Citizens of now

High-quality youth social action in primary schools

Participating in high-quality youth social action opportunities has a ‘double benefit’. It benefits both the young people involved and their communities.

We want to encourage more primary schools to make the most of the opportunities and benefits high-quality youth social action has to offer. Over the last three years, in partnership with the Pears #iwill Fund, the RSA has been exploring this. We designed, delivered, and evaluated RSA4, a youth social action programme for Year 4 pupils. Our action research investigated what high-quality youth social action looks like in a primary school setting and what enables or limits teachers’ abilities to embed youth social action into their practice.

This report is a celebration of the RSA4 schools’ efforts and achievements, and we hope that with the practical guidance, it inspires more teachers to lead youth social action in their own settings, empowering pupils to be socially responsible citizens of now.

This flyer is a summary of insights and practical guidance for educators.
High-quality principles for social action

The six principles help define what high-quality social action means in practice for all young people. This should be your starting point:

1. Foster greater involvement in similar activities
2. Provide opportunities for recognition and reward.
3. Are led, owned and shaped by young people
4. Create positive social change that is of benefit to the wider community as well as to the young people themselves
5. Normalise social action as part of participants’ lives
6. Are stretching and engaging, as well as exciting and enjoyable

Principles for high-quality youth social action

Reflective

Socially impactful

Progressive

Youth-led

Challenging

Embedded

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What are the active ingredients of high-quality youth social action?

**For achieving intended outcomes:**

— Pupils’ ownership over the goal and the means of the youth social action project.
— Pupils’ feel connected to their local community and part of something bigger.
— Pupils’ perception that the project is sufficiently difficult, including feeling a sense of ‘controlled discomfort’.
— Pupils’ perception that the project is successful.
— Pupils’ awareness of their personal development.
— Schools are connected and engaged with their local community.
— Teachers have confidence in teaching sensitive and/or controversial issues.

**For overcoming practical and ethical challenges:**

— School leadership drives a culture of youth social action and helps to overcome teacher-level barriers to engagement.
— Schools encourage youth-voice.
Practical guidance for educators

In order to support these active ingredients, here is some practical guidance for teachers on how to facilitate high-quality youth social action:

**Give pupils agency**
Allow pupils to lead, shape, and own their youth social action project.

**Explore the issue in full**
Provide plenty of learning opportunities for pupils to better understand their chosen social issue.

**Get to know your community allies**
Your local community is a great resource for you to draw upon to enhance the quality of youth social action.

**Make it relevant to your school**
Embed youth social action within your school and practice.

**Agree milestones for reflections**
Create a sense of commitment and accountability by agreeing on milestones, as well as what good would look like at each stage.

**Link to your curriculum**
Adapt your scheme of work to incorporate the chosen social issue across different subjects.

Full report, ‘Citizens of Now’ available on the RSA website thersa.org