

Sustainable Schools: support available to you

Despite the Sustainable Schools strategy being cut¹, there's no reason why you shouldn't continue the great work you are doing to bring sustainability into your school. Whether you have been working in this area for years or are just starting out, we set out in this letter the [resources and support](#) we can offer to help you.

With a new government in power the Department for Education's approach to a whole range of issues, including sustainable schools, is to increase the freedom and responsibility you have to make your own school improvements. We want to encourage you to use this opportunity to put sustainability at the heart of what you do. The [latest research](#) shows that by doing so you can reap rewards in terms of pupil outcomes and budget savings. You will also be building a better future for your school's local and global communities and the environment.

If you're familiar with sustainable schools and the benefits it can bring, skip onto the [resources and support](#) section below. If you're new to this area, read on for a short introduction to sustainable schools and the [benefits](#) it brings.

"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."

Lezli Howarth - Chandos Primary School

What is a sustainable school?

Schools have started the process of becoming a sustainable school in a whole range of ways. Many are encouraging pupils to think critically and creatively about poverty, climate change and the opportunities associated with sustainable development across their curricula. Others are encouraging pupils and school staff to reduce their energy use, or serving healthy food for lunch. Still others are working with parents to arrange a walk to school once a week or to improve their school grounds for wildlife.

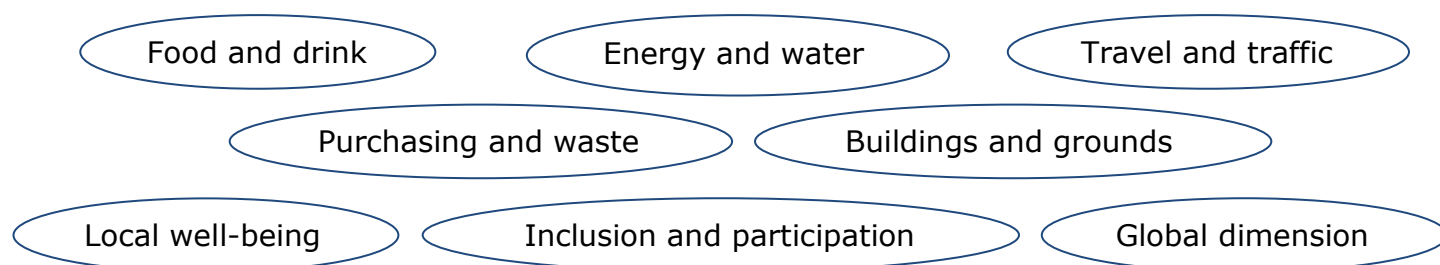
Signatory organisations:



“We want to have a say in how our world is run, to make people aware of... what is going on in our world and how they can help us to change it... we want children to grow up respecting their community and each other.”

Year 8 student

A sustainable school is one that puts learners at the heart of everything they do, following an ethos of care - care for oneself, for each other (across cultures, distances and generations) and for the environment itself (far and near). A sustainable school takes an integrated approach to its improvement. It explores sustainable development through its teaching provision and learning (curriculum); in its values and ways of thinking (campus); and in its engagement of local people and partners (community). Schools can establish or develop their sustainability practices using eight doorways:



“At the beginning I thought it was all about recycling and saving energy. Now I can understand how the parts fit together and have an impact upon society locally, nationally and globally. The best part is that the pupils and I are learning together, we’ve made mistakes and sometimes we turn into cul-de-sacs, but because of that we have an even better holistic understanding.”

School leader

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 your 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 recent publication *Evidence for the Impact of Sustainable Schools*.

