

Eco-Schools England

Exploring success to inform a new horizon

Keep Britain Tidy, July 2013

Part of the Keep Britain Tidy Family



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Executive Summary

Exploring success to inform a new horizon

Environmental improvement is only half the story

In February 2013, Keep Britain Tidy commissioned independent research into the Eco-Schools programme. This research engaged directly with schools to explore what success means for Eco-Schools, and how that success is achieved. More specifically, the research looked at what makes Eco-Schools successful as a framework and how the programme could be made even better. In this report, we outline and respond to the key findings, summarised below.

What success looks like: The Eco-Schools programme does create positive environmental change, but environmental improvement is only half the story. Encouragingly, the research also found evidence of positive impacts on wellbeing, behaviour, motivation and cognitive skills that benefit the whole school community.

Achieving success: There are three factors critical to the success of Eco-Schools:

- A framework that remains easy to follow and realistic to implement;
- The presence of professional internal and external support networks for eco-coordinators and committees;
- A continued emphasis on the importance of sustainability education in the National Curriculum.

Building on success: To make the programme even better we need to focus on:

- Developing the framework to better engage secondary schools;
- Improving the supply of direct support and peer support for eco-coordinators;
- Further engaging school leadership teams to enhance their understanding of the Programme benefits.

Conclusion: The research concluded that the Eco-Schools framework positively supports schools to deliver effective environmental education. This report contributes to the growing body of evidence that indicates that schools that embrace education for sustainability are also schools who succeed and do well.

Love Where You Live, Keep Britain Tidy

Where we live matters

Cleaner streets, beaches and parks provide the backbone for strong communities.

Keep Britain Tidy campaigns to improve environmental and social equality. We are an independent charity, which fights for people's right to live and work in a place they can be proud of. A single truth underpins our success – caring for the environment is the first step to a better society.

How we live matters

By preserving scarce resources, wasting less and recycling more, we create a healthier society and a healthier planet too.

60 years ago, we started with litter. Today we do much more. We work at the heart of business, government, schools and the community to help people understand that *what's good for the environment is also good for us*.

Eco-Schools

Eco-Schools, one of our programmes, is part of an international family, run in 53 countries around the world, from the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). For more than 18 years, Keep Britain Tidy has been supporting and inspiring schools in England to put environmental education and actions at the heart of school life. The Eco-Schools programme is designed to guide schools on their sustainable journey, providing a framework to help embed these principles within the schools and in the students' wider behaviour.

In particular, we want to work with schools through the Eco-Schools programme to:

Ensure every school age child participates in education that enables them to develop as happy, healthy citizens who actively understand and care for themselves, each other and the environment.

England now has the most Eco-Schools in the world, with more than 70% of all schools in England currently registered with the programme.

This is against a rapidly changing landscape over the past five years. These include a significant increase in the number of schools involved in the programme, external changes to the curriculum, a variety of both positive

and negative government policies and a furthering of the market-driven pressure for young people to behave and consume in ways that don't align with a sustainable lifestyle.

Eco-Schools engages approximately 17,000 schools across England that are at various levels of award stages - Bronze, Silver and Green Flag.

1. Introduction

Looking to the Future

In February 2013, Keep Britain Tidy commissioned independent research into its flagship Eco-Schools programme. This research engaged directly with schools to explore what it is that makes Eco-Schools successful as a framework and what exactly this success looks like. We report on the key findings relating to both here.

1.1 Preparing children for the future

Schools who view all education as education for sustainability are also schools who succeed and do well.

Today's world is globalised and technology driven, it is changing the way people learn, work, socialise, shop and play. Experts such as Sugata Mitra¹ and Ken Robinson² argue that the current dominant ways of educating children are woefully outdated and do not produce adults capable of thriving in today's 'real' world, let alone the world of tomorrow.

Children starting primary school in September 2013 will complete their secondary education in around 2027. At this distance, we cannot predict with any certainty exactly how the world will have changed, but it is likely to have changed significantly. Thanks to an expanding population, increasing globalisation and advances in technology, we can expect significant societal and ecological changes. Without significant interventions, more people will be consuming more resources, global temperatures will be around 0.4C warmer, demand for food will have doubled globally, more than four million people in the UK will have diabetes and we will have an ageing population. This is just a taste of what we can expect³.

