

# Courageous Advocacy

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May 2021



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
EDUCATION OFFICE

## The purpose of this document

The term ‘courageous advocacy’ is the only new concept in the 2018 SIAMS schedule. It has been widely welcomed by schools and this resource has been produced to explain the idea and to help schools reflect on how this might help enhance the education they provide for their pupils.

It is important to stress that this is not about meeting the requirements of SIAMS, or a way of getting a good or excellent grade, or a box ticking exercise. If schools approach it in that way, it will be a meaningless – ‘a chasing after the wind’ as Ecclesiastes puts it in Chapter 1 verse 11. Courageous advocacy is a long-term legacy, an endowment to future generations; it is about releasing the possibility of the pupils in our schools to serve the common good.

This document is offered as a guide and a support to help schools, school leaders and SIAMS inspectors to explore the concept of courageous advocacy and what that might mean in the unique context of each school.

*‘What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ (Micah 6:8)*



***St Peter’s CE Primary School, Rochdale*** receiving their Global Neighbours Bronze award

## Courageous Advocacy: A New Concept

### Introduction

First perhaps an explanation is needed of the thinking behind the introduction of this ‘new thing’.

School leaders understandably have a natural tendency to look inwards toward the interests of the school, its pupils and its immediate community. This is commendable: it is what they are there for; it is what accountability agencies including SIAMS have always focused on; it is what the educational leadership literature stresses. When charitable work is considered it is inevitably through a lens that asks, ‘how will this benefit our pupils?’, ‘how will this develop individual pupils?’, ‘how will this improve the reputation of the school?’

All schools support a range of charities, often including Comic Relief, Children in Need and local or other charities chosen by the children or wider community. This is a good thing, but it is universal and a natural thing for a profession led by caring and compassionate individuals; it is not in itself an aspect of Christian distinctiveness.

As a SIAMS inspector of many years standing, I had become increasingly frustrated with the conversations I was having with school leaders around the charity work that the school was doing. I was normally presented with a list of charities the school has supported. When I asked the question about how this related to the usually impressive list of school values provided, I was regularly met with confused looks. Something was missing.

Yet sometimes I came across a school that really did have a profound sense of social action. A school that had looked beyond the local, the current and the fashionable to the global, the long-term and the unfashionable. A school that had rooted that outlook in a concern for justice and in its understanding of its identity as a church school. It may have originated in the inspirational work of a member of staff or something in the school’s local environment but wherever this had happened, it was transformational.

In the discussion paper ‘The Fruits of the Spirit’ (2015), the Church of England Education Office articulated it in this way:

*‘The role of the Church of England as the established Church is to look constantly to the bigger picture, to follow a higher calling, to be a prophetic voice in society. Character education may be educating every child to be as well equipped to be a prophet as to turn a profit’<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *The Fruits of the Spirit: A Church of England Discussion Paper on Character Education* (The Church of England Education Office 2015) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)



I have always been challenged by the quote widely attributed to Dom Helder Camara, the former Archbishop of Recife in Brazil:

*'When I feed the poor, they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist.'*

The prophetic voice - the asking 'why' people are hungry, even if that makes you unpopular - is an important part of a Christian response. Compassion is important, but more is needed. Jesus identified with the poor and the marginalised. The understanding of the causes of suffering and the righteous anger this engenders is the first stage of a Christian response. It is the beginning of empathy and understanding. It is the start of action and response. It is also a more enquiry-led educational activity than thinking of new ways to raise money.

We wanted the new SIAMS schedule<sup>2</sup> to capture something of this. Standing up for the poor and marginalised is not easy, it takes courage and resilience, but it is a gospel imperative. And so the concept of courageous advocacy was born.

*Pupils at Knayton school are genuinely passionate and articulate about their role as 'agents of change', firmly believing that they can 'change the world'... Pupils have ownership of projects because they have such an important role to play in deciding what projects should be chosen, what action they would like to take to bring about change and in evaluating its effectiveness. Learning about people from different backgrounds and environments was viewed as central to their school life and pupils explained clearly that they didn't just view courageous advocacy as fundraising but cited projects they were involved in which involved other ways of effecting change. Pupils were strong in their conviction that their role as 'agents of change' would not end when they left Knayton school stating: 'whatever school we go to, we can make a difference there'.*

From **Knayton CE Academy** Global Neighbours Gold Assessment

We could have located this almost anywhere in the schedule, but it felt right that this was part of the character development of pupils, so its natural home seemed to be Strand 3 of the SIAMS schedule. This was something that would, at its best, be a worldview that would shape young people and something they would carry with them into adult life.

