen. The National Conversation on Education offers a timely opportunity to embed Global Citizenship Education at the heart of Ireland's long-term educational strategy.

## ***Global Citizenship Education Officer for Educate Together***