As a result, an increasing number of schools are positioning 'sustainability' as a core guiding principle. Reports by OFSTED⁴, the DCSF⁵, the Cooperative group⁶, the Scottish Government⁷ all strongly suggest a link between the adoption of sustainability as a guiding principle and the improvement of schools as a whole. Schools see improvements in standards, behaviour, teacher and student motivations, attendance, exam results, community linking and environmental performance. Put simply, we can say that schools who position sustainability as a core guiding principle would recognise what Stephen Martin and colleagues describe here:

A quality education should facilitate and promote human relationships characterised by justice, peace and negotiated mutual interests which lead to greater equity, respect and understanding. It is these qualities which underpin both sustainable development and a quality education.⁸

To this end the Eco-Schools framework can be seen to guide schools towards topics and ways of learning that will help them deliver a quality education that prepares children for their future.

1.2 Research methodology

- *13 schools across England visited*
- *Talked to more than 130 teachers and students during school visits*
- *More than 520 online surveys completed*

Keep Britain Tidy commissioned 'Kids Industries,' an independent research agency, to explore and assess the performance of the current Eco-Schools programme. Researchers visited 13 schools across England that reflected a range of criteria, including school size, location, OFSTED rating and Eco-School award level (from newly registered to Green Flag and Ambassador.) In each school they interviewed children and teachers, including those involved with the Eco-committee and those who are not. They also, if possible, interviewed a member of the school leadership team and other staff members such as business managers and caretakers. In addition, more than 520 Eco-coordinators, school leadership team members and other teaching staff responded to an online Eco-Schools survey.

The qualitative and quantitative findings from this research provide us with a detailed insight into Eco-Schools from the perspective of those who directly engage with it.

2. Eco-Schools impacts

“Parents don’t switch off when we’re brushing our teeth. I always say to mum: ‘Why don’t you switch the tap off because you’re wasting water?’”

[Six-year-old girl, eco-committee, Green Flag Primary]

What does success look like?

Eco-Schools are successful schools. That’s the headline message from the research.

But environmental improvement is only half the story. In many cases, the benefits to pupils, staff, parents and the wider school community stretch far beyond simple environmental efficiency gains. The research has found evidence of improvements to wellbeing, behaviour, motivation and cognitive skills that bring benefits to the whole school community.

Over the years, Eco-Schools has built up a reputation for supporting schools to do three key things:

- Become more environmentally efficient in their operations;
- Educate children about environmental issues;
- Encourage and implement positive environmental behaviour change.

The research found evidence supporting this and we report on this in section 2.1 below.

The research also found evidence to support our belief that when schools engage with Eco-Schools a lot more can happen. Through the nine headline topics, children, teachers and the whole school community engage with the full breadth of environmental, social and economic factors that shape our world. In doing so they can:

- Develop new skills and competencies;
- Engage in enjoyable activities that improve wellbeing;
- Become more motivated and engaged in school life as a whole.

The research found evidence to support this; these findings are reported on in section 2.2 below.

2.1. Environmental benefits of Eco-Schools

“I say to my dad: ‘When you leave the room turn the light off – or next time I’m going to take the bulb out!’”

[Eight-year-old girl, Bronze primary]

“It is very important they know now they can take it through and they can teach their children more than my parents or grandparents did.”

[Eco-coordinator, medium primary, Midlands, Bronze]

“We need to work on our playing field. It’s plain... we need more flowers and wildlife.”

[Nine-year-old girl, eco-committee, medium primary, Midlands, Bronze]

Qualitative research revealed that at successful Eco-Schools significant positive environmental behaviour change occurred among children engaged in the programme. Teachers in these schools are proud that the programme has helped to produce well-rounded, caring and responsible children, as well as the significant cost savings associated with environmental efficiency gains.

Through the online survey, eco-coordinators were given five statements relating to environmental awareness and behaviour. They were asked to select the statement that most closely reflects the situation in their school. For example, 21% of eco-coordinators from schools holding the Green Flag award chose *‘Children have the opportunity to suggest and lead activities across the school that enable wider sustainable behaviours’* as the truest statement. Figure 1 shows that positive environmental behaviour, attitude and awareness change is more likely to be observed in Green Flag schools compared to Silver Award schools, which in turn perform better than Bronze Award and registered schools. These findings confirm what we would expect to see; as schools progress through the Eco-Schools awards levels the engagement of children in environmental and sustainability issues strengthens.

