

Eco-Schools and the Journey to Excellence

How Good is our School, parts One & Two – HMIE 2007

“How Good is Our School – the Journey to Excellence” (HMIE 2007) identifies 10 ‘Dimensions of Excellence’ and illustrates how these can be achieved by offering level 4 (Good) and level 6 (Excellent) descriptions of excellence.

While the Eco-Schools programme touches on all ten dimensions (there is some evidence that involvement in Eco-Schools can raise whole school attainment – Dimension 1), we would like to highlight the following as more direct influences. Quotations are drawn from the level 6 descriptions.

DIMENSION 2

– Planning the Outcomes of Learning A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Teachers enable children to develop the skills to evaluate their own and each other’s work against clear criteria.”

“Young people keep ongoing records of their progress so that they can track their pace of progress...”

One of the seven elements of the Eco-Schools programme is Monitoring and Evaluation. Pupils involved in Eco-Schools learn – in very practical ways – the advantages of monitoring and evaluating their work to maximise future benefits.

DIMENSION 3

– Developing a Common Vision A school is excellent to the extent that...

“The necessary collective commitment of all staff, pupils, parents and the wider community has been secured.”

Another of the seven elements of the Eco-Schools programme is the development by the whole school of an ‘Eco Code’ – basically the school’s ‘vision statement’ about what it hopes to achieve through Eco-School participation both through school action and wider community involvement.

DIMENSION 5

– Working in Partnerships A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Work with other establishments, organisations and businesses is used to broaden and deepen young people’s learning and enable them to achieve success in wider contexts.”

“Community-based activities are used to develop young people’s self-esteem and creative skills, meet individual and group needs and prepare them for their future roles in society. They also enable young people to make positive contributions to the experiences of other people.”

“Staff draw on community resources to develop young people’s leadership skills. All pupils participate in enterprise activities, community involvement, work placements and shadowing, sports leadership awards or similar activities.”

“The community, agencies and other stakeholders are represented on relevant school committees and decision-making groups.”

It is expected that the Eco Committee attracts membership from the local community if at all possible. Very often projects are delivered with the enthusiastic support of local environmental agencies, parents and local businesses. Such active links and partnerships, aimed at improving the school and local environment, greatly enhance the reputation of the school within its community and open pupils’ eyes to the

DIMENSION 4

– Leadership

A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Leaders at all levels within the school act to show that influence is two-way. They draw on the collective knowledge, experience and personal interests of a wide range of staff and on pupils’ views.

Leaders reinforce a culture where staff and pupils feel able and confident to take lead roles within and beyond the classroom.”

The first task for a new Eco-School is to set up the Eco Committee. This is a democratically appointed team representing all pupil groups, teachers, parents, school support staff and community volunteers. It is expected that pupils take executive roles and are allowed to make and follow up key decisions.

DIMENSION 8

– Valuing and Empower Staff and Young People

A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Many young people, staff, parents and members of the wider community plan, consult and work collaboratively to improve the school environment and the experiences the school provides for its pupils. The pupil council, or equivalent, has taken on challenging issues and has been successful in having a positive impact on important aspects of school life and on the wider community.”

This statement of excellence embodies the entire ethos of the Eco-Schools programme.

It embodies all seven elements of the Eco-Schools programme in requiring teamwork, planning, evaluation, communication, problem-solving, ethos, and inclusion.

Involvement in the Eco-Schools programme provides valuable evidence of a school's commitment to pupil empowerment.

Properly motivated by staff, pupils can make great strides in personal confidence and sense of achievement through practical,

world beyond the school gate.

DIMENSION 6

– Working with Parents

A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Parents participate in debates and discussions about education, and use their skills to contribute to school improvements. Parent representatives are involved in school development groups, working parties and committees.”

“It involves parent representatives alongside pupils and staff in identifying improvements.”

Parental membership of the Eco Committee is encouraged and parental involvement in the various projects – recycling, health, school grounds, etc – can involve large numbers. Parents are generally supportive of Eco-Schools, as it leads to improvements in their children's lives.

DIMENSION 10

– Developing a Culture of Ambition and Achievement

A school is excellent to the extent that...

“A coherent relationship between enterprise, creativity and citizenship has been established and is being fully exploited. Citizenship and creativity are embedded in school, stage and departmental development/improvement plans.”

“We do everything through our Eco!” reported one primary head teacher at a recent conference. Many schools find that the Eco-Schools programme offers a unique common theme which integrates several other initiatives, fascinates pupils, and allows them to develop a whole range of academic and personal skills in a very practical and real-life context.



positive, environmental projects.

DIMENSION 9

– Promoting Well-Being and Respect A school is excellent to the extent that...

“Children and staff develop self-confidence, self-esteem and positive views about themselves and their school, through participation in an extensive and varied programme of activities both within and out of school hours. The world beyond the school is regularly used as a source of learning for all young people.”

“Young people are proactive in developing ideas about their future and have acquired the skills and knowledge to plan their careers effectively.”

In the document “Taking Learning Outdoors - partnerships for excellence” (LTS 2007) Learning and Teaching Scotland defines outdoor education as “...a teaching approach which can enhance and integrate a broad range of core experiences ... which connect learners with their environment, their community, their society and themselves. It engages and motivates learners through first-hand experiences...”

While not all Eco-Schools activities take place outdoors, many do, and all are aimed at environmental improvement.

Additionally, particularly for secondary pupils, exposure to professionals from environmental protection agencies and waste management companies, among others, will raise their awareness of ‘green’ jobs available in the environmental arena

