

Sustainable Schools

What do you think?



A Summary for Young People

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

‘Sustainable schools’ - what do you think?

You and your school have a special part to play in helping our communities become safer, healthier and greener for everyone now and in the future. That’s why we have produced a ‘consultation paper’ which sets out what we would like schools - and pupils like you - to do to help.

You may wish to read the consultation paper yourself - ask a teacher to get hold of a copy or download one from: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations. This site allows you to respond in a number of ways - online, offline or by post.

Alternatively, you can read this summary designed for young people, and take part in an online survey. You’ll find out how to do this at the end of the document.

As you read it we’d like you to think about the things you could do to improve the world around you in your home, school, local area and perhaps further away. You might also consider how your school could assist any efforts that you make. We’ve included a number of questions for you at the end to spark further ideas.

Just a word about definitions before we begin. You might have heard people talk about sustainable development in your school or on television, or at home. It’s all about seeking a better life for everyone now and in the future without destroying our most precious resource

- the planet. That means caring for the things we most depend on - ourselves, each other and the environment - so that we can avoid problems like climate change and poverty. Schools can play a big role in helping pupils to think in this way, which is why we would like all schools to become sustainable schools.



Change is happening

Change is happening all the time, all around us. You will have seen it yourself as you grow up - you steadily change as you get older, from birth through teenage years to adulthood. Your surroundings change with the seasons, from winter through spring, summer and autumn. Practically no one used a mobile telephone twenty years ago, and computers were still quite rare.

Think about the world around you. Where it is clean and safe, a great place to be, it makes you feel different about it - and about yourself. Life feels better. Where it is green and full of plants and wildlife it can be uplifting. But if you're in a place that is dirty, noisy or polluted, or among people who don't respect each other and there's an atmosphere of anger or fear, it's not a place you want to be in, is it?



No-one knows what will happen in the future. There are likely to be plenty of good things - like discoveries in science and medicine, or new inventions such as cars that don't pollute the air. You might even play a part in creating these things. But if we all continue to treat the world in the way we have been, with little regard for the future, we will do lasting harm. And that means that we'll all be less well off than we are today.

You may have heard about some of the things that are happening in the world, like climate change, which is creating unstable weather patterns and more droughts and floods, and rising sea levels. The world's population is continually rising, putting huge pressure on forests, water and soil. Millions of people live in poverty and one billion don't have safe, fresh water.

What is sustainable development?

Sustainable development is about making sure that the way we live does not end up destroying our world and the things we value. It means us rethinking how we organise our lives so that we take care of the things that matter to us - ourselves and where we live, our families, our communities and those in other countries, our environment and our planet. That's where you come in.

What are sustainable schools?

You and your school are at the centre of 'sustainable schools'. A sustainable school starts with the idea of care:

- Taking care of yourself
- Taking care of each other - in the school itself but also in the streets and local area, and thinking about people living in other places and countries
- Taking care of the environment - both locally and further away.

Care also involves taking responsibility. In schools where pupils are given a say in the design of playing areas, for example, there's less bad behaviour, less bullying and less vandalism.

Many schools are quite good at this already. That's because sustainable development helps to inspire pupils and teachers, and to get parents and others involved in activities to improve the school.



What's the Government doing about it?

The Government would really like you, your family and friends, your school and all the people connected with it, to get behind the idea of sustainable development, and work together to make it happen in your school. We think this will be very good for the school, its pupils and the whole community, as well as being good for the environment.

What's it like at a sustainable school?

Sustainable schools are fun places to learn, and a lot of learning takes place outside the classroom in the school buildings and grounds, and the local area. Some of this learning involves meeting local people and helping to understand local problems.

Other things a sustainable school might do include:

- grow their own vegetables and set up wildlife areas
- make their own energy from solar panels or wind turbines
- install low-energy lighting with movement sensors to save energy
- collect rainwater from the roof for use in gardens, and recycle water from sinks
- encourage travelling by bike or foot
- recycle paper and compost food scraps
- celebrate diversity in the school and community, and make sure everyone feels valued
- partner with schools in other countries to understand different ways of life, and help out with their problems.

What you learn is related to issues that really matter to your future, so that school is relevant to your life.

We have produced a 'national framework' setting out our goals and suggesting ways in which schools can move forward. The framework looks at the challenge through what it calls 'doorways' - eight different ways to approach the task of building a sustainable school.

The doorways are highlighted below, together with some real-life examples of how pupils have become involved in making their schools more sustainable.