The concern for social action has the potential to develop into a rather depressing aspect of education and there is some evidence that concern about social issues such as climate change can raise anxiety levels in young people<sup>3</sup>. As such, it is important that courageous advocacy is framed in terms of hope and aspiration. Courageous advocacy is about creating the confidence that we can make a real change in the face of some of the seemingly insurmountable giants the world faces.

<sup>2</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Evaluation Schedule* (The National Society 2018)

<sup>3</sup> 'Overwhelming and terrifying: The rise of climate anxiety' The Guardian website 2020/02/10 [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/10/overwhelming-and-terrifying-impact-of-climate-crisis-on-mental-health) (accessed 23/06/20)

Drawing on biblical teaching, Professor David Ford and Andy Wolfe capture well the importance of this positive approach:

*'Biblical leaders at their best, place their confidence not in themselves, but in leaning on God and God's wisdom - 'I can do all this through him who gives me strength' (Philippians 4:13); resting in God's security - 'You are my strength, I watch for you: you God are my fortress, my God on whom I rely' (Psalm 59:9); bold in ambition - 'for the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline' (2 Timothy 1:7); expectant in prayer - 'This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us' (1 John 5:14). Christian confidence is not simply about boldly doing more, or becoming self-assured, but about a choice of orientation towards God and God's purposes.'*<sup>4</sup>

### **Derek Holloway: School Character and SIAMS Development Manager**

#### **Questions for this section:**

*What 'seemingly insurmountable giants' do you feel the world is facing?*

*What motivates you to get involved in charity and social action projects? Your faith? Your personal experience?*

*What factors influence your school community in the choice of charitable causes to support?*

*How does this relate to your school's vision and values?*

*To what extent do you take a wider view of need beyond your school?*

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<sup>4</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Called Connected Committed 24 Leadership Practices for Educational Leaders* (The Church of England Education Office 2019) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)

## Some working definitions

### Courageous Advocacy

By way of a working definition, when using the term ‘courageous advocacy’ we are referring to the act of speaking out against an issue of injustice, often on behalf of those whose voice is not heard. Speaking out, at whatever level this takes place, requires an element (and sometimes a great deal) of courage! Becoming a courageous advocate for change, therefore, must involve being informed about an issue and it must move beyond simply knowing, to saying and doing. Educating for courageous advocacy must embody an ethos of action-taking, challenging injustice and becoming agents of change in the transformation of ourselves, our relationships and our communities from the local level to the global.



**Trinity St Peter's CE Primary School, Liverpool**  
Gold Global Neighbours award holders: pupils with Local MP, Bill Esterson and Hannah McLean-Knight, Campaign Officer for the Send My Friend to School Campaign

### Social Action

A government policy paper providing guidance on enabling social action defined it as, ‘people coming together to tackle an issue, support other people, or improve their local area. It involves people giving their time and other resources for the common good, in a range of forms – from volunteering to community-owned services, and peer networks to community organising.’<sup>5</sup>

*They expressed hope of a ripple effect, with their parents talking to friends and colleagues and the message spreading outwards from Formby. Likewise, pupils have petitioned local councillors as well as MPs. They have secured assurances that their ideas will be taken further. The whole school has particularly embraced the Send My Friend to School campaign. Pupils’ actions that started small, grew to include focused conversations with MPs, faith leaders and other local schools. Pupils continue to be driven to see the campaign progress and one pupil commented that ‘they feel more confident to make the change’.*

From **Trinity St Peter's CE Primary School, Liverpool**, Global Neighbours Gold assessment

<sup>5</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance) (Feb 2017)

## Section 1: A theological basis for courageous advocacy

The Christian gospel is, at its heart, a message of hope for all people and all situations. Living in the light of resurrection hope, we seek to ‘step back’ to try to catch a glimpse of God’s view of reality, a hopeful vision of the future from a God who can do ‘immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine’ (Ephesians 3:20). God invites us to join in with this vision as we work towards the building of his kingdom here on earth.

