

ACT Parallel Elections Project

Teachers' Guide

Welcome to your parallel election!

This teachers' guide has been designed to support schools delivering the ACT Parallel Elections Project.

A parallel election is a planned learning experience designed to allow pupils to experience all the stages of an election in real time. A parallel election mirrors a real election – while the electorate is reading campaign material, so are the pupils; while the electorate is voting, so are the pupils. Unlike a mock election, in which pupils debate and vote for made-up political parties, in a parallel election pupils learn about and vote for real policies and candidates.

The ACT Parallel Elections Project has been designed to run from now until shortly after the general election. Resources will be released in four blocks – one set per week – with an additional week following the general election when pupils evaluate their parallel election results.

Running a parallel election will help you address the requirements of the Key Stage 3 and 4 national curriculum programmes of study for Citizenship (or the primary Citizenship programmes of study if you're delivering the project in a primary school).

We recommend you read this guide all the way through before launching the project in your school, as it will help you to see the bigger picture and plan week on week.

We hope you and your pupils enjoy using these materials to deliver a parallel election in your school!

A parallel election and whole-school aims

Democracy is a key aspect of the promotion of Fundamental British Values. A parallel election project allows pupils to experience democracy first hand and immerse themselves in a general election.

The knowledge and skills gained from this project support high-quality Citizenship education and align with the Citizenship programme of study teaching requirements for Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

Wider personal development is supported through the promotion of cultural capital. All pupils taking part in the parallel election, at whatever level, will be introduced to political literacy and current events about the general election, regardless of home circumstance.

Oracy, speaking and listening, critical thinking, teamwork and other skills are developed through the promotion of debate, questioning, and discussion and working with others during the parallel election project.

ACT's Parallel Elections Project materials have been written with full consideration of political impartiality. For more detail, see the section at the end of this guide.

How is the parallel election project structured?

The ACT parallel election project is structured over four weeks:

- **Week 1:** Parallel election launch. Pupils explore the importance of general elections and learn what a parallel election is.
- **Week 2:** Getting to grips with real-life issues and political party manifestos.
- **Week 3:** Delving into election broadcasts and thinking about the role of the media.
- **Week 4:** Time for hustings, debates and poll predicting!

Four weeks of build-up are then followed by election day! If possible, this should take place on Thursday 4 July – the same day as the UK general election. If your school is being used as a polling station, please make sure your parallel election takes place BEFORE 4 July.

Your parallel election day should feel like a special day in school, giving pupils the opportunity to cast their votes at a polling station run by your very own election officials.

After your school's results are announced, spend time comparing your result with the school's constituencies and the national result, considering:

- Why might the results be different?
- Why might school-age children vote differently to adults?
- Were there particular policies that influenced the pupils?
- Who is their new MP and how can they contact them?
- What do the results mean for the country and for them?

What resources are available?

To keep things as simple as possible, the materials for each week follow the same format, with:

- An assembly
- A knowledge-based lesson, with teachers' notes and a worksheet
- A lesson focusing on the logistics of the parallel election that week
- Separate pupil toolkits for campaign teams, election officials, media teams and the electorate
- A vocabulary sheet

The toolkits explain the important roles that pupils will take on during the election, with practical help, guidance and resources to ensure the project runs smoothly.

All resources have been written for use by both specialist and non-specialist teachers.

Do we have capacity to deliver a parallel election?

We understand that different schools will have different levels of capacity and have designed the parallel election resources to be flexible enough for you to deliver in a way that suits you.

How you deliver the parallel election project may vary week by week, depending on what else is happening in school. You might decide that all pupils will get involved as the electorate and campaign teams, but that staff will oversee the work of the election officials. The choice is yours!

Political impartiality in a parallel election

ACT's Parallel Elections Project has been written in line with our guidance on how to maintain political impartiality.

We understand that schools may be concerned about political impartiality around the parallel election project. However, as the subject association for Citizenship, we have the expertise and knowledge to plan lessons and guidance that schools can use with confidence. ACT was the first organisation to provide political impartiality training for teachers, also attended by DfE and Ofsted colleagues. We have also produced guidance for the Welsh government for teachers to use.