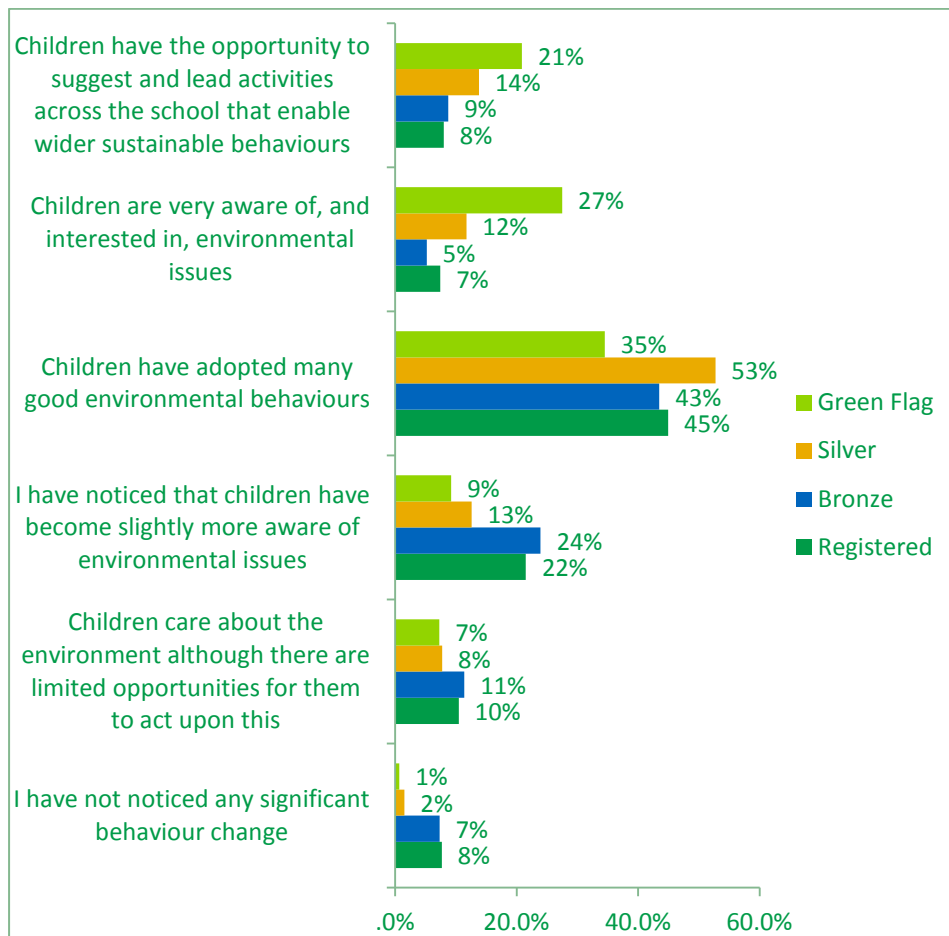


Figure 1: Eco-coordinators were asked to select the **one** statement that most accurately reflect the engagement in sustainability actions and behaviours

Further research revealed the topic areas that are most popularly explored by schools and children. In particular, the creation of observable, tangible results (e.g. visible reduction in litter) was identified as a factor driving engagement in particular topics.

As a result, Eco-Schools are tending to engage children in issues surrounding energy efficiency, biodiversity, better use of resources, gardening and appreciating the outdoors. Having tangible, measurable outcomes helps reaffirm children's understanding that their improved actions and behaviours really work.

School leaders who responded to the online survey provided some interesting results, revealing the benefits school leaders associate with Eco-Schools.

They were asked how much they agreed (not at all, somewhat, very much so) with a list of proposed benefits. This yielded very positive responses

(shown in figure 2) on a range of environmental and sustainability issues as well as several other areas.

