

# Conversations about learning for sustainability

Case studies of Scottish schools and early years centres to mark the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)



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<sup>1</sup> ESD - Education for sustainable development. Scotland takes a different approach to that of the UN agencies and many other countries in that it phrases ESD as 'sustainable development education'.

## Executive summary

### The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

The launch of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development<sup>2</sup> (DESD) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005 marked the start of a collective global effort to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st century.

Scotland embraced the opportunity and the Scottish Government produced two action plans, *Learning for the Future*<sup>3</sup> and *Learning for Change*<sup>4</sup>, to set out its ambitions and targets for each half of the Decade. Within the school sector, the biggest achievements have arguably been the embedding of global citizenship and sustainable development education as themes across learning<sup>5</sup> within the new national curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence. The embedding of outdoor learning<sup>6</sup> as a key pedagogical approach within the curriculum was also a key development as was the continued success of the Eco-Schools Scotland Programme<sup>7</sup> which has engaged 98% of local authority schools in whole school activities relating to sustainability. Some 50% of Scottish schools now boast a Green Flag Award as a result of their achievements.



Learners from Cowgate Under 5's Centre venture up a stream at Stickland

In 2012, further progress was made when the *One Planet Schools Working Group*<sup>8</sup> produced the *Learning for Sustainability Report*<sup>9</sup> outlining key advice and guidance to Government Ministers on how to ensure that every practitioner and every school in Scotland reflects the principles and values of learning for sustainability so that every learner benefits from the transformational educational experiences that sustainable development education can provide. A National Implementation Group<sup>10</sup> has now been established to take forward these recommendations and the values and principles of learning for sustainability have now, significantly, been embedded within the new General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards<sup>11</sup> for all registered teachers, education practitioners and school leaders.

### Reflecting on progress

From a policy perspective, therefore, there is much to be optimistic about as Scotland seeks to build on all that has been achieved over the last 10 years and sets its sights on another decade of progress. But as we approach the conclusion of the DESD in December 2014 we are prompted to reflect on how the reorientation of education towards sustainable

<sup>2</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=14131&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/geography/en/ev.php-URL_ID=14131&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/25143907/0>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/05/20152453/0>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/learningacrossthecurriculum/themesacrosslearning/globalcitizenship/index.asp>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/index.asp>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/sustainable-development-education/eco-schools>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/LearningforSustainability>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/education/schools/curriculum/ace/learningforsustainability>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/standards.aspx>

development has made a difference at classroom level and how has it improved outcomes for learners, their families and school communities?

This was the question put to Scotland and a small number of other countries by UNESCO, the lead United Nations agency for the DESD, ahead of the global conference in Japan in November 2014 to mark the conclusion of the Decade. It provided a timely prompt and Education Scotland<sup>12</sup>, as the Scottish Government Executive Agency for Quality and Improvement in Education, undertook to gather further evidence through a series of conversations with educational establishment across Scotland. Twenty establishments in 14 local authorities were visited. The selected schools and centres reflected a variety of geographical and socio-economic contexts and included early years establishments, primary and secondary schools, and also schools for learners with additional support needs (ASN). All the schools and centres chosen had been identified as having interesting approaches or a long-standing commitment to learning for sustainability.

### **What schools told us**

The case studies in this report attempt to capture the rich conversations that took place with learners, parents, staff, headteachers and community representatives in each of the centres. The intention of the conversations was simply to gather information through personal testimony rather than to undertake detailed qualitative or quantitative research. However, there was a real consistency in the responses from all establishments about the benefits they said they had experienced as a result of their engagement with learning for sustainability, which in Scotland is defined as including sustainable development education, international education, citizenship education, outdoor learning, children's rights and play. The responses from participants were almost universally positive, and in some cases emphatically so, and pointed to the following benefits and positive outcomes of learning for sustainability:

**Enhanced learning and motivation and readiness to learn** – all establishments reported that learners were more motivated and open to learning and that the use of outdoor learning and real-life contexts within their community helped engage learners in their learning. Children and young people said that learning was more fun and real to them and that they preferred 'doing stuff rather than just using textbooks'. Many establishments pointed to improvements in behaviour as a result of higher levels of learner engagement which helped create a climate for learning. Five establishments reported that motivation was so high that it was likely to be having an impact on attendance of learners. Many parents, learners and teachers stated that learning was more effective as a result of learning for sustainability and some reported increases in the quality and detail of learners' work.

**Increase in development of skills for life, learning and work** – the skills agenda provided a strong thread through most conversations with participants reporting that learners were able to learn more independently and had further developed their thinking, problem solving and creativity skills. Learners were able to



Young people at Wallace Hall Academy learn about democratic principles

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/>

articulate the many skills they had developed, with learners in three establishments specifically reporting that they felt better prepared for life beyond school as a result of learning for sustainability. Many respondents felt that learners were able to take responsibility for their own welfare and manage risks, and a number of establishments, particularly early years and ASN, reported that a focus on sustainability had improved skills relating to resilience, forming relationships, communicating and interacting socially.

**Increase in confidence** – every establishment reported an increase in confidence of their learners as a result of the enriched experiences they'd been provided with and because learners were being 'listened to'. There were reported benefits too in terms of the self-esteem of learners.

**Improved reputation and standing of the establishments in their communities** – ten establishments reported that their reputation in the community had improved. A number of these reported increases in placing requests from outwith their catchment area as a result of their activities. Parents reported that the learning for sustainability approach of the school, from the promotion of children's rights to developing its school grounds, had been a deciding factor for them when deciding where to send their child. A number of schools had received awards and national recognition for their achievements.

**Improved staff morale, wellbeing and motivation** – many establishments reported that staff wellbeing and motivation had improved as a result of learning for sustainability activities with some agreeing that it had improved staff attendance and satisfaction levels. This was due to a number of factors: staff were enjoying the richness and variety of learning experiences themselves, learners were more engaged and there were, as a result, lower levels of stress and disruption due to bad behaviour.

**Enriched ethos of school and improvements to the community spirit** – many establishments reported greater levels of engagement with parents and the wider community and had come to depend on parents as volunteers to support many activities. A number of establishments reported that learners were more caring, thoughtful, respectful and empathetic. Many establishments had established a rich web of connections and community partnerships as a result of their sustainability programmes.



Thornlie Primary hard at work digging out their artwork trench

## Conclusion

The responses from learners, parents, staff and community representatives who participated in the conversations were authentic and were grounded in their personal experiences. Their collective testimony has identified many positive outcomes and benefits in relation to adopting learning for sustainability approaches.

It is beyond the scope of this report to prove any causal relationships between learning for sustainability and the benefits identified. To do this in the complex world of the classroom and school life would be a significant challenge. We have simply reported what schools and centres have told us. We think there is real value in that, and hope the case studies affirm what many involved in learning for sustainability have come to know from their own experiences. We hope too that the case studies will inspire others to take another step on the journey towards a coherent whole-school approach, safe in the knowledge that others have gone before them and have taken risks that have borne much fruit.

The task team would like to extend a sincere thank you to all the establishments and individuals for their warm welcome and for being so generous with their time and in sharing their stories. It has been an enormous privilege and an opportunity for us to learn and develop too. After visiting the establishments we are left with a number of thoughts:

- Each centre and school has taken sustainability forward in a way that best meets their needs and local contexts. There is no one-size fits all approach – each found their own way.
- Schools make links naturally between the various aspects of learning for sustainability and weave them together without complication – they don't compartmentalise issues such as the environment and children's rights.
- Many establishments were of the opinion that more needs to be done to improve progression in learning for sustainability and improve transitions between early years and primary and between primary and secondary schools so that the prior learning, skills and capabilities of learners are valued and recognised and can be further developed in a coherent way across their 3–18 year learning experience. An effective cluster approach is required to overcome this.
- Leadership is key and the commitment and vision of the headteacher is crucial. In most cases the headteacher played a pivotal role in allowing activities to grow and flourish but shared leadership at all levels was also important in ensuring approaches were sustained.
- The task team was struck by the motivation and enthusiasm of staff they encountered and by the richness of partnership working. It was clear that parents were highly supportive and were convinced of the benefits of learning for sustainability.

Finally, and most importantly, the task team were struck by the maturity and confidence of the learners we met. They were consistently impressive, articulate and a joy to speak with. When one group of children was asked about the benefits of learning for sustainability, they pointed to themselves and in unison replied, 'Look at us! We're the evidence of the benefits!' We couldn't agree more!

## Definition of terms

Learning for sustainability, as used in this report, should be taken to include global citizenship, sustainable development education, international education, education for citizenship, outdoor learning, children's rights and play.

The One Planet Schools Working Group agreed to use the term *learning for sustainability* to ensure consistency with the language used in the GTCS Professional Standards. The Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group endorsed both the use of this term and the Working Group's definition of learning for sustainability as:

*A whole school approach that enables the school and its wider community to build the values, attitudes, knowledge, skills and confidence needed to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable and equitable society.*

Many schools are already successfully weaving these themes together to develop a holistic and coherent whole school approach where learning about sustainable development and global citizenship is brought to life through outdoor learning as part of successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and an approach to learning which is highly relevant, connected and meaningful.

There is no suggestion that sustainable development education, global citizenship and outdoor learning are absorbed into the term 'learning for sustainability' or that this limits any of these educational domains but rather that, in taking a whole school approach to learning for sustainability, *all* must feature. Learning for sustainability is not intended to replace what schools are already doing but to build on it by providing a linking thread that draws these together into a coherent whole, united by the aim of building learners' capacity to develop practices and take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable society.

The One Planet Schools Working Group was also very clear that the term *learning for sustainability* should not be understood to relate exclusively or solely to the environment and 'green issues'. The word *sustainability* is used in the way it is understood by UN agencies and countries across the globe to incorporate the inextricable link between environmental, social and economic issues.

*When we speak of a more sustainable world, we mean in terms of all three spheres of sustainable development – society, economy and the environment. Unfortunately, a misconception still exists that sustainable development and environmental conservation are synonymous. United Nations documents related to sustainability make it clear that social and economic issues are also at the heart of sustainability. In the educational community, this translates to incorporating into the curriculum social justice issues as well as ecological and economic topics.*

McKeown, R. and Hopkins, C. (2010)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> McKeown, R., and Hopkins, C., (2010) *Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development: Transformation in the Initial Teacher Education of Teachers*. In Wisely, T., Barr, I., Britton, A. and King, B. *Education in a Global Space*. IDEAS



social justice  
pupil participation peer learning school linking  
peace and conflict engaging with democracy  
globalisation pupil empowerment local to global progression  
climate change using school grounds developing political literacy  
energy and water use poverty growing food and other plants  
expressive arts to explore ideas contact with nature  
understanding interdependence respecting social and cultural diversity  
exploring ethical issues  
waste reduction and recycling  
global dimension to learning involving learners in meaningful decision-making  
reducing overuse of the planet's resources exploring different perspectives  
addressing discrimination and prejudice discussing controversial issues  
addressing equality and fairness enquiry-based problem-solving  
taking action developing ecological literacy cooperative learning  
outdoor learning and play human rights critical and systems thinking  
collaborative group work environmental stewardship  
parental involvement addressing real life issues  
community involvement biodiversity  
active citizenship reflective learning  
active travel

# learning for sustainability

## A decade of action

*'Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into a reality for all the world's people.'*

Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations 1997–2006

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005, the nations of the world embarked on a complex and far-reaching undertaking. The challenge they set themselves was to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The primary goals of this United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), supported by UN General Assembly Resolutions 59/237 and led by UNESCO, were to:

- Promote and improve the quality of education
- Re-orientate existing education to address sustainable development
- Build public understanding and awareness
- Provide practical training.



Learner from Drummore Primary

In many ways, the timing couldn't have been better for Scotland. In 2005, the Make Poverty History<sup>14</sup> campaign was in full swing and had brought together one of the biggest anti-poverty coalitions ever seen to call for urgent action on international aid, debt cancellation and trade justice for the world's poorest countries. Millions of people wore white bands in support of the campaign, 444,000 people emailed the UK Prime Minister about poverty and a record-breaking 225,000 people marched through the streets of Edinburgh in support.

The timing was perfect in another sense too. A few years earlier in 2002, Scotland had launched a national debate<sup>15</sup> to develop a new vision for our education system to ensure it would prepare our young people fully for the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is estimated that over 800 events were held around the country and more than 20,000 people participated in the debate. A Curriculum Review Group was established in 2003 to take the findings forward and in November 2004 *A Curriculum for Excellence*<sup>16</sup> was launched. Over the span of the DESD, the implementation of the new curriculum has transformed education in Scotland and has created opportunities for new themes, approaches and pedagogies such as global citizenship and sustainable development education which are now recognised as key themes across all learning, and also outdoor learning has been established as a key approach to learning.

