

Hertfordshire Schools Going Green



Foreword

Following the UN climate talks at COP 26, much debate is underway on how to take next steps on what has been agreed, and how to move forward on that which was not. Despite mixed outcomes, one element was very clear – the level of engagement from children and young people.

From holding events in the COP26 Green Zone, to brightly coloured artworks around Glasgow, to the estimated 25,000 that turned out for the march organised by Fridays for the Future, the organisation set up by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg.

Who could have guessed that one 15-year old sat, initially alone, outside her national parliament every Friday could spark a global movement on such a huge scale? From small acorns, mighty trees grow, as an old English proverb once wisely said.

At COP26, the government **announced moves** to bring climate change and nature more firmly into the school curriculum. Teachers will be supported to deliver education on these subjects through the science curriculum by 2023, and a Climate Leaders' Award – similar to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award – is to be launched to recognise children and young people's contributions to improving the environment.

Children and young people will be encouraged to increase biodiversity in the grounds of their nursery, school or college, and map their contribution against those of other schools on a virtual National Education Nature Park. Combined, the grounds of schools, colleges, nurseries and universities in England take up an area over twice the size of Birmingham, so improving their biodiversity could make a significant difference.



At a more local level, climate change and nature loss are already hitting home. In Hertfordshire, the county council declared a climate emergency in July 2019. Furthermore, the Environment Agency declared that Hertfordshire was officially in a state of drought, as three preceding dry winters meant that the county only received around 50% of the water normally recharged over winter.

Our wildlife is suffering too, with up to 17% of species that lived in the county becoming extinct since 1970, and up to 70% noticeably declining, according to an assessment by **the Wildlife Trust**.

At Herts for Learning, we've been taking our own action on **the climate and nature crises**. For example, in 2021, we began a partnership with charity Trees for Life, to support their mission to rewild the Scottish Highlands.

We have created the Herts for Learning grove in one of Scotland's most beautiful glens, Glen Affric. By planting new trees here, we are mitigating our carbon surpluses, helping reduce the impact of climate change, and supporting the UK net-zero target by 2050.

We have also worked with Hertfordshire County Council throughout June 2021 to share resources, suggest activities and examples of how schools in Hertfordshire have adopted a whole school approach to sustainability, to support others with further engaging pupils across all phases in environmental sustainability and climate change topics.



Trees for L^{ife}



In 2022, we have begun the roll-out of an **online, role-playing game, En-Roads**, which will simulate an emergency summit organised by the United Nations, where global stakeholders (our schoolchildren) need to create a plan that limits warming to levels agreed by the UN's 2015 Paris Agreement. Young people in all of Hertfordshire's 75 secondary schools will take part, and will be able to see the outcomes of their own decisions via an interactive simulator.

Charlotte Mendel, a volunteer environmental educator based in Nova Scotia, Canada, who leads the sessions, says: "There's no ignorance about climate change anymore, everybody knows what's going on. But there's a lag between the talk and a walk. And I think we need to find creative ways of changing the message, to inspire people's imagination."

"But there's a crisis of despair and apathy. The simulator focuses on the positive opportunity and what can be done, rather than what will happen if you don't," she says.

In fact, much work is already underway in our schools to inspire greater change through climate and nature-related projects and initiatives. Despite the disruption bought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, the schools spotlighted in the following pages have begun their journey towards sustainability, with children and young people of all ages involved, and often pushing the agenda.

We hope you are inspired by their stories, and can replicate some of this work, or create your own projects to help make Hertfordshire cleaner and greener.

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Focuses on waste

Simon Balle All-Through School

Students act on wasted energy



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Simon Balle All-Through School has already achieved the Eco-School Silver award, and is working towards being awarded the Eco-School Green Flag award by winter 2022. Its director of business Haydn Walsh and deputy head Mike Moss are working with the students on several projects to achieve this.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

The school is currently driving down energy waste during evenings and weekends. This began when Walsh and Moss talked to the sixth formers about some energy monitors they had during an extracurricular activity. The monitors give a reading of how many kilowatts have been consumed every ten minutes, so the students were tasked with analysing the data and producing graphs of the school's energy use.