The 'doorways'



Doorway 1: Food and drink

Is it easy for you to eat enough fruit and vegetables each day? The pupils at St Matthew's Primary School in Belfast eat an amazing amount of fruit and are supporting local and fair trade suppliers at the same time. Every morning they buy fruit at the School to eat during the day, and any money made from this goes into bank accounts for them at a local credit union. All the pupils have their own reusable plastic water bottles that they carry around with them, and they can fill them up at one of three chilled water dispensers they bought with the profits from the fruit scheme.



Doorway 2: Energy and water

Imagine if you could produce your own energy. Pupils at Cassop Primary School in County Durham don't have to imagine any more, because they've got their own wind turbine and solar panels. And pupils who act as 'Energy Monitors' make sure none of the energy they make goes to waste. The School has reduced its energy bills by a third - and can even sell energy back to the grid when they've got some left over!



Doorway 3: Travel and traffic

What would make it easier for you to walk or cycle to school? 75 per cent of the pupils at Kesgrave High School in Suffolk get to do this, because their school has done a lot to make sure the routes to school are safe, they've got their own separate entrance, and bike sheds where the bikes are safe and protected from the weather. And when they have to go to other sites for swimming and tennis, they don't have to wait for a minibus - they can just hop on their bikes and be there in no time, with no pollution.



Doorway 4: Purchasing and waste



Have you ever wondered what happens to the waste you put in the bin? Pupils at Culcheth High School in Cheshire have found out - as part of their school activities they visit a recycling centre or landfill site, to see how much waste is produced in their local area and how it impacts on the environment. And what they see and learn can form a part of all sorts of lessons - in Literacy, they can write reports on their trips, and in Design and Technology they can make recycled paper for posters that promote recycling and waste reduction around the School.



Doorway 5: Buildings and grounds



Could your school grounds could made safer or more exciting? The Eco Working Party at Thomas Tallis School in London weren't happy with an area of the grounds that was being ignored, so they replaced it with a cottage garden with flowers and herbs, and now use the herbs in recipes during Food Technology.



Doorway 6: Inclusion and participation



Do you feel involved in the life of your school? Pupils at Glebe School in Kent, who have some learning difficulties, are among the best sales people at their local farmers market. At school they have an organic fruit, vegetable and flower garden and learn about organic production and food miles. They then sell their produce at the market, making friends with farmers, stallholders and market staff, gaining valuable skills in organising and running the stall - and a lot of happy customers.



Doorway 7: Local well-being

How is your home doing on all this stuff? It's good to be sustainable at school, but it's even better if you're doing it at home too. Bowbridge Primary School in Nottinghamshire has tried to make it easier for parents to understand about things like healthy food by holding special classes for parents that show how if the food you eat is healthier, you're more likely to do well in class.



Doorway 8: Global dimension

Can you imagine what it would be like to live in another country? Alderbrook Primary School in London has a special link with a school in Ghana. Both the schools have gardens, but they grow very different things - in London they grow carrots, beans and tomatoes, while in Ghana they grow plantain, cassava and gourds. By linking up, the pupils in London have learnt a lot about the problems faced by farmers in developing countries, and why 'fair trade' is important.



How can you help?

As a pupil, you are the most important participant in sustainable schools. You can help shape the future - for you and your school, for your family, your community and the wider world. Now that you have read this document, what will you do?



Here are some questions to get you going. You may wish to discuss them with your friends and teachers, and put them to your parents or carers.

Later in the year we will be providing a resource pack for teachers to help them support your learning about sustainable development.

You and your world

- What do you think is really precious in the world, and worth saving?
- What concerns you most about how people treat the world?
- Do you think the world is getting a better or worse place to live in as you grow up?
- Does anything spoil your local area, or make it less enjoyable than it should be?
- If you were Prime Minister, what three things would you do to improve the world?
- What could you do to make a difference, at home, at school or in your local area?

How sustainable is your school?

- Do you learn about sustainable development in your lessons?
- Do you notice it happening in the way the school is run?

- Are there opportunities for pupils to get involved?
- Does your school try to get parents and carers involved?

What next?

- If your school could be taking a more active approach to sustainable development, how will you let it know?
- Could you take your ideas to the School Council, or to a teacher that you think might be interested?
- Could you ask your family or carers to raise it on your behalf?
- Could a group of you get together so that your voice is heard more easily?
- Could you research the issues on the Internet or in books to make a stronger case?

You can send us your answers to these questions by completing the young people's survey at: www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations

? Help

To find the young people's survey, scroll down the list of consultations until you find the one called 'Sustainable Schools for Young People'. Click on that and look out for the young people's survey link on the left hand side.

Over to you...



Sustainability considerations



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The sustainable schools consultation is climate neutral. Working with Climate Care, we have offset the CO₂ emissions arising from all printing and distribution, consultation events, and response routes. The money used to offset these will go towards sustainable energy projects, like the production of energy efficient cooking stoves for schools in India.

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