



teaching about **Grenfell**

recommendations
from the community

June 2025

Background

The Grenfell Tower fire disaster occurred on June 14, 2017, in North Kensington, London, and was one of the most tragic events in recent British history.

Investigations revealed significant failures in social housing policy, fire safety regulations, and building materials, with the state, emergency responders, cladding manufacturers, and testing and certification bodies bearing substantial responsibility for creating and perpetuating these social injustices.

The Grenfell Curriculum project is a community-based participatory project that looked at how we can redress such injustices and help build a safe and just society through education. Educational researchers from the

Universities of Southampton and Oxford worked with the Grenfell community and teachers to co-create educational visions and recommendations based on the lessons of Grenfell.

These recommendations can guide how Grenfell is presented, remembered and taught, for example in

- education in schools, colleges and universities
- training of teachers in relevant subjects
- training of students and professionals in construction, fire safety, and business management
- design of memorials, museums and other out-of-school learning environments.

Why teaching about Grenfell is important

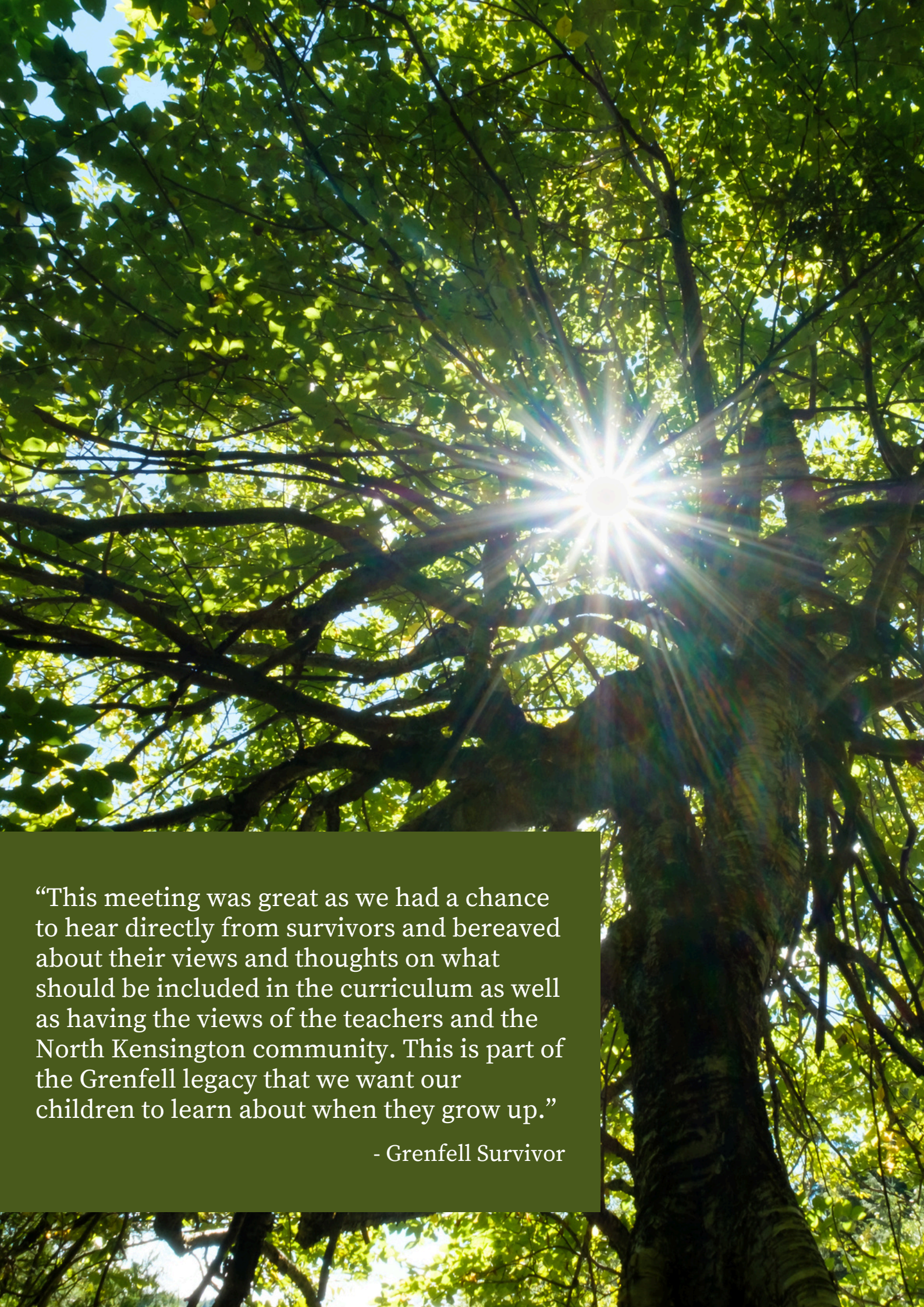
Education about Grenfell is essential for preventing future disasters. By learning about Grenfell, people can understand the importance of using safe, non-combustible materials and adhering to robust fire safety standards. They can also understand how to be responsible citizens and good neighbours who can advocate for a just society.