The students noticed that the school was still using around 20% of its typical daily use, even on Sundays when the school was unoccupied.

"That seems a disproportionate amount of electricity to be using at the weekend," says Walsh. "My immediate guess is that people are leaving computers and monitors on when they go home for the weekend."

The students have carried out energy audits of each of the school classrooms and blocks to see what electronic equipment has been left running on a Friday evening, recording the results in Google forms. They will repeat the exercise in order to establish a baseline of typical behaviour against which to compare progress.

"We're going to start a competition for departments, a bit of friendly competition to see who can make the biggest impact on reducing our consumption on evenings and the weekend," says Walsh.

"The sixth formers will then go back to the monitoring software and pull out the new data for the most recent week or two and see how many kilowatts were using compared with before the exercise."

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

Anything the school does to be more environmentally friendly has a direct link to curriculum work, and provides the students with real examples in a context they understand, says David Ayres, Simon Balle's assistant head of curriculum.

"The energy audit is being led by several of our Year 13 geographers: as part of their A-level course they have studied the carbon cycle and this is a great opportunity for them to put that theory into practice and make a difference.

"They are also motivated by the idea that their actions will have a positive impact on what happens on a day-to-day basis in the classroom: one of the big messages that they're pushing to staff and students is that money saved on energy bills will translate into more resources to support learning," he says.

The energy audit promises significant energy savings, with the money being spent on unnecessary energy use equating to around £60 a day.

What's next?

Simon Balle already has a mini farm with chickens, rabbits and guinea pigs through which it teaches values such as respect and kindness. It has fruit trees including pears, apples, plums and cherries growing on the grounds, as well as vegetable beds. It has recently started composting.

Walsh wants to set up a mini-business running a farm shop with the students making connections with local organisations such as Mudlarks in Hertford, a charity that provides employment opportunities to adults with learning difficulties and mental health issues, and runs a vegetarian and vegan café.

Running the farm shop will give the students experience of running accounts, with income and expenditure reports, budget monitors and cash flow, Walsh says. "It's really educational, giving them real-life work experience, as well as improving the school's impact on the environment," he says.

Walsh is also keen for the school to introduce bee hives. The deputy head and one of the pupils already have knowledge of beekeeping and have told the school's environment committee about their experiences. Plans to plant wildflower meadows as a food source for the bees are underway, and Walsh plans to speak to a school in Greenwich that has been keeping bees for around 10 years to learn from its experiences.

Plans area also being developed to build a new sports hall, which the school would like to be zero carbon. Walsh wants to involve the students in design ideas, such as what materials will be used for construction.

"It will give them exposure to real-life working scenarios, so sustainability is not just something that they hear their parents talk about or hear on the news. They will learn that these are actually issues and problems that their school is dealing with, and give them some clarity and transparency about how we're doing that, so they can feel part of the decision-making process," he says.



Martins Wood Primary School

Brings learning into nature to beat lock-down blues



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

The school was conscious that many of its pupils had been confined to their homes due to national restrictions and the need for home learning. It wanted to show the importance of being outside to the students, but also highlight the importance of being in nature to parents.

Learning for the youngest to the oldest was taken outside to inspire learners, and give them time away from screens and classrooms, and instead use the power of nature to overcome mental health and isolation issues suffered during lockdown.

Natalie Morris, a teacher at Martins Wood Primary School, explains: "We are fortunate that we have a lot of outside space that could be used throughout the week to vary the experiences, and we could think about what activities would work for different areas. Learning still took place, with nature used to enhance the experiences and to give it a purpose."

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

Lessons were planned around the outdoors, so that nature and the environment were used to support themes already on the curriculum.