The Education Act 1996 provides clear guidance on schools' legal duties around political action:

- *Section 406: The LA, governing body and headteachers shall forbid the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in the school.*
- *Section 407: The LA, governing body and headteachers shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils... they are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.*

In addition to this, in February 2022 the DfE released further guidance to schools, making it clear that:

- *Schools "should not take a mechanistic approach to ensuring a balanced presentation of opposing views"*
- *It is "more important that teaching about contested views on political issues remains fair and dispassionate and pupils are presented with a range of views over time, to ensure balance"*
- *Teachers may spend several lessons "teaching exclusively about a single political ideology" but to comply with the law they should "ensure they are not presenting these ideologies as fact or promoting the partisan political views being covered". The teaching is likely to include "critical analysis, including elements of other political ideologies"*

A final source of guidance comes from the DfE document *Pre-election guidance for schools and multi-academy trusts*, which includes a section that highlights:

- *The restrictions set out above should not be seen as preventing schools and teachers from using the pre-election period to raise pupils' awareness and understanding of the political process.*
- *Activities could include hustings events and visits by local candidates or political party representatives. Schools are also able to run events such as mock elections involving pupils and overseen by school staff.*

Taking this legislation and guidance into account, ACT's Parallel Elections Project has been designed to ensure that all pupils taking part benefit from increased political literacy. This will include developing an understanding of the campaign messages of a range of political parties, critically evaluating manifestos, and developing the skills of critical media and information literacy to analyse political information in a range of formats from different organisations.

Case Study A - Senarce High School

11 to 18 mixed-ability school

Curriculum provision: Weekly Citizenship and PSHE lessons
A Level Politics
GCSE Citizenship

Campaign team: Year 12 Politics students
Election officials: Year 10 GCSE class
Media team: Year 10 GCSE class
Electorate: Entire school

Staff team: Head of Politics, Head of Citizenship, SLT lead for PD

The programme will be delivered using the assemblies and content lessons to all year groups. The core Citizenship lesson will be used for all students to take part in the second lesson of the week, which focuses on the active citizenship element of the project.

The politics students will have adapted versions of the lesson to use during their study periods to ensure they have planned their campaign thoroughly and will use year group assemblies and form time to communicate with the electorate.

Year 10 Citizenship students will use this as an opportunity to revise some topics around the general elections and voting, such as registration, photo id and turnout, as well as organising the parallel election. Registration will take place during breaks and lunchtimes running up to the final registration date, with a final push in the form time of that day. This group will also set up the polling station in the main hall and the timetable for each class/form group to vote.

Once voting is over, they will run and organise the count, then make the announcement of results the next day during form time.

Year 10 will be the media team to ensure that the rest of the school receives the most up-to-date information. They will also work with the campaign team to run hustings events and interviews with candidates and spokespeople. Working through the media team will reinforce the learning from the media section of the specification and help them consider the importance of the role of the media in society and holding the government to account, for example by fact-checking claims.

Hustings events will be arranged for year groups for the electorate to hear from candidates and ask questions in addition to updating the electorate with interviews in writing and or videos to be shown in form time.

Form times will be used for the rest of the school not involved in the election teams to complete the activities of the electorate.

The results analysis will be carried out in the Citizenship core lessons following the election.

Case Study B – Cherrytree School for Girls

11 to 18 selective school

Curriculum provision: A Level Politics
Core PSHE/Citizenship

Campaign team: Year 12 Politics class
Media team: Year 10 English class
Election officials: School Council
Electorate: Entire school

Staff team: Head of Politics, Head of English, Head of PD, AHT Curriculum

Year 12 will use some of their study periods to plan and complete the activities contained in the second lessons of the week dealing with the active citizenship elements – developing campaign materials, speeches etc.