God’s heart for justice and vision of human flourishing are plain to see in the justice thread that runs throughout the biblical narrative. From early in the Hebrew scriptures, God’s vision for his people is evident. Embedded in the instructions God gave to his people in Leviticus and Deuteronomy is God’s heart that all, including the disadvantaged, should have the opportunity to flourish. God’s care for the weak and the vulnerable is clear in his instructions that the orphan, the widow, the fatherless and the foreigner should not be mistreated or taken advantage of but should, in fact, be cared for.

The call of God’s prophets echoes this vision as God’s people are called to repentance and a recalibration of their treatment of the poor and vulnerable. God longs for a world where ‘justice rolls like a river’ (Amos 5:24) and that is what we too are called towards.

This justice thread continues to weave its tapestry through the New Testament as Jesus ushers in God’s kingdom. Jesus welcomed the outsider and spoke up for those who were marginalised and ignored. Again and again, we read of life-changing encounters for individuals on the fringes of society when they met with Jesus: those with disabilities, leprosy sufferers, the Samaritan woman whose behaviour meant she visited the well to draw water when others were not around, dishonest tax collectors seen as traitors to the Romans. These marginalised neighbours were the very people Jesus invited to dinner.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25 onward) is powerful, well known and regularly used in schools and in wider society. It is often used to explore values such as ‘kindness’ and ‘compassion’ in school: the focus is normally on responding to need when you come across it, but it is worth revisiting why Jesus told this parable. He was asked by ‘an expert in law’ the question, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ His use of a Samaritan (neither racially or religiously pure in the eyes of the original audience) as the main protagonist - in a parable to teach about what love of neighbour truly looks like - speaks volumes about Jesus’ desire to speak up for the ‘voiceless’.

Jesus’ heart for courageous advocacy is unmistakable. He risks public ridicule to speak up for the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), highlighting the injustice about to be brought upon her by people who needed to do some self-examination before passing judgement on others.

By empowering young people and adults within our schools to claim their voice and take their place as active global citizens, we join in with kingdom building and God’s redemptive work in

the world, which can be transformative for all involved as we ‘tap into’ God’s reality and his vision for the future of his world where justice and mercy will reign.



**Holy Trinity CE Infant School, Southwell**  
Bronze Global Neighbours award holders

## A call to courageous advocacy

The words of Martin Niemöller, founder of the Confessing Church in 1930s Germany (set up in protest at the Nazi takeover of the German Protestant Churches) serve as a reminder of the importance of speaking up against injustice. This is a lesson that we ignore at our peril; a warning against apathy and a reminder about the moral interconnectedness and interdependence of the human family. Human flourishing is not possible without a commitment towards one another.

*‘We are only persons with each other: our humanity is ‘cohumanity’, inextricably involved with others, utterly relational, both in our humanity and our shared life on a finite planet. If those others are of ultimate worth, then we are each called to responsibility towards them and to contribute responsibly to our communities.’<sup>6</sup>*

A call to courageous advocacy is therefore vital to the outworking of a Christian vision of human flourishing and the offer of life in all its fullness for all. This call can be seen in the four basic elements that run through the Church of England’s vision for education and form an ‘ecology’ of the fullness of life, rooted firmly in the belief that each person is created in the image of God and that this is where an individual’s ultimate worth lies.

<sup>6</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian Serving the Common Good* (The Church of England Education Office 2016) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)



Our hope is to grow communities of people who have the courage to, ‘speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves’ (Proverbs 31:8) as the communities we serve experience education for wisdom, hope, community and dignity:

<b>Wisdom</b>	develop people who seek wisdom, nurturing skills and creativity, including, notably, in the area of sustainable development
<b>Hope</b>	open up horizons and seek to inspire hope in God’s future for our world as we provide opportunities to encounter the Jesus of hope and experience the possibility of a vision of justice and mercy, sending out young people who are carriers of hope
<b>Community</b>	teach people what it means to live in a global community that enables people to flourish and the centrality of love of God and neighbour to this
<b>Dignity</b>	embody respect and value each person, blessing others that they in turn might be a blessing.

