

Cedar Mount High School Eco awareness: an international perspective

Summary

An international link with an environmental focus has not only provided opportunities for global dimension work, but has greatly increased understanding of sustainable development relating to the other doorways too. The international ESD dimension is embodied in the School Improvement Plan, giving it strategic importance. The project is integrated with a range of curriculum areas, assemblies, primary transition work and national awards.

The headteacher has provided the vision, inspiring and encouraging staff to run with ideas. The appointment of an international coordinator facilitated a strategic overview and overarching rationale, linked to other school initiatives. Leadership is focused on strategic delivery and active involvement of participants across all levels of leadership, incorporating partnerships with pupils, staff, governors and the wider community.

Impacts: Student and staff awareness of sustainability issues and their impact locally, nationally and globally has been considerably enhanced, enabling them to become informed, active and responsible global citizens. The success and breadth of the work has been recognised by achieving a number of national awards.

Key leadership roles: headteacher and international coordinator

Cedar Mount High School has worked within an equitable partnership with Meru High School in Kenya focusing on environmental issues. International friendship and understanding have been enhanced through collaborative projects and regular communication.

Looking outward

The dialogue undertaken between Meru and CMHS has been valuable and significant with regard to ESD. Cross curriculum activities included raising pupils' awareness of the importance of water and looking at the personal experiences of living through difficult times in Meru, such as: exchanges about illegal logging and hunting on Mt Kenya and how it affects the environment and ecosystems. Urban and rural life were compared through an art exchange with Kenya, Beijing and Manchester, art depicting various issues faced by the differing communities and transcendent of language acquisition.

Global dimension

Focusing on learning

The school strives to raise far greater awareness of the global issues that we face and ultimately make a difference to the communities that we work with. It also aims to facilitate opportunities so that pupils are empowered to learn to live in ways that improve the quality of life for themselves and others without endangering or depleting the earth's resources. Our ESD work is seen as a process of learning regarding how to make decisions that consider the long term future of the ecology, economy and equity of all communities. The work with Meru High School shows how a virtual relationship can impact significantly across the continents and has all the elements of passion, emotion, commitment and intellectual debate.

Distributing leadership

The school has been successful in its international work due to effective leadership and whole school commitment to developing ESD. Leadership is focussed on strategic delivery and active involvement of varied participants across all levels of leadership, incorporating significant and flexible partnerships

Inclusion and participation

with pupils, staff, the wider community and governors. Important aspects include:

Setting the vision

*Innovator/
risk taker*

- Essential support of the headteacher – the architect of ethos, culture and vision allowing direction and implementation. The international ESD dimension is embodied in the School Improvement Plan thus allowing for accountability and strategic importance. The headteacher's role has been crucial, allowing staff to run with ideas creatively, fully supported and backed within an educationally strategic and sound philosophy. The headteacher's clear vision, inspiring colleagues' enthusiasm, commitment and passion, ensures its success.

Resource provider

Focusing on learning

- The appointment of an international coordinator for long term management of the project facilitated the strategic overview of the work undertaken and persistent drive for success. The coordinator is able to structure, engage, encourage and facilitate learning opportunities through regular dialogue and genuine partnership with key staff and able to give SLT sanction to ideas and opportunities as and when they arise; encouraging the prevalence of innovative and imaginative approaches to learning, teaching and curriculum planning and design. The coordinator is able to cross reference the project with underpinning school initiatives, thus providing an overarching rationale and direction to the work undertaken in a coherent way. The coordinator also facilitates the empowerment of a wide range of staff and pupils, giving a real sense of ownership to many of the projects and initiatives.

Distributing leadership

Communicating and interpreting

Connectors – the big picture

- Key staff involvement. The success of the work undertaken is due to the involvement of staff who have different levels and strands of leadership responsibilities and capabilities within the school – thus the project pervades the different dimensions within the school and in itself allows for sustainability through curriculum lessons, transition work with primary schools, assemblies and utilisation of national awards' success criteria such as Healthy Schools, International School Award and Green Flag award. Staff involved are all people that get on and do things: active, dynamic, passionate and skilled. Through appropriate leadership their strengths have been utilised to the full and all have developed professionally as a consequence.

Promoting student voice

- The involvement of the eco group with significant pupil voice capability. This aspect has to be recognised due to the potential it holds: their voice matters and the school values such activity. An interest has been generated that has had a knock on effect within other lessons and within the community at large.

The benefits:

Focusing on learning

- Much of the work undertaken is cross curriculum based: Citizenship, ICT, Technology, English, RE, Geography, History, Science & ICT, and Art are predominantly incorporated within this partnership - all working collaboratively together and ensuring active sustainability and maximum impact.

- Perspectives of those involved have changed and the concept of global warming, deforestation and water conservation have been brought to the fore, engendering a far deeper understanding of such issues amongst staff and pupils. Meru pupils' essays on tourism, global warming and pollution have influenced personal understanding of global environmental issues and highlighted the need for all of us to come together and be responsible for carbon emissions. As one Meru pupil commented: "Let us march forward to protect this peaceful and gorgeous earth." And another, "We must conserve our environment in order to survive."
- Improved knowledge and understanding about environmental issues, locally, nationally and globally.
- Development of an international curriculum enabling pupils to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding to become informed, active, responsible global citizens.
- The reality of drought, earthquake and flooding has had considerable impact on pupil and staff understanding at CMHS. We have learned much from our partner school and our awareness of the importance of water and the effect global warming and tourism can have on eco systems have been heightened. All are far more active participants in projects relating to education for sustainable development.

Looking outward

Key Lessons

- The sustainability of the partnership due to effective and shared leadership at all of levels of involvement.
- Leadership and dynamism are crucial to ensure initiative and action.
- The importance of shared vision and shared values.
- Strategy, coherent coordination, vision, philosophy, sustained drive and commitment underpin success.
- Pupil engagement is paramount: their ideas and commitment have been inspiring and informative.
- Persistence and imaginative responses are required to overcome any barriers presented.
- The fragility of eco systems and our collective responsibilities.
- That even small actions can have the potential to effect world change.
- Initially the work was very dependent on one or two members of staff driving the project forward. A strong team of staff need to be actively involved right from the start in order to sustain regular dialogue and activity. The project and relationship improved as more staff and pupils became involved in a coordinated way.
- As part of our research and development work the school hopes to extend the project in Kenya and consolidate the work undertaken within the framework of flexibility that the new key stage 3 curriculum allows.

Distributing leadership

Connectors – the big picture