The core lesson of the week will be delivered across the school during PSHE/Citizenship so all students have the knowledge they need to make informed decisions when they vote. The assemblies will be delivered by form tutors during tutor time.

The Head of English, who is especially keen on supporting the project, has volunteered her English group to act as the Media Team as she sees this as reinforcing core learning in English regarding types of communication and supporting oracy.

The School Council, led by the Head of Personal Development, will complete the duties of the election officials.

Hustings will be arranged for all year groups during lunchtimes for those who want to attend.

Results lessons and post-election lessons will be delivered through core PSHE/Citizenship lessons by the normal class teacher.

Case Study C – Stormsafe School for Boys

11 to 18 selective school

Curriculum provision: A Level Politics

Campaign team: Year 12 Politics class
Media team: Year 12 Media Studies
Election officials: School Council
Electorate: Entire school

Staff team: Head of Politics, Head of Media and Photography, PSHE Co-ordinator, AHT Pastoral

Stormsafe teaches Citizenship across the curriculum and form-time programme. It will use the assemblies to introduce the week's themes, then tutors will deliver the knowledge lesson to reinforce this across the week. The role of the electorate will be added to the form time activities from the active citizenship lesson.

The year 12 classes will use self-directed time to prepare the campaigning and media materials, delivering this to the whole school via form time and by hosting stalls at break and lunchtime. These examination classes have some knowledge and this will be an opportunity to apply this to a real-world situation.

The School Council will use their regular meetings to plan the election and run registration during break times, at lunchtimes and before school.

The post-election lessons will be taught via assemblies and form time.

Case Study D – Woodgreen Academy

11 to 16 non-selective school

Curriculum provision: PSHE and Citizenship taught in form time

Campaign team: N/A – students are provided with information via their tutor

Media team: N/A – students are provided with information via their tutor

Election officials: School Council

Electorate: Entire school

Staff team: Tutors, Heads of Year, AHT Pastoral

Woodgreen has less flexibility in its curriculum, with no Citizenship or PSHE lessons and no sixth form. Therefore it is running the parallel election project differently by focusing on the role of the electorate (all students) and covering the campaign information during form time (rather than via a campaign team).

Each week the students will receive the assemblies explaining the focus of that week for the election.

During form time the students will complete the knowledge lesson over the week, as well as the activities for the electorate. To ensure that the students understand the different policies each party is offering, these will also be included in the form-time activities and discussed as a group.

The school council will act as the election officials and arrange the voter registration and organisation of the vote itself. Voting will take place in form time on the day of the election and the school council will be the counters.

The post-election lesson will also be delivered through form time with tutors.

Case Study E – Sunnystreet Primary School

Three-form entry

Curriculum provision: PSHE and Citizenship is taught in one weekly 30-minute lesson. Citizenship is taught during ‘Parliament Week’ in cross-curricular projects and links are made with the school council.

Campaign team: N/A (pupils are provided with information needed)

Media team: N/A (pupils are provided with information needed)

Election officials: Y5 and Y6 student school council reps

Electorate: Y5 and Y6 pupils

Staff team: Year 5 and 6 teachers, SLT member, PSHE/Citizenship lead teacher, English/Oracy lead

Sunnyside Primary is keen to develop its older pupils’ understanding of active citizenship through the general election. In the second half of the summer term, there is some flexibility in its curriculum to run a light-touch parallel election project.

The project will focus on the role of the electorate. Pupils will investigate several topical issues. The main political parties will be introduced, along with the pledges they are making on these issues during the period of the election campaign.

The timetable will be freed up during the upper KS2 assembly, class assembly time, one weekly English session (or the PSHE session) and during guided reading sessions where possible. On their ballot paper, pupils will choose to vote between candidates standing for the main political parties (those represented in the previous Parliament) in the local constituency.

The focus of each week will be introduced in an upper KS2 assembly, using the presentation provided.

During a class English session, the election knowledge lesson slides will enable deeper investigation. Further discussion activities using the activity prompts provided will take place in the classroom assembly and reading slots. This will ensure pupils’ questions can be discussed and that they understand the different policies each party is offering. It also gives the opportunity for any misunderstandings and misinformation to be addressed.