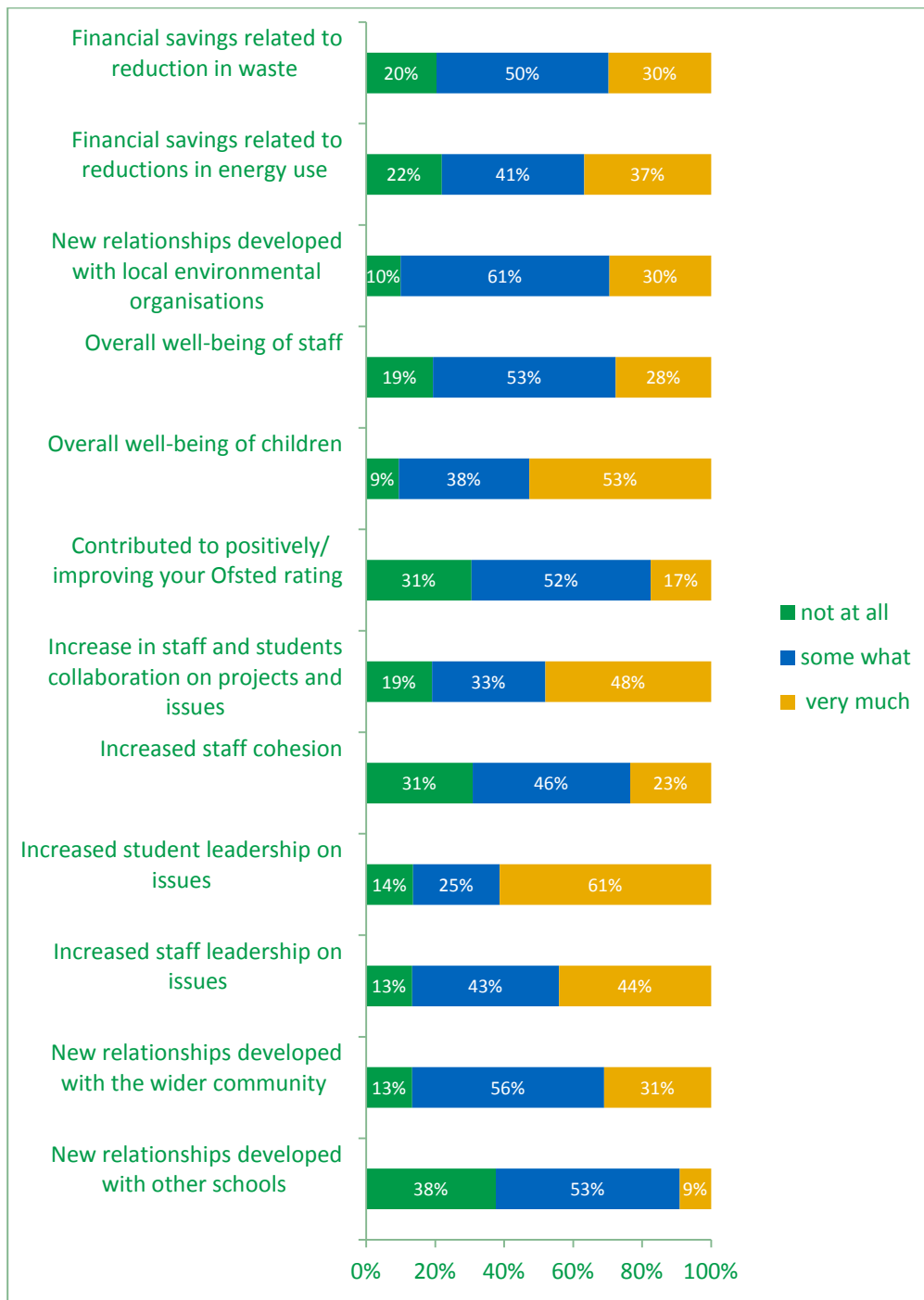


Figure 1: Agreement by School Leadership Team members with statements on the proposed benefits of Eco-Schools

2.2. Wider benefits of Eco-Schools

“We needed to find a way to get the children motivated to come to school and learn”

[Headteacher, medium primary, North, Green Flag]

Figure 2 (above) begins to show the wider benefits of engagement in Eco-Schools for children, teachers and the broader school community. The benefits are clearly not restricted to improved environmental behaviour and knowledge. In this section we explore what else the Eco-Schools programme does for the wider school community.

