

Eco-Schools and How Good is our School?

Eco-Schools Evidence in Support of the Quality Indicators

Outcomes from a school's involvement in the Eco-Schools programme can be used as evidence supporting the school's assessment of its position against HMIE's six levels of excellence.

Statements below are taken from the level 5 illustrations from HGIOS 2007.

QI 1.1 Standards of attainment over time

"Overall, our learners are successful, confident, exercise responsibility and contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. They are personally and socially adept and have achieved in a range of activities for personal and wider achievement including, where appropriate, areas such as work and residential experiences."

Involvement in the Eco-School committee offers some pupils the opportunity to exercise leadership and responsibility, but for all pupils involvement in environmental activities offers success in practical outcomes for the common good.

QI 2.1 Learners' experiences

"Our learners are motivated and eager participants in their learning. They are responsible and contribute actively to the life of the school and the wider community ... know that their views are sought and acted on...feel that they are valued, and have appropriate opportunities to express their views which are taken into account in decision making. Our learners feel successful, confident and responsible, and they contribute effectively to the school and its community, and to society more generally."

The Eco-Schools process requires pupil empowerment and consultation. Working within the school and local community, pupils are expected to express their own views but also take those of others into consideration.

QI 2.2 The school's success in involving parents, carers and families.

"Our parents ... play an important part in their children's learning and development. They participate well in relevant meetings and school events ...contribute as actively as possible to key aspects of their children's education ... with effective support from initiatives developed by us and our partners. Parents ... engage with us with confidence."

Parental involvement is a desirable element of Eco-Schools; both directly as members of the committee, and indirectly supporting activities. This also raises joint family awareness of issues and encourages shared activities such as recycling at home.

QI 3.1 The engagement of staff in the life and work of the school.

"We make very effective contributions to the life of the school and work together well in teams within our school and with

Teacher involvement in Eco-Schools is crucial. There has to be at least one (preferably more) 'white knight' dedicated to keeping the Eco Committee focused and on target. Schools often find they have a number of

partner agencies. We recognise our personal and professional responsibility for the personal and social development and health education of all children and young people.	staff who share environmental concerns and are willing to support the work of the Eco Committee. In secondary schools, the wide range of environmental topics covered across subjects offers a pool of talent and opportunities for cross-curricular learning.
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QI 4.1 The school's success in working with and engaging with the local community.

"Members of the local community are actively involved with our school ...The community perceives that we take account of its views on aspects such as our school's reputation, its use as a community resource, our responsiveness to complaints from the community and the level of community involvement in the life of our school."	The issue of litter is often a cause of friction between schools and local communities. Visible, ongoing and cooperative efforts to reduce litter can enhance a school's reputation. In addition, joint efforts to upgrade and enhance local beauty spots can further enhance a school's standing in the local community.
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QI 4.2 The school's success in working with and engaging with the wider community.

"Our school 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."	Issues such as climate change, environmental justice, poverty and world health are appropriate areas of investigation for Eco-Schools – particularly in the secondary sector. Eco-Schools itself is an international programme and a school's involvement means joining a worldwide community with common aims.
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QI 5.2 Teaching for effective learning

"...we create a stimulating learning climate using skilful and well-paced teaching and learning approaches ... We develop learners' abilities to be curious and creative and to think critically ... Our teaching fully involves learners and encourages them to express views and ask questions."	Use of environmental issues as the context for a wide range of learning experiences makes fullest use of pupils' own life experiences which they can question, examine, analyse and come to understand at their own level
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QI 5.3 Meeting learning needs

"We match learning activities to the needs of individual learners and groups with differing abilities or aptitudes."	The great variety of challenges and outcomes arising from involvement in Eco-Schools allow pupils of all interests and abilities to become involved. Disaffected pupils often respond to the practical and creative aspects of recycling and school grounds development. Others relish the challenge of identifying a project and managing an action plan. Yet others accept the environment as a familiar context in which to develop advanced skills in e.g. mathematics and modern languages.
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QI 5.5 Expectations and promoting achievement

“Learners have high expectations of themselves and others ... achievements in the community are valued and celebrated in our school ... We use a wide range of approaches for reporting on and celebrating the success of individuals, groups of young people and staff and our school community as a whole ... Relationships across the school community are positive and founded on a climate of mutual- and self-respect within a strong sense of community and shared values.”

One of the seven elements of Eco-Schools is the requirement to include and share outcomes with the whole school and wider community. Regular communication ensures successes are regularly celebrated and misunderstandings more easily avoided. In addition pupils, staff and the local community can all share the common values of environmental concern irrespective of race, belief or social background

QI 5.6 Equality and fairness

“We have a culture of inclusion, participation and positive behaviour based on respect ... We take steps to engage disaffected learners and their families and enable them to experience success and belonging within the school ... We stress the importance of putting values into action ... We recognise, value and promote diversity in our school and its community whilst stressing what is shared in our values and experience.”

The maintenance of diversity lies at the heart of environmental concern. The study of pressures on animal habitats, the understanding of the mutual support required to maintain biodiversity, and the realisation that ‘everything depends on everything else’ can provide a very practical background for wider discussions on human cultural diversity and the pressures and benefits which arise.

QI 5.7 Partnerships with learners and parents

“We actively encourage parents to participate in their children’s care and education ... We welcome parents being proactive in raising issues and engaging in school improvement beyond the needs of their own children.”

Parents are rightly interested in the ‘here and now’ of their children’s education; however, active participation in Eco-Schools activities often allows parents (and children) to come to realise that some project outcomes (e.g. tree planting, a new garden) very often will most benefit later generations rather than themselves.