The achievements in relation to Curriculum for Excellence are hugely significant and could arguably have marked the high point in Scotland's progress against the goals of the DESD and the targets set by the Scottish Government in its two action plans for the decade: *Learning for the Future* and *Learning for Change*. However, further progress was yet to come. A review of teacher education was conducted in Scotland by the former Chief Inspector of Schools, Graham Donaldson, and led to the publication of the *Teaching*

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/takeaction/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2003/01/3009>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/howwasthecurriculumdeveloped/index.asp>

*Scotland's Future*<sup>17</sup> report in 2011. The report contains 50 recommendations to build the professional capacity of teachers and ultimately improve young people's learning. In *Continuing to Build Excellence – the Scottish Government's Response to the Teaching Scotland's Future Report (2011)*<sup>18</sup> it was recognised that, 'The Government believes that all teachers should have the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge in relation to important cross-cutting themes across the curriculum, such as international education, sustainable development, citizenship, enterprise and creativity.' *Recommendation 42, p29*

This provided an important marker for the *One Planet Schools Working Group* which was established following the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in 2011. The remit of the group was to provide strategic advice and direction to Ministers to support the delivery of the Scottish National Party's manifesto commitment which stated, 'We welcome proposals for the creation of One Planet schools, and will look at ways of developing this concept. This will include action to continue the development of professional standards around sustainability education and leadership within our schools on environmental issues.'



Cover image of the Learning for Sustainability Report

The Scottish Government accepted all of the 31 recommendations that the Working Group outlined in its final report, *Learning for Sustainability (2012)*. The report contains five high-level recommendations to build on all the achievements to date and provide forward momentum beyond the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. These are:

1. All learners should have an entitlement to learning for sustainability
2. In line with the new General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards, every practitioner, school and education leader should demonstrate learning for sustainability in their practice
3. Every school should have a whole school approach to learning for sustainability that is robust, demonstrable, evaluated and supported by leadership at all levels
4. School buildings, grounds and policies should support learning for sustainability
5. A strategic national approach to supporting learning for sustainability should be established.

A National Implementation Group is now taking forward the recommendations but, significantly, learning for sustainability has already been embedded in the GTCS Professional Standards to support all practitioners in the embedding of the values, principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work. In addition, under the new changes to the professional learning and development of teachers, all practitioners now need to participate in a Professional Review and Development<sup>19</sup> process and also a Professional

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/t/genericresource\\_tcm4654352.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/t/genericresource_tcm4654352.asp)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/Teaching/SGresponse09032011>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/professionallearning/prd/index.asp>

Update<sup>20</sup> process every five years to demonstrate how they have engaged in a continuous cycle of professional learning and development to meet the Professional Standards.

There is much work to be done to implement all of these developments but there is a sense that we are starting to see a real coherence across many important aspects of educational policy in relation to schools: not only is learning for sustainability embedded within the national curriculum, Curriculum for Excellence, we also have laid the foundations for all practitioners to have the necessary values, skills, knowledge, confidence and capabilities to make learning for sustainability an integral part of the experiences they provide for every learner in Scotland.

And if the policy landscape provides cause for optimism and hope then so does the tremendous passion and commitment of the many individuals, agencies, non-governmental organisations and civic society in general, which has supported and driven forward the national process of change. Over the course of the DESD, Eco-Schools Scotland has flourished and has grown to become one of the leading Eco-Schools programmes in the world with over 98% of all local authority schools participating in the programme and approaching 50% of schools having gained the Green Flag Award. In 2013, the efforts of the Scottish Fairtrade Forum, faith groups and civic society led Scotland to become one of the worlds' first Fairtrade nations<sup>21</sup>. In addition, over 12,500 John Muir Awards<sup>22</sup> were awarded in academic year 2013/14 and there has been a host of activity supported through outdoor learning organisations and providers, and through the Real World Learning and the International Development Education Association of Scotland (IDEAS)<sup>23</sup> networks as well as through activities supported by the British Council<sup>24</sup>, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award<sup>25</sup> programme and children's rights organisations such as UNICEF<sup>26</sup>. The support, resources and guidance provided by these organisations and many others has been of enormous value to teachers and schools as they make progress towards a coherent whole school approach to learning for sustainability.

In December 2012 and concurrent with the publication of the GTCS Professional Standards and the Learning for Sustainability report, the United Nations University accredited Scotland as a 'Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development', making it one of only a handful of whole nations to be accorded this status. The centre has a Scotland-wide remit in support of all forms of education and community involvement, and in-line with the other national initiatives has the working title of 'Learning for Sustainability Scotland' (LfSS)<sup>27</sup>.

As we approach the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development there is much to celebrate and also much to look forward to. The year 2014 has provided a fitting climax to the ten years of action and has provided a number of inspirational moments of learning including the:

- Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games – a wealth of activity took place in Scottish schools in relation to the Games with Scottish schools linking with countries across the Commonwealth to share learning about values, lifestyles, culture and the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-update/professional-update.aspx>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.scotland.org/features/scotland-a-fair-trade-nation/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ideas-forum.org.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.dofe.org/>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa>

<sup>27</sup> <http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/>

environment. Education Scotland's *Game On*<sup>28</sup> website received over 1.25 million page views and reached out to over 1 million children across the globe

- Centenary of the death of John Muir<sup>29</sup> – celebrated globally as a naturalist and conservationist, Muir was born in Dunbar in East Lothian and emigrated to America where he later founded the Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks
- Royal Assent of the *Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014*<sup>30</sup> – which includes additional duties in relation to the promotion of the United Nations on the Convention of the Rights of the Child
- Referendum on Scottish independence – which gave 16 year olds the opportunity to vote for the first time and led to a vibrant national political debate about Scottish identity, values and the nature of democracy.

International crises and conflicts in 2014 have also served as reminders as to why the DESD was so crucially important and why we must persevere in our efforts to nurture our children and young people as global citizens committed to the principles of peace, sustainability, human rights and respect for others.

It is clear then that the work of the DESD must continue and that we must maintain forward momentum. The learning for sustainability agenda in Scotland provides a good basis for this and the forthcoming themed years in Scotland<sup>31</sup> of Food and Drink (2015); Innovation, Architecture and Design (2016); Culture, History and Archaeology (2017); and Young People (2018) will provide a focus for continued action, as will the legacy programme of the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. In the global content, the launch of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>32</sup> in 2015 will do likewise as they seek to build on the progress made against the Millennium Development Goals<sup>33</sup> which sought to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty, reduce hunger and improve access to education.

The future is yet unwritten and we cannot know what challenges and triumphs will await us in the coming years. However, if the case studies in this document are anything to go by then we can be confident that children and young people across Scotland are being encouraged in large numbers to care deeply about justice and are being equipped with the skills, knowledge, confidence and leadership abilities required to find solutions and build a more sustainable Scotland, and a better world.



Learners at Auchnacraig Nursery go in search of wild spaces

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.gameonscotland.org/>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/studyingScotland/resourcesforlearning/scotlandintheworld/homecoming/greatscots/muir.asp>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/8/contents/enacted>

<sup>31</sup> <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/New-Focus-years-programme-announced-3f1.aspx>

<sup>32</sup> <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

## What difference has the UN Decade of ESD made?

Since 2005, there have been numerous events, initiatives and programmes within schools, communities, local authorities, and at a national level, to embed sustainable development education into education programmes and to raise public awareness and promote training.

Sustainable development education, global citizenship, international education, education for citizenship and outdoor learning have now been embedded within the national curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence, and many schools are successfully weaving these together with children’s rights and play to develop coherent whole school approaches to learning for sustainability.

The drive to embed sustainability within education is also supported by the wider policy landscape in Scotland to tackle climate change<sup>34</sup>, promote renewable energy<sup>35</sup>, tackle inequality and child poverty<sup>36</sup> and develop the capacity of our communities to bring about positive change<sup>37</sup>. Through the National Performance Outcomes<sup>38</sup>, all public sector organisations are striving to make Scotland a greener, safer and stronger, smarter, healthier, wealthier and fairer nation.

This begs the question – how has the move to embed learning for sustainability within the curriculum enriched learning and teaching and the experiences of learners, if at all? If we visited schools to look at the outcomes for learners, parents, teachers and the wider community, what would we see? What is the relationship between education for sustainable development and high-quality education?

These were the questions put to Scotland by UNESCO, the lead agency for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), in 2013 as preparations to mark the conclusion of the Decade began. A number of countries with interesting practice in relation to sustainability were invited to gather qualitative evidence and bring this to the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Nagoya, Japan, in November 2014. If the results from the various countries are found to be significant, other countries will be invited to join a second phase of investigation that will be designed to support the continuation of sustainable development education around the globe.



Learners at Mary Russell School at their Fairtrade assembly

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/climatechange>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Energy/Energy-sources/19185>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/03/5304>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/engage>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/outcome>

## About this study

The focus of this study was to gather information to explore the relationship between learning for sustainability and high-quality education.

A detailed evaluative study was beyond the scope of the project as was the means of proving a direct correlation, or even causality, between learning for sustainability and indicators of educational performance such as attainment, achievement, attendance and exclusion rates.

The approach taken, therefore, was to gather personal testimony by visiting schools and early years centres across Scotland and have conversations with learners, parents, practitioners, educational leaders and members of the wider community about their experiences.

Twenty educational establishments were visited across 14 local authorities (See Appendix 1 for a list of participating schools). The establishments were located in a wide geographical area and reflected a mixture of urban and rural locations and socio-economic contexts. Various sectors were included: early years establishments, primary and secondary schools and schools for learners with additional support needs (ASN).

The establishments were identified in a number of ways: some were already well known nationally and locally for their commitment to learning for sustainability or related aspects such as outdoor learning or children's rights. Others were identified by local authorities, or through the inspection process, as having particular strengths or interesting practice in relation to sustainability. It was felt to be important to involve schools with sufficient depth and breadth of commitment to sustainability as this would allow the task team to explore, in conversation, the outcomes resulting from various interventions within the same educational context over an extended timeframe.

A task team of between two and four individuals visited each school for approximately three hours. These teams consisted of Education Scotland staff and, in some cases, members of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group. Conversations were structured in various ways in the different establishments to accommodate the availability of those participating and the various contexts of the school. For instance, in some occasions learners and staff took part in joint discussions and in other cases separate discussions were held.

The visits to the schools and centres took place between June and September 2014.



Girl at Doune Nursery gets to grips with nature

## What people told us

The schools and centres participating in the conversations were often operating in very different contexts but there was a strong level of consistency in what they said about learning for sustainability and the resulting outcomes for learners, parents and their wider communities.

The case studies included in this report provide details about the journey each school and centre has taken and describe the main activities and programmes they have supported. They also, through the inclusion of quotes, attempt to capture the richness of the discussions that took place. They reveal strong support for learning for sustainability in every establishment, but that, perhaps, is to be expected given the commitment that each centre, and many of the individuals involved in the conversations, had shown to this area of learning over an extended period of time. The conversations were very positive, with stakeholders often talking with passion and conviction about the benefits their approach to sustainability had brought.

However, it was clear too that many schools and centres had encountered difficulties and challenges along their journey that required skilled leadership and lots of enthusiasm and energy to overcome. Therefore it would be misleading to suggest that embarking on a journey towards a whole school approach to sustainability will always be a pleasant, peaceful trip from the outset. Benefits have come to all the establishments in this study, and the establishments saw these as being very positive and significant, but realising these has taken time and some improvements have been hard won.

### Positive outcomes

Learners, staff, parents and community members participating in the conversations identified a number of positive outcomes from their school or centre's approach to learning for sustainability. These included:

**Enhancing learning** – all establishments reported that their approaches to learning for sustainability had enhanced learning. Parents talked about these approaches 'feeding the imagination of learners in an expansive way' and giving an 'experience of freedom, personal choice, taking responsibility and looking out for others'. Others reported how experiences were giving learners time to 'reflect, make decisions, plan and gaze in wonder and awe at nature'. Consistently, parents and teachers spoke about the importance of developing children as moral, social and ethical human beings and how learners were 'developing the very qualities they will need to use throughout their lives.'

Other establishments mentioned that children and young people were, through sustainability, moving beyond superficial learning to engage in deeper learning experiences. Comments from learners supported the view that learning had been enhanced with one group stating that 'in this school they know the trick to make you learn' with the result that 'we will always have these memories'.



Putting finishing touches to the pond at Kilmaron School



Parents and staff mentioned repeatedly that they were 'amazed' by the maturity, knowledge and skills of learners.

**Enhancing motivation and engagement with learning** – This came through strongly in many of the conversations. Time and again practitioners, headteachers and parents would talk about how motivated and engaged learners were, particularly in relation to outdoor learning.

Parents talked about the enthusiasm their children had for their learning, and for the approaches being used by the schools and centres, and how they came home bursting with news of their day and full of questions about nature and the world. Learners spoke very positively about this too by saying, 'that they were having so much fun, they didn't know they were learning', or that, 'it's much better to be outdoors learning and doing stuff rather than using textbooks'. In some cases, learners were so self-motivated that they would go to lengths to continue their learning beyond the school day.

The thread running through all these conversations was that giving learners opportunities to engage with the natural world and their local communities made learning 'real' and relevant and helped motivate learners.

**Enhancing attainment** – there was a mixed picture when participants were asked about the relationship between learning for sustainability and attainment. A number of establishments reported that their attainment had increased in recent years, or had been high for some time, but that they couldn't attribute this success to learning for sustainability alone as there were a number of different approaches to raising attainment being taken in the school over the same period.

Other establishments, when asked, talked about how learning for sustainability had improved the quality of work, or raised attainment, of certain groups of learners but didn't point to a wider impact across the school.