A range of activities took place across the school, from nursery to Year six that highlighted the value of outdoor learning. For example, children who were looking at charcoal art as part of a topic on the great fire of London had a campfire outside, singing songs and eating marshmallows. Afterwards, they used the charcoal at the bottom of the fire to create charcoal pictures.

The children also tidied and planted lots of plants outside the classrooms to help encourage wildlife to visit. The outdoors was used to enhance mathematical learning in a variety of ways, such as using tally charts to record their results, using leaves to create arrays to represent amounts and estimated amounts.

Science classes looked at the differences between plants grown from seeds and those grown from bulbs, and went on nature hunts, and planted flowers and bulbs outside their classrooms.

Some pupils also thought about how to use plants to encourage wildlife to visit the school, using wildlife surveys to justify the addition of different plants around the school grounds.

Map skills were used to locate grid references around the school to find clues, then planning the route they would take to the nearby pond, while observing the human and physical features on the way. Technology was used to take pictures of local woods on a nature walk, then used to create bluebell art work.

Story-telling also took place outside, using a 'reading throne' to read short stories or continue with longer books over a number of days. All year groups had chance to explore a large space dedicated to wildlife on the school field, where there are lots of trees to climb, and insects to find.

Parents were given insight into the activities in a special newsletter that showcased pictures and highlights from each year group. They were also sent ideas to support mental wellbeing through nature online and offline from National Online Safety, and about the '30 days wild' challenge from the Wildlife Trust, which was taking place at the same time.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

"The children really loved it, they thought they weren't really learning, they were just outside having a good time, and that's how we got the learning involved. It was about having fun outside, and a different experience rather than just being in the classroom," Morris says.

What's next?

Martins Wood wants to become an Eco-School. The **Eco-School programme** covers ten topics altogether, including encouraging biodiversity; greener travel to school and climate change.

Though progress has been delayed by Covid restrictions which have made holding meetings for the Green Team difficult, Morris says the school is hoping to have it back up and running by the end of the school year.

The school is also evaluating its carbon footprint, and looking at its equipment, such as whether taps turn off automatically, whether teachers are leaving whiteboard and lights on when classrooms are not in use.



Albury and Puller Primary Schools

Hold leaders to account at COP26 School's Parliament



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Albury and Puller Primary Schools are located in very rural parts of Hertfordshire, surrounded by fields, farmland and rivers. While pupils are not exposed to the same types of pollution as more urban children, they have become aware of other environmental changes in their surroundings. Some children had spotted an empty riverbed, and questioned whether it was really a riverbed, explains Sarah Stevens, headteacher at Albury and Puller.

The school teaches its pupils "cultural capital" so that they can understand how the world works and become good citizens. Stevens' previous experience running a children's parliament for Hertfordshire led to the school being asked to participate in the **virtual Children's Parliament** just before the start of UN climate change talks at COP26 last November.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

Two of the pupils put their names forward to participate in the Parliament. Once selected, they had to prepare answers to several questions that would be put to them by MPs and prime minister, Boris Johnson.

They also had to think of three questions that they wanted to ask themselves. The pupils decided to ask about why their rivers were dry. Ahead of the event, which was live-streamed on YouTube, the children visited the nearby river Rib with Friends of the Rib and Quin, a community volunteer organisation looking after the rivers.

Stevens explains: "The river Rib is one of just 224 chalk streams in the whole world. The children had a chance to go and look at the ecosystems, and measure what was happening there during a chemistry lesson on the riverbank. They had what looked like really great, clean water, but when they did a chemistry test, they found that the measure in the water for phosphates was 70 times what it should have been."

The children started a campaign around not using certain types of washing powder and soap because they remain in the water system, she adds. They have also written to the local water company to ask why so much water from the chalk streams is redirected to household use, especially in new housing developments.

"They've been really, really active. It was a quite a simple question about something that was very close to them, but which they've got very deep into. At **the Children's Parliament**, they were able to ask the question at the highest level," Stevens says.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

The COP26 Parliament was the first activity Albury and Puller schools had undertaken together, giving the children the chance to meet each other. "Since then, they've gone on to do some other events together as well, so it's been good for us as a school community," says Stevens.

