

HUMANITIES 20:20

A new vision for primary schools



We are educators who work with young children and believe that the humanities matter profoundly. It is through the humanities (*History, Geography, Religious Education and Citizenship*) that we learn about the world and its people and become responsible citizens. These help children to explore questions to do with values, purpose and meaning and to build their sense of identity and self-worth. This empowers them to contribute to creating a more just and inclusive society.

Primary schools have a duty to equip children for the challenges of the 21st century. We believe that the primary school curriculum in England is failing to do this or to fulfil the legal requirement for a balanced and broadly-based curriculum. Literacy and numeracy dominate the curriculum while other vital aspects of learning are often ignored. This is wrong.

We want young children to be literate and numerate, but much more than that. We affirm that every child is entitled to rich, stimulating and engaging learning experiences.

We want children to have more opportunities to be creative and to build on their sense of curiosity. We would like to bring more joy and imagination back into the classroom.

We are building an alliance of like-minded people to campaign for change. Our aim is to promote the teaching and learning of the humanities in primary education and to empower heads, teachers and teacher educators to explore, try out and share varied ways of working. We invite you to join us in bringing this vision to life.

"We are the first generation to know we are destroying the world and we could be the last that can do anything about it."

David Attenborough

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WHY THE HUMANITIES MATTER

The humanities prepare students to be good citizens and help them understand a complicated, interlocking world. The humanities teach us critical thinking, how to analyse arguments and how to imagine life from the point of view of someone unlike yourself.

Martha Nussbaum

The challenges of globalisation and the need for sustainability and social justice in the 21st century raise important, often controversial, issues about identity, diversity and how to care for other people and the planet.

History, Geography, RE and Citizenship have a vital role in addressing these questions. These areas contribute to children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) and learning to be responsible citizens in ways which enrich their sense of what it is to be human.

Put simply, the humanities matter because they enable children to:

- consider questions about the meaning and purpose of their lives
- explore their own identities, values and beliefs and concepts such as time, space and faith
- develop skills and habits associated with critical and creative thinking
- extend their cultural and imaginative horizons
- learn to empathise with people who are different, as well as those who are similar, thereby celebrating diversity and challenging stereotypes
- learn about democracy, global citizenship and sustainability
- strengthen a sense of care for themselves, each other and the planet in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We believe that our aims and vision based on the education of the 'whole child' are widely shared by those who work with primary school children. The humanities can light a 'fire' in young children that can burn for the rest of their lives, promoting a thirst for knowledge and truth.

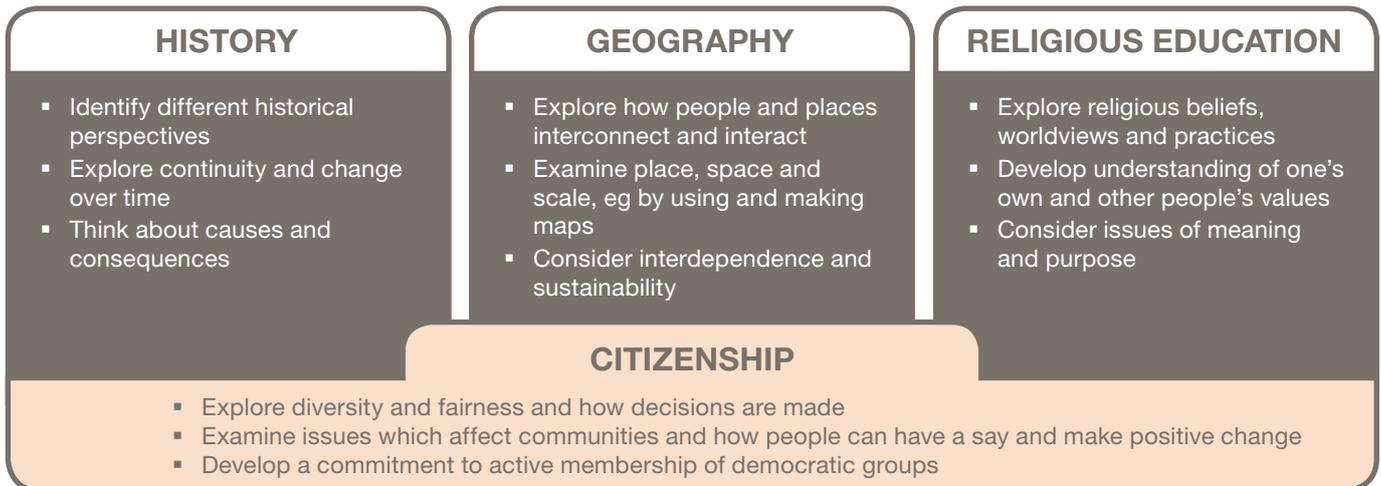
Without a good humanities education, children will have fewer opportunities to develop sensitivity and empathy, to understand their responsibilities to others and to recognise how shared understandings and values enrich and improve society.



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WHAT THE HUMANITIES MEAN FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

The chart below sets out some distinctive ways in which learning through history, geography, RE and citizenship education can stimulate children's interests and enable them to be educated for a world of change and diversity.



Children value and enjoy learning factual information and the skills and concepts associated with specific subjects and disciplines. But young children, especially, learn these most deeply through active, first-hand experience and by applying their knowledge in situations which they find real and meaningful.

This involves ways of working and thinking such as observing, questioning and interpreting, often through fieldwork and visits which may involve crossing subject boundaries.

Such an approach helps to build on and stimulate children's curiosity, imagination and creativity and to challenge them in ways that extend and enrich their experience and knowledge. It also requires types of assessment which do not just judge what can be measured in tests.

We believe that this approach is appropriate and motivating for all children, including those who are disengaged from the more 'academic' aspects of schooling.

Teaching in this way is demanding but fulfilling. Providing a high quality education requires a considerable level of expertise and a commitment to understanding how young children learn best. Making this vision a reality will require the provision of extensive opportunities for professional learning.



Taking action

This manifesto has been written because we care passionately about helping young children to be fulfilled individuals and compassionate global citizens. We want to stimulate discussion and to be empowering rather than prescriptive. And we hope that you and many others will join us in campaigning for, and creating, change.

EVERYONE CAN HELP BY

- signing up to express their support at www.humanities2020.org.uk and encouraging other people to do so
- sharing this manifesto widely, electronically or by ordering hard copies
- contacting your MP and other politicians asking them to sign this manifesto and
- letting us know what you plan to do and have done.

PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS AND TEACHERS COULD

- review your curriculum to consider whether it is too narrow and consider how you can
- meet the needs of children in the ways described, even better than at present.

TEACHER EDUCATORS COULD

- discuss and plan with colleagues ways in which students can be introduced to this vision of the humanities.

PARENTS AND GOVERNORS COULD

- raise these ideas with the headteacher or governing body and ask them to ensure that all children experience a rich, varied and engaging curriculum.

CHILDREN, WHATEVER THEIR AGE, COULD

- let us know what types of learning you really care about and enjoy; and
- tell your parents and teachers.

These are just some ideas. We are sure that you will have others. Together, we can and must ensure that our vision becomes a reality.

This manifesto, written by a group of teacher educators, is supported by many individual teachers, headteachers and teacher educators and organisations which represent the views of primary practitioners in specific subjects and more widely. Supporting research evidence and case studies are available at www.humanities2020.org.uk and will be added to in the future. To find out more, tell us what you are doing or plan to do, and help re-invigorate the humanities in primary education, please contact us on info@humanities2020.org.uk

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