Six establishments stated that it was their view that approaches to learning for sustainability had improved attainment at a whole school level. In a number of centres, parents and staff noted that children's work was more detailed, more creative and was of a higher quality following outdoor learning and other related activities. Some learners were emphatic in saying that learning for sustainability had improved their attainment and that it, 'made them learn better', and, 'made it easier to remember what we'd learned'. Three out of the four secondary schools participating in the study reported increases in attainment in Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) exam results over the last few years and saw this as being attributable in some way to their learning for sustainability approaches.

In a few cases, the importance of the relationship between attainment and sustainability was queried by practitioners given the focus of learning for sustainability, and Curriculum for Excellence, on developing the whole child.

**Improving behaviour** – again, there was a high level of consistency across establishments in relation to questions about behaviour. Most centres and schools felt that behaviour had improved, largely as a result of increased engagement in learning. This came through particularly strongly in schools that had engaged with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also in relation to outdoor learning too. Participants in some schools said that learning about rights created an ethos of mutual respect and trust that had helped to reduce low level

disruption and created a climate where young people were ready to learn. This allowed teachers to adopt different pedagogies and approaches which further enhanced engagement and behaviour.

Three schools reported significant reductions in the number of learners that had been excluded and saw this being connected in some way to their learning for sustainability approaches. Others witnessed improvements in behaviour of specific learners, or groups of learners, whose behaviour had presented a challenge previously.

**Improving attendance** – some schools reported that their approach to learning for sustainability was likely to be leading to improved attendance of staff and learners. Practitioners in the establishments visited came across as being highly motivated and enthusiastic and explained that being supported by their headteacher, and being encouraged to innovate and take responsibility for global citizenship, outdoor learning and other activities, had boosted their confidence, morale and job satisfaction. The view of many was that this was likely to help reduce staff absence rates.

Five establishments believed that learning for sustainability had been a contributing factor in improving attendance of learners. Learners spoke about loving school and 'never wanting to be off' whilst parents and teachers spoke of how learners loved school and how they wanted to attend even when they were sick. One secondary school mentioned that a rights-based approach had led to an increase in attendance of additional study classes for various subjects.

Some schools, however, were unable to confirm any relationship between sustainability and attendance because they had always enjoyed high attendance and could not state that learning for sustainability had any bearing on this.

**Developing confidence and skills** – every centre and school pointed to an increase in confidence of learners as a result of their approach to sustainability and others commented on how it was raising the self-esteem of learners. This was attributed to the many responsibilities and rich learning opportunities that learners had been afforded, from standing for election to the Pupil Council, to speaking to local residents or to distinguished audiences at big events. Frequently, establishments reported that confidence had increased because children and young people were being 'listened to'.

Staff and parents said learners were more resilient and capable of managing risks because they were being given regular opportunities to do so through activities such as forest education or the John Muir Award. These activities also helped to improve coordination skills and physical abilities. Many pointed to young people becoming more independent as learners, and developing creativity, higher order thinking skills and problem solving skills. There were many cases where young people were given leadership roles and opportunities to participate in decision making. Learners valued the skills they had developed and saw them as being very important for their lives and future careers. A rights-based approach in one school had led to learners being much more confident about speaking to teachers about their learning which they reported as bringing a number of benefits.

Many schools commented on the improvement in social and communication skills of the learners, particularly in ASN settings. One school stated that learners with additional support needs were much more likely to interact and work in group settings

in the outdoors. A number of centres stated that learners were becoming more imaginative and also skilled in collaborating with others.

**Enhancing values, ethos and relationships** – many schools pointed to an improved ethos as a result of the focus on global citizenship, international links and children’s rights etc. Parents commented that their children were more caring of siblings and also thoughtful and reflective. Through links with schools in other countries, learners developed an understanding of needs and wants and social justice and a sense of their responsibility to share and help others. A rights-based approach in some schools had helped create a very respectful atmosphere whilst a focus on learner voice and participation meant that young people felt more ownership and responsibility for improving many aspects of the school. Restorative approaches were reported to be helping learners resolve conflict independently.

There was a strong focus on values in every establishment and relationships came across as being very positive. Learning for sustainability was reported to be reducing incidences of disruptive behaviour which also helped to improve learner and teacher relationships.

**Improving reputation and increasing school roll** – a number of schools and centres reported that their approach to learning for sustainability had increased the profile and reputation of the school or centre. This had resulted in an increase in the school roll and placing requests from outwith their catchment area. Testimony from parents supported this with the determining factors being the ethos of the establishment, the professionalism and commitment of staff, the quality and use of the outdoor learning space and the provision of rich and varied learning experiences.

**Improving staff morale and wellbeing** – staff in many schools and centres were evidently passionate and enthusiastic about their jobs and commented how the open, participative ethos had allowed them to flourish and grow. They also stated that providing rich, creative learning experiences was enjoyable for them too and was also helping to increase staff satisfaction levels. Staff commented that the improvement in behaviour as a result of increased engagement of learners had reduced staff stress and absences and that taking learning outdoors was helping to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of staff as well as the learners.

Through learning for sustainability, staff were being encouraged to develop creative learning experiences for children and were having to ‘work outside their comfort zone and learn new skills’ which they found both motivating and enjoyable.



Dumbarton Academy Learners take a rights-based approach to enterprise

**Enhancing parental engagement and benefits to parents and families** – parents spoke of their appreciation at how much their children enjoyed the approaches to learning taken by the establishments. There was a real sense of connection and loyalty to the establishments with many parents giving up significant amounts of their time to volunteer to assist with the Forest School<sup>39</sup> programme, outdoor learning programme or educational excursions. Some parents continued to volunteer even after their own children had left the school. In some cases, parents had accompanied their children on visits and had learned about places to visit and community resources that they didn't know existed.

A few parents became much more actively involved in Parent Councils and other groups in their child's primary school as a result of the experience their children had at early years. Their motivation was to help the primary school adopt similar approaches to learning for sustainability and outdoor learning that the early years establishment had taken. Parents often remarked how the experiences provided by the schools and centres challenged them



Space to explore at Palnackie Primary

as parents and prompted them to listen to their children more and give them more freedom and responsibility or spend more time outdoors.

The opportunities for parents to become involved in sustainability activities, volunteer or just sit and enjoy the wonderful physical spaces that schools and centres had created was also reported in some centres to be useful in engaging parents more effectively in their child's learning.

**Enhanced community partnerships** – learning for sustainability was helping to connect centres and schools to their communities and many were sustaining a number of active partnerships with local businesses and community organisations. A commitment to outdoor learning meant that children were more visible in their communities and were engaging with shopkeepers, librarians, community police officers and in a positive way.

Activities related to the development of school grounds, school allotments and outdoor learning programmes created opportunities for relationships to be fostered and connections to be made across the community, enhancing a sense of community spirit in the process.

A number of schools reported that the community partnerships and spirit had reduced the number of incidences of vandalism in the school and grounds and that the efforts of the school were having wider community benefits such as reduced incidences of dog fouling or littering.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://owlsotland.org/local-options/forest-schools/>

**Inclusion** – some of the ASN schools felt that learning for sustainability had led to them being more included and had connected them fully to their communities and to other schools in their authority. This was extremely important to them as well as to parents and learners.

**Positive destinations** – four establishments reported that their learning for sustainability programmes were influencing careers choices for learners and leading to an increase in positive destinations.

## Other aspects

**Progression and transitions** – some schools and centres spoke of their frustration with poor transitions from their establishment to another. In some cases, parents and practitioners spoke of children who had flourished in a particular setting because of their outdoor learning programme or approach to learning for sustainability only to feel 'suffocated' when they made the transition to another school because outdoor learning provision wasn't as advanced. Similarly, some establishments felt that the skills, values and capabilities that they had worked so hard to nurture in learners were not appreciated or recognised by the receiving establishment.

**Inspection** – it was clear for many schools that their school inspection had been a positive milestone for their school. A few centres spoke very positively about how a school inspection had provided an important turning point for them, for the better. Others felt that their inspection had given a strong endorsement to the approaches to learning for sustainability that they had adopted, sometimes in the face of external challenges and pressures.

**Leadership** – a number of practitioners and parents commented on the pivotal role their headteacher had played in the achievements of their establishments. Many of the developments required vision, a willingness to take risks, courage and determination. Along the way, some staff had to be won over with sensitivity; relationships with the community nurtured and trust established. Throughout this process of change, people had to feel included, supported and empowered to participate fully. Staff, parents and learners were often full of praise for their Headteacher as a result.

## Conclusion

Having the opportunity to visit the establishments participating in this study was an enormous pleasure and privilege for those involved. This was not a detailed evaluative study but the conviction and passion with which many people spoke, coupled with the consistency of what they were reporting, did make a compelling case for learning for sustainability in terms of the benefits and outcomes schools have experienced.

Further research is required, however, if the relationship between learning for sustainability and high quality learning and teaching is to be more formally established. Clearly, each of the positive outcomes listed above could merit a whole research programme of their own but it is hoped that this study has contributed at least something to the knowledge that existed already.

Many questions remain. For instance, is learning for sustainability unique? Some schools that have a strong focus on music or sports development programmes and may also have experienced similar benefits to those listed above. This study has not provided an answer but in the words of one headteacher:

*'The difference with learning for sustainability is how easily it lends itself to the theme of connections – how it links. By definition, learning for sustainability has to get beyond your fence and school grounds into your community. Learning for sustainability can't be insular. We took the biggest risks with our most problematic children – building dens outside with heavy objects, making fires pit etc. To me, by definition it connects more. It also means it can fail more because you are not wholly dependent on your school resources. Making a start is the most important thing. You can't achieve anything until you begin. But, through it we teach children to be more resilient and creative.'*

And so to the next 10 years. The Learning for Sustainability Report states that learning for sustainability should be regarded as 'an entitlement for all learners' and, in line with the GTCS Professional Standards, the national expectation is that the values and practice of all practitioners should reflect the principles of learning for sustainability. A lot has been achieved already and there is much to celebrate about the work taking place in many schools in Scotland. The task for the next decade is to ensure that the great work in *many* schools becomes the norm in *all* schools so that learning for sustainability can become the day to day, lived experience for every learner in Scotland.



HRH Prince Edward joins learners at Wallace Hall Academy in their learning at the Queensberry Initiative

## Acknowledgements

Education Scotland would like to extend its gratitude and appreciation to all the establishments that participated in the conversations. Visiting each establishment was a pleasure and a privilege and the task team gained so much personally from the experience. We are grateful too for the warm welcome we received and for the opportunity to meet such an interested, committed and passionate group of children and young people, practitioners, parents, staff and community members.

Thanks also go to the 14 local authorities that helped facilitate the visits and also to the members of the Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group who assisted with the visits including:

Professor Pete Higgins – Co-chair of Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group and Chair of Outdoor, Environmental and Sustainability Education, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh

David Leng – Co-chair of Learning for Sustainability National Implementation Group and Director of Children, Young People and Education for Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils

Alan Crosbie – EIS representative

Morag Watson – Development Manager, Learning for Sustainability Scotland

Betsy King – Development Manager, Learning for Sustainability Scotland



Learners from Cowgate Under 5's demonstrate how Stickland got its name



Learners from Wallace Hall Academy working with local farmer through the Queensberry Initiative





# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Participating schools and centres

<b>Sector</b>	<b>School/centre</b>	<b>Local authority</b>
Early years	Auchnacraig Nursery	West Dunbartonshire
	Cowgate Under 5's Centre	Edinburgh City
	Doune Nursery	Stirling
	St Leonard's Nursery	Edinburgh City
	Westercraigs Nursery	Glasgow City
Additional support needs	Drummore Primary	Glasgow City
	Kilmaron School	Fife
	Mary Russell School	Renfrewshire
Primary	Carleton Primary	Fife
	Craigievar Primary	Aberdeenshire
	Inveraray Primary	Argyll and Bute
	Kirkhope Primary	Scottish Borders
	Lochyside Primary	Highland
	Luing Primary	Argyll and Bute
	Palnackie Primary	Dumfries and Galloway
	Thornlie Primary	North Lanarkshire
Secondary	Bo'ness Academy	Falkirk
	Dumbarton Academy	West Dunbartonshire
	Hazlehead Academy	Aberdeen City
	Wallace Hall Academy	Dumfries and Galloway



# Appendix 2

Case studies of participating schools

### Auchnacraig Early Education and Childcare Centre, West Dunbartonshire Council

Auchnacraig is a non-denominational early education and childcare centre in Clydebank in West Dunbartonshire Council. The predicted roll for 2014/15 is 80 children (morning sessions) and 60 children (afternoon sessions).

Outdoor learning is a key feature of learning at Auchnacraig and, in the 2011 inspection report for the centre, the quality of the children's learning experience outdoors and in the Forest School were identified as key strengths. Also highlighted was the strong and supportive partnerships with parents, the inclusive nurturing environment for learning and the focus that was given to leadership for learning by the head of centre and staff team.



Learners enthralled by a Forest School activity

The vast outdoor environment within the centre grounds is well used to deliver learning across the curriculum and children spend time outdoors every day. The area has been developed extensively with the help of parents and local organisations and includes a designated Forest School area and a sensory garden which was developed in partnership with community organisations.