**Questions for this section:**

*In what ways are global citizenship education and courageous advocacy integral to human flourishing?*

*If our vision for human flourishing includes a vision for opening pupils’ eyes to the wider world, how might that inform decisions about spending, curriculum, collective worship, opportunities for social action, engagement with charitable organisations...?*

*When we pray, ‘your kingdom come’, what are we doing to look beyond ourselves for opportunities to work for a fairer and more joyful world?*

## Section 2: Courageous advocacy in schools: Educating for Hope and Aspiration

Much has been said elsewhere about character education so, for the purposes of this resource, we will focus on the courageous advocacy element of ‘Strand 3: Character Development: Hope, Aspiration and Courageous Advocacy’<sup>7</sup> in the SIAMS Evaluation Schedule. However, it is

*Pupils and staff are able to articulate and explain how to address areas of disadvantage, deprivation, and the exploitation of the natural world with passion and practicality. Concern for the declining bee population motivates younger pupils to grow bee-friendly plants. Older pupils link their environmental concerns with their global knowledge. This leads them to recycle plastics into eco-bricks to help construct a school in Calcutta. The school takes their concerns to their local Member of Parliament (MP) who raises them in Westminster demonstrating courageous advocacy on a remarkable scale for a very small rural primary school. This is recognised by the Eco-Schools bronze award which has boosted the pupils’ confidence and esteem. Parents confirm that this learning extends beyond school. One parent states their child led a beach clean-up whilst on holiday. Another parent states that their child wrote to a coffee chain to ask them to stop using single use plastics; both a direct result of learning at school.*

**Shocklach Oviatt CE Primary School SIAMS report**

important to acknowledge that character and moral development, supported by a school vision that is, ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good’<sup>8</sup>, is integral to giving pupils and adults a hopeful vision for the communities of which they are a part. The development of these virtues helps to develop an outward looking sense of responsibility towards others.

The Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership seeks school leaders who are ‘called’, ‘connected’ and ‘committed’<sup>9</sup> and such leaders have much to offer in articulating God’s vision for his world with human flourishing at its heart. Decisions made in school reflect what leaders consider to be worth learning about and worth investing in (time, finances, resources) and so, by living their vision into being, school leaders demonstrate what they believe to be important.

Being courageous advocates for change begins with called, connected and committed school leaders who make decisions based on a clear moral purpose about what education is for: **called**

<sup>7</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Evaluation Schedule* (The National Society 2018)

<sup>8</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian Serving the Common Good* (The Church of England Education Office 2016) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)

<sup>9</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Called Connected Committed 24 Leadership Practices for Educational Leaders* (The Church of England Education Office 2019) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)

leadership marked by integrity and honesty; **connected** leadership centred around interdependence, compassion and humble servant leadership; and finally, leadership that is **committed** to the flourishing of all members of the school community. It is the living of your Christian vision into being every day that will inspire the whole school community to dare to embrace the possibility of a more hopeful vision of the world than they can currently imagine. This, in turn, leads to courageous action to make this hopeful vision a reality.

## Courageous advocacy: Challenging injustice

*‘There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.’ Desmond Tutu*

Schools have always taught pupils about the work of charities and have sought to support charitable causes through fundraising. Courageous advocacy and social action seek to move beyond ‘simple solutions’ (fundraising – on its own – is unlikely to solve underlying injustices that keep people poor) to ask ‘why?’ and ‘what can be done about it?’. We must consider the structural causes of poverty and look at the complexities that cause injustice in order that we might tackle root causes rather than simply soothing symptoms alone.

Teaching and learning needs to get underneath the problem of injustice to be tackled, recognising that pupils may raise questions that are not always easy to answer but it is that very critical thinking, reasoning and questioning that need to take place. It is natural that when pupils learn about issues of injustice, they want to act to change things and it is important to support them in working this out in practice.

As educators we must consider how to channel this righteous ‘table turning’ anger in constructive ways that harness the energy of youth but never patronise or put limits on their passion.



