

Bydales School A Specialist Technology College

Making sustainability happen through engaging & motivating our young people and the wider school community

Summary

Developing an understanding and commitment to sustainability was a central feature of the school's Technology College Plan submission. To celebrate gaining specialist status, a week of activities focusing on technology and environment took place, delivered by key staff and external organisations and businesses. Students worked in vertical groupings, each with a trained peer leader. The week included community events to raise environmental awareness.

A new school building has some sustainable features, providing resources to further embed sustainability throughout the curriculum. A sustainability plan has been created as part of the SDP based on the National Framework for Sustainable Schools.

Leadership was distributed to emerging leaders from teaching and support staff who planned the week of activities, communicating aims and expectations to all staff and pupils to ensure wide engagement. Vertical grouping, peer leadership and mentoring were very successful and this model has been incorporated into other aspects of school life. Celebration played a central role in engaging and informing both the school and the wider community.

Impacts: The week of activities raised awareness of environmental responsibility amongst the school and the wider community, and helped develop a coherent understanding of sustainability. Many of the activities helped develop students' enterprise skills as well as improving the physical environment. A local councillor noted that students were questioning how we can improve the environment both locally and globally. Links established with external agencies led to invitations to participate in further partnership work. Involvement in the working party gave staff a sense of responsibility and ownership and raised their profile, leading in every case to a Teaching Learning Responsibility.

Key leadership role: Emerging leaders

A week of challenge with awe and wonder

Developing an understanding of and commitment to sustainability is at the heart of our head teacher's vision for our school, and was a central feature of our Technology College Plan submission for specialist status. On gaining specialist status in 2004 the school invited leading speakers to give key note presentations and celebrate our achievement with staff and other relevant partners.

Setting the vision

Looking outward

*Innovator/
risk taker*

Distributing leadership

To celebrate with pupils, the leadership team decided to collapse the curriculum in the last week of the summer term and develop a week of

activities focusing on the twin themes of technology and environmental awareness. A working party consisting of three NQT teachers, one support assistant, one PGCE student, one assistant head teacher and a Business Link partner was set up to plan and prepare for the week. The working party developed the vision and purpose of the week and created a workable framework to deliver the activities. It was decided to create 'vertical' pupil groupings for the week to maximise the learning experience. The members of the working party co-ordinated and shared out the task of researching and planning the activities, using key staff in school and over 20 external business links and organisations to deliver the activities. Some activities were funded from the Technology College and Government Enterprise funding. Much of the assistance was from voluntary or charity based groups who gave their time willingly.

Looking outward

Resource provider

An overview of the planned week was delivered by the working party at a staff meeting. Staff were to be in the role of learners / facilitators throughout the week. The activity structure allowed for 32 groups of 20 pupils of mixed ages to experience learning activities that build and develop the skills of: consolidation & reflection, problem solving, innovation, risk management, social enterprise, creativity and citizenship, all in settings out of the classroom. Each group had an identified peer leader, chosen for their leadership skills, who received a day of leadership training run by members of the working party at one of the industry link sites.

Focusing on learning

Inclusion and participation

Promoting student voice

Engaging others

Key to the week's success was ensuring both staff and pupils had a clear understanding of the aims and expectations of the week. Pupils kept a learning diary throughout the week detailing their thoughts on the learning undertaken in the activities and identifying the skills used. Staff were issued with a resource pack containing all information needed to ensure a smooth and successful week. Information for staff was also displayed on our staffroom notice board and in the two weeks leading up to the big week, information was discussed during staff briefing time so that any questions, queries and worries could be dispelled before the event.

Focusing on learning

Before the week started all staff and pupils were involved in an enterprise activity to establish the new vertical groupings and engage and motivate pupils. The week was launched by 'Bioregional' which set the context of environmental awareness. Staff and peer leaders assessed the pupils during the activities, focusing on specific skills and qualities. These assessments were collated and used to allocate prizes. A prize giving ceremony at the end of the week gave the opportunity for all pupils, staff, partners and the wider community to see a showcase of the week's learning activities. Staff and pupils completed formal evaluations, the results of which were used to inform the following year's activity programme.

Looking outward

Throughout the week we planned a series of community events aimed at adults, which focused on raising environmental awareness and included:

Local well-being

- bringing local sustainability into the mainstream by Bio Regional
- the bridge between industry and nature by Inca
- life @ South Gare by Ken Smith & Ian Lawrence

The week was repeated the following year. The working party was extended and the group evaluations and pupil diaries formed the basis of planning for the new year's activity programme.

