

Meeting your MP

A Guide for Teachers

Members of Parliament (MPs) do more than sit in the House of Commons and debate legislation.

An important part of their role is to meet as many local constituents as possible, learn about what concerns them and campaign to raise these issues both in Parliament and in their wider work.

Schools are important communities within an MP's constituency. Many parents and school staff are voters and young people will soon be future voters.

This guide shows teachers how schools may involve their MP in meeting, listening to and supporting young campaigners under 18. It may also be used with elected members of the devolved administrations.



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

This guide is written for teachers and we advise that contacting an MP is teacher-led. However young people should have as much leadership of their MP meeting as possible.

Before your meeting

Step 1 - Find your MP's contact details.

Step 1 is to identify who the MP for your school is and find their contact details.

The young people and adults in your school may live in a number of different of constituencies. Therefore, it's best to contact the MP representing the constituency where your school building is located.

If you don't know who the MP is, click [here](#) and enter your school's postcode. This will provide you with your school MP's name, contact details, website url and social media links.

A small number of MPs may not have a local constituency address, personal email or website. If this is the case the postal address of all MPs is:

(Name of MP), House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

MPs should preferably be phoned or emailed at their constituency office (information on their website) or at Westminster (information [here](#)).

When you phone your MP, it's very likely you'll be leaving a message on an answering machine which will be picked up later. Make sure you have your message ready (see step 2).



Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Step 2 - Send your invitation

Step 2 is to send your school's MP an invitation to visit school.



Now you have your MPs contact details, you can invite them to visit school. Make your phone message, email or letter precise and brief. Explain the campaign action the young people have been taking part in and what they would like to speak to their MP about.

Suggest the time(s) and date(s) you'd like to meet and give your MP plenty of time to get organised. MPs are busy, so be prepared to be flexible about your plans.

As a rule of thumb, MPs are in their constituencies on **Fridays**. Parliament usually does not sit on Friday and MPs usually spend the day in their constituencies; holding their drop-in 'surgery', attending events, visiting schools and businesses and generally trying to meet as many people as possible.

This is a busy schedule and your MP is likely to have around 30 minutes to spend with you. However this is plenty of time for young people to get their message across at a well planned event.

Step 3 - What should you do if your MP doesn't reply?

It's possible you may not receive a reply from your MP straight away. Time is short. What should you do?

MPs are very busy. Along with their Parliamentary, constituency and party responsibilities, it is estimated they may receive 200 - 300 messages every day. So, it's possible they won't get round to your message straight away.

If you don't hear back from your MP within several days, it's fine to send a follow-up email or call to make sure they've seen your invitation and are acting on it. Ask to speak to their 'diary secretary'. It's fine to be 'politely persistent' in these circumstances and make a follow up call.

If your MP is not available to visit school or hold a virtual meeting, this doesn't mean the young people may not make their voices heard.

If your MP cannot come to school, you could do the following.

1. Arrange for a small group of young people to meet your MP at their regular constituency 'surgery'. There will be information about dates, times and locations on your MP's website.
2. Meet your MP on a trip to Parliament
3. Write to your MP, explaining your campaign and calling for action.



Step 4 - Preparing for your meeting



Photo: John McLaverty/Oxfam

It's important to prepare for your meeting.

But there's no need for young people to be nervous.

They simply need to let the MP know how passionate they are about their campaign, what they've been doing and call on the MP to take action.

It's also a great opportunity to learn from the MP about their role, their experiences and similar campaigns they've been involved in.

Your MP will not expect young people to be policy experts and many MPs are not experts themselves. Neither do they have to agree with the campaign or the young people's political viewpoints to represent them.

Instead, the young people simply need to let the MP know how passionate they are about their campaign and the campaign actions they have taken. This will be impressive no matter what the MP's own opinions about the issue are.

Here are five tips to help young people prepare

1. **Research.** Use your MP's website or [here](#) to find out a little more about them, their opinions and their interests. Include this information in your meeting if it's helpful.
2. **Plan** with the young people about what they are going to say and who is going to say it. They could divide their presentation into sections and share out the roles.
3. **Rehearse.** A teacher could play the role of your MP. Think about any props or visual aids you'll use. Aim to make your presentation as visual and memorable as possible.
4. **Listen.** Plan for young people to do most of the speaking. However, give your MP a right of reply of about one third of your meeting time - eg: 10 minutes.
5. **Record.** Allow 5 minutes at the end for photos. Make sure your MP is aware of your school's consent policy (see below - Step 7).