Year 5 and 6 school council reps will act as the election officials. They’ll arrange the voter registration, prepare and run the polling station, and organise the count. Voting will take place on 3 July as the school is closed on the day of the general election. Classes will be allocated times to vote during the day.

After the election, the results will be announced by the election team in an upper KS2 assembly. The election follow-up lesson will take place during an English/PSHE slot.

Case Study F – Riverside Primary School

One-form entry

Curriculum provision: Citizenship is taught alongside PSHE and during cross-curricular projects. Oracy is being developed and the school has introduced weekly Topical Talk sessions.

Campaign team: N/A (pupils are provided with information needed)

Media team: Y6 pupils

Election officials: Y6 pupils

Electorate: KS2 pupils

Staff team: KS2 class teachers, English/Oracy lead, SLT

The school is keen to build on the oracy skills and topical talk the school has introduced this year. The school has some flexibility in its timetable in the second half of the summer term so the parallel election project will run throughout KS2. Weekly assemblies and classroom assemblies will be used to introduce the focus for the week, using the materials provided.

All KS2 pupils will be part of the electorate. One weekly parallel election lesson will be given (during an English lesson) and discussion activities followed up during the weekly PSHE or Topical Talk session. Their purpose is to provide a real-time experience of politics and how the UK is governed. They are also keen to give pupils the opportunity to debate key topical issues that are part of election campaigning.

A group of Year 6 pupils will take on the role of the media team and report election events and updates to the rest of KS2 during assemblies and classroom oracy sessions. They will use their 'reading timetable slots'. The Oracy Lead Teacher will support these pupils.

A group of Y6 pupils will also take on the election officials role to organise and run the polling station on election day. The Student Council Lead will support these pupils.

The results will be announced in a KS2 assembly the day after the election. This will be followed up with the post-election KS2 lesson.

Case Study G – Glebe Farm Primary School

Two-form entry

Curriculum provision: The school teaches citizenship alongside PSHE. Drama and debating is an integral part of their provision, and runs through cross-curricular projects taught here.

Campaign team: Y6 debating club and Y6 pupils

Media team: N/A (pupils are provided with information needed)

Election officials: Y6 school council reps

Electorate: Y6 pupils

Staff team: Y6 teachers, Head of English, SLT

The school is keen to simulate the general election for Year 6 pupils to further develop their debating skills and understanding of UK democracy.

The parallel election project will run in two weekly English lessons, PSHE and reading sessions in Year 6 classrooms, using the assembly and lesson materials provided. These sessions will be used to develop all Y6 pupils' understanding of the process of a general election and the issues that will be focused on during campaigning.

Y6 school council reps will act as the election officials. They will organise voter registration and polling using the toolkit provided. The School Council leader will support this team.

Y6 debating club and other Y6 pupils keen to take part will form the political party campaign teams. This will be led by the Head of English who runs the debate club.

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During the project, pupils should spend time exploring the local candidates of each party that is standing in your school's constituency and the differences they are campaigning on. In doing so, the issue of partisan views is avoided and teachers and governors can rest assured they have fulfilled the guidance and legislation. Should a school feel that looking at all candidates in a constituency would be inappropriate, for example due to pupils' age, the number of candidates standing or lack of time, then limiting the candidates and parties investigated is justified.

It is also important to remember that not all parties or candidates need to be given 'equal airtime' and in a lesson trying to look at one issue across all parties could lead pupils to become confused rather than giving them a chance to develop critical understanding. Again here teachers should use their professional judgement, however spending time on one party or candidate for an entire lesson would not in itself be partisan as long as in future lessons alternative views are offered.

Read our full guidance on political impartiality here:

<https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/resource/political-impartiality-in-citizenship-a-guide-for-secondary-schools-in-england/>

Sign up for online CPD on political impartiality during a general election here:

<https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/event/political-impartiality-for-school-leaders-during-a-general-election/>