Resource provider

Focusing on learning

Distributing leadership

The new school building also provided an opportunity to demonstrate and celebrate a commitment to environmental responsibility. The school building and grounds have a wetland area, a viewing platform, hydrogen fuel cell, outside classroom, wind turbine and weather station. These resources are used to embed sustainability learning activities throughout the curriculum. The National Framework for Sustainable Schools was a focus for planning the new school celebration. The day comprised sustainable learning for pupils, the community and local dignitaries, coupled with the launch of the school fair trade shop. Key members of staff, senior pupils and pupil team traders planned, organised and led the day.

Buildings and grounds

Setting the vision

Redesignation for technology college status provided an opportunity to ensure sustainability was at the heart of our SDP. Using the SSAT self evaluation toolkit the school leadership team reviewed progress thus far. From the review the Bydales Sustainability 3 Year Plan was formed as part of the SDP. Our vision states: The future holds many challenges for young people. Climate change is one of the most significant; global poverty and global citizenship are others. Young people have a high stake in the future and whilst we don't know what that will be like, we do know that there is strong evidence to suggest that it may not be possible to deliver the Every Child Matters agenda unless the issue of environmental responsibility is addressed.

Connectors - Every Child Matters

The benefits – making changes – creating action

Initial benefits of the project were raising awareness of environmental responsibility amongst members of the school and wider community and the development of a coherent understanding of sustainability. The diversity of the activities encompassed all five aspects of the 'Every Child's (Future) Matters' agenda with all pupils actively participating. Many of the activities helped develop pupil enterprise skills.

Activities focused on pupils engaging in improving their local environment. A local resident commented: "The children arrived and in one morning they transformed the pathway, I think they also

Local well-being

enjoyed doing the work. I have already had positive feedback and I am in full praise for their efforts”.

A representative from the environment agency commented: “I would like to congratulate you and your colleagues on organising such a packed and stimulating programme. As someone who has a professional interest in the environment and promoting environmentally conscious behaviour, I am really encouraged to see a strong environmental theme running through the week”.

Looking outward

One local councillor commented: “Thank you for an enlightening and well presented morning. I believe education is not just about reading books and learning from a teacher, but about questioning the norms of our ever changing society and learning how to embrace those changes. The students giving the presentations seemed to be questioning how can we improve the environment, both locally and globally.”

Promoting student voice

The mixed age groupings proved to be so successful that we used this model for a new pastoral system in September 2006, with older children in the groups mentoring the younger pupils. The peer mentoring feature was also adopted by our Primary University programme leader, giving gifted pupil leaders the opportunity to support primary pupils.

Inclusion and participation

Pupil comments from evaluations

“I thought the environmental based activities were very good, people enjoyed them, found them interesting and learnt something at the same time. At the trip to the woods people weren’t just running around, they were actually looking at the insects and talking about them.”

“It taught us how the environment will soon change for the worse if we don’t do something now.”

“I think the week was a success and taught members some important skills that they can use in later life. It was also very enjoyable and made a change from regular lessons.”

Looking outward

The links established with external agencies provided further opportunities to be involved in regional pilot schemes to develop exciting learning resources. These included: WWF Pathways, Explore Renewables Project (NAREC) and the North East Climate Change Specialist Stream project.

The new school building has contributed to the school’s improved environmental performance with some sustainable features. We have produced revised eco school audits and action plans, as well as launching a local eco footprinting project supported by the Environment Agency. We are at present working towards becoming a Fair Trade school.

Buildings and grounds

Key lessons

- Understanding the importance of mixed aged groupings and the use of peer mentoring to improve learning and enjoyment.
- The use of specialist resources and learning outside the classroom to motivate and engage young people with real life issues.
- To help engage hard to reach adult learners in community activities it is best to encourage family activities.

Involving staff who were emerging leaders on the working party proved to be successful, giving a sense of responsibility and ownership, and raised their profile within school. All staff who were on the working party now have a TLR.

Distributing leadership

The administration support was disappointing as it took a lot of time to pull the evaluation results together and this reduced the learning impact as pupils did not have the opportunity to review and reflect collaboratively on the week of activities. This could be improved by ensuring the administrative team are actively involved in the project at conception.

Focusing on learning

As part of our community of practice we have planned two CPD days for deepening thinking and planning, allowing the staff involved to complete their S3 document, create an action / communications plan for leading sustainability in their school. A collaborative week long event on climate change will be organised, as well as a collaborative workshop for eco school pupils to participate in. The community of practice members will keep a learning diary and this will be shared at termly meetings. The community of practice project is embedded in the School Sustainability plan which is an appendix of the SDP.

Looking outward