

# BECOMING A SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL & why bother?

"A sustainable future is one in which a healthy environment, economic prosperity and social justice are pursued simultaneously to ensure the well-being and quality of life of present and future generations.

Education is crucial to attaining that future."

*Learning for a Sustainable Future - Teacher Centre*

Sustainability can be broken down into three CAREs.

How do we:

- Care for the world?;
- Care for the community?;
- Care for ourselves?

In school settings the Sustainable School Framework looks at these under '8 doorways', while Eco-Schools sees these as 9 themes. Either model is effective and recognised as impactful by Ofsted. Both provide a large range of teaching and planning resources.

[www.eco-schools.org.uk](http://www.eco-schools.org.uk)

[www.sustainable-schools-alliance.org.uk](http://www.sustainable-schools-alliance.org.uk)

## SUSTAINABILITY THEMES

Under each theme being sustainable is about what happens in the classroom, on the school campus and with the local community.

SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK	ECO SCHOOLS MODEL
Food and drink	Energy
Energy AND water	Water
Travel AND traffic	Biodiversity
Purchasing AND waste	School grounds
Building AND grounds	Healthy living
Inclusion AND participation	Transport
Local well-being	Litter
Global dimension	Waste
	Global citizenship

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## WHY AIM TO BE A SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL?

You probably already do some activities and thinking under each of the different themes.

However, lasting sustainability comes from coherent approach that covers all areas WHILST reducing workload, increasing connections and improving staff and pupil well-being.

Sound good?! Don't just take our word for it.

## The Impact and Benefits of becoming a Sustainable School

A growing body of evidence shows that taking a sustainable schools approach helps you to meet your existing school priorities, whether that's exam results, sparking young people's interest in learning, improving pupils' well-being and behaviour, saving money through reducing energy costs, or promoting healthy lifestyles.

This evidence was very well summarised by the **Department for Education** in their publication "*Evidence for the Impact of Sustainable Schools*". Most recent information from the Department of Education places the responsibility to perform sustainably squarely on school and locality led action.

*Ofsted* agrees. In their research they have found that "learning about sustainability captures the interest of children and young people because they can see its relevance to their own lives." Head teachers have found that "education for sustainability has been an important factor in improving teaching and learning more generally." Further to this, "some school leaders identified links between particular pupils' involvement in sustainable activities and improvement in their attitudes and behaviour generally."

*"Some years ago I would not have highlighted [Education for Sustainable Development] to Ofsted for fear they would consider it a distraction from core business. Now ... I am confident that our work in this area has made a direct difference to pupils' achievement, behaviour and health and I'm therefore proud to discuss it with inspectors. ... Without doubt sustainable development has helped our children to develop a greater sense of care towards each other, the natural environment and the wider community... preparing [them] for the future."*

**Head teacher**

*"I hope I think about things as much as I ask my children to think about them. I hope I question as much as they do, because seeing the world through the eyes of the children who are growing into it, and giving them the opportunity to develop critical skills to deal with the way that the world is changing, is the most important thing an educator can do."*

**Primary school teacher**

*"The children benefit from the calm and quiet time working in the garden and being close to nature. They develop a reflective disposition which helps them to reflect on their behaviour both outside and inside the classrooms. Parents and visitors always comment on how good the garden looks and the children are very proud of it."*

**Head Teacher, Primary School**



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## KEY AREAS THAT ARE IMPACTED BY SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS

1. **School budgets** - Simple, sustainable resource efficiency and energy saving can make savings of £10-20,000 per annum
2. **Learning** - pupils enjoy learning about sustainability issues as they are directly relevant to their current and future lives, and their job prospects. They can make connections between what happens in the classroom and a bigger picture, and see themselves as successful learners.
3. **Wellbeing** - pupils channel negative energies through gardening and outdoor activities, which make them better able to focus and deal with difficult situations in the classroom. They can also improve their speaking and listening and other transferable skills.
4. **Community cohesion** - benefits are passed on to parents and the wider community.
5. **Attainment** - schools with a whole-school approach to sustainability (involving governors, bursars, school leaders, curriculum coordinators, pupils and parents) achieve well in other areas.
6. **Recognition** - 'green issues' can really enhance an Ofsted visit and show all the added value activities in school and the benefits to wellbeing and learning of its pupils. Ofsted regularly comment in inspection reports on the wider benefits to a school of outdoor learning and being sustainable.