*The first two schools in the country to achieve Global Neighbours Bronze Awards: **Wilson’s Endowed CE Primary School and Whittle-le-Woods CE Primary School***

Schools have an important role to play in empowering pupils to be courageous advocates for change both now and into adult life. It is important to note that understanding and skills will deepen over time as pupils move from Early Years Foundation Stage, through the primary and secondary Key Stages and into the Sixth Form. When education for courageous advocacy is done well:

- taking action should be a deeply educational and empowering experience involving reflection and critical thinking. Pupils should be involved in decision-making and have a sense of ownership and understanding of why they are taking a particular action;
- pupils should be encouraged to think critically through the full range of options and how they help address the causes and symptoms of a particular situation;
- pupils should be supported to think through the possible consequences of their actions and to take account of the law, school policies and ethical and safety considerations;
- pupils should reflect on what has been learned through taking action.

*A group of Year 5 girls planned and led a very impressive worship about the plight of orangutans and the destruction of their habitat due to the growing use of palm oil. This was part of a series of worships led by these pupils, and as such, all pupils within the school are aware of the use of palm oil and are able to hold conversations about the concerns that have been raised through worship.*

**From St Luke's CE Primary School, Sway** Global Neighbours Gold Assessment

### Questions for this section

*Where in your current school curriculum do you explore injustice?  
Is this done in a planned and progressive way or ad hoc?*

*Do you unintentionally present a 'victim' narrative of injustice? How do you consider the selection and use of image and story to ensure that everyone is afforded dignity and respect?*

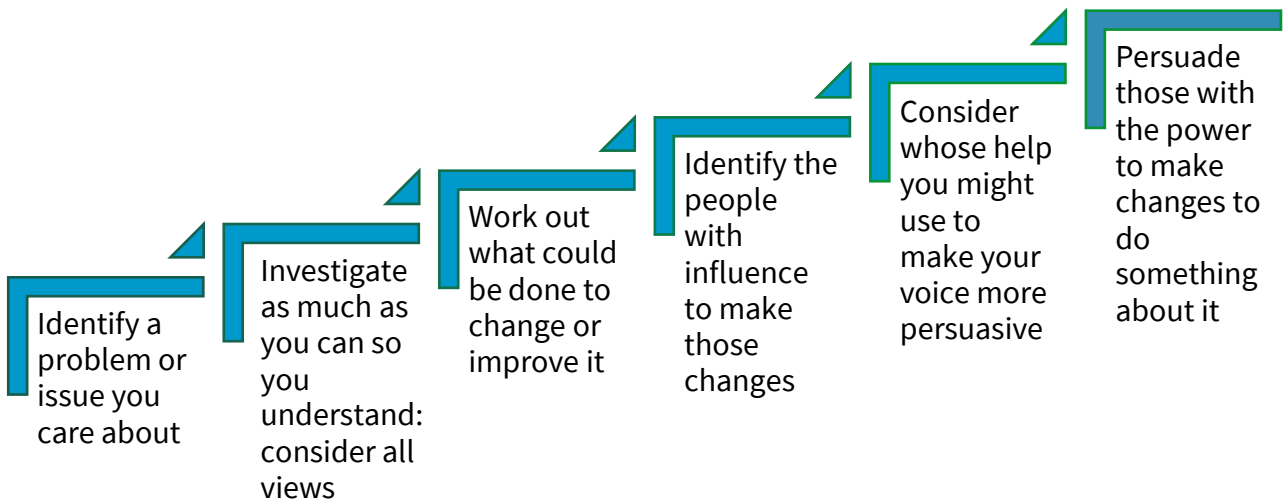
*Do you present simple solutions or give pupils the skills to explore complex situations?*

*How do you avoid unintentionally reinforcing negative stereotypes, and assumptions about Majority World peoples and cultures? How might you ensure that your approach is balanced?*



### Section 3: Courageous Advocacy - some practical advice

A set of simple steps like the ones below may prove a useful guide for pupils:



*Pupils throughout the school are confident in challenging adults if they believe change is needed. This has included speaking to the school's leaders about the purchasing of resources; to parents, concerning the way they shop or use resources at home; the Prime Minister, with concerns about pollution; the council, to discuss concerns about the welfare of the animals in the forest; or large supermarkets and stores to ask them to consider changes that could be made to the items they sell.*

From **St Luke's CE Primary School, Sway**, Global Neighbours Gold Assessment



**St Luke's CE Primary School, Sway**  
Global Neighbours Gold award holders:  
Sway Parish Junior Council meeting.

## Some should and some should nots

Schools also, of course, have very specific responsibilities and important limitations on what they can and should do when it comes to political engagement. Christian Aid has some helpful basic guidelines about courageous advocacy and activism in schools.