Grenfell is also a poignant example of the social inequalities faced by communities. The disaster and its aftermath have highlighted many issues with housing policy in the UK. By learning about the systemic causes of the disaster, we can work towards a fairer society where everyone is treated fairly and has access to safe and secure housing.

The aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire has exposed significant failings in local and national government accountability. By learning about Grenfell, future policymakers, civic leaders, and the public can better understand the importance of transparency, accountability, and active listening to community voices.

Grenfell's story is also one of community strength and resilience. Since the tragedy, residents and activists have banded together to advocate for justice, support survivors, and demand changes to housing policy. Learning about the story can inspire individuals to become more engaged in their communities and to advocate for positive change. It can empower people to stand up for their rights and the rights of others, fostering a culture of activism and solidarity.





“This meeting was great as we had a chance to hear directly from survivors and bereaved about their views and thoughts on what should be included in the curriculum as well as having the views of the teachers and the North Kensington community. This is part of the Grenfell legacy that we want our children to learn about when they grow up.”

- Grenfell Survivor

The project



Interviews

Between January and July 2024, the project team interviewed survivors, bereaved families, and trusted support workers (therapists, activists and educators) who have been involved in recovery work since the fire. They shared their views and experiences, and gave advice on the project.

Grenfell Education Meetings

In June 2024, four 'Grenfell Education Meetings' were held at the Museum of Brands in Lancaster Road. An invitation was sent out via the NHS Grenfell Dedicated Service mailing list, as well as other community channels. Grenfell survivors and bereaved (including young adults and children) and local teachers gathered to discuss education for social justice after Grenfell. Over 40 people attended and discussed the future of education about, and for, Grenfell.



Analysis

We carefully reviewed the discussions from the interviews and the Grenfell Education Meetings, noting the ideas that people suggested about education and Grenfell. These suggestions were then analysed and grouped into bigger clusters.



Writing this report

The draft report was shared with the participants and feedback was received on its structure and content. We also had meetings with community members to gather feedback. We updated the report based on the feedback to accurately reflect the voices, experiences and visions of the community.

What should we teach about Grenfell?

Here we draw on our conversations with the community to consider what content should be taught about Grenfell and what students should know, have and be able to do as a result of learning about Grenfell.

The story of Grenfell

Although much information about Grenfell is currently focused on the fire itself, it is important to note that the story of Grenfell is not just the story of the fire. Life happened before the tragedy and has endured after the events of June 2017. For some in the community, we heard how important it would be for learners to be aware of the 72 lives that were lost and to become familiar with the bereaved and the local community.

Community solidarity

At the heart of the story of Grenfell is the community. Throughout conversations we heard an emphasis on community solidarity, and how members supported one another when institutions failed and neglected the people. Grenfell was a community before the fire, and underwent huge transformations, after the fire. One community member believed that we should teach “how the community stood with each other without the support of the government”. We were told how engaging with a fuller story of the community could help raise greater awareness about the rich and varied lives of those from Grenfell and offer learners an opportunity to reflect on the meanings of community amidst tragic events.

Positives and negatives

Closely related to a focus the Grenfell story and community solidarity are the different positive and negative topics associated with before, during and after the fire.

