The Fairtrade movement is growing in strength and Britain has now overtaken Switzerland to become the biggest importer of Fairtrade products. With March 6th seeing the start of this year’s national Fairtrade Fortnight, it is a current and newsworthy issue which can be easily used by schools as a vehicle for citizenship education.

Fairtrade is an opportunity for schoolchildren to understand and debate a global issue and with this in mind the Co-Operative Group has produced a resource pack which outlines the role primary schools can play in the development of Fairtrade and gives ideas for activities which get children involved in their community and wider world.

The pack includes a range of information on Fairtrade, from what it is and how Fairtrade operates, to lesson plans, activities and ideas to help teachers “deliver the message to pupils”. With a CD-ROM attached to the pack there is an electronic copy of the guide as well as additional resources including interactive games and an image library.

The guide is divided into seven sections. The first section is an introduction to the Fairtrade system – how it works and how it helps farmers in the developing world secure a fair and stable price for their goods. It is clear, concise and extremely informative for teachers with limited prior knowledge of Fairtrade. However, Co-Op have not missed the opportunity to talk about themselves or the range of Fairtrade products available at Co-Op food stores and these references do not really add any value to the pack as a teaching resource.

Section two provides a strong argument for bringing Fairtrade into schools and answers the question why your school should support Fairtrade. As well as the obvious humanitarian reasons for doing so, it makes a good case for Fairtrade activities improving the creative, critical thinking and team working skills of children. It advocates the need for children to “do something”, be it an audit, newsletter or radio advert or a tuck shop and a Young Co-Operatives Scheme.

Following on from demonstrating why Fairtrade should be brought into primary schools, section three tells us how we can make a full time commitment to Fairtrade by achieving ‘Fairtrade Friendly’ status for our schools. One step up from the occasional Fairtrade activity, this section details the steps needed to ensure that Fairtrade will be embraced across all areas of a school’s operations such as products, staff room refreshments, displays, projects and assemblies. A lot of this information is at teacher or governor level, for example, PR advice on making the press aware of a school’s Fairtrade work. However, the pack makes the point that by following their suggested action plan and “getting teachers and pupils in your school to agree to
become Fairtrade Friendly you will be in a much better position to support Fairtrade in a more productive way”.

The next two sections list more ideas to incorporate Fairtrade into lesson plans, as well as other activities such as a Fairtrade song and Fairtrade games. The suggestion of a Fairtrade Friday, with an outline timetable for an entire day of educational games and activities is useful. However, some of the Fairtrade themed lesson plans are quite weak and demonstrate how cross curricular work can be a bad thing if an issue or topic is shoe horned to fit into a subject for the sake of it. Also, some of the activities in section five are, at a push, adequate as a wet play activity for particularly interested children (e.g. colouring in the Fairtrade logo), but aren’t suitable to engage a whole class.

The final two sections contain resources for use in the classroom including photographs, case study stories and data sheets. This factual information is useful to support any Fairtrade activities in schools, and has been designed so it can be used in conjunction with the teaching suggestions throughout the pack.

A cynic may point out that this pack is merely a marketing opportunity for the Co-Op and recognise that although the pack criticises unfair world trade rules, the Co-Op’s agricultural business, Farmcare, receives over £2.5 million a year in agricultural subsidies. However, putting that issue to one side, it is true that the Co-Op has led the way in promoting and supporting Fairtrade products. It has demonstrated its commitment by making this pack available and on the whole it is an excellent tool for a teacher looking to get a good understanding of Fairtrade. Through its ideas for hands on activities, the pack shows that by bringing Fairtrade into a school, children will have the opportunity to become active and participative citizens and I recommend the pack as a useful addition to any resource library.