The centre offers a programme of activities for parents ranging from leisure activities, parenting programmes to educational courses and parents take an active role in the community garden and Eco-Schools group. The centre provided support and advice to a group of parents who successfully secured £50,000 in community funding to establish a play park in the local area.

Auchnacraig also has a strong focus on the rights of the child and promotes its 'Rights Respecting Nursery' approach to parents.

The centre's achievements have been recognised in a number of ways including:

- West Dunbartonshire Amazing Things Award (Three years running).
- Education Scotland Award (2014) – *Parents as Partners in Learning* category
- Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag status
- Children in Scotland Magazine (Sept 2014)

#### What difference does it make?

*Conversations were held with centre management, staff and parents. Those who took part in the discussions were all of the opinion that the centre's regular use of the outdoor environment as a means of enhancing learning had led to a number of positive outcomes:*

##### *Enhanced school reputation*

- 'Auchnacraig has now become renowned for its learning environments and parental engagement and groups. We are situated in an area of high deprivation and unemployment. However, we are now receiving requests for placements for children.'  
*Member of senior management team*

- ‘After coming here, I didn’t want to move him...particularly because of the outdoor element and Forest Schools.’ *Parent*

#### *Enhancing learning and skills*

- ‘Children became more relaxed and creative in their play.’ *Member of senior management team*
- ‘Their imagination gets developed outside – they know right from wrong, what is safe and what isn’t.’ *Parent*
- ‘Parents put restrictions on children whereas here they encourage problem solving and independence. He loves the bear hunts and the treasure hunts.’ *Parent*
- ‘When he was in the nursery he would rhyme off what he had been doing outside because he was motivated and having fun.’ *Parent*
- ‘My youngest child’s coordination has really improved. She has made a lot more friends being outside than she otherwise would have inside.’ *Parent*
- ‘I think it had a really positive effect on his speech – he would always be talking about why they were digging, what they were looking for, talking about lighting the fires.’ *Parent*
- ‘It’s all about character building here – if they fall, they get up and get on with it. When he falls he gets up and gets on with it .... It toughens them up and makes them more resilient.’ *Parent*

#### *Enhancing the sense of community*

- ‘There is a real sense of community and belonging. The parents from Auchnacraig all talk to each other.’ *Depute head of centre*
- ‘As a result of the initial stages of gaining the involvement of parents in creating our outdoor learning environment it led on to community allotment spaces. Involvement at this point also became the springboard for our parent learning and family learning programmes.’ *Member of senior management team*
- ‘A safe play area has been developed through our partnership with parents and Save the Children. Parents in the community are receiving support at home from parents who have embarked on parenting support training and many children will receive early literacy support through the book bug training our parents have been part of. All of these have supported community ownership enabling the community to sustain developments on their own.’ *Member of senior management team*



Children enjoying wild spaces

### Cowgate Under 5's Centre, Edinburgh City Council

Cowgate Under 5's Centre is based in the heart of Edinburgh, close to Edinburgh University and the Scottish Parliament. Children attending the nursery come from across Edinburgh and beyond, including some children from Dunbar and Fife. There is a rich cultural mix at Cowgate: there are only three families in the nursery where both parents of the children are Scottish. The centre roll is 57.

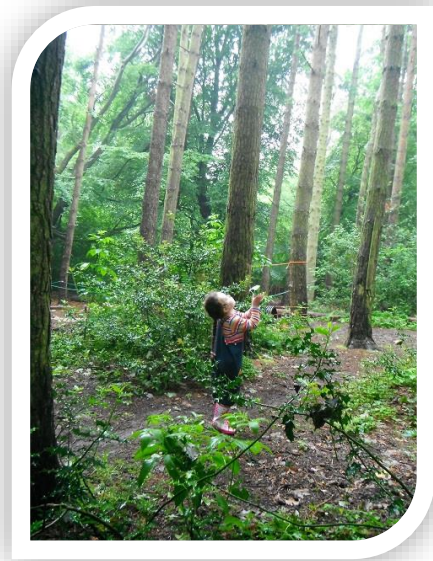
The quality of the experiences that Cowgate offers learners has been recognised in a number of ways. In 2008 the centre won the Nursery World Awards and it has also achieved an Investors in Children Award. The centre has also gained four Green Flag Awards with Eco-Schools Scotland and in its most recent inspection in 2014 the quality of children's learning at Cowgate was described as 'outstanding'. As a result of its achievements, the centre receives many national and international visitors.

The Centre's approach to learning has a strong, Froebelian influence, where the belief is that, through engaging with the world, understanding unfolds. Play is seen as a creative activity which provides children with the opportunity to become aware of their place in the world. The Centre's ethos revolves around the promotion of children's autonomy and the structure of the day is influenced by learners' interests. Listening closely to learners has led to the transformation of the outdoor play area into an imaginative and stimulating learning environment which provides children with the opportunity for daily contact with nature. Again, feedback from the children about the Centre's Forest School programme led the centre to expand its horizons in search of wide open spaces. A link with Bonaly Outdoor Centre on the outskirts of Edinburgh flourished as a result and Cowgate now has its own dedicated space there where teepees and a yurt provide staging posts for wider exploration of the surrounding forest. The site is affectionately named 'Stickland'. Here, children have freedom to direct their learning, pursue adventures in the forest, climb hills, investigate nature and direct their own learning in countless ways.

Cowgate also makes full use of its city centre location to promote an outdoor 'way of being' and to connect children to their community. Children from the centre are highly visible in the Grassmarket area of the city where they make full use of the community recycling bins and work alongside a local community project which provides assistance to the homeless. They also walk regularly to Holyrood Park and gardens in Stockbridge and work closely with a local storytelling centre and Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. The centre's journey is never complete as each new generation of children to arrive at the centre bring their own interests and ideas which leads to ongoing renewal and transformation.

#### **What difference does it make?**

*Conversations began with the senior early years officer and a group of parents in Bonaly Outdoor Centre. The conversations then continued back at Cowgate Under 5's Centre with a PhD student, a small group of staff and the head of centre.*



Enjoying the wonder and awe of nature at Stickland

*Enhancing learning and motivation to learn*

- 'We love everything about Stickland.' *Learner*
- 'You can't count the benefits of children being here. Just encouraging the natural wonder that children have for nature and outdoors is great – many live in tenement flats and 'live in the air' so to have a long uninterrupted time in a natural space provides time for them to be solitary, reflective and just gaze in wonder.' *Senior early years officer*
- 'Our approach makes an impact in loads of ways – the descriptive language children use increases. The confidence in decision-making and planning grows. We also see growth of children's physical skills.' *Senior early years officer*
- 'Stickland adds a magical element that feeds their imagination in an expansive way. There is experience of freedom, personal choice, taking responsibility, looking out for others.' *Parent*

*Benefits to parents*

- 'There's been an impact on me – I've been challenged as a parent. It made me reflect on own way of parenting.' *Parent*
- 'It has made me more willing to influence the environment my children will be in the future. I'm now in the Parent and Teacher Association of the primary school.' *Parent*
- 'Children live at a city pace here – we slow the pace in the nature kindergarten. This gives a sense of wellbeing to children, staff and visitors. Parents are relaxed and chilled. It has given us an opportunity to talk to parents too.' *Early years practitioner*

*Developing skills, confidence and resilience of learners*

- 'My daughter has picked up concern for other children and is much more caring. There is a deep ethos of respecting the child and sustainability.' *Parent*
- 'My older child is at primary school and got the headteacher's award for positive attitude. I think this was linked with her Cowgate experiences and is connected with being able to make decisions.' *Parent*
- 'Cowgate's approach teaches empathy – my child sees injustice and social responsibility.' *Parent*
- 'I see the children are so much more capable than learners I've met in the past. They're better at problem solving skills – whether relationships, using tools etc.' *PhD student*
- 'I love jumping in the river.' *Learner*

*Enhancing reputation of the centre*

- 'The reputation is stellar – you speak about Cowgate and a lot of people know what it is and what it is about.' *Parent*
- 'We have 300 children on the waiting list. Learning for sustainability has undoubtedly enhanced our reputation.' *Head of centre*

*Staff motivation and health and wellbeing*

- 'One child spent 1.5 hours in one space – he found a loom band, and played with it, spotted planes in sky and just loved it. It's good for the emotional wellbeing of staff too.' *Senior early years officer*
- 'Stickland and our approach has a huge impact on mental wellbeing of staff – it helps with their mindfulness.' *Forest School leader*



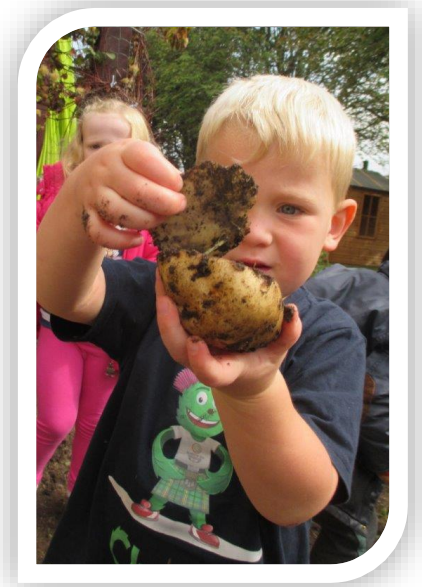
Enjoying time to be curious and explore at Stickland

## Doune Nursery, Stirling Council

Doune Nursery is a non-denominational, integrated setting which provides an extended-day flexible provision for families. The nursery opened in the year 2000 and is a purpose built provision for three to five year olds in the grounds of Doune Primary School. The nursery takes in children predominantly from the village of Doune but some children also attend from outlying areas and villages. It is registered for 32 children attending at any one session.

The nursery was inspected in 2010 and was evaluated as being excellent in all six areas. The following were among the strengths identified:

- The quality of children’s learning experiences and their wider achievements
- Children’s sense of responsibility, decision making and independence
- Partnerships with parents and the wider community
- Quality of interaction between adults and children.



Harvest time at Doune Nursery

Since its opening, the nursery has focused on the importance of the children’s voice in the learning process. The nursery has developed many strategies to ensure children are respected and that their views are listened to and made visible. This focus is supported by a local authority focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and desire to embed a pedagogical *Documentation Approach*<sup>40</sup> to children’s early learning in their early years establishments. The nursery currently holds a Level One UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award. The staff talk to children about their rights and in particular focus on the importance of being respectful to themselves and to the environment.

Families have been very involved in the learning and teaching of children’s rights. Children work together in learning groups with adults, which are formed when a group of children are observed over a period of time to be sharing an interest in a particular topic. In these groups children lead the learning and share their knowledge on particular topics with the other children.

Doune Nursery also has an ongoing commitment to learning for sustainability and has threaded this throughout their values and principles. All areas of the curriculum are delivered outdoors and a member of staff leads on Eco-Schools work as the nursery pursues its fourth Green Flag Award with Eco-Schools Scotland. The nursery has a well-established outdoor learning space which is used every day and continues to be developed through consultation with the children and their families. The indoor playroom opens out into the garden and children are encouraged to move freely between the two spaces. The nursery organises family gardening days to provide parents with opportunities to get involved and understand more about the learning that takes place outdoors.

<sup>40</sup><http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/sharingpractice/d/documentation/aims.asp?strReferringChannel=sharingpractice&strReferringPageID=tcn:4-376085-64>



The nursery's approaches to learning for sustainability are now well-embedded but the annual arrival of new learners, parents and staff means that work to share the philosophy of the establishment is ongoing. Doune's next steps will be to forge closer links with the associated primary schools to share experiences and explore opportunities for joint learning and moderation.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the head of nursery, depute head of nursery and four parents. They identified the following positive outcomes from their approach to learning for sustainability:*

#### *Enhancing behaviour*

- 'Learning outdoors has a positive effect on behaviour. Staff share expectations of behaviour outdoors and ensure that children know what is expected of them.' *Head of nursery*
- 'The conversations staff have with the children are respectful. Children share their opinions but learn respect also. The children are aware they have an opinion.' *Parent*

#### *Enhancing learning*

- 'Children are motivated to learn because they have been involved in the consultation process.' *Head of nursery*
- 'The nursery focuses on why we do things. It's not task orientated – it's child orientated.' *Parent*
- 'The natural environment offers endless opportunities for creativity.' *Depute head of nursery*
- 'It's real learning – children have a sense of time outdoors, they can see the changes in the natural environment.' *Head of nursery*
- 'The outdoor environment is rich and resourceful and helps develop children's understanding.' *Head of nursery*

#### *Enhancing confidence, skills and resilience*

- 'Respecting and actively listening to each other has increased children's confidence.' *Head of nursery*
- 'I can't believe some of the conversations I have with a four year old.' *Parent*
- 'Children are involved in recognising their own talents, skills and achievements and that of others.' *Head of nursery*
- 'By involving children in decisions about their learning the staff have seen growing self-confidence and increased self-esteem in the children.' *Head of nursery*
- 'The nursery massively promotes independence.' *Parent*

#### *Enhancing health & wellbeing*

- 'By learning outdoors, children can just be.' *Head of nursery*
- 'Nursery is an extension of her life, she feels very settled and secure.' *Parent*
- 'The outside area is particularly important at pre-school level – it's important that children are physically doing something.' *Parent*



Nursery grounds

### St. Leonard's Nursery, Edinburgh City Council

St. Leonard's Nursery School is a denominational, co-educational establishment located close to the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. The centre serves a catchment area which comprises a broad social and cultural mix and caters for pre-school children aged three to five years. Children attend over two sessions and the total roll of the centre is 76.