For example, one teacher from the Grenfell Education Meeting expressed:

“We got positive and negative, because it was a warm sense of the community. [We can] teach children how [strong] the community was, and the dark was how it was avoidable, and mistrust by the world and these individual people, and [we can] talk about how important they are in the community.”

Yet, focus on the positives as it relates to community being ‘tight knit’ also had to be balanced out with the ‘darkness’ of institutions neglecting and not listening, and how ‘avoidable’ the fire was. The negatives were also connected to the idea of social cleansing, that exclusivity and purposefully segregating communities in North Kensington was a part of the government agenda.

Facts and truth

Having a balance of discussing both positives and negatives as it relates to Grenfell also led to questions of ‘right and wrong’ and ‘facts and truth’, with one young survivor remarking how they wished “to give everyone the sort of harsh facts in what we should be doing now”.

Additionally, we heard an emphasis of engaging with the facts and truth of Grenfell, which included what started the fire and the experiences of the people living in the block. This was related to a push for increasing awareness about the event, and to ensure that the wider population had an accurate representation of the Grenfell story that was not distorted by media.

Emotional capacity

Despite not being supported by local institutions, the Grenfell community has demonstrated emotional strength and courage. Though the heartbreak and grief of losing and remembering families and friends is part of the Grenfell narrative, young people, children, families, individuals and schools continue to work through the emotions of the event through a variety of therapeutic activities. In testifying to the strength

and emotional journey of the community, one therapist expressed:

“What I would like to see is some good come out of something so horrific. If you could put in a bottle of what this community did for each other. It’s quite extraordinary and that is through galvanizing energy. So I don’t wanna call that resilience. Because you know, I probably know better than anyone the journey some of those children have had to go through and are still going through.”

Professional ethics

Related to ensuring an event like Grenfell would never happen again, the community members remarked on the importance of educating construction workers, firefighters and police officers. There were discussions as to where such learning would best take place: for example, in engineering courses, university settings and through invited speakers from the community.



Justice

The question of what to teach about justice challenged us all. It was a difficult topic to consider as many remarked how ‘subjective’ justice was. For some, justice was related to a lack of government accountability and responsibility, for others it concerned the cladding injustice, a reflection of the wider institutional neglect of the Grenfell community and their experiences of living in the tower.

Yet the unresolved nature of Grenfell also surfaced the differences between justice and the law. One educational worker described the current challenge “that the resolution will not reflect what the community consider to be justice.” Teaching justice would thus demand teachers being able to make a distinction between the current laws and resolutions related to Grenfell and the wider concept of justice.

Finally, justice was, for some, connected to change. One young person we spoke with remarked:

“There are themes that you need to touch upon such as loss and remembrance, but also other things like change and justice, being able to balance the two and, being able to talk about them both with equal weight.”

Citizenship

The idea of using the Grenfell case study to teach about citizenship came up throughout our conversations, particularly as there was an

emphasis on responsibility and being a good neighbour to one another. One survivor remarked how a focus on the positives as it relates to the “community all coming together” and volunteers from outside also coming to offer their time and support. We also heard how this idea of citizenship could be connected to a more general idea of citizenship, a concept which could focus on the expressions of diversity and inclusion from the Grenfell community:

“The softer subjects... about what it is to be a good neighbour, about what it is to be inclusive. Because it is a very diverse community. So what it is to be inclusive... [and] why that is important.”

Relating Grenfell to other disasters

Grenfell can be taught in relation to other disasters in history, and in other parts of the world. Learning about Grenfell in this way can develop consciousness of the global nature of tragedies and help foster empathy and responsibility. For example, considering Grenfell in comparison to the Infected Blood Scandal can highlight the patterns of injustice repeated throughout time.

Including case study examples from other countries can also provide learners with an opportunity to expand their vision and sense of interdependency with the wider world. Learners can also draw lessons from past mistakes, keep the memories of those past alive, and consider individual and collective approaches to ensure such tragedies are not repeated.

How should we teach about Grenfell?

In this section, we look at what different members of the community thought about how we should teach about Grenfell. This includes the approaches that are most effective and empowering for children and young people, while being sensitive and respectful.