Those engaging in Eco-Schools, both teachers and children, reported a wide range of benefits relating not only to behaviour, but also to motivation, wellbeing and educational outcomes. These findings mirror the feedback Eco-Schools has had from schools in recent years. Several head teachers have already recognised the wider potential of the Eco-Schools framework. St. Edward’s Primary School is a good example:

When Lynne Coxell joined St. Edward’s primary school as the new headteacher in 2005 raising attendance and attainment figures was high on her agenda. Fully investing in the Eco-Schools programme with its pupil-led, whole school and creative learning approach was chosen as a framework through which to try and achieve this. By using elements of Eco-Schools St. Edward’s has been able to create a culture in which pupils were motivated to come to school and learn⁹.

As figure 2 shows, school leadership teams recognise how Eco-Schools is directly contributing to the improved wellbeing of children and staff, positively improving OFSTED ratings and increasing collaboration both within the school and beyond the school gates within the wider community. These broader benefits are hugely encouraging for the programme and are more pronounced in schools that progress to Green Flag award level.

It is worth focusing on the impacts of Eco-Schools on ‘wellbeing’ specifically, as an emerging policy driver for national government. While the measurement of wellbeing is an emerging science, the Office for National Statistics has identified ten elements associated with wellbeing.¹⁰ These were used as a guiding framework for analysing the wellbeing impacts of Eco-Schools. Respondents to the online survey were asked: *‘To what extent do you feel the Eco-Schools programme can have a positive influence on the following elements of children’s wellbeing?’* Figure 3 shows that Eco-Schools is having a positive impact on all elements of wellbeing.

Eco-coordinators revealed it to have an especially strong influence on children's affiliation with and awareness of the natural environment.

