

Students call for change

Should the climate emergency be added throughout the curriculum? We speak to teachers and students who think it should be. Words: Kimi Chaddah



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With Latin lessons being offered to thousands of state school pupils across England to make the subject less ‘elitist’, a £4m investment, students surveyed across the country feel something more urgent should be added to the curriculum instead — the climate crisis. Research by Teach the Future suggests only 4% of students feel they know a lot about climate breakdown, and with 68% wanting to learn more about the environment, it’s unsurprising students are now lobbying MPs and launching campaigns to have their voices heard.

Teach the Future, a nationwide campaign run by student volunteers, is at the forefront of these. With the support of 150 organisations, it’s calling for students to be taught about the roots of the climate emergency and ecological crisis, and how this will shape their lives.

Campaigners argue that knowledge of the climate crisis should be ‘comprehensive’, woven throughout the curriculum and that the current system encourages climate denial. One volunteer, 18-year-old Thiziri Boussaid, says Teach the Future’s perception of a ‘comprehensive’

education involves “talking about climate change in every subject, but also looking at it from a social and economic standpoint.”

Teachers agree. Ben Eccersley, secondary school teacher from Sheffield, says study of the climate crisis shouldn’t be confined to geography. “Knowledge [of climate breakdown] is coming from TV, social media and peer-to-peer conversations,” he says. “This can often expose them to bias or individual non-factual viewpoints. Starting in primary, conversations around the climate emergency need to become normalised. In secondary schools, I think discussions should be had in form groups and PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education).”

As opposition rises on the basis that the climate crisis is already part of a (limited) specification, Jude Daniel Smith, 16, believes differentiating between the crisis and climate justice is key. “We need to talk more about the social challenges, barriers and causes that have led to climate breakdown,” he says. “For a subject that talks a lot about the way in which humans are impacted by the world, we don’t talk about how the climate crisis relates to people.”

“The purpose of education is to prepare us for the future,” says 19-year-old Natasha Pavey. With hopes of a green workforce and net-zero emissions, students continue to fight for comprehensive climate education that will prepare them for the future, give them the skills they need to accommodate changes brought on by the climate crisis and empower them to create positive change. For more on the campaign, visit: teachthefuture.uk/vision

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