Community voice

In our work with and in the Grenfell community, we have striven to centre community voices, to listen carefully to people's experiences and to translate that into potential teaching and learning approaches for the classroom. Yet we are mindful that not everyone will want to be part of this conversation, with some individuals preferring to keep their perspectives and experiences private.

In hearing these views, we came to understand how important a 'resident's up' approach is to devising Grenfell content which can be taught in the classroom. We particularly heard emphasis on "listening to every single voice" and were encouraged by the Grenfell Education Meeting participants to engage more widely and deeply with the diverse views within the community. One teacher from the Grenfell Education Meeting

reflected on how overworked teachers are, questioned the boundaries and support for teachers attempting to educate about Grenfell, and emphasised that "all the issues should be informed by the community to be affected".

Paying particular attention to young people's and children's voices became central to our understanding of an effective approach to teaching about Grenfell, with a young person sharing how vital it is to 'give people a voice and listen' and another sharing how 'it is good to give us a platform'.

We thus regard voices from the Grenfell community, whether it be through recorded responses or personal artefacts (e.g. poems, artwork or testimonies), as imperative to supporting learners to develop their own perspectives on Grenfell, as well as offer accurate representations of the community's experiences.



Art-based approaches

Arts (broadly conceived as any form of creative activity such as dance, poetry, drama, painting, crafting etc.) was repeatedly spoken of in relation to initial therapeutic responses to Grenfell and as a teaching tool to effectively speak about Grenfell and to raise awareness in wider society. We learnt of the different informal learning and memorialisation activities like mosaic, collaging, walks, and movement which helped processing difficult emotions and memories.

One educational expert shared the connection they saw between a social approach to education and the arts:

“... actually the importance of the social approach, particularly through the arts, is brilliant, and because it enables everybody to have a language.”

We also frequently heard the power of poetry as a means for learning about Grenfell and processing difficult emotions and experiences for the families, particularly for the young people who used both poetry and art for voice and empowerment. One educational expert shared how an implicit approach to teaching Grenfell may be effective, saying that “teaching through English and poetry might be more effective ... [as

it] allows for subjective reflections”

In summary, we realised how powerful creative mediums can be for coming to terms with and learning informally about the complexity of Grenfell, and how they can be used as a tool for recovery and healing within the community.

Trauma-informed education

The overwhelming and traumatic nature of Grenfell demands those who teach on the topic to be deepened in trauma-informed approaches, which involves being sensitive and compassionate to the context, needs and triggers embedded within different learning communities.

In considering what being trauma-informed demands of us, there is an extra layer of complexity to be mindful of when we reflect on the different learning communities and contexts that teachers are embedded within. For example, taking a trauma-informed approach to teaching about Grenfell within North Kensington will look different from the approaches taken in Birmingham, due to the context, history and needs of learners. In the words of one educational expert, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to teaching about Grenfell, and each teacher needs to be attentive to the needs and biography of the learner in front of them.

Furthermore, one challenge of teaching Grenfell within the local Grenfell community is the risk of re-traumatisation. For example, there may also be a danger in taking a multi-sensory and embodied approach to teaching about Grenfell to a young person from the community through use of the arts:

“I’m sort of thinking about things, [it’s] been quite dangerous in terms of the art. Doing something creative [can lead to becoming] quite unstable because you take somebody straight into feeling. It’s right hemisphere; you’re working with the art.”

On the question of use of images and language, this was related to ‘how raw’ the topic was, the nature of the image (e.g. green hearts, local heroes or visuals of the night of the fire), how it would be framed, the school context in which they would be shared, and the age-appropriateness of the content. For example, one teacher and bereaved member shared:

“I thought, ‘I think I’m going to have to start using some pictures’ because the audience they don’t know and they don’t remember and often the words aren’t enough. Before I just felt like I couldn’t do it. It was just too too raw to be able to deliver something and talk about something so personal.”

Another bereaved member of the community also suggested showing the ‘full unfettered version’ could be done in the appropriate setting

(e.g. a university course or during testimony week).