## The increasing importance of Sustainable Schools into the future -

- There is a demanding global need for more education and skills in this area to raise awareness, build sustainable technologies and change behaviours. Preparing our children for the jobs and roles of the future.
- Through Building Schools for the Future and other capital programmes, we have a legacy of some fantastic new school buildings - but it's crucial to develop the behaviour change and awareness to go alongside that, using the building fabric and grounds as resources for learning.
- The Newham family of schools is one of the most important examples of co-operative leadership across the country. We have the opportunity to ensure we have a sustainable core to all we do. To truly "be the change we want to see in the world"
- The work adds value to many other work streams - teaching and learning, pupil wellbeing and school ethos, active citizenship, promoting British values, healthy lifestyles, parental involvement, and behaviour.
- Through more sustainable behaviours schools can save a lot of money and limited global resources - through simple education about low or no cost measures.

## SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Ofsted has found that, in the most successful schools, sustainability was an integral element of a well-planned curriculum alongside special events and activities, and was experienced both within and outside the classroom. In these schools, Ofsted found instances of enhanced attitudes to learning, better behaviour and attendance, and improved standards.



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Education for sustainability had been an important factor in improving teaching and learning more generally. This was confirmed through lesson observations in a range of subjects across the sample of schools visited.

- School leaders identified links between particular pupils' involvement in sustainable activities and improvement in their attitudes and behaviour generally.
- Pupils responded particularly well to education for sustainability when it gave them the opportunity to take part in practical activities within and outside the classroom and enabled them to research, plan and implement projects that made a clear difference to the school and the local community.
- A common characteristic of the lessons observed, across the full range of National Curriculum subjects seen during the survey, was the high level of engagement of the pupils in work they perceived as relevant to their lives and future well-being.
- The schools demonstrated how greater awareness of the need for sustainability can lead to reduced financial costs and better management of resources and estate.
- The knowledge and understanding that the pupils gained at school contributed to their leading more sustainable lives at home which, in turn, led their families to re-examine their lifestyles and use of resources.

## Case study

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*One of the primary schools visited had been given a notice to improve by Ofsted because it was failing to provide a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils.*

*While recognising the need to raise standards in English, mathematics and science, the headteacher was keen to ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 2 continued to study a range of topics on sustainability. Scrutiny of their work during the survey showed that many of the pupils were making good progress in these lessons because they found the topics interesting and the opportunity to take part in practical activities stimulated their learning.*

*The school made significant improvements and, in just over a year, it had progressed to being a good school. Its most recent inspection report refers specifically to the links between the improvements made and the 'exciting' curriculum of which sustainability was an 'outstanding feature'*



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## SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS - FACTS, FIGURES AND POTENTIAL SAVINGS

### Reduced carbon

The **Fair Earth Share** is the maximum amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that scientists have calculated each person can use before our planet becomes unsustainable. This is about 2.5 tonnes per person per year, requiring a huge reduction from the 10 tonnes currently produced by the average person in Britain.

Effective energy management at school level combined with new meter reader technologies can identify huge overspends. For example, through Energy Use Analysis, Hallsville School saved £20,000 of their annual energy costs 2011/12. That is 11 tonnes or 66 double decker busloads of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### Reduced energy and water use

The Carbon Trust states that schools can reduce the amount of energy they use by 20% through simple, low cost measures. A typical Newham primary school spends around £4000 per month on electricity, so a 20% reduction equates to £800 saved per month, or £9,600 per year.

The impact of new technologies (such as voltage optimisation), capital programmes and renewables bring additional financial, ecological, and educational benefits

Water is a scarce resource and costs are rising rapidly. Equipping a school with water conservation devices can halve its water use, delivering savings in the region of £500-1,000 per year.

### Sustainable purchasing

42% of carbon emissions from the schools sector come from procurement. This is nearly one per cent of total carbon emissions in the UK.