Longer-term, the issue is now part of the school's geography curriculum, and will be incorporated in lessons about the UN Sustainable Development Goals for years three and four.

"All the children that are taught here will be able to look at the rivers, and then we'll be able to decide if there's been an improvement based on this group raising concerns about it, and can compare data from year to year," she says.

Though MPs did not fully answer the question on the chalk streams during the Children's Parliament, the school is expecting a more comprehensive answer to be sent from the office of Boris Johnson.

"We're two tiny maintained schools, with only 118 children, so to be involved and have a voice at something as high-profile as COP26 where most of the other schools were much larger was pretty great," Stevens says.

The children's work has also raised awareness of the issue locally. Since the virtual event, Hertford and Stortford MP Julie Marson has written an article supporting action to protect chalk stream protection in the local paper.

What's next?

The school's Junior Dragons (an after-school club centred on entrepreneurship) has been given £50 seed funds, with a challenge to use it to make as much money as possible for charity of their choice. The students at Albury and Puller decided to collect for the Bishop Stortford Food Bank due to the rising cost of living.

"Their first event, an afternoon tea, raised £167. But while they were there, they were able to convince a number of people to come along to other events, and also to donate extra money, such as £20 for film nights," Stevens says.

"All the debating skills that they learnt as part of the COP26 Children's Parliament are coming to the fore for negotiating. It's been good for their confidence levels as well because they've been able to work across both schools and also get involved with organisations outside school," she says.



Fearnhill School

Restores nature, learning as they go



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Fearnhill School in Letchworth Garden City is surrounded by trees and bushes with views towards the end of the Chiltern Hills. It is regularly visited by foxes, muntjac deer and other animals. It also has a lot of chalk grassland, a rare habitat that supports a great diversity of animals, insects and plants.

Its headteacher Liz Ellis explains: "When I joined the school, the site was in need of some care and attention, and there were certain areas that we prioritised to make them attractive areas for students to be in.

"Our work was initially based on a vision to make certain spaces around the school much more outdoor-learning friendly to support the welfare of our students. We've got several quadrangle areas near the library, for example, and one of the things that were keen to do was to develop one as a sensory garden so that students could use it to sit in and be calm and quiet.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

Though progress with these initial projects has been slower than anticipated, others have picked up much more momentum, Ellis explains.

The school was one of two schools in north Hertfordshire to be accepted into **the nature-friendly Schools initiative**, a national programme run by the Department of Education, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and conservation organisation the Wildlife Trusts to drive forward outdoor learning in schools.

The initiative aims to develop teachers' confidence in teaching outdoors so that pupils get at least two hours outside every week, both on their doorstep and further afield. It is also making school grounds greener and wilder as outdoor classrooms are created alongside wildflower meadows and allotment areas.

Fearnhill School has been assigned an environmental education officer from charity Groundwork to work with students and staff to review and develop its outdoor learning environment to increase student learning outdoors.

So far, teachers and students have given the school's pond area a makeover, and built a new path and seating areas. They have also drawn up plans for nature trails, an outdoor learning shelter and an outdoor classroom. The students were asked what they liked and disliked about the grounds, and what they would like to see there. An audit of the grounds was conducted to identify what features that could attract or provide homes for wildlife were already there.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

The pond area is now available for students to sit next to. A family of ducks have made it their home, and this has been very therapeutic for the students, Ellis says. "It's really helpful to take a student who's having a bad day for whatever reason to go and see what the ducks are doing. It can really defuse situations, that's just the power of the natural world."

What's next?

Fearnhill also plans to bring some neglected greenhouses back into use. It will also set aside an area of its site next summer so it is not mown, and instead wildflowers and grassland can thrive.

It is also trying to introduce more sustainable transport to and from school by installing extra bike sheds to encourage students to cycle to school, using funding from the local council.