Thus, an awareness of time passed, how ‘new’ or ‘raw’ the topic feels, and who is viewing or listening to the content, is part of taking a trauma-informed approach to working with language and images of Grenfell. In sum, whether working with explicit Grenfell content or with the arts, there is a clear imperative for teachers working on the topic to take a trauma-informed approach and to receive the necessary training to compassionately respond to their learners and their own needs.

Politics

The politics surrounding Grenfell was one element of teachers or schools could consider as part of a potential approach to teaching for social justice. Yet, depending on the school and the sensitivity of the teacher, there was a diversity of response in ‘how’ to engage with the politics of Grenfell. For example, one young person who attended a school in the area at the time of the fire questioned the ‘neutrality’ of their school and their teachers, commenting on young peoples’ capacity to know ‘right from wrong’:

“It was like a neutral school. It doesn’t take one side. So they teach everything like completely neutrally. They won’t teach things like politics and stuff; basically no one speaks about in school.

Teachers aren’t allowed to tell you who they vote for or anything like that. So stuff like that. In terms of Grenfell specifically, everything was about memorial. It wasn’t



the facts and who was right and who was wrong. We all knew who was right and who was wrong. I think at times I can see where it is helpful but also as young kids we aren't dumb essentially like we do understand right from wrong."

Such a perspective was also offset by an educational expert who reflected on the politicisation of the topic, yet still emphasised the need for 'critical thinking' of learners as it relates to education for social justice.

For example, an education expert shared:

"I think it needs to be done without it being politicised. It needs to be done without teachers being able to bring in their own bias, and I think that is a challenge to do it in a way that does it justice. Give kids the opportunity to research, to use their critical thinking skills to really think about what it means for them and where they sit in the world and how it relates to their own lives."

Curriculum

Grenfell could be included in the national curriculum, given its historical significance as a

national tragedy that must be remembered. It should be taught across a range of curriculum areas, including history, English, citizenship and science. Although Grenfell should be a core part of the curriculum, asking about it in exams needs more careful consideration. Exams tend to focus on memorising simplified facts, which is not an ideal way to learn about Grenfell.

As one young survivor mentioned:

"It needs to be more than just one image, remember five facts about it, put it in an essay, use some examples."

Age-appropriate approaches

Grenfell should be taught to learners of all ages, including adults. However, many people suggested that teaching about Grenfell should be appropriate to the age of the learner. Grenfell is inevitably a sensitive and uncomfortable story, and young children could be distressed by learning about it.

Suggestions included teaching the positive aspects of the story, such as community solidarity and activism, at a young age, and addressing social justice issues at later stages of education (e.g. secondary school onwards). Given that Grenfell was a recent event, teaching and learning programmes should be sensitive and responsive to learners' familiarity with the story.

Recommendations

- 1** Grenfell should be taught across subjects and levels of education, to students and adults across the country. Teaching should be trauma-informed and age-appropriate.
- 2** Education about Grenfell should be focused on the community's story and the truth about the tragedy. It should aim for developing the emotional capacity, ethics and citizenship of individuals who can advocate for social justice.
- 3** As a recent and ongoing national disaster, Grenfell should be taught with sensitivity and respect for those who were affected.



Project team

Wonyong Park
Associate Professor of Science Education
University of Southampton

Arzhia Habibi
Chapel Director and Junior Research Fellow
Somerville College, Oxford

Nigel Fancourt
Associate Professor of Education and Values
University of Oxford

Hanan Wahabi
Community Representative
Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission

Acknowledgements

Ruaa Al Rubaye

Research England

ESRC Impact Acceleration Account

The Grenfell Foundation (<https://www.grenfellfoundation.org.uk/>)

Grenfell United (<https://grenfellunited.org.uk/>)

Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission (<https://www.grenfelltowermemorial.co.uk/>)

The SPACE and Space Youth (<https://www.214space.org/>)

How to cite this report

Park, W., Fancourt, N., Habibi, A., & Wahabi, H. (2025). Teaching about Grenfell: Recommendations from the community. <https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/P1214>



“The meeting was very helpful and comforting, as we were heard and able to express our thought, views and feelings on this sensitive topic, I am extremely grateful to work alongside the team and looking forward to continue working together and making further change.”

- Young Survivor