These emissions are produced by companies that supply goods and services to schools, for example a school food provider. This could include: emissions related to their use of energy to run their buildings and produce their food products; emissions associated with transporting their products to school sites; and emissions from waste produced by schools.

Simple procurement tools can reduce the carbon impact of the day-to-day buying choices and decisions made by each school whilst saving school funds. Many medium-scale investments can have payback within 2-3 months; for example replacing paper towels with 'bio-dryers' at £3,000 (initial outlay but negligible electricity cost) generates a saving of £4000 per year on fuel bills, reduces carbon liabilities, and saves paper resources and waste disposal costs.

### Sustainable school travel

Emissions from school travel and transport increased by 59% between 1990 and 2006; journeys to school, and private car use for those journeys, increased considerably. School travel planning has gone a long way to addressing this; they key is to make these changes sustainable.

### Reduced waste

Schools in England throw away the equivalent weight of 185 double decker buses of waste every school day. A lot of rubbish ends up in landfill sites, meaning we lose valuable resources.



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The majority of waste in schools is recyclable. However, primary schools currently only recycle 13% of their waste, and secondary schools 20%. A large proportion of waste from schools is food, paper and card (75% by weight from primary schools and 70% by weight from secondary schools). It is generally more expensive to dispose of waste in landfill sites than it is to recycle.

Simple no or low cost changes that can be made immediately can save £1500 per year.

## Sustainable school food and catering services

Food waste production can be reduced by as much as 20% in many schools, often with little or no capital investment. Many small and large steps can have a positive and significant effect on the sustainability of the school food system.

Many of these steps will also have a positive effect on school budgets, as in most cases efficiency and sustainability can be pursued at the same time. Schools working together can have a huge impact on the use of locally sourced foods, levels of waste recycling, and the energy efficiency of kitchen and dining equipment.

## Global dimension in schools

Sustainable development isn't just about the environment - and it isn't something we can achieve in isolation. The air we breathe, the food we eat and the clothes we wear link us to people, environments and economies all over the world. Schools, through curriculum, campus and community, can help pupils to make sense of the complexity of our world and their place in it.

For example, what is our carbon debt to developing countries and how do we repay it? Simple projects such as Carbon Partners tying international linking with sustainability can make global justice real for our young adults.

## Engaging with biodiversity

Biodiversity is life. Scientists use the word to describe the links and variety between all living things on the planet; humans, nature, wildlife, plants and animals are all inter-connected. We all rely on biodiversity for our survival, because of the way our planet provides for us.

Economic growth and social progress can result in the neglect of the essential need to consider and care for the environment. Yet the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is critical for both the global economy and for the basic resources needed to support our planet's growing population.

By engaging with biodiversity, schools can improve their own performance, while equipping pupils with the skills, understanding, and confidence to adapt to these changes and to succeed in the future. At the same time, they will also be benefiting biodiversity - in the school grounds, local community, and all around the world.



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## BUT WHERE TO BEGIN?

Sustainability is about the whole school. Its ethos, long-term planning, finances, learning commitments, relationships ...

The governing body is the place to start.

### 6 BIG QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNORS

1. How can your school embed the care agenda highlighted by Sustainable Schools - care for ourselves, care for others, and care for the environment - as a distinctive characteristic or feature of the school?
2. How can your school involve all the school's stakeholders in its decisions, balancing short-term interests with longer-term goals while considering the needs of the environment, future generations, and other communities?
3. How can your school use the Sustainable Schools doorways - and the real-life learning opportunities that they offer - to enhance pupils' enjoyment and progress, and contribute to pupils' achievement and standards?
4. How can your school develop individuals with the knowledge, values, skills and self-confidence they need to make positive contributions to their family, their community, their job, the environment, and the wider world?
5. How can your school's curriculum best address the statutory requirements for teaching sustainable development while contributing to each pupil's enjoyment of learning, and their need to keep learning sustainable behaviours over their lifetime?
6. What style of school leadership and management does the school need to promote lasting school improvement through a joined-up approach that integrates best value, best practice and sustainability?