So far, Fearnhill's nature work has been extracurricular, but the school plans to link it much more closely into the curriculum, including history, art and across all sciences, Ellis says. "We've got a core group of students who are very committed, and some staff as well who are doing some really good work.

"We're very fortunate with our site, it has lots of room for students and there are some lovely natural features. It's a work in progress, but we're really committed to making more use of it."



Rickmansworth School

Set its sights on reducing plastic waste



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Headteacher Matt Fletcher introduced the idea of becoming an Eco-school, having been part of the scheme at his previous school. Cover teacher Lorna Bevan decided to get involved, and is now the school's eco-lead.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

The school first set up an eco-committee to work towards earning its first Green Flag under the Eco-Schools programme. Students from every year group are involved in the committee, with about 30 in total.

A major focus of its work has been to raise awareness of environmental issues. As Bevan says: "Environmental issues and sustainability are merely hinted at in schools' curriculum. We have 1,500 staff and students, so it's a large number to raise awareness with."

Out of the ten themes under the Eco-Schools initiative, the committee has chosen to focus on marine, energy and waste. It has led several assemblies on these themes, covering issues such as fast fashion and Christmas waste. It also uses staff and student bulletins, social media sites (@rickyecoschools), e-library and Eco Board to bring issues to the fore.

"Even if the students are environmentally aware, parents may not be, so these channels get the information to a larger audience," says Bevan.

The eco-committee works closely with the school's Horticultural Society in the school garden, and with its Food Tech Department. It has had meetings with school caterers to share ideas on how to promote healthy eating, source seasonal local produce, hold meat-free days and look at reducing packaging and waste.

The school's governing board has agreed an environmental and sustainability policy, one of the aims of which is to work towards being free from single-use plastics. The senior leadership team has agreed to scrap the requirement for plastic book covers on students' exercise books from next year. "All the students bring laptops in every day and work on devices, so they're using them less, and there's less reason to cover them," Bevan says.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

In December, two of Rickmansworth's students were selected to sit on the Eco-School's national eco-committee, which Bevan says has made her feel like a "proud mamma". They will join more than 20 other students in coming up with plans to share experiences across the country, and identify new projects the school could take forward.

One idea is a monthly online newsletter, with vegan recipes and tips and information about environmental projects underway around the school. It wants to have an outdoor classroom, and expand the existing pond so that pupils from local junior schools can visit.

Bevan believes the awareness-raising push has started to work. "I have students run up to me saying: 'Look miss, I've bought a reusable bottle, I'm not using plastic bottles anymore', so that is a big one. We did quite a few assemblies on veganism and vegetarianism, and quite a few students have told me they're trying it, or that they're eating less meat. They love coming back and tell me how it's going – as a cover teacher, I have access to all the students, so they've got to know me as the eco person."

What's next?

Litter is going to be a big focus for next term. "Litter around the school is something we'll constantly battling with - it's mainly things like sweet and crisp wrappers," Bevan says. "There will be more recycling bins, and the cleaners and premises staff are all now on board with recycling, which they weren't necessarily before," she says.

The eco-committee is also planning assemblies to make students aware of what can be and can't be recycled, as there is a lack of knowledge on that, with items such as blue kitchen roll being put in the recycling.

Bevan is also keen to share experiences with other schools, starting with St Michael's, where she is a governor. Bevan says: "Schools are normally in competition for exam and sports results. But if schools are working together to exchange ideas, you're not worrying about competing with them."



Edwinstree School

Students learn that their voice counts with their MP



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Edwinstree School headteacher Jo Gant had noticed a growing concern over the past five years that she had been working at the middle school. Children were really worried about their future, but also wanted to take action, she says. The pandemic was also a driver, as it made the school determined to make more use of its outdoor space both for learning and just for being outside.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

The school invited local MP Sir Oliver Heald to come in and meet with students. He spent around 1.5 hours with 15 of the children, who asked him about the best way to stop climate change; what the government was doing about it; what he thought about Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg; how the UN talks at COP26 would help; and what people could do to make a difference.