QI 5.8 Care, welfare and development

“Learners are actively encouraged to extend their wider achievements, care for others and develop citizenship skills ... Learners are proactive in developing ideas about their future and have acquired the skills and knowledge to plan their careers effectively and gain experience of the world of work.”

Eco-Schools activities are generally unselfish and community focused. No one person benefits from them and the outcomes are widely shared. Involvement in specific topics such as anti-littering, recycling and anti-pollution campaigns heighten pupils’ awareness of personal responsibility towards the society in which they live. Pupils also become aware of a range of work opportunities within environmental care, waste management, alternative energy, eco tourism and similar ‘green’ jobs which they may never have previously considered.



QI 5.9 Improvement through self-evaluation

“Where appropriate, we use accreditation schemes as a sound basis for improvement ... Our school community takes a joined-up approach to improvement across all that it does.”

The Eco-Schools programme is one such ‘accreditation scheme’. Through a combination of self-evaluation, quality control and external assessment schools can verify their level of excellence by moving through the bronze, silver (self-assessed) and Green Flag (officer assessed) levels. Eco-Schools can also be used as a point of focus for creativity, enterprise, drama, language and many other areas of the curriculum. “We do everything through our Eco!”

QI 6.2 Participation in policy and planning

“Staff, learners, parents, partner agencies and other stakeholders participate actively in staff meetings, pupil councils, groups representing parents, working groups, focus groups and other stakeholder forums ... Staff, learners, parents and partners are confident in contributing ideas, expressing concerns and making suggestions.”

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QI 6.3 Planning for improvement

“ ... we make effective use of information from self-evaluation and ... review and development ... We have taken careful account of issues of continuity and sustainability in planning improvements.”

Monitoring and evaluation are major elements within Eco-Schools. Planning for the future takes precedence over ‘instant fix’. Pupils are encouraged to take careful note of progress, understand the reasons for any ‘slippage’ and take remedial action to ensure success.

QI 7.2 Staff deployment and teamwork

“We have established a collaborative and collegiate approach to our work.”

The required ‘whole-school’ approach of the Eco-Schools programme can encourage collaborative working. While one member of staff may be allocated the ‘Eco-Schools’ remit (and the time and resources to develop it) others will be prepared to support activities as required. In secondary schools, Eco-Schools projects offer superb opportunities for cross-curricular work through the identification of common themes and areas of teaching and learning.



QI 8.1 Partnerships with the community .. establishments .. agencies .. employers

“Staff are committed to the aims of joint working and engage actively with partners, community representatives and agencies ... links with other educational establishments, community and specialist agencies and employers have enriched learning and improved learners’ achievements ... Staff participate actively in initiatives led by other agencies.”

Eco-Schools activities can provide a focus for working with health and sports professionals, environmental protection agencies, local and national businesses, the national utilities companies, etc who can enrich pupils’ learning by relating it to the ‘real world’ outside school. Such partnerships chime very clearly with some of the objectives of ‘Determined to Succeed’.

QI 8.2 Management of finance for learning

“We consult staff, learners and parents on funding bids and these are clearly linked to the needs of the school ...”

Allocation of (often scarce) school resources to the Eco-Schools programme can be a measure of a head teacher’s commitment to it. This could be an allocation of funds, but also an allocation of time to a teacher with the remit to promote the programme. For pupils, the thrill of managing a small budget and being allowed, with guidance, to spend it can be a rich learning experience.

QI 8.3 Management and use of resources and space for learning

“Our accommodation, including corridors and playgrounds, provides a safe, pleasant and stimulating environment for learning, social and leisure activities.”

Many schools employ the Eco-Schools programme to enhance school grounds and unproductive inner space. Judicious use of planters, murals, and activity equipment has turned barren tarmac playgrounds into attractive leisure spaces and new teaching points. Inner spaces have been transformed with colourful artwork – especially in secondaries and special schools – using recycled or ‘trash’ materials.

QI 9.1 Vision, values and aims

We continually revisit and reinforce our vision, values and aims through our events and activities ... Our vision, values and aims set out clear expectations for, and positive attitudes to, diversity. We are strongly committed to equality. We promote equity and celebrate diversity and inclusion and this is reflected in our improvement plan.”

The school’s Eco Code is its environmental vision statement. Schools are encouraged to review and update their Eco Code as they overtake old objectives and undertake new ones. As noted above, investigations into biodiversity can underpin and support understanding of issues arising from social diversity.

QI 9.3 Developing people and partnerships

“We have made an impact individually, within teams and across our school ... We help people tackle challenging problems, share information and deal

Pupils working within an Eco Committee will be able to point to both effective and affective achievements in modifying their own and fellow pupils’ views on environmental issues. They will also benefit from lessons learned through plans frustrated by bureaucracy or the priorities of others, and to accept that compromise is often the way forward. Working within a team of



with difficulties ...An ethos of teamwork is evident in our school.”	mixed ages, experiences and backgrounds they will also have recognised the richness that such variety brings to discussion and debate.
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QI 9.4 Leadership of improvement and change

“We win over hearts as well as minds ... Our school constantly explores ways to support improvement through developing talents and skills.”	Involvement in Eco-Schools sometimes arises ‘from the heart’ – e.g. pupils concerned about an endangered species following a successful environmental studies topic, or worries about local flooding following a lesson on climate change. These initial concerns often dissipate unless the mind is engaged in investigation and analysis. Schools which allow pupils to develop their skills of research and problem solving on real-life issues within the Eco-Schools programme are certainly among those on the path to excellence.
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