The nursery's journey towards sustainability began in 1992 when it sought to transform its tarmac playground into an imaginative and stimulating environment that would provide ample

opportunities for learners to engage with nature. Consultation with children, parents, staff and partners established a shared consensus which provided a resolve for the journey ahead and reinforced the nurturing and caring community ethos of the nursery.

Some 12 years later, the nursery grounds have now been completely transformed and staff at all levels endeavour to provide children with an exciting curriculum based on play and active learning. Children are given a wide range of opportunities to care for their environment, become active global citizens and engage with the local community.

Sustainable development education has flourished and now permeates every aspect of life in the nursery. Biodiversity is encouraged and children have regular opportunities to observe living things and explore the natural habitats of a range of species thanks to a pond, bird boxes with camera and mini-beast hides.

Recycling is well established throughout the centre and labelled bins are a visible reminder of what can and cannot be recycled. The school composts its fruit peeling and other material and uses the compost for planting fruit and vegetable seedlings which the children tend, harvest and eat during snack times.

Young people save energy by turning lights off and save paper by using both sides. They have also installed water 'hippos' to save toilet water and collect rainwater using water butts which they measure alongside the temperature over time: collecting, interpreting and assessing information as they do. Collected water is used to water the plants and to top up the pond.

The nursery school's commitment to environmental issues led it to be the first nursery in Edinburgh to be awarded Green Flag status with Eco-Schools Scotland in 2004. Since then it has also won the Sustainable School Category in the Scottish Education Awards (2008) and a Smarter Scotland Greener Schools Award in 2009. Staff were also invited to a reception at No. 10 Downing Street in recognition of their success in delivering high quality environmental education learning experiences and for being a finalist in the 2009 National Teaching Awards.

The nursery is constantly striving to improve and take on new challenges and hopes to attain Fairtrade status for the establishment and develop children's rights further through UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Programme.



Learning to be scientists

## What difference does it make?

*Conversations were conducted with the headteacher, four parents and a small group of learners. All were of the opinion that the centre's approach to global citizenship, sustainability and outdoor learning had led to the following positive outcomes:*

### *Enhancing learning, skills, values and attitudes*

- 'We need to use both sides of the paper, so the trees don't get chopped down.'  
*Learner*
- 'In 1992, the school grounds were underused and underdeveloped. At that time, pupils lacked social skills but today there is a stark difference, with children now much more confident and motivated in their learning.'  
*Headteacher*
- 'Being outdoors helps children learn to respect wildlife and creatures. This is really important for children who live in flats for example and perhaps don't have a garden. Had my children attended a different nursery without an outdoor space, I think it would have been a completely different experience for them – they wouldn't have developed the same skills.'  
*Parent*
- 'We're composting. I put banana skin in the compost bin. I saw worms making mud.'  
*Learner*
- 'It's all about socialisation here and learning within play. They develop their social skills here. My daughter was an Eco rep in primary one and she didn't get that at home – that is directly from here.'  
*Parent*
- 'We try to be eco-friendly at home but the work that they do here really reinforces this. By the time my children left here, they had really grown in confidence.'  
*Parent*
- 'It is an inspirational learning journey for all of us with the children firmly at the centre. Their knowledge, confidence, questions and understanding impress us all. These young children are already developing the very qualities they will need to use throughout their lives to protect and care for our planet.'  
*Headteacher*



Making award-winning compost

### *Enhancing the reputation of the centre and sense of community*

- 'When my husband and I visited here we just knew that this was the place to send our children.'  
*Parent*
- 'It's worth the hassle travelling further to take my children here. My two older children flourished here. It's such a holistic environment and I love the environmental focus. They do a lot with the nature garden and are always doing something new.'  
*Parent*
- 'They get the opportunity to be outside here which is really important.'  
*Parent*

### *Enhancing motivation, enthusiasm and wellbeing*

- 'Staff are all on board with taking learning outdoors and are aware of the positive impact of taking learning outdoors. Staff do this with children year on year and they do so with such enthusiasm.'  
*Headteacher*
- 'Staff are so enthusiastic and pro-active here. Children are given the opportunity to choose when they go outside and what to do when they go outside.'  
*Parent*
- 'We create successful learners – learners with enthusiasm and motivation, a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, who are able to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle.'  
*Headteacher*

## Westercraigs Nursery, Glasgow City Council

Westercraigs Nursery serves the Dennistoun area of Glasgow. Most families live in tenement or multi-storey housing with no access to a garden. There is some affluent housing in the area and 40% of children have English as additional language. The nursery is a standalone establishment based in portakabin accommodation. The roll is 60–60 morning/afternoon and the nursery operates 8am to 6pm. Most children attend part-time but some do attend for extended times.



Collecting the Glasgow Citizenship Award

The nursery has well-established and active programmes in every aspects of learning for sustainability including: global citizenship, children's rights, international education, sustainable development education, outdoor learning and play. Their journey towards a coherent whole establishment approach began when they first moved into their temporary accommodation. There was no fence up at the time around the outside of the nursery grounds so staff had to take learners out into the community on structured visits to give them an opportunity to be active in the outdoors.

The nursery now boasts a creative and imaginative outdoor play area and urban kitchen garden that the learners helped to design and develop. The children also visit the local park frequently and staff are trained in Mindstretchers and Forest Schools outdoor learning approaches. The vibrant local community is seen as a wonderful resource and learners are out almost every day interacting with local people in the community such as charity shop workers, local restaurateurs and community police officers. This work is enriched by partnerships with many community organisations and businesses.

The school has extensive links with the global community too through links with Italy, Malawi (through Glasgow City Council's Leaders of Learning programme and the Mary's Meals Programme) and support for Fairtrade. The school was also heavily involved in the Game On programme for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and partnered with a school in Lesotho.

Central to all of the above activity is a rights-based learning approach. The headteacher through her place on the Values & Citizenship Strategy Group is involved in disseminating the Children's Charter to other early years practitioners in Glasgow City Council and has worked with a former parent to promote rights-based approaches across the nursery. The resources produced to support this are being made available to all other early years establishments.

In recognition of its achievements, the nursery was in the first tranche of schools to receive the Glasgow Effective Partnership Award and also won the Glasgow Citizenship Award from the Trades House.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the head of establishment, staff and parents. Members of the wider community also took part including two former pupils, a former parent and the community police officer. All spoke positively about the approach to learning for sustainability which the nursery had adopted and listed a number of benefits including:*

### Enhancing learning and confidence of learners

- ‘The change has been dramatic. My daughter is far more confident and outgoing now. The amount of detail in her writing is incredible. The quality of her writing has improved and she is also far more sociable. She is learning to share and be more self-sufficient.’ *Parent*
- ‘My sons are much more independent and are learning about their community. They are definitely more willing to learn.’ *Parent*
- ‘Westercraigs children grow in confidence because they’re being listened to.’ *Former parent*
- ‘Our philosophy is that children have to experience it – we do this for every interest. The challenge we give to staff is to find the most dynamic, challenging and interesting contexts for learning. Staff get really involved in coming up with creative contexts.’ *Head of establishment*
- ‘Within weeks of being here there was a massive, massive difference in my sons’ speech. Their confidence has really improved. My kids don’t stop asking questions. Kids have freedom of speech.’ *Parent*



Educational excursion to Cumbrae with parents

### Motivation to come to nursery and learn

- ‘Our attendance for almost all of our children is above average – this is definitely because of the way they learn. Children are desperate to get back to nursery.’ *Child Development Officer*
- ‘This approach to learning is all about experiences and creating a more rounded person. My daughter is much more willing to come to nursery as there are a variety of activities on offer – every day is different.’ *Parent*

### Enhancing parental involvement and community partnerships

- ‘We take parents on trips too. Some haven’t been to Millport, Bo’ness etc. and some had never been on a ferry. They say, “These are things that we’ve never done – we’ll come here ourselves.”’ *Head of establishment*
- ‘Yes, we are definitely reaching out and engaging more with community partners as a result of learning for sustainability.’ *Head of establishment*
- ‘Learning isn’t just Monday to Friday. We make the children visible to people who work and live here. It can only have a positive impact on children to be confident outside, meeting people from their community.’ *Child development officer*

### Increasing staff skills and motivation

- ‘Staff are hugely empowered by this type of learning and have ownership of it.’ *Head of establishment*
- ‘We’re asking children to engage with the unknown so staff have to do the same and work outside their comfort zone. Staff are learning new skills and languages and are proud of themselves. There is a sense of fun and enjoyment and this is a motivating and positive place to work.’ *Child development officer*
- ‘I am more enthusiastic about my job as I have access to good resources. I am aware that pupils’ confidence has grown through their learning experiences.’ *Child development officer*

## Drummore Primary School, Glasgow City Council

Drummore Primary School is a non-denominational, co-educational school located within Drumchapel Learning Community in Glasgow City Council. It provides additional support needs (ASN) provision for about 90 learners with a range of social, emotional and behavioural needs. Approximately 50% of the learners are diagnosed as having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The school celebrates diversity, promotes equality and prides itself on its positive, inclusive and supportive learning environment. Its values, ethos and global citizenship activities were highlighted as strengths in its most recent inspection report in 2012. The global citizenship programme has been taken forward since 2009/2010 by a dedicated member of staff who has sought to embed global citizenship within all levels of the curriculum. A significant programme has developed as a result. Within the curriculum, children learn about homes and homelessness around the world, about the right to play and to water and about energy and sustainability issues. The school has gained two Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flags and through its contact with the West of Scotland Development Education Centre, school staff have participated in professional learning activities and have networked and shared approaches with other practitioners across the city.

Similarly, another member of staff has had a remit for outdoor learning remit and since 2011/12 has harnessed the potential of the extensive school grounds to develop a thriving outdoor learning programme. This has included the introduction of new creative play areas and planters to provide contact with nature. The central courtyard has also been developed into a school community garden containing raised beds for learners to plant vegetables. An extensive tarmac playground is well used for cycling activities and the woodland and hill within the school grounds provides an exciting focus for the schools' outdoor learning activities.

Numerous community partnerships have flourished as a result of both the global citizenship and outdoor learning programmes including with the local nursery and schools, allotment associations, John Muir Award, Countryside Rangers, The Conservation Volunteers Green Gym, Commonwealth Orchards Programme, Community Action Team and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the headteacher, two members of the senior management team, two members of staff with responsibilities for coordinating learning for sustainability activities, two parents and nine learners. All participants felt that the school's approach to global citizenship and outdoor learning had led to the following positive outcomes:*



Learning to manage risks

*Learners are more motivated, engaged and learn better*

- ‘Thursday is their favourite day because that’s the day they learn in the woods. He is really motivated by this type of learning. He comes home excited – you would think it was the first den ever built.’ *Parent*
- ‘All kids learn better outdoors.’ *Learner*
- ‘Our learners have really enjoyed learning about global issues. We see more enthusiasm and a greater level of questioning. It is really something for our learners to be learning to communicate. Listening and talking has improved because different contexts generate interest. There is definitely an impact on motivation and attitudes to learning. We talk about evidence of impact – we can recognise this as professionals through moderation activities.’ *Teacher*
- ‘The learners really enjoyed climbing the hill into the woods – they developed problem solving skills and personal resilience.’ *Teacher*



Having a ball with global citizenship

*Learners with social, emotional and behavioural needs learn to interact, communicate, empathise and socialise*

- ‘My son comes alive in the outdoor environment. He also wants me to adopt a snow leopard. They really develop social skills and every child gets better. They are learning to play with others and play imaginatively – parents can see a huge increase in imaginative play. Indoors he is often involved in a lot of solo play but in an outdoor environment he becomes more engaged in collaborative play.’ *Parent*
- ‘Eco-activities help us see how good Scotland is.’ *Learner*
- ‘I help people more outdoors – I just ask them, “Do you need any help?”’ *Learner*

*Learners become motivated to eat healthier*

- ‘As a result of the outdoor activities and school orchard he will eat fruit and now wants the healthy option.’ *Parent*

*The school profile and reputation has grown*

- ‘The minute you make a link it opens up doors to other things. The community understands what we do now – we are getting increased placing requests from within the city and from the neighbouring authority. The school is more high profile now – we are treated with a lot more respect.’ *Headteacher*

*Staff are more reflective and committed to collegiate working and professional learning*

- ‘It has made me much more reflective as I’m always asking myself how I can improve experiences. It has helped me with team teaching and I am now more active in accessing personal professional learning.’ *Teacher*
- ‘It has also been good for collaborative teaching and learning to play to each other’s strengths. Joint reflection after activities has been very useful.’ *Teacher*

## Kilmaron School, Fife Council

Kilmaron School is a non-denominational, co-educational 3-18 years school located in the town of Cupar and serving the North East of Fife. It provides support for about 20 learners with a range of complex physical, social, emotional and behavioural additional support needs (ASN) taught in four classes. All learners attending Kilmaron have additional learning needs and many also have additional physical needs.