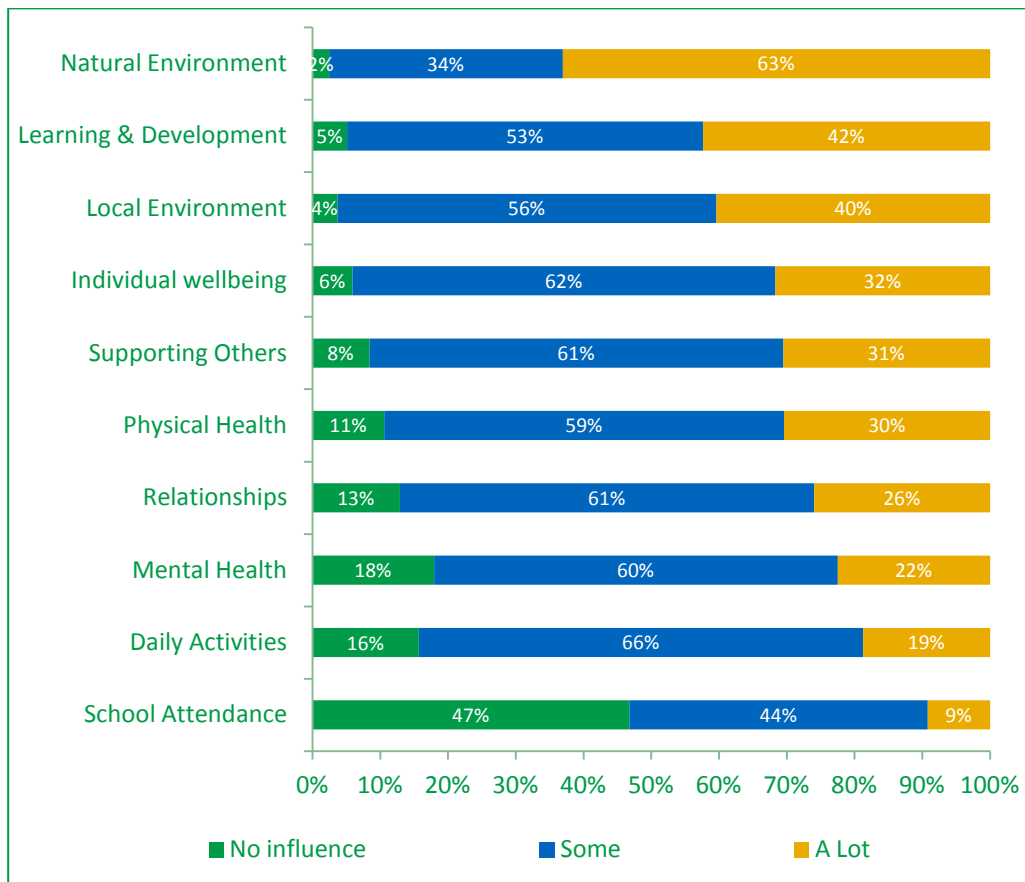


Figure 3: Extent to which eco-coordinators felt that the Eco-Schools programme contributes to ten elements of children's wellbeing

These results indicate the strong contribution Eco-Schools can make to children's wellbeing.

Beyond this, the in-school interviews revealed more specific insights into what these wellbeing improvements look like.

Eco-Schools activities such as preparing and giving presentations to others at school, engaging in eco-committees and learning new skills were all felt to directly contribute to a more developed sense of purpose, pride and self-confidence, and improved relationships with others at school being exhibited among teachers and children.

3. Eco-Schools operation

How is success achieved?

“Senior management are supporting this - that’s what makes it all possible”

[Eco-coordinator, large secondary, South, Green Flag]

As section 2 outlined, the Eco-Schools programme brings multiple environmental and educational benefits and it’s clear that this is the core reason why schools follow it and why it has successfully spread to more than 17,000 schools. The design of the programme is key to this success, but so too is the infrastructure that surrounds it. In this section we present findings from the research to highlight three factors that are critical to the success of Eco-Schools:

- A realistic framework that it is easy to follow and implement;
- Professional internal and external support networks for eco-coordinators and committees;
- Emphasis on the importance of sustainability education in the National Curriculum.

With these improved understandings we are able to outline here the key areas Keep Britain Tidy and the wider Eco-Schools community need to focus on to ensure the programme continues to be successful. These are:

- Developing the framework to better engage secondary schools;
- Improving the supply of direct support and peer support for eco-coordinators;
- Further engaging school leadership teams to both develop their support for the programme and the need to maintain sustainability education within the curriculum.

3.1 The Eco-Schools Framework

Our other classmates want to be on it as well but we’ve been chosen!”

[Nine-year-old boy, eco-committee, small primary, North, Bronze]

We meet as and when we can, usually when there are issues”

[Eco-coordinator, medium secondary, Midlands, Silver]

The research confirmed the continued appropriateness of the Eco-Schools framework for enabling positive change in schools. Staff and students alike reported how proud they are to be involved.

From the formation of an eco-committee, action planning to writing a school eco-code, the seven steps that the Eco-Schools framework is based on were confirmed as logical and supportive for aiding progression through the programmes activities. These guiding steps are seen to grow key transferable skills for students while still allowing flexibility in their implementation.

Some however are found to be more useful than others, presenting a clear opportunity to look at how we can enhance steps such as aiding teachers in linking Eco-Schools to the curriculum and supporting the eco-committees in informing and involving others across the school and within the wider community. The nine topics are also found to provide an interesting, appropriate and familiar structure for schools to connect with. Topics can and are often prioritised over others, especially in the early stages as 'quick wins' can be established such as energy, water, waste and litter.

Some schools may be restricted in some topics (e.g. lack of school grounds or lack of control over heating provision) but are often found to be creative in getting round this. Compared to secondary schools, primary schools find the topics more directly relevant across the board and easier to blend into their activities and curriculum.

Secondary schools will always provide a more challenging model for interventions that aim to directly impact on all students. The greater number of students, their developing awareness of the world around them and the subject based approach to learning creates a very different environment compared to primary school.

To improve engagement at secondary school level, Keep Britain Tidy intends to work with the Eco-Schools community to pilot the introduction of new approaches to secondary school learning and new topics for secondary schools that enhance the existing nine topics.

3.2. Supporting Eco-Coordinators

They (LAs) are vital to be honest... there is an education for sustainable development team, who work with schools... it's brilliant - they suggested the Eco-school model as a way forward..."

[Eco-coordinator, medium primary, Midlands, Bronze]

Teachers who act as eco-coordinators are important and highly motivated ambassadors of the programme. When they are well supported by other staff members and the wider school community Eco-Schools flourishes.

