

## Eco-Schools and Child at the Centre

### Eco-Schools Evidence in Support of the Quality Indicators

The Eco-Schools programme can be used by pre-school and Early Years establishments to provide evidence for achievement within several of the Quality Indicators of Child at the Centre.

#### Extracts from Level 5 Illustration

##### QI 1.1: Children's progress

"Children at risk of missing out achieve and progress very well. They are able to show responsibility and independence...they contribute well to the life of the centre and its community."

The practical, fun and real-life nature of Eco-Schools activities greatly motivate young children and can engage the interest of those at risk of 'opting out.' The concept of 'making things nicer' or 'protecting plants and animals' adds to a feeling of belonging, community spirit, and caring for others.

##### QI 2.1: Children's experience

"Our children ... are fully engaged, highly motivated and interact well during activities. They ... are increasingly able to cooperate with (others) and take turns. Children feel successful and are confident, and they can contribute appropriately in our centre."

The Eco-Schools programme gives even the youngest pupil the opportunity to take responsibility for certain activities (water plants, pull up weeds, clear litter) With this responsibility comes the opportunity to share and delegate tasks, and the confidence to make suggestions and come to decisions.

##### QI 2.2: Involving parents

"Our parents play an important part in their children's learning and development. They are represented on our parent groups, such as the nursery school council or playgroup committee, and participate in relevant meetings and in our centre's events."

It is a requirement of Eco-Schools that adults – particularly parents – are members of the Eco Committee. This is an area of development with which parents – especially fathers – feel very comfortable, especially school grounds improvement, painting, gardening etc. Grandparents, too, can become directly involved as appropriate, and 'Eco Days' are usually very well supported.

##### QI 3.1: Engagement of staff

"We are motivated and meaningfully engaged in improving the quality of education and care for our children. We are actively involved in developing the centre's work through effective teamwork within our centre and with our partner agencies."

Through Eco-Schools, staff can develop a wide range of play/learning activities with a common theme and a direct link to the outside world. Eco-School programmes provide the perfect vehicle for introducing professionals from agencies such as Health, Environmental Protection, Biodiversity, etc who can interact with the young people at their own level within the context of a familiar environment.

#### QI 4.1: Engagement with the local community/agencies

“Members of the local community are actively involved with our centre. We work collaboratively with relevant organisations in the wider community to broaden (children’s) experiences. Organisations in the community engage with and support our centre. Our local community ... report positive views on the quality and impact of the services we provide for families and children. The community feels that we take account of its views ... and the level of community involvement in the life of our centre ... our centre has effective partnership arrangements which enrich our provision and the experiences of our children.”

Observing adults at work is highly motivating and instructive for curious young people. In the process of modifying school grounds or brightening up interiors to support the Eco-Schools programme, children have the opportunity to see artists, craftsmen, gardeners, landscape artists and a range of other skilled artisans at work. This sort of experience lays the groundwork, even at an early age, of the process leading to career development.

#### QI 4.2: Engagement with the wider (global) community

“We are well informed about a range of innovative programmes, including links with centres and schools in other parts of the country and overseas. Our centre is outward looking. We understand and engage with wider issues affecting people in other areas. We educate for sustainability and prepare our learners for global citizenship.”

The widespread growth of Eco-Schools in nursery and primary schools allows ample opportunity for themed visits to partner nurseries or ‘big school’ visits to receiving primaries. International links often take the environmental theme of ‘how we live’ and highlight differences. The wonderful opportunity to teach very young people the lessons of ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’ cannot be overstated and some early understanding of global interdependence is a very valuable lesson for later life.

#### QI 5.1: The curriculum

“Our curriculum has a clear rationale based on shared values... and leaves scope for staff to introduce well-considered innovations, and for children to follow their interests. The curriculum is based firmly on play and active learning. Our programmes are stimulating, challenging and enjoyable. Our curriculum supports progression within and links between areas of learning, and promotes progress in wider achievements very well.”

At the centre of the Eco-Schools programme lies the Eco Code. This is, in effect, a vision statement which illustrates the values shared by the staff and pupils in the school, and the rationale behind the activities enjoyed. In early years establishments, this is often in the format of song or nursery rhyme which children learn as part of their music/ language development. The concept of time and progression can be strengthened by the need to wait while plants grow and develop, and thus the personal attribute of patience is also nurtured.

#### QI 5.2: Teaching for effective learning

“We use a wide range of learning environments and teaching approaches. Play activities involve them with others in making decisions, investigating and solving problems. Our teaching fully involves children and encourages them to express their views and ask questions. We consistently promote curiosity, independence and confidence in children.”

The principles contained within “Taking Learning Outdoors – Partnerships in Excellence” (LTS 2007) underline the many benefits of activities within Eco-Schools. The opportunity to learn more about their own environment within the safe limits of school grounds, and further opportunities to suggest improvements and take part in implementing these improvements, provide young people with real life experiences in investigating, problem solving, and decision-making.



### QI 5.3: Meeting learning needs

“We match learning activities and resources, including natural materials, to the age, needs and abilities of individual children. We make effective use of resources to support children’s learning and meet a wide range of learning and teaching styles. We identify at an early stage, review and evaluate children’s needs, including those whose needs are significantly different from their peers.”

The practical and cooperative nature of many Eco-Schools activities help pupils develop social skills in working with others, motor skills in handling e.g. garden tools and litter pickers, and interpersonal skills in caring and sharing. More introspective children often react well to the natural environment in dealing with plants, insects and animals, and with growing confidence can move on to greater interaction with their peers.

### QI 5.4: Assessment for learning

“Our staff use an appropriate range of assessment methods, including observation and high-quality interaction with children. “

Involvement in Eco-Schools activities can afford observational opportunities in creativity (artwork from recycled materials), cooperation (sharing ‘gardening’ duties), enterprise (collecting and sorting recyclables), language development (identifying plants and insects), number (making graphs). While all of these can be assessed in other activities, the common ‘eco’ theme provides a benchmark against which observations can be measured.

### QI 5.5: Expectations and promoting achievement

“Our children have high expectations of themselves and others. They have a sense of achievement and progress, and enjoy appropriate opportunities to exercise responsibilities. Their work is displayed well around the playroom and centre. Their high levels of motivation and depth of engagement demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. We celebrate children’s achievements regularly within the centre and with family and the community.”

Early Years staff have always used the environment both as a place of learning and a resource for learning. They have long recognised the need for young people to be outdoors and opportunities for learning in the process. Drawing these opportunities under the discipline of the Eco-Schools programme gives the young people a target to aim for and a tremendous sense of achievement at various stages of success. Achievements within Eco-Schools can easily be demonstrated to parents and visitors, and even the youngest child is eager to describe, demonstrate and discuss progress.

### QI 5.6: Equality and fairness

“We promote equality of opportunity, and a sense of fairness is strongly evident in the centre’s work. Diversity is recognised, valued and promoted in our centre and its community whilst stressing what is shared in our values and experiences.”

While young people from different cultures may vary in terms of religious belief, language and values, these all share a common respect for the environment. Working together on an Eco-Schools environmental project gives common ground for children to cooperate with each other irrespective of personal differences in a way that such differences become non-threatening and personally enriching.