The strong emphasis on communication within the school was highlighted as a key strength in its most recent inspection report in May 2014. The systems the school had developed to help children and young people make choices was also seen as a strength as was the commitment of the headteacher and staff to increase the profile of the school within the community and the partnerships put in place to support families and the work of the school.



Learners admire their recycled Christmas tree

The school is working towards UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award and global citizenship is woven into all three themes learners focus on each year including: rights and responsibilities, diversity and sustainability. The recently formed Pupil Council helps learners to become involved in organising activities which will benefit themselves and others, for example organising fundraising events such as Burns Night events and the *Hoolie in the Schoolie* Ceilidh. The school also encourages learners to engage in global issues and a school twinning programme with St. Lawrence Catholic Girls School in Malawi has been established as part of the Connecting Classrooms<sup>41</sup> initiative run by the British Council.

The school is set in attractive grounds that have recently been developed with the help of RAF Leuchars to offer integrated play and opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Smooth pathways for wheelchairs and large adventure play equipment offers different experiences for the pupils. Pupils grow produce in raised beds to be used in the school kitchen and there is a small pond, wildlife garden and orchard.

Numerous links with the local community have developed as a result of learning for sustainability. In addition the RAF Leuchars partnership listed above, links have also been established with the Rotary Club, Cupar Art Club, Cupar in Bloom, Cupar Fairtrade Group, Mary's Meals and St James Church as well as other schools and colleges in the area.

### What difference does it make?

*The headteacher and a group of four staff participated in conversations about learning for sustainability and identified the following as positive outcomes of the approach that the school had taken:*

#### *Enhancing learning, engagement and confidence*

- 'Children who wouldn't usually have concentration for more than a few minutes were there for the whole performance.' *Headteacher*
- 'One learner participated in the dancing, music and use of colour. She had increased knowledge of Africa, music, art and how to print.' *Headteacher*

<sup>41</sup> <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/regions/americas/connecting-classrooms>



- ‘This work provides a real context for learning and makes it more real for the children.’ *Teacher*
- ‘The link with Malawi has provided a real connection with another part of the world. When we had a teacher visiting the school from Malawi our pupils were interested in sensory involvement and the teacher let them put their hands in her hair.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Engagement with real life issues such as recycling has improved our pupils’ awareness, life skills and has given them confidence to take action.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘Pupils have become very engaged with issues through musical productions with environmental themes e.g. ‘Eddie the Penguin saves the world’ and ‘Michael Recycle’. This has increased pupil engagement. A pupil directed the production. Pupils wrote songs, made props from recycled materials and this increased their skills and confidence.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘Our learners gained increased knowledge of people elsewhere and confidence in their ability to sing and dance. They became more accepting and curious, particularly intrigued by the musical instruments, clothes and food brought from Malawi.’ *Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing community spirit and parental involvement*

- ‘Despite the pupils coming from a wide area this work has helped us make links with the wider education community and has improved parental involvement. Evidence of this is a local to global themed open day where the school had 100 visitors and a well-attended Commonwealth sports day linking with other ASN schools.’ *Headteacher*
- This work has improved team involvement.’ *Teacher*

#### *The school profile and reputation has grown*

- ‘The involvement with mainstream schools has had a positive impact on both pupils, staff and on parents’ perceptions of the school. Pupils felt included, the school has never been included in initiatives like this before.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘We value the pride that this has engendered in partners, for example Rotarians, and their feeling that this is our local community school.’ *Headteacher*



The link with Malawi has promoted understanding of other peoples and cultures

## Mary Russell School, Renfrewshire Council

Mary Russell School is an inter-denominational, co-educational school located in the Paisley area of Renfrewshire. It provides ASN provision for around 220 learners from five year-olds to post-16, with a range of needs. A significant number of children (approximately 22%) are diagnosed as having an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

A number of staff within the school work closely together to lead global citizenship and sustainable education projects. The school has gained five Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flags and the school enthusiastically embraced the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games with each class adopting a Commonwealth country to provide a focus for learning. Themes relating to justice, poverty, biodiversity and global citizenship are embedded in the curriculum and are also used to promote interdisciplinary learning (IDL) and develop learners' higher order thinking skills.



Learners support Fairtrade and children's rights

Learner voice is prominent throughout the school and children from primary four and upwards participate in the Pupil Council and a variety of other school committees. Following a traffic accident close to the school, learners successfully campaigned for road safety signs and improvements to the school parking area. The school building recently underwent a significant upgrade and learners were involved with this process at every step. Children in the secondary part of the school have monitored the school's carbon footprint and made recommendations which led to the installing of energy saving equipment throughout the building.

Outdoor learning is a prominent feature of activities and is carefully planned and used throughout the curriculum. This is supported by a member of staff who has been trained as a Forest School leader. The school has developed gardens within the school grounds and the outdoor space is also used for a car valeting enterprise project.

Older learners from the post-16 'STEP' unit often work with the younger classes to nurture their skills for life, work and learning. The young people in the STEP unit meet once a week with the senior management team to discuss issues and ideas for the school.

The school has many partnerships and links with the community which they use to further enhance learners' skills. The school has been a Fairtrade School since 2002 and a partnership with the Rainbow Turtle shop in Paisley enables learners to run a monthly Fairtrade stall. Learners take responsibility for controlling the stock and managing the stall. The school also has strong partnerships with Capability Scotland, The Conservation Volunteers, Enable Scotland and an orphanage in China.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations involved the acting headteacher, two members of the senior management team, three members of staff, six learners and five parents.*

Learners, parents, staff and the senior management team were of the opinion that the school's approach to global citizenship, learner voice and outdoor learning had led to the following positive outcomes:

*Learners have grown in confidence and are developing skills and independence*

- 'We have more confident learners which has impacted positively on attainment.' *Headteacher*
- 'We gave the Eco Inspector a tour around the school with no staff involved.' *Learner*
- 'We stayed for three days in Skelmorlie, we went swimming and learned how to stay away from home for a couple of days. It made me more confident.' *Learner*
- 'Pupils come in to the school very timid, unsure and quiet but don't last that way very long! My child has blossomed as he has now started independent travel. These activities have given him the confidence to be able to do these things.' *Parent*
- 'My child is now looking after children new to the school. It really boosts their confidence when they are involved in different things.' *Parent*
- 'My son has changed because of the projects and working with children in different classes and ages. He has friends now.' *Parent*
- 'We have to film our speeches if we want to be in the Pupil Council, we're not nervous though and I liked doing it.' *Learner*
- 'The whole building has been improved as a result of the work children are doing. Parents have been amazed at what pupils are able to do. Pupils' confidence is much higher and they can talk about their learning as a result.' *Eco-schools coordinator*
- 'There's a young person on the Pupil Council. She was an absolute leader and grew in confidence because she felt that she was making a difference.' *Headteacher*

*Learners are engaged with issues in their local community and the wider world*

- 'We have a stall and the money goes to farmers in Africa to help them get a fair price for their goods.' *Learner*
- 'My boy was involved in the car valeting enterprise. It was great for him as he got work experience. He learned about making money, keeping records and interacting with the local community, not just people in school. It's given him skills for when he leaves here.' *Parent*
- 'We're walking about the supermarket and he tells me, "You've got to get that one" – pointing to all the Fairtrade stuff. He can tell you everything about it, why we have to buy it, what the farmers do in other countries. I couldn't have told you anything like that at that age!' *Parent*

*Learners are engaged with and make links between their learning*

- 'I really like school because we come up with ideas for how we can improve our school.' *Learner*
- 'The school are great at taking learning out of classroom and placing it in a real life situations. My kids will have the skills they need for life. That's the best kind of learning.' *Parent*
- 'The beauty of all this work is how it has brought the school together. Initially we planned discretely but we adopted joint planning for citizenship which was linked to interdisciplinary learning.' *Eco-Schools coordinator*
- 'Behaviour is better – kids will buy into it if they do something that is meaningful. Pupils put on a Chinese lunch for whole school last year. Engaging children in these things when they won't engage in other things has a huge impact.' *Depute Headteacher*

## Carleton Primary School, Fife Council

Carleton Primary School is a non-denominational school serving the Woodside and Prestonhall areas of Glenrothes. The school was built in 1953 and is perhaps one of the oldest in Glenrothes.

The school has promoted children's rights for a number of years and has achieved Level Two status with UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools programme. Learners visit other schools and organisations to peer assess other schools and raise awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Learners are regularly involved in making decisions about how they work in class and about developments in the school: they draw up class charters, set targets for themselves and collate samples of their work.

They also take on responsibilities as prefects, monitors and peer mediators and contribute effectively to committees such as the learning and teaching group, Eco-Schools committee and Pupil Council. A children's rights steering group, made up of learners and staff, meets regularly to ensure rights are embedded in the school's ethos, policies and practice. The annual 'Day for Change', is run in partnership with UNICEF and highlights the need for specific rights such as the right to clean water and food.

The school has also undertaken a lot of work on its school grounds to support learning and play. Learners are currently transforming one area into an attractive outdoor learning area with seating and plants especially chosen to attract wildlife for observation. A floral display was planted at the entrance to celebrate the Commonwealth Games and the Eco-Schools Group has worked in partnership with the janitor to plant vegetables in raised beds.

In addition to the work on its grounds to promote biodiversity, the school's commitment to recycling, composting and energy saving has earned it two Green Flags Awards from Eco-Schools Scotland.

Carleton Primary also recognises global citizenship and international education and has participated in a number of school links, exchanges and overseas visits to encourage learners to develop empathy for others and to promote understanding of other peoples and cultures.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations were conducted with the senior management team, eight staff, parents and a group of learners. The visit concluded with primary 7 pupils providing a tour of the school. Those who participated felt the school's approach to learning for sustainability had led to the following positive outcomes:*

#### *Enhancing values and ethos*

- 'It makes us reflect on what we have.'  
*Learner*
- 'The school ethos is supportive of making mistakes and allows children to build up skills in taking responsibility and helping others.'  
*Teacher*



Another delivery to the local foodbank

- ‘It makes us remember that we should be respected, and to think about others.’  
*Learner*
- ‘We are creating children who are confident and willing to share.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Whenever I’m in school I see children and teachers interact so positively.’ *Parent*
- ‘I like doing Eco-Schools because it’s fun and it is about helping the school.’ *Learner*
- ‘It’s an achievement for us, helping the school by making it cleaner and helping the environment.’ *Learner*
- ‘I am being educated through him! He’s telling me so much about Fairtrade and rights across the world.’ *Parent*

#### *Enhancing skills, behaviour and learning*

- ‘One third of the children are involved in committees. For me, that’s a good thing as it gives them a feeling of responsibility and that it is something worthwhile. Right from the beginning, they know it is important what they think.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘Because children feel they are involved, they value it, they feel mature and have ownership.’ *Teacher*
- ‘I was a bit dubious at first, but once we got going it made a big impact. Seeing the children and it working – listening, valuing opinions.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Children have the skills to deal with issues. Behaviour has become better.’ *Teacher*
- ‘I’ve seen a huge increase in confidence since he joined the Eco-Schools Committee, he’s more resilient and takes his tasks very seriously. He takes charge at home and constantly talks about the changes we could make environmentally.’ *Parent*

#### *Enhancing reputation of the school*

- ‘The school has an excellent profile in the local community and local press. Twenty per cent of the school roll are placing requests due to this.’ *Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing community spirit*

- ‘Staff feel there is a sense of community and they share contacts and resources etc. The learning for sustainability approach is not as strenuous for staff as the approach is so embedded. One staff member leads each initiative but it is very clear that it is everyone’s responsibility to take these forward.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘There has been an impact on our work with parents. There was a visit to the Fairmont Hills one weekend – children informed parents of the visit to the hills and the uptake of families was huge.’ *Teacher*
- ‘It is amazing seeing the confidence of children increase and the sense of community in the school.’ *Parent*



Commonwealth Games garden

## Craigievar Primary School, Aberdeenshire Council

Craigievar Primary is a small rural school situated seven miles south of Alford and twenty-five miles west of Aberdeen. There is no village at Craigievar and the school is surrounded by barley fields and a forest. There is a real mix of families in the area – some are local families whose parents and grandparents came to the school; others have moved to the area and commute daily to work in the oil industry in Aberdeen. The school roll is 38 and there are three teachers in the school and a teaching headteacher. Less than 10% of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Craigievar School was one of the first schools in Scotland to become a Forest School. Since 2008 the children in primary four to seven have been visiting the local forest on a regular basis for a whole day of outdoor learning. In recent years, the school has increasingly linked the activities in the forest to the curriculum to ensure learning indoors and outdoors are connected. This work is supported by a partnership with the local National Trust for Scotland countryside ranger and also a bush craft expert who lives locally. The school has also created raised vegetable beds and has developed a thriving wildlife garden in the school grounds which is a regular source of enjoyment and study by all the children. A grant from Learning and Teaching Scotland allowed the school to share their practice in outdoor learning with twenty other schools in the local area.

Back in 2005, Craigievar was also one of the first schools in Aberdeenshire to obtain the prestigious Green Flag Award with Eco-Schools Scotland. The school is now working towards its fifth Green Flag. Global citizenship has also been woven into the curriculum in a flexible way and learners are encouraged to lead learning and explore topical issues. Young people help plan and shape learning through the use of floor books and learners are encouraged to participate in decision-making in the school. The school has recently registered for UNICEF's Rights-Respecting School programme and sees this as the next step on their journey towards a holistic whole school approach to learning for sustainability.