Ofsted agrees. In recent 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

Support available to you

As head teachers, teachers and school staff, you are better placed than anyone to know what works for your school. But, as charities working in this field, we also know that sustainability can sometimes be a tricky issue to bring into your work. If you are keen to explore education for sustainability in your school and would like some support to do so, we recommend the following resources and networks (this list is by no means exhaustive):

Umbrella organisations: Hundreds of organisations offer a wide range of support and resources. The following membership-based organisations can operate as gateways to help you find what you are looking for:

- SEEd: www.se-ed.org.uk/sustainableschools
- DEA: www.globaldimension.org.uk
- NCB : www.ncb.org.uk/osow
- Learning outside the classroom (LOtC): www.lotc.org.uk

Support and advice networks:

- Your **local authority** may well have dedicated support for sustainable schools and/or for the global dimension. SEEd, DEA, LOtC or Eco-schools can direct you to your local authority contact.
- There are over 40 **development education centres** around the country who offer local support, resources and training on sustainable schools and the global dimension: www.globaldimension.org.uk/localsupport
- Several **local, regional and national networks** exist to support sustainable schools, where you can discuss issues with other school leaders.
- SEEd and LOtC have **lists of local facilitators** who will offer advice and CPD
- People and Planet offers **tailored packages of support** to teachers and learners at Key Stages 4 and 5: peopleandplanet.org/education/staff
- Groundwork can offer schools **specialist sustainable schools practitioners** to work with all school stakeholders on programmes tailor-made to benefit the curriculum, the school campus and the wider community: www.groundwork.org.uk/our-services/schools.aspx
- Sustrans offers support to schools to promote **sustainable school journeys**, local walking and cycling routes, and the Bike It project which has doubled cycling to school: www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/bike-it

Online resources and advice:

- The **Global Dimension website** has a wealth of resources and activities that you can use to bring sustainability and global issues into the curriculum. The website is accessed about 25,000 times a month:
www.globaldimension.org.uk
- The **Oxfam Education website** offers an extensive range of subject specific or cross-curricular resources, as well as details of school speakers, regional support staff, annual school conferences and youth groups:
www.oxfam.org.uk/education
- National Children's Bureau's (NCB) **One Step One World Programme** offers schools resources to use a tried and tested challenge approach that empowers students to make and keep making lifestyle changes that promote a more sustainable way of life:
www.ncb.org.uk/osow/take_part/osow_challenge.aspx
- NCB also has an online directory of organisations, resources and campaigns on **sustainable living**:
www.ncb.org.uk/osow/resources.aspx
- SEEd's website has many of the **government's resources** for sustainable schools, including 'top tips' publications in a range of areas: www.se-ed.org.uk/sustainableschools/index.html
- The BBC's Breathing Places scheme has lots of ideas on **improving school grounds for wildlife**, and links to many environmental organisations working with schools more broadly: www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/schools
- WWF's **One Planet Schools**[®] website gives you access to a suite of school-based projects, activities and resources designed to engage students and teachers in learning about and taking action on sustainability:
www.wwf.org.uk/oneplanetschools

Award schemes and accreditation:

There are many award schemes and forms of accreditation that you can pursue, which can be a useful guide when starting out on a journey towards becoming a sustainable school. We list some of the main ones below, and any of the organisations listed above can direct you to further opportunities:

- **Eco-schools:** www.eco-schools.org.uk
- **International School Award:** www.globalgateway.org.uk/default.aspx?page=5057
- **Rights Respecting Schools Award:** rsa.unicef.org.uk
- **TES Outstanding Sustainable School Award:** www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storyCode=6004064&s_cid=sustainable
- **Fairtrade Schools:** www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/default.aspx
- **Ashden Awards** for sustainable energy: www.ashdenawards.org/schools

This letter has been written by a consortium of education, sustainable development, environment, international development and children's charities, including: DEA (the Development Education Association); Groundwork; NCB (National Children's Bureau); Oxfam; People and Planet; RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds); SEEd (Sustainability and Environmental Education); Sustrans and WWF. In the next few months we'll be exploring new ways to support your work on sustainable schools. Please contact SEEd if you'd like to hear more: info@se-ed.org.uk

ⁱ *Climate change strategy falls victim to Tories' anti-centralising*, Times Education Supplement, 17 September 2010: <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6058171>