

What
is an

Educate
Together
School?

GLISH * MATHS * SCIENCE * ART * GEOGRAPHY * HISTORY * MUSI

I Learn
Together
to Live
Together

A Brief Introduction

Educate Together primary schools are a new type of school being offered to families in England for the first time. They are a model of primary school that has been successfully developed over the past 35 years. The model and its special ethical education curriculum are particularly suited to the education of children for life in today's diverse and globalised world.

What Makes Educate Together Schools Different?

Where schools differ from each other is in their "ethos". The ethos of a school describes its spirit and character. This is built upon its legal aims and objectives, its policies and procedures and a school's ethos should be reflected in all interactions and relationships within its community.

The fundamental legal concept of Educate Together's sponsorship is that the Board of an Educate Together school is bound to operate a school that delivers equality of access and esteem to all children, irrespective of their social, cultural and religious backgrounds.

This very simple idea is the foundation of all policy and practice in the school, whether it is the admissions policy, the way that the Board carries out its work, the way that a code of behaviour is developed or the manner in which the curriculum is delivered.



Governance

Educate Together Academy Trust is a new academy sponsor approved by the Department for Education. An academy sponsor takes on the responsibility of establishing a school, setting up its board of governors, establishing its fundamental curriculum approach, recruiting staff, setting up the financial structure and most importantly, establishing the school plan.

The trust is a company limited by guarantee whose activities are regulated by its Memo and Articles and relevant legislation. It is a not-for-profit organisation, a charity regulated by the Department for Education. It is a modern, transparent and accountable model of sponsorship. It is responsible to the Department for Education to ensure that its schools deliver an excellent education to children and value for money to the taxpayer.

In its operation as a school sponsor, the trust has set itself legally binding principles which determine all its activities. These principles are that all its schools and educational operations must be:

- **Equality based** i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- **Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities
- **Learner-centred** in their approach to education
- **Democratically run** with active participation by parents, pupils and the community in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers

The fundamental legal concept behind Educate Together's sponsorship is that the Board of an Educate Together school is legally obliged to operate the school to deliver equality of access and esteem to all children, irrespective of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds

It is important to note that these principles are not 'mission statements' or merely statements of aspiration or intent. They form real commitments to deliver an education that reflects these binding principles. The Board of Governors of an Educate Together school must judge its performance against these core principles at all levels of school activity.

It is worth considering these commitments in some detail.

The equality principle

Educate Together schools are committed to the principle that children of all backgrounds should be equally respected in all operations of the school. This definition embraces the family of the child and includes social class or wealth, culture and ethnicity, ability, gender and religious or philosophic viewpoint. This principle starts from the standpoint that no child chooses their family and every child has an infinite potential to progress. No child should be unfairly discriminated against in school. In religious terms the definition includes those of humanist, agnostic and atheistic viewpoints and a generic concept of 'personal creed'.

The term 'respect' is carefully chosen. There is a clear distinction made between the concept of accommodation or tolerance of difference and the concept of respect. Toleration and accommodation inherently imply that a majority view must make allowances for minority views and minorities must make requests to achieve this accommodation; respect implies care and equal treatment as of right.

In practice, the objective of an Educate Together school is to create a school culture and practice in which the identity of every child is guaranteed active support. Neither the child nor parents or guardians should have to ask for that respect to be given and no child or family should feel that they are an outsider.

The school works hard to create a positive, comfortable atmosphere. The underlying concept is that human diversity enhances life, enriches cultures and provides huge educational resources for current society and for its future social, cultural and economic prosperity.

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The Ethical Education Curriculum

In an Educate Together school a daily period of time is set aside for the ethical education curriculum. This programme is called the “Learn Together” curriculum and is published by Educate Together. It defines the values core of all teaching and learning in the school. It is subject to continuous review and development in our schools and decisions made at Annual General Meetings of the sponsor. A copy of the curriculum is available from the trust and is downloadable from the Educate Together website.

The programme is divided into four strands: *Moral and Spiritual Development, Justice and Equality, Ethics and the Environment* and *Belief Systems*. The curriculum specifically addresses the Educate Together ethos and it is here that the values that the school seeks to model in its ‘characteristic spirit’ are articulated and explained in greater depth.

Moral and Spritual Development

The aim here is to help develop in children a critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of right and wrong. Teachers aim to develop a strong awareness of social, ethical and moral standards through reflecting on the meaning and purpose of life. The strand should encourage and develop the individual on the journey to inner discovery and empower the child to make informed moral decisions.

Equality and Justice

The general aim of this strand is to develop in children a critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues relating to human rights, equality, culture and diversity, social justice and social inclusiveness and to empower them to make a difference.

Ethics and the Environment

Here the school develops in children a knowledge, appreciation and respect for their environment and to empower them to take an active rôle in its stewardship. The ‘environment’ is defined to include concepts of social, economic, political and environmental sustainability.

Belief Systems

In the strand called ‘Belief Systems’, the programme explains and explores the major belief systems in the world in an educational manner, teaching children about these faiths and beliefs without endorsing any particular one as religious truth. This strand of the curriculum is usually very important to ensure that children of all backgrounds feel fully part of the school.