### What difference does it make?

*Over the course of the three hour visit to the school conversations were conducted with the headteacher, teaching and non-teaching staff, a group of learners and two parents. A third parent, was unable to attend and kindly submitted comments in writing.*

#### *Enhancing learning*

- 'I think the learning with forest and global citizenship is fun. I find it easier to learn – I'm doing something but not on a sheet.' *Learner*
- 'In terms of impact, I see their writing is more creative as a result of the forest school programme. They are more interested in the world and ask more questions.' *Parent*
- 'They are very involved in this and planning and organising ideas for learning. This has given them a greater confidence. They feel responsible for their learning. Because they experience this, their understanding is much greater.' *Teacher*



Brewing a hot drink at Forest Schools

- 'In terms of learning for sustainability – we're going into it in much more depth. It isn't superficial learning. There's much more sharing through more cooperative learning and more activeness in their learning.' *Headteacher*
- 'This intensive immersion approach to outdoor education gives the pupils a deeper experience than can be taught in the classroom and enhances the standard curriculum. I am often surprised and impressed at the learning my son has achieved.' *Parent*
- 'I like to learn about other countries. I like to learn about wood and other things – I think I learn better. I've noticed that my writing is better.' *Learner*

#### *Enhancing behaviour and social skills*

- 'You learn not to argue easily or if you do argue you learn to communicate and sort it out yourself.' *Learner*
- 'The children are more tolerant of one another – we do restorative approaches. This has had a very positive impact. Their self-control has improved. They like to discuss issues as a class and want to resolve it.' *Teacher*
- 'In terms of the impact on learners, they are more reflective, sociable, cooperative and less disruptive.' *Parent*
- 'It is a life skill. They're listening to you and taking it in. They feel a lot more independent.' *Teacher*
- 'When they look outside the bubble of their school, their maturity evolves because of that knowledge. They are learning responsibility. I've seen a lot more patience in terms of resolving issues – learning to balance fairness and equality.' *Teacher*

#### *Enhancing enthusiasm and engagement of staff, learners and parents*

- 'I liked finding out about all the countries involved with the Commonwealth Games. If we didn't do this – we wouldn't learn about helping society.' *Learner*
- 'Staff enthusiasm has increased because they can teach what they want to teach. Pupil engagement has increased. I saw lots of disengagement before – learners weren't engaged in what they were learning. This is not happening anymore. The school is so happy.' *Headteacher*
- 'Learning for sustainability increases our motivation and enthusiasm – definitely. It is all very positive and is reflected in the classroom. Our children are never off! They always come to school even in bad weather.' *Teacher*
- 'Learners are allowed to use axes and saws in Forest Schools. It persuaded me to have an open mind and to provide learners with new opportunities and give them a chance to be trusted. It was a huge blessing for me.' *Teacher*
- 'They seem to enjoy it. They're very confident.' *Non-teaching member of staff*
- 'The school has a good reputation in the community. Adults are quite happy to be involved even although they have no connection with the school. There is a really strong community spirit.' *Parent*
- 'The Forest School makes a difference to my son. It is a different learning space and gives him a real sense of freedom.' *Parent*



Expressive arts in the forest

## Inveraray Primary School, Argyll and Bute Council

Inveraray Primary School and Pre-five Unit is a non-denominational school situated within extensive grounds in the centre of the Royal Burgh of Inveraray in Argyll. The current roll of the school is 69 with 26 children attending the nursery.

During the 2006 inspection the following were identified as particular strengths of the school:

- Pupils' active involvement in learning and their skills in listening, talking and working together.
- Very effective use of the outdoor environment to stimulate pupils to learn, particularly in mathematics and sustaining the environment.
- Pastoral care of pupils and the outstanding atmosphere for learning created by staff, in which relationships and sense of pride in the school were strong.
- Supportive and productive partnerships with parents, the School Board and the community.
- Leadership of the headteacher in encouraging curriculum innovation and teamwork.



Bird hide made from wooden pallets

In 1999 Inveraray Primary School began the journey of developing its school grounds with support and funding from Scottish Natural Heritage. The purpose of this was to ensure learning and teaching outdoors was as accessible as learning and teaching indoors. Staff, learners, families and community members were all involved in the project and local businesses, landowners and local contractors helped with some of the changes.

The subsequent improvements to the grounds and local biodiversity prompted the school to begin its journey towards an Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award. This has continued to be a big focus since 2001. A partnership with Argyll Estates, and identification of a suitable forest site, allowed the school's interest in Forest School to grow and develop. Forest School activities are also undertaken within the school grounds for pre-five and primary one learners and are supported by the staff, parents and the janitor who have been trained as forest leaders.

Inveraray Primary School also has an established programme with Crofting Connections. This has involved the school partnering with Auchindrain Highland Farm Township<sup>42</sup>, a preserved farming community. Learners have looked at the history of crofting and have learned traditional farming techniques. They have also had the opportunity to grow and harvest food both at Auchindrain and in the school grounds. The produce they have been grown has been used in the school kitchen for school meals and also sold as produce to help pay for seeds for the next growing year. Parents and members of the community have also been involved at all stages in the growing and harvesting of these crops.

The school has also carried out significant work on children's rights and learners have helped establish a playground charter. A programme of wider community projects is also

<sup>42</sup> <http://auchindrain.org.uk/>



supported including the TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) project which encourages learners to come up with an ideas which will benefit the school and the community. 'Groovy Gardeners' is one such initiative set up by a TASC group; the learners tidy the gardens of the residents at the local sheltered housing area using money they raised by holding a coffee morning to cover the gardening costs.

### **What difference does it make?**

*Conversations were conducted with the headteacher, three parents and the school janitor who is heavily involved in the Forest Schools programme. The approach to learning for sustainability was felt to have a number of benefits including:*

#### *Enhancing learning*

- 'You have to do things to learn about them. You need to jump a burn to know what it is like rather than reading about it in books.' *Parent*
- 'Forest School is a great leveller. Children who have ASN can excel outdoors as they can share their skills. We have a group of boys who are very motivated outside and produce a much higher standard of work. These boys will sit on a tarpaulin and write in a more focused manner.' *Headteacher*
- 'He doesn't even realise he is learning when he is outside, the information stays better in their head.' *Parent*
- 'We have seen understanding of maths concepts increase through practical work outdoors and their understanding of the practical applications of mathematics and science in particular.' *Headteacher*
- 'The children will tell you more about outdoor learning than anything else.' *Parent*

#### *Enhancing behaviour*

- 'Some pupils' behaviour is better outdoors compared with indoors and they focus better on tasks, including self-directed opportunities for imaginative play.'  
*Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing confidence, skills and resilience*

- 'Particularly with boys we saw an increase in a 'can do' approach to learning when outdoors. All the pupils who took part in Forest Schools showed increased confidence and improved self-esteem.' *Headteacher*
- 'In terms of mental health, we are trying to show children there is more to life. We want to give children time to be children. Outdoor learning offers time to be a child.'  
*Headteacher*
- 'My son was in the Pupil Council and it gives them confidence.' *Parent*

#### *Enhancing pupils' wellbeing and environmental awareness*

- 'The children's involvement at every level of the school grounds has fostered responsibility and respect. We have very little vandalism or concerns over the use of the school grounds out of school hours because the children, their families and the community are invested in the ongoing project' *Headteacher*
- 'My own children are more mindful about the environment around them.' *Parent*
- 'Even though we live in an area with lots of nature, not all parents take their children out so it is great for children to experience jumping in the river or climbing over hills.'  
*Parent*
- 'Children are encouraging their parents to spend time outdoors.' *Parent*

## Kirkhope Primary School, Scottish Borders Council

Kirkhope Primary School is a non-denominational, co-educational school located in the village of Ettrickbridge in Scottish Borders Council. The school has two composite classes, primary one to four and primary five to seven, and a morning-only nursery class. The roll of the school is 25.

Sustainable development education (SDE) has been a large part of the school's culture and ethos for more than 10 years and has been supported by the passion and commitment of the recently-retired headteacher who was amongst the first group of practitioners to gain Professional Recognition<sup>43</sup> in SDE from the GTCS. Key to the school's approach has been to embed sustainability within the curriculum at all levels, for example, through themes relating to fossil fuels, transport and the rainforest. Over the years, the school grounds have been developed to support learning and include: a wild flower area to encourage biodiversity, raised vegetable planters, a willow/bamboo coppice and a composting area and wormery. A small array of solar panels on the school roof is linked to an energy read-out in the school which provides further opportunities for learning.



Upcycling old science lab stools

Learners have opportunities to contribute to the life of the school and participate in at a number of levels – such as through involvement in the Eco-Schools group, Pupil Council or as Junior Active Schools Co-ordinators. Older children can also become playground buddies for younger children. All staff, including teachers and support staff (office, learning assistant and catering), support the school's approach to SDE. The procurement policy of the school, for instance, is based on the principles of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' and procedures for recycling paper, batteries, printer ink cartridges, clothing and shoes are well embedded as are practices to reduce food waste and save energy. Learners are particularly proud of their ethically-sourced football!

The school also enjoys many links with its local community. In addition to links with a local Saturday morning sports club, it also has well-established links with the local church, library and village horticultural group. Staff from the nearby Bowhill Estate have also provided training for school staff and have supplied materials for the development of the school gardens. The school has also benefitted from the donation of an acre of land by a villager which the school is currently developing as an outdoor learning area. An international link with a school in Kenya provides learners with the opportunity to better connect with the global community.

The school has recently been awarded a fifth Green Flag Award by Eco-Schools Scotland in recognition of its commitment to sustainability and has also received a Healthy Eating Award.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the headteacher, four members of staff, five parents, four community members, learners from across the school and three former learners. Those*

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-recognition>

*participating in conversations were all of the opinion that the school's approach to learning for sustainability had resulted in a number of positive outcomes including:*

*Learner motivation, engagement, confidence*

- 'I loved being part of the school community and looking after it. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience from nursery to primary seven. I hope to take what I learned in the Eco-Schools committee into the world.' *Former learner*
- 'The skills and knowledge learned through Kirkhope Primary School's eco work has without doubt given the pupils a greater respect for their local environment. By making the activities fun the children are easily engaged, attain a good level of understanding and build self-confidence.' *Parent*
- 'A group of six pupils worked with our Community Librarian on an 18 month project called *Discovering the Library*. Links were made to our Eco-School's ethos of reusing and recycling. This group then created a library for our own school, based on their discoveries.' *Headteacher*

In relation to this project, parents said the following:

- 'This project has given my son more confidence in reading.' *Parent*
- 'The project has helped peer group relationships.' *Parent*
- 'My son gained confidence and was extremely proud of what he had achieved.' *Parent*

When asked what made their school special, learners responded:

- 'We do litter hunts which helps the countryside so that the litter doesn't kill or harm animals.' *Learner*
- 'We make bug houses and look after wildlife.' *Learner*
- 'We are better at reusing, reducing and recycling so the world is cleaner and healthier.' *Learner*

*Enhancing learning and teaching*

- 'Our sustainable development work has really motivated the children; they have enjoyed the active, cooperative nature of the learning and real life contexts for learning. As a direct result of this work, discussion and leadership skills are noted as a real strength amongst pupils.' *Teacher*
- 'My daughter has a much greater understanding of the world around her and the need to care for it due to her enhanced experiences at Kirkhope Primary. These include studying mini-beasts in the nursery garden, visits to Bowhill Estate with the Countryside Ranger, rock-pooling at Coldingham Bay, applying successfully for the job of Junior Countryside Ranger and putting together information for the school's fifth Green Flag Award.' *Parent*
- 'The eco-work was a huge motivator for the children. They were confident enough to lead presentations because they had something to say that was uniquely theirs and that gave them a real sense of pride in what they had achieved.' *Parent*

*Enhanced community partnerships and learning*

- 'The school's influence has extended into the community with a noticeable reduction in the amount of litter and dog 'poo' in the village.' *Community member*
- 'Learning about sustainable practices at a young age can surely only help to make such things habitual throughout the rest of their lives. As a parent, I have seen both of my children transfer skills learned at school into home life.' *Parent*

## Lochyside RC Primary School, Highland Council

Lochyside RC Primary School is a denominational, co-educational school situated west of Fort William. Most children attending the school are from the areas of Caol, Lochyside, Banavie and Corpach, though a small number travel from other districts in Fort William and the surrounding area. The roll of the school at present is 94 pupils.

The school aims to provide learners with a stimulating learning environment supported by an ethos of encouraging achievement and celebrating success. Staff at all levels are keen to embrace change and actively promote partnership working with parents/carers, the local

parish and the wider community to encourage children to be effective global citizens who recognise their responsibilities towards each other and the wider world. The very positive school ethos, effective partnership working and the high-quality, stimulating learning experiences for children were all highlighted as key strengths in the school's most recent inspection report, published in 2012.