The research revealed that being an eco-coordinator for their school made many teachers feel more motivated in their role with feelings of fulfilment, empowerment and happiness increasing once a school achieves Green Flag status. An over reliance on one eco-coordinator was felt to be one of the most important obstacles; lack of time was reported to be the major issue effecting progress, particularly in secondary schools.

However, eco-coordinators need support in their role, in particular in the earlier stages of getting started and creating momentum. Respondents to the online survey were asked: '*Which of the following changes to the Eco-Schools programme do you think would smoothly fit into the ethos of your school and positively impact how your school progresses to the next award?*' They were told to select all relevant options. Figure 4 shows the results and a clear preference for looking at ways to increase peer to peer learning and more frequent face to face contact time between Eco-Schools representatives and eco-coordinators.

Keep Britain Tidy intends to work with our localised existing Eco-Schools networks, the wider education for sustainability sector and our volunteers to strengthen our existing support structures and develop new ones.

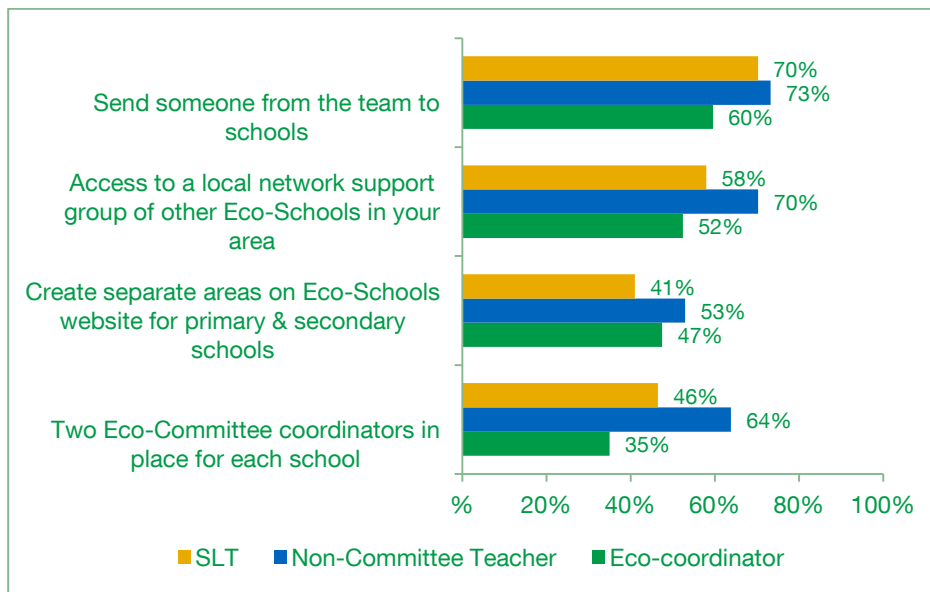


Figure 4: Eco-coordinators were asked: ‘Which of the following changes to the Eco-Schools programme do you think would smoothly fit into the ethos of your school and positively impact how your school progresses to the next award?’ and told to select **all** relevant options.

3.3. Sustainability in the National Curriculum

“We have the opportunity here to allow them to develop their ideas and run with them, use their skills and experience and go out and talk to other people about it, spreading the word and getting confidence and self-awareness”

[Deputy Head, non- committee, secondary school, South, Green Flag]

The education system in England is in the midst of a potentially significant moment of change. Proposed changes to the National Curriculum in England, if enacted, could impact significantly on the delivery of education for sustainability in our schools both positively and negatively.

The research highlighted broad concern from school leadership teams, teachers and eco-coordinators in relation to the apparent weakening emphasis being placed on sustainability by the current Government.

Encouragingly, however, the research revealed how much teachers value education for sustainability and frameworks such as Eco-Schools that help them implement it. Through the online survey respondents were asked: ‘Looking to the future of Eco-Schools and sustainability in education in England, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?’