Heald spoke about the COP26 conference, and what individuals could do about climate change, according to Gant. He also talked about local environmental issues such as damage to chalk streams. "He said it was really powerful that the children were thinking about this early because they would need to. He didn't back away from any of the tough messages that actually it's their generation that's going to see the biggest impact of climate change," she says.

One of the students then attended the virtual Children's Parliament ahead of COP26, where climate change was debated with prime minister Boris Johnson and Conservative MP David Davis. Following the event, she fed back to the rest of the school about what happened.

To follow up on COP26, the school held an event in February where people would pledge an individual action they would do to make a difference to the environment, and display it on a large mural. "Even small changes can have a powerful impact when put together, and think the worse thing is if the children feel they are unable to make a difference - I don't want 9-13 year-olds giving up," says Gant.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

The children saw that they had a voice, and that an MP would listen to them, says Gant. "He valued their opinion. And he recognised that young people who were going to be most affected by this. They didn't completely agree with everything he said - they were a bit more radical than you'd anticipate them being - but they were heard, and, for me, that's massive. Unless they're allowed a voice, how can we encourage them to keep going, to have resilience, to make a difference?"

What's next?

Edwinstree School has plans to make more use of its outside space, including building a pond.



Samuel Ryder Academy

Cuts waste and saves money



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Samuel Ryder Academy is part of a trust with other local schools Sir John Lawes, Harpenden Academy, Robert Barclay Academy and Priory Academy. The assistant headteacher at each school is responsible for sustainability, and all work together with a centralised budget. Waste management has become a big focus as the schools share a contract with the same waste contractor.

The schools are also working towards an Eco-School certification. This is largely being driven by the students, around 45 of whom meet monthly as part of the eco-committee, which is led as far as possible by the older students, according to assistant headteacher Lauren Craddock.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

Students on the eco-committee completed an audit of the schools, looking at topics such as what materials the schools uses were recyclable, if there were rainwater butts for recycling water. From that, Samuel Ryder decided to focus its action plan on biodiversity, global citizenship, litter and waste.

The school has had new blocks built, and that has been an opportunity to upgrade equipment to reduce waste, Craddock explains. For example, the washrooms have taps that shut off automatically, while taps in older blocks have been gradually replaced as well.

The school received a grant from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for solar panels, so is now able to generate some of its own electricity, and monitors energy use minute-by-minute through an energy portal. LED lights have been automated so that they are only on if someone is in the room, and so they only produce as much light as is needed, according to how much natural light there is.

The canteen has been a big area for action, with the focus on finding alternatives to single-use items such as clingfilm, which has been replaced with silicone food covers. The school has stopped selling drinks in plastic bottles and cans, and instead, students are given their own reusable bottle, which can also be used with the drinks dispensing machine.

"The canteen has been a huge area of improvement - we're not throwing away hundreds of bottles everyday anymore," she says.

The school has also significantly cut down printing by making sure all staff and students can work on a tablet. The maths and IT and business departments are already paperless, except for when students have to sit exams. Other departments are targeting a 20% reduction in printing this term.

"We're using technology in a way that means that worksheets and printing are becoming a bit redundant. We're saving loads of paper and loads of money," Craddock says.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

The children have got so much from the eco committee, according to Craddock. "I think they feel a very real sense of accomplishment when they see the impact of things we have discussed and proposed. It's so led by the students that they rightly feel that they are creating change in our school."

The eco-committee has also given them the chance to improve their leadership and oracy skills through discussion and presenting; teamwork and a sense of belonging to a group, she added.

Craddock expects to see a lot of financial savings when data becomes available on water use in the washrooms, as well as savings on paper and ink for printing.

What's next?

As part of its focus on biodiversity, Samuel Ryder has plans to start building an allotment in the spring, which it will use for planting wildflower seeds as well as growing produce, some of which it hopes can be used in the canteen.