Courageous advocacy in schools should:

- encourage pupils to think widely and deeply about issues (asking ‘why?’);
- empower pupils to understand political processes and their own rights and responsibilities in society;
- encourage pupils to think of creative solutions to problems (asking ‘what can be done about it?’);
- equip pupils to identify where power is located and how decisions are made;
- enable pupils to express themselves confidently and articulately to decision-makers and others.

Courageous advocacy in schools should not:

- be party political;
- spoon-feed actions to pupils;
- pretend that complex problems have simple solutions;
- be un-thinking or reactionary;
- fail to take account of a wide variety of differing viewpoints;
- involve anything illegal or dangerous (obviously!).



**St Luke's CE Primary School, Sway**  
Global Neighbours Gold award holders:  
Sway Parish Junior Councillors  
encourage people to pick up litter and  
they organised new dog litter bins to be  
installed in the village.

## Types of courageous advocacy

There are so many different forms that advocacy can take, but they can be broadly grouped into certain types:

1.	<b>Awareness raising</b>	<i>The whole school took part in The Climate Coalition’s ‘Show the Love’ campaign. Pupils assembled on the school field in the shape of a huge heart and used a drone to take an aerial picture. They tweeted this picture and sent it out with a press release to local media.</i>
2.	<b>Community influencing</b>	<i>The school holds an open assembly at the end of each term. The pupils themselves give a presentation on an issue that they care about – with appeals for wider community action.</i>
3.	<b>Lifestyle changes</b>	<i>Single-use plastic bottles are banned in school and each pupil is provided with a refillable bottle to use. More water fountains are installed around school.</i>
4.	<b>Consumer power</b>	<i>When the school boiler needs to be replaced, senior leaders agree that they should opt for a much greener biomass boiler. There is an initial outlay, but costs will be recuperated over time. The financial and ethical case is made for this and agreement sought.</i>
5.	<b>Engaging with decision-makers</b>	<i>After finding out about the plight of refugees, pupils write to the local MP, appealing to her to ensure that more is done to tackle the refugee crisis.</i>

In all of our work on courageous advocacy and social action, we join in with God’s redemptive work in the world as we hold fast to a hopeful vision for the future of his world. Along with the prophet Micah we ask, ‘*What does the Lord require of you?*’ And hear the reply: ‘*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*’ (Micah 6:8).

### Questions for this section:

*How do you enable pupils to go beyond a sense of compassion to a concern for justice?*

*How do you structure opportunities for pupils to talk about, discuss and challenge injustice and inequality?*

*Do you give pupils regular opportunities to engage in social action projects that they themselves have identified or do you direct or select those opportunities for them?*

*How comfortable are you with the idea of pupils ‘speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves’ and the action being driven by pupils rather than adults? How willing are you to ‘relinquish control’ and allow this to happen?*

## Conclusion: What is education for?

The Church of England sets out a vision for education that is ‘Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good<sup>10</sup>’. Education should enable pupils and adults to flourish, ensuring that it is about the whole person. Character development and a concern for those ‘beyond the school gates’ go hand in hand with academic development.

If the purpose of education is the promotion of life in all its fullness and human flourishing, then this must, by necessity, involve developing young people who can learn to flourish in every aspect of their lives - young people who can work for the flourishing of others and for the planet we share.

Character development is about much more than learning about Christian (or universal human) values in isolation. If it is to be meaningful, character education must lead to pupils and adults living out the virtues they encounter and learning to take their place as active global citizens in our world. Education must move beyond pupils simply being passive recipients of knowledge and skills to pupils becoming courageous advocates for change.