Figure 5 shows how many respondents agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

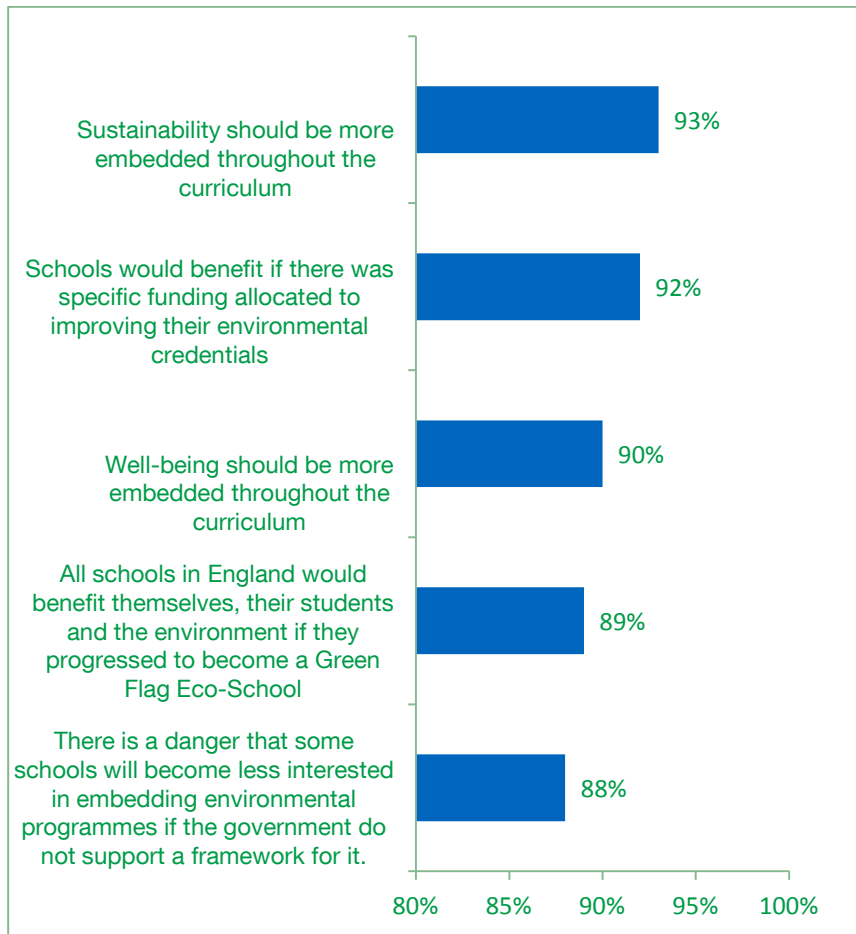


Figure 5: Teachers were asked ‘Looking to the future of Eco-Schools and Sustainability in Education in England, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?’ The percentage of those who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements

Keep Britain Tidy will work with school leaders and the broader education for sustainability sector in England to continue to champion both the programme and education for sustainability and to campaign for them to be more strongly recognised within the National Curriculum.

4. Conclusion

“I like being on the committee because I like the feeling that you get from knowing that you help future generations and have taken part in something good...”

[Nine-year old boy, committee, large primary, North, Green Flag]

This research demonstrates how highly valued the Eco-Schools programme is among children, teachers and senior leadership teams. It is perceived as providing significant environmental, financial, personal and social benefits, as well as acting as a catalyst for positive behaviour change that ripples out beyond the confines of the school, into pupils' homes and the wider community.

The research also highlighted the strengths of the Eco-Schools framework. The structural elements (Seven Steps and Nine Topics) of the programme are widely considered to be logical and well-founded, supporting schools to progress through the awards and inspire towards a more sustainable school.

But we recognise that there is always room for improvement and we will be working hard to further develop the programme in line with what we have learned from the research.

We firmly believe that the children, teachers and school leaders we work with now and those that are yet to join the Eco-Schools programme are the real champions of Eco-Schools.

Its future success will depend on the capacity of these dedicated and creative individuals to communicate the full range of benefits of the programme to those responsible for shaping the internal and external conditions it needs to thrive.

This report presented the key findings from an in depth piece of independent research into Eco-Schools. The valuable insights gained into what success looks like and how that success is achieved, will guide the future development of Eco-Schools in England. These learning's will ensure Keep Britain Tidy finds the most effective and efficient ways to support eco-coordinators and eco-committees in their efforts to educate for a better future.



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