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During the year, an Educate Together school may mark - in an age appropriate way - festivals such as Chinese New Year, Easter, Hindu Festival of Lights (Diwali), Harvest Festivals, Samhain (Halloween), Darwin Day, Ramadan and Eid, Hannuka and Christmas. The programme allows the school to explore the similarities and differences with the older celebrations that underlie many of these festivals. Examples would be how Celtic festivals and practices underpin the way that Easter is celebrated in Britain or the solstice-based festivals that occur in many religions around the end of the year.

It is normal that the treatment of these events becomes integrated into the whole school programme, involving drama, art, music, history and geography and also in many cases, parental and community participation. This may mean exploring wider cultural themes such as cuisine and family celebrations. The range of such activities within an individual school will be determined through careful consultations with the school community.

The educational aim of this work is to model positive information about the diversity of humanity in a respectful atmosphere which highlights rights and responsibilities.

This approach has a number of consequences:

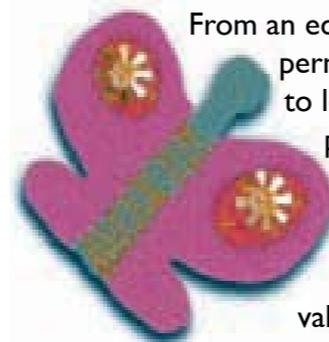
- When this model of school ethos is conscientiously implemented, no child is ever placed in a position in which they feel themselves an outsider in the school programme because of their family or individual identity. The approach minimises the situations in which parents or children feel the need to remove themselves from aspects of school life.
- It maximises the school's ability to address the religious rights of all families without favour or discrimination.
- Responsibility for religious formation of children is assumed to be that of the family and religious organisations, while the responsibility of the school is to provide a safe, caring and respectful environment for all children. This encourages children to have a strong and secure contact with their own identity and comfort in interaction with people of different faiths and persuasions.
- The human rights of teachers and other workers in the school are addressed, as staff are never placed in a position in which they may be required to put forward as religious truth a viewpoint that they may not themselves hold.

Whilst Educate Together holds that this way of treating religious difference in a school context offers many advantages, we appreciate that there are families for whom this model may not be suitable. For instance,

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an Educate Together school depends on parents who are happy to allow their children to explore and be exposed to different religious and philosophical views and who do not regard it as their religious duty to seek to persuade others of their beliefs.

Educate Together schools will attempt to handle these issues as sensitively as possible and engage with the families involved. However, in the case of families who observe strict guidelines around their children's exposure to artwork, games or sports of other faiths, a religious school of their conscience, or a recognised programme of home education may well be a more appropriate choice.



From an educational perspective, the inclusive nature of the Educate Together ethical programme permeates and influences all teaching in the school. The focus is on an explorative approach to learning that is managed and facilitated by the teacher. Children are encouraged to gain personal understandings in a creative and supportive learning environment. They are encouraged to evaluate information, form judgements and articulate these judgements in a supportive, respectful and safe environment.

Educate Together schools promote an approach to education which is based on the core values of mutual respect, self-esteem, dignity and critical awareness.

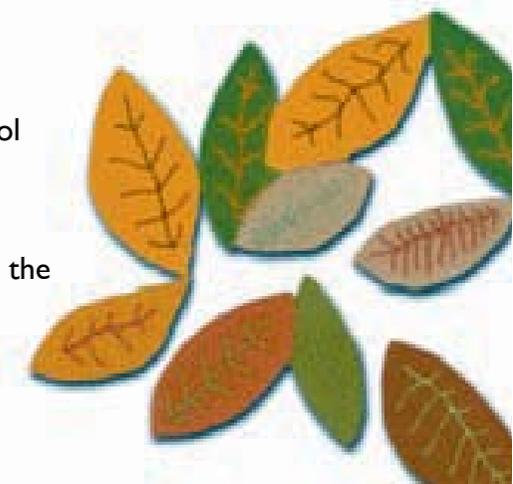
The child is formally recognised as a participant in the education process and a valued part of the learning organisation that is Educate Together. Participation in school affairs and listening to the voices of the children is part of the democracy that underpins the school. This core value of partnership aims to nurture a deep appreciation of the concepts of participation and rights in society, organisations and the world.

The approach taken to ethical education in Educate Together schools aims to directly promote the life skills that are essential to a generation of children, growing up into a diverse and varied social environment. Their adult experience will be genuinely global in scope.

Co-educational

The co-educational principle obliges the Board of an Educate Together school to work to ensure that all children are empowered to fulfil their potential irrespective of gender.

Co-educational education is far more than simply putting girls and boys into the same classroom and teaching them the same curriculum. Instead, it should ensure that the school develops a comprehensive programme to counter



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gender stereotyping in all its forms. Schools should be proactive in promoting an approach to learning that encourages and supports the wide variety and range of talents among the children irrespective of gender.

This is a complex issue that a school cannot solve on its own; nevertheless it must be addressed and discussed within schools in partnership with parents, teachers and students. The significance of this element of a school's work should not be underestimated.