"We're really excited to have our allotment up and running, so that we can literally see the fruits of our labour. We're planning more lessons, particularly for primary students on where food comes from, also getting kids involved in growing produce," says Craddock.

Work under the theme of global citizenship will involve an audit of subject curricula by each head of department, to identify where sustainability issues are already covered, and where there are gaps. "I suspect there will be gaps, and then teachers can make plans for next year to make sure that sustainability is being covered in all subjects," she says.

Improvements to the canteen will continue, with a goal to completely eliminate disposable items from the canteen by September 2022.



Aboyne Lodge

Focuses on waste



What was the inspiration for the school becoming more involved in sustainability issues?

Around eight years ago, Aboyne Lodge recognised that sustainability was becoming a big issue, and decided to set up an eco-committee so that the students could lead on making the school more sustainable.

What sustainability projects has the school undertaken?

Each year, two pupils in each class are elected by other children to lead on sustainability issues in the school's eco-committee, which meets three or four times a term. The children decide what they want to prioritise in order to reduce the school's environmental impact.

The school has had a strong focus on waste reduction and recycling. Food waste is now separated from packaging, both in classrooms and the dining room, meaning that both waste streams can be recycled, which was not possible when mixed together in the same bin.

Classrooms have trays for paper that can be reused, such as the back of worksheets. Once it is no longer reusable, it is put in the recycling bins. There are also recycling points around the school for items such as batteries, crisp packets and pens, either from classrooms or from home.

The school ran a project with Affinity water, which visited the school to do an audit of taps and water fountains to find out how much was being wasted. Following this, taps and fountains were fixed, and the school also ran a campaign to encourage children and their families to have shorter showers to save water.

Aboyne Lodge has introduced meat-free Mondays in its canteen, after a trial proved successful. "The catering firm that we use will produce a meat-free menu, but you have to sign up for that and have children prepared to buy those meals otherwise it's not viable. That's been very successful, so we now have the meat free Mondays up and running for the second academic year," says Amanda Handley, who leads the school's eco-committee and sustainability work, as well as being geography lead.

The PTA has been encouraged to add sustainability elements to events that are run, for example, asking people to bring their own mugs in return for a discount on drinks, and trying to source recycled and recyclable cutlery and plates, and sourcing prizes that are not plastic. School fairs now have an eco-stall running an activity such as making a bug hotel, alongside traditional bottle stalls and raffles.

Separately from the eco-committee's projects, the school has undergone a significant refurbishment. This was used as an opportunity to replace inefficient windows and taps, improving the school's overall sustainability.

What has been achieved environmentally, and for learning and wellbeing?

Since sustainability became more of a focus at Aboyne Lodge, the students have become very much more aware of the world around them and the need to respect and protect it, says Handley. "This is apparent in their actions both inside and out of school, as well as in the discussions we have in the classroom. Their understanding of the issues is growing and they are becoming more interested in having a personal involvement in finding solutions," she says.

Staff and families are also spending more time discussing environmental issues, and both young people and teachers are trying to forge meaningful links with sustainability through the curriculum. "Well-being is high on the list of our priorities at Aboyne and this dovetails very closely with how we engage with our local and wider environment and the nature in it," Handley adds.

What's next?

The school has now moved back into its buildings following the refurbishment. Once the hoardings and building works are completely removed, the eco-committee wants to have a big focus on improving its outdoor areas by setting up gardening projects, rejuvenating the wildlife area and its pond, and removing all litter.

Aboyne Lodge is also re-writing its curriculum this year and will be including more on sustainability in subjects such as geography and science. It also hopes to incorporate learning on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals at a future date.





We hope you have been inspired by some of the fantastic work that is already underway in a number of schools across Hertfordshire, as they embark on their journey towards sustainability.

If you have an environmental case study from your school you would like to share, please email info@hertsforlearning.co.uk

Further support, resources and contacts can be found on [The Grid](#).