During your meeting

Step 5 - Present the campaign to your MP and make an ask

Make sure somebody is waiting in reception to welcome your MP and bring them to the room.

Don't worry if they're running a little late. This is usual. Be ready to begin once your MP arrives.

Introduce your MP and invite the young people to begin their presentation. Aim to make it as close to a discussion as possible and aim to give everyone scheduled to speak a fair chance to make their points - including the MP!

Make sure you ask the MP to do something. The main opportunity is for your MP to amplify your campaign with the Government, fellow MPs and their networks. You could be specific and ask your MP to raise your campaign with the relevant minister or the Prime Minister. There are more ideas for MP actions below.

Here are some actions for young people to to ask an MP to do

- Tweet about the meeting and publicise their support for the young people's campaign. Ask them to tag your campaign's and/or your school's social media handle.
- Join the All Party Parliamentary group most relevant to the campaign. Find out more [here](#).
- Write a blog or article about your campaign and the actions they will take.
- Ask a Parliamentary question about your campaign.
- Write to the Prime Minister or the relevant minister. Government ministers are 'shuffled' regularly. However the list of Cabinet members is kept updated [here](#).
- Raise your campaign with their colleagues.



Photo: Tom Maguire/Results

Step 6 - Make an impression

Your MP may meet hundreds of people on the same day they meet you. How will you make sure your meeting makes an impression?



Photo: John McLaverty/Oxfam

Most campaigns provide opportunities to get creative and be visual. So young people should think about how to make a colourful impact to go alongside their meeting. For example, they could use drama, music, film or photography.

Use the most powerful and persuasive facts and arguments possible and aim to make the meeting memorable. However, whatever young people do, it should support a strong message and not overwhelm it. And it should always be planned in line with how much time the young people have to get their message across.

Step 7 - Record what happens

Keep a record of what's said and take photos. But always remember to follow your school's consent and safeguarding policies. This includes the MP.



Choose someone to take notes of any comments or promises your MP makes, and someone else to take photos of your meeting, particularly if you've organised something visual.

Photos will really help to spread the word about the meeting and can be shared on social media. Remember to use the correct handle and hashtags. Writing a [press release](#) will help to get your story in the local paper.

Photos which feature young people under 18 should have parental consent as outlined in your school policy. MPs often request photos for their own social media. Make sure they follow your school's consent policy too. Finally, do not record a virtual meeting without everyone's consent. A screenshot photo will be fine.

After your meeting

Step 8 - Stay in touch

It isn't all over when your MP leaves the building. Aim to build a relationship with your MP so you can call on them again.



Young people should write to the MP afterwards to say thank you for the meeting, and to remind them of any promises they made when you met. Your MP often wishes to post content on their own website or social media, so send them any photos you took (making sure you have the correct parental consent - see above). Be equally polite in saying thank you whether the MP agreed with the young people or not.

Track your MP's actions by setting up an email alert [here](#) and find out if they support your campaign in Parliament. Aim to build a relationship with your MP and keep in touch with them for the future.

Step 9 - Spread the word

Amplify your meeting in the local media as soon after it takes place as possible.



Draft a [press release](#) and send it to your local newspaper just before or immediately after your MP meeting. Local papers are usually very happy to receive stories from schools. Include a photo. A landscape photo taken on a good quality smartphone is usually fine.

Include your school website, social media and newsletter in your media to-do list. And don't forget to tell any campaign organisations you're partnered with about how your meeting went.

Good Luck!

Links

- [UK Parliament](#) website: everything you need to know about the UK Parliament, its business, its members, the Government and how it works.
- [UK Parliament Education Service](#)
- [The Scottish Parliament](#)
- [Senedd Cymru](#) The Welsh Parliament
- [The Northern Ireland Assembly](#)
- [They Work For You](#). Does your MP represent you? A citizen's guide to the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru, Northern Ireland Assembly and London Assembly.
- [MP for a Week](#). Role play the work of an MP for a week. Age 11-16.
- [How to write an effective press release](#) (Guardian)