The rebalancing of gender roles based on equality and respect is central to the growth and development of society and Educate Together is committed to ensuring that children are given every opportunity to explore and develop an equitable approach to gender.

Active combating of gender-based discrimination and encouragement of children of both sexes is an important part of the 'school plan' in an Educate Together school.

Learner-centred

This principle ensures that the approach to teaching and learning in an Educate Together school is based on the educational needs of the children of the school. In other words, the teaching staff are required to observe and analyse these needs, devise appropriate lessons and activities to address them and to be accountable to the board for the success of their teaching. In other words, Educate Together schools do not simply teach to the test. They teach to the needs of children which in many cases are far beyond the levels set by standardised tests and are always much broader.

Learner or child-centred education addresses the full range of a pupil's intelligence and ability. The school addresses emotional well-being, confidence, teamwork, creativity, sports, drama, performance. It embraces physical, practical and academic skills. However, this principle means rather more than the definition of a teaching philosophy. It defines another element of policy formation.

It obliges its Board to take decisions primarily based on the broad educational and developmental needs of the children over and above other external factors. This for instance, would influence decisions on opening hours, school holidays, code of behaviour and allocation of funds. Many of these decisions involve striking a balance between conflicting obligations. Nevertheless, this aspect of Educate Together's legal obligations ensures that the needs of the children of the school decisively influence the decision-making process.

It should be noted that we refer to the "children of the school". A school is a collective organisation that strives to address the individual needs of every child. However, any school must balance these needs with the general interests of all the children.



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Democratically-run

Educate Together schools base their operations on high levels of parental and community participation. Our experience, and a wide range of international research shows, that a child's education is deeply affected by the influence of their family and factors outside school. The more a school engages a child's parent or carer and the community from which they come, the better the school works and a huge level of 'added value' can be accessed. As a sponsor, Educate Together facilitates this process and empowers those involved.

Educate Together provides advice, training and support in negotiating with relevant organisations, including the Department for Education, local authorities and local community, business, sporting, cultural and religious organisations. We understand that the key stakeholders in the process are the parents and volunteers who tackle the difficult and complex task of establishing and running a school.

As a result, parents have a vital role in the operation of the school and its ethos reflects this. High levels of parental involvement in the work of the school are encouraged. Our democratic principle obliges the school's Board to encourage and welcome this involvement whilst balancing it with an equal obligation to "positively affirm the professional role of the teacher".

Educate Together schools have been pioneers in the development of the concept of partnership between parents and teachers in the operation of schools. A critical element of this lies in the involvement of parents and guardians in the educational process itself. This is achieved through the provision of support for the teacher inside and outside the classroom and in providing educational activities that are not available to the school in the normal way.

Examples of such support include:

- participation in classroom activities
- the organising of extra-curricular activities
- participation in educational support activities such as paired reading, language development and sports
- help with the artistic, musical, dramatic, linguistic or science and technology programmes
- support in the delivery of the ethical curriculum
- support in the maintenance of the school building
- serving on Boards of Governors and other school committees

No Child an
Outsider

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Educate Together and the Community

Once a school opens itself up to the participation of parents, guardians, carers, grandparents and the community, it has access to a wide and rich range of resources that would be impossible to provide by funding alone. This is of great support to the teachers in the school and of immense educational benefit to the children.

It requires skill and care to operate a primary school which respects the delicate balance between the intense individual commitment of parents to their child's education and the professional, objective care and attention of highly qualified teaching professionals. Educate Together is committed to ensuring that schools nurture this partnership, and provides training and support in order to maximise the potential of this approach.

The involvement of parents and carers in partnership with the staff provides children with examples of practical community co-operation. This is a powerful support to the values articulated in the classroom. Children thrive in this atmosphere and are similarly inspired to work together in diverse settings in order to achieve common goals.

This approach to education promotes the democratic involvement of children in the school. We have found that it is possible to operate effective Student Councils in primary schools and that it is vital to the success of codes of behaviour that children and parents directly participate in the drawing up of such policies. Once children have a safe space in which they can participate, assured of support of teachers and parents, they can influence the growth of many other school policies and have done so very successfully. In recent years, for instance, many school environmental policies have been successfully driven by children's committees and have resulted in the granting of awards by the Eco-schools organisation to many schools.



What is an Educate Together School?

Conclusion

This is a very brief overview of some of the key concepts involved in the Educate Together model of primary school.

Educate Together does not claim any exclusive rights to these ideas. Many of them are implemented in other schools in the UK and abroad and we fully endorse the efforts of dedicated educators operating in schools with different sponsors or management structures.

We do not see our future as an exclusive or niche provider in the system. Rather we see the development of Educate Together schools as part of a complementary development. We believe in cooperation and schools of different types working together. We are committed to work with others to bring the structure of education into balance with the needs of our rapidly changing society and to address the human rights of children, parents and teachers.

We hope that this booklet has been helpful in answering some of the questions about an Educate Together school and our aims as an educational charity. If you would like to know more, would like to enrol your child in an Educate Together school or help us with our work, further information is available from our office and website.

We look forward to meeting and working with many people and organisations to provide an educational system that truly serves the needs of today's children and young adults.

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