The vision of human flourishing should not be restricted to the pupils and adults within the walls of the school but must extend far beyond. We want those in our schools to look beyond themselves and seek to bring hope. We aspire that they should be a blessing to their communities as well as their global neighbours, with whom we are interdependent. It is about recognising that we are all members of local and national communities as well as the global family to which we all belong.

In living this vision into being, we join in with God’s redemptive work in the world. In educating for wisdom, hope, community and dignity, we help to build God’s kingdom here on earth and work to bring about a fairer and more joyful world; a world that moves ever closer to fulfilling God’s heart for human flourishing.

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<sup>10</sup> The Church of England Education Office, *Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian Serving the Common Good* ( The Church of England Education Office 2016) available at [www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications](http://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications)



## Postscript: Courageous advocacy, Coronavirus and racial injustice

The academic year 2020/21 was one that shook our comfortable Western lives. At a school level it meant that speakers from charities and other agencies were not able to visit schools. Many of those staple fundraising activities, from cake sales to food collections for Harvest festivals, had to cease. Schools, as always, responded by being innovative and imaginative in their practices. But at another level it highlighted the vital importance of courageous advocacy being central to the vision and values of the Church school.

Coronavirus came as a huge shock to us all and overnight it challenged our attitudes and behaviours. In many ways we had come to believe that we were in control of our lives and that we had an instant cure for every problem that life presents. Coronavirus was a reminder that we cannot eliminate every misfortune and that when misfortune does strike it is rarely the fault of those it befalls. We learned first-hand that those with the least power, the least money, the voiceless, are those that tend to suffer most. This is a truth already well known to those in much of the Majority World.

The death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement it re-ignited brought into sharp focus that injustice is complex, that it is structural and that we all must start by listening to and learning from the voices of the black community to examine our understanding and our attitudes. We must not forget that this is a global issue, and that historical injustices underpin the inequality that we see today - in our country and across the world. The climate crisis, for example, is not just an environmental challenge, but an issue of justice: those who are most affected by the impacts of climate change are the ones who have done the least to contribute to the problem<sup>11</sup>.

Nowhere is a reevaluation of our colonial past more prescient than in our consideration of what it means to be a global neighbour. These events that have shaken our world are surely an opportunity to reset and rethink. To quote Ruth Valerio writing for development agency Tearfund:

*'One day, we will make it out of this crisis. But what sort of world do we want there to be on the other side? Can we repent of the world we have created, and instead look to build one without such a huge gap between rich and poor – a world where we live in harmony with creation, in which we understand that the well-being of one is bound up with the well-being of all?'*

*In Christ, there is always hope. We can let that hope motivate how we live our lives today as we hold on to God our rock. And, with the love of Christ in our hearts, let us continue to reach out with compassion and determination.'*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> World's richest 1% cause double CO2 emissions of poorest 50% say Oxfam The Guardian Online [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/worlds-richest-1-cause-double-co2-emissions-of-poorest-50-says-oxfam](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/worlds-richest-1-cause-double-co2-emissions-of-poorest-50-says-oxfam) (accessed 23/10/20)

<sup>12</sup> 'Decoding coronavirus: Sin Judgement and (not) the end of the world' Tearfund Website 2020/04/02 [www.tearfund.org/en/2020/03/decoding\\_coronavirus/](http://www.tearfund.org/en/2020/03/decoding_coronavirus/) (accessed 24/06/2020)

## Suggestions for further reading

The following documents have influenced and informed this resource and thinking about courageous advocacy (except for the Grove Booklet they are all available as free downloads):

A handbook for schools seeking Global Neighbours accreditation, Christian Aid  
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/schools/global-neighbours/global-neighbours-handbook>

Every Child of God Matters Everywhere – the (then) Dioceses of Bradford and Ripon & Leeds  
<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/everychildofgodmatters.pdf>

Igniting Potential, Developing Character and Leadership through Social Action, Elizabeth Howat, Grove Education eD39 <https://grovebooks.co.uk/products/ed-39-igniting-potential-developing-character-and-leadership-through-social-action>

The Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good, Autumn 2016 <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications>

The Fruits of the Spirit – A Church of England Discussion Paper on Character Education, Oct 2015  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications>

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