Learners are encouraged to develop their leadership and citizenship skills by participating in an extensive range of clubs and activities within and outwith the classroom. The school was the first within Highland Council to achieve the Rights Respecting School (RRS) Award and four members of staff have received RRS training. The school's values are derived from the Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and staff work hard to ensure that these guide the behaviour, actions and relationships of all members of the school community. Learner voice is encouraged and through the activities of the Learning Council, children observe lessons in other classes with teachers and provide suggestions for improvement.

The school is very committed to sustainable development issues and has been awarded three Green Flags by Eco-School Scotland. Children in all classes have helped develop the school's eco garden and enjoy planting crops each year which they cook and eat or include in food parcels for the elderly during the school's annual Harvest Festival. The school will soon merge with a neighbouring establishment on a shared campus and has successfully used this real-life context to develop its new school travel plan.

Outdoor learning is embedded within the school's curriculum and opportunities for taking learning outdoors are carefully planned. The school has established very effective partnerships with a range of organisations including the Lochaber Rural Education Trust where primary four children follow produce from 'seed to supper'. The school also works with Lochaber Fisheries Trust which monitors and protects populations of native wild fish in the region. Primary six and seven pupils also work closely with the Glen Nevis Rangers as part of their John Muir Discovery Award Project.

As a result of children's efforts, the school was again, the first within Highland Council to be awarded Fairtrade status in 2010. Employees of the Co-operative Group regularly visit the school to raise pupils' awareness of fair trade products and children sell bags of rice to pay for young people to attend school in Malawi.



The school's eco garden springs to life

## What difference does it make?

Interviews were conducted with the headteacher, three members of staff with responsibilities for coordinating learning for sustainability activities, two school partners, three parents and five learners. Participants were all of the opinion that the school's approach to global citizenship and outdoor learning had benefitted the school significantly as follows:



Warming up in Leanachan Forest

### Enhancing learning, motivation and confidence

- 'You can actually see what the teachers are talking about and you look at things differently when you learn outside of the classroom. It's a different kind of learning – it's more fun.' *Learner*
- 'The biggest impact has been the improved motivation and confidence of the children. Pupil attainment is very good across the school – pupils are focused and interdisciplinary learning using global citizenship underpins this.' *Headteacher*
- 'My boy is in the Fairtrade Committee. He is like a sponge, he takes in all the information and everything he learns on the Committee. He went to the Parliament and hasn't stopped talking about it. He did a presentation at the Parliament and it has been a real confidence builder for him. He is now singing in the choir.' *Parent*
- 'I know it's still work but it's more fun because it's something different. Going outdoors encourages you to think about helping the school by joining a committee.' *Learner*
- 'I have noticed a great difference in my child, he is more settled and he comes home tired as he has been actively learning outdoors and he has been properly engaged.' *Parent*
- 'They can talk confidently and at length about their work and their learning such as writing letters and producing presentations for others.' *Parent*

### The school profile and reputation has grown in the community

- 'Our placing requests have increased – parents want their children to be a part of the high profile events in our school.' *Headteacher*
- 'The school has a reputation as a well-run organised school with a strong community around it.' *Parent*
- 'The way the school works here is how all schools should run with children being involved in committees and being responsible for their community.' *Parent*
- 'We have posters in shops, sometimes reports on the radio and lots of things in newspapers. The community knows that we're a good school.' *Learner*
- 'We like to help the community because we know that they help us too. It's called giving back.' *Learner*

### Children develop key skills for learning, life and work

- 'Accountability is important at any age. Pupils here own the projects they are involved in which teaches them how to be responsible now and when they are older.' *Parent*
- 'Children have gone on to positive destinations at university as a direct result of activities in school.' *Teacher*
- 'Children take part in forest trails with rangers – the boys loved it. They hatch eggs from the fisheries, they learn about life cycles, local resources, and local businesses. They also learn about nature and the dangers of water too – giving them real skills for life.' *Parent*

## Luing Primary School, Argyll and Bute Council

Luing Primary School is a non-denominational school with a nursery serving the Isle of Luing. Children from the village of Cuan on the Isle of Seil also attend. The current school roll stands at 12, including three learners in the pre-five unit. Luing Primary is a single teacher school. The headteacher splits his headship between Luing and Easdale Primary School.

During the 2010 inspection the following were identified as particular strengths of the school:

- Confident and well-behaved children who are very proud of their school and enjoy the wide range of activities to raise achievement
- Very effective teaching in the nursery and primary stages which provides children with interesting and motivating learning experiences, particularly through outdoor activities
- The nurturing and supportive ethos, based on shared values and mutual respect.
- Leadership of the headteacher and the teamwork and commitment of all staff, teaching and support, to ensure all children make progress in their learning and enjoy school
- Partnerships with parents, support agencies and the island community to meet learning needs and broaden children's learning experiences.



Even fence posts in Luing have character

Luing Primary School prides itself on a strong school ethos which centres on the needs of the child and the importance of learner voice. This is particularly exemplified by the General Democratic Meeting (GDM) which is used to involve learners in decision-making processes. Based on the Summerhill Model<sup>44</sup>, the GDM allows learners to have control of the agenda (although this is shared with the headteacher prior to each meeting) and take turns to chair the meeting. Older children represent the younger pupils (nursery/primary one) to make sure their voices are also heard.

The school was chosen by the Black and Ethnic Minorities in Scotland (BEMIS)<sup>45</sup> organisation to be one of two schools to work with the Five Nations Network<sup>46</sup> on the development of human rights. The school set out with the aim to develop the understanding of human rights across the whole community with older children focussing on human rights across the world and younger learners using the theme of human rights to focus on empathy, behaviour and respect.

Regular access to learning outdoors is another feature of learning at Luing Primary with learners spending time outdoors every day using both the school grounds and the local area, including the beach. The pupils have been involved in projects to clear up the shoreline around the island as they work towards achieving their fourth Green Flag Award with Eco-Schools Scotland. Learners noticed that much of the waste they were collecting was

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/>

<sup>45</sup> <http://bemis.org.uk/>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.fivenations.net/>

connected to local industries such as fishing and agriculture and were able to share these findings with the local community.

### **What difference does it make?**

*The conversations with the headteacher and with the classroom teacher were conducted by telephone. Both the headteacher and class teacher spoke positively about the benefits learning for sustainability was having on their school:*

#### *Enhancing behaviour*

- ‘Some children find the confines of a class stifling. Going outdoors can enhance learning.’ *Teacher*
- ‘The care of the older children for the younger pupils is more pronounced – the school has a buddy system, each older pupil is responsible for a younger pupil.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Behaviour at school has always been very good. However the General Democratic Meeting allows staff to challenge any issues or inappropriate behaviour by reminding pupils about the meetings and asking them, “What did you decide at the last meeting?”’ *Teacher*

#### *Enhancing learning*

- ‘Attainment may be better in speaking – pupils are more confident than before.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Outdoor learning adds more variety, it allows you to do bigger and messier things. It means learning can be noisier too. Outdoor learning is important here because we have a small, two classroom school.’ *Teacher*
- ‘It’s more fun and a different way of learning. Using outdoor learning has helped reinvigorate my practice.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Learners’ motivation is increased as they see that their ideas are acted upon.’ *Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing confidence, skills and resilience*

- ‘Learners are involved in developing their own risk assessments for outside activities and areas. They are much more aware of how to keep themselves safe.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Pupils are more adventurous due to outdoor learning.’ *Teacher*
- ‘Children are very confident about voicing their opinion.’ *Teacher*
- ‘The General Democratic Meeting is an excellent way for children to learn to listen to each other.’ *Teacher*

#### *Enhancing community engagement*

- ‘The island is hugely enthusiastic about the school, there is a big attendance at all school events.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘The language of rights has gone with the pupils to the high school. Many are wanting to be part of the Pupil Council at the high school.’ *Headteacher*
- ‘We knew we were impacting on the community when a ferryman, not related to the school, was passing a petition against child soldiers around the passengers.’ *Headteacher*

## Palnackie Primary School, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Palnackie Primary School is a non-denominational, co-educational school. The school is situated in a small rural community on the banks of the River Urr and has the use of the woodland area adjacent to the school. The school has a large playground and has developed the garden area to include a range of playground features related to outdoor learning. At the time of the visit the school roll was 19.

In 2011, the arrival of a new headteacher provided an opportunity for the school to review its vision, values and aims. From this

exercise came a renewed desire to establish successful partnerships and relationships and make the school a focal point of the community. The school also felt that more needed to be done to help learners look outwards, beyond the life of the village, and become better connected to the world and important global issues. For the school, a commitment to global citizenship and outdoor learning provided an obvious route to help it take this work forward and achieve the following specific aims:

- Enable learners to develop tolerance and respect for others
- Break down stereotypical views and appreciate diversity in the community and the world
- Promote understanding of social justice in the school
- Help learners realise the positive role they can play in the world.

A link with Ayucha Primary school in Nyando district, Kenya, has proved to be extremely fruitful in this regard and has allowed issues relating to children's rights, lifestyles, needs and wants and understanding of other cultures to be embedded within learning and teaching. Eight other schools in Dumfries and Galloway are also linked with schools in Nyando District and this has helped sustain the partnership with Kenya and has provide an opportunity for the Scottish schools to share practice, approaches and resources too.

The school's outdoor learning programme has grown in tandem with the focus on international links and has successfully met the schools ambition of developing community links. Parents have been very supportive of the school's desire to introduce a more relevant and diverse curriculum and a number of parents volunteer to support the forest education activities in the school. Other self-employed parents have also contributed generously to the construction of new facilities within the school grounds.

Wider community relationships have flourished too and a link with a local home for the elderly has allowed intergenerational understanding to develop. Learners have also received regular support from the village shop, pub and post office as they learn how to use money, when conducting surveys and when taking action to address dog fouling, littering and reducing the speed of cars coming through the village.

The school has identified new goals to help it make further progress towards a successful whole school approach. In addition to continued development of existing work, the school hopes to make links with other countries as it takes forward its commitments in relation to



Enjoying learning outdoors



the One Plus Two Languages Policy<sup>47</sup> (mother tongue plus two additional languages) and pursues the British Council International Schools Award<sup>48</sup>. The school also plans to develop children's rights further through UNICEF's Rights Respecting School programme. A strong cluster approach will be adopted in this coming year and beyond as the Palnackie Primary joins with two other schools in a new partnership arrangement. This will necessitate the sharing of staff and learner skills to ensure all three establishments can learn from their collective experience and build successfully on all that has been achieved to date.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the headteacher and groups of learners, staff and parents. The headteacher of one of the local primary schools also participated. Those taking part in conversations were all of the opinion that the school's approach to learning for sustainability had resulted in a number of positive outcomes including:*

#### *Enhancing behavior and ethos*

- 'As a result of the focus on rights and rights respecting behaviour has improved. Pupils are more caring. The ethos in our school has changed.' *Headteacher*
- 'The pupils are caring – they look out for each other.' *Parent*
- 'The pupils didn't have a concept of the wider world but through the Kenyan project they have developed an awareness of other people – it brings the world into the classroom and has developed their sense of justice.' *Headteacher*
- 'Learning outdoors leads to pupils taking better responsibility for themselves and others.' *Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing learning and skills*

- 'Pupils are more engaged when they are learning outdoors.' *Headteacher*
- 'Learning is more interesting now and we like to meet visitors from other countries.' *Learner*
- 'Literacy levels have improved – the care, standard and length and creativity of writing has all increased.' *Headteacher*
- 'Learners are motivated to learn and are interested in what is being taught. They discuss their learning with parents and sometimes pupils have even come back to the school grounds after school to continue their learning from that day.' *Teacher*
- 'My children are happy – they don't realise they are learning, they are learning by osmosis.' *Parent*
- 'Pupils are making their own risk assessments, they are more aware of the dangers and how to deal with them.' *Parent*
- 'They are using their own initiative and are more responsible. The pupils are very independent.' *Parent*

#### *Enhancing links with the community and world*

- 'Learners are more aware of the world and more aware of global issues. The Kenyan project has also opened up my eyes.' *Parent*
- 'This is an open door school. The headteacher takes on board the suggestions of both parents and children.' *Parent*
- 'The parents are now much more involved in the life of the school.' *Parent*
- 'We have seen an increase in placing requests as a result of our activities.' *Headteacher*

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/0to9/a1plus2approachtolanguagelearning/introduction.asp>

<sup>48</sup> <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/accreditation-and-awards/International-School-Award>

## Thornlie Primary School, North Lanarkshire Council

Thornlie Primary School is a non-denominational, co-educational school serving the Pather area of Wishaw. The current school roll is about 160. In its most recent inspection in 2011 the following were among the key strengths identified:

- Confident, motivated children who really enjoy learning
- The quality of active learning including innovative outdoor learning
- Partnerships with the local, national and international communities
- Outstanding leadership and commitment of the headteacher and all members of staff.



Learning for sustainability can be a leap of faith

The school's journey towards a whole school approach to learning for sustainability began in 2005 with the development of the school's extensive grounds. The motivation was not simply to improve the appearance of the immediate environment but also to improve relationships and connections across the school, tackle behavioural issues in the playground, and enhance staff morale. Outdoor learning has grown to become an integral part of the school in the intervening years and the grounds now provide a vibrant and stimulating learning environment which are used daily to support the curriculum and natural play. The school is very committed to sustainability issues and now boasts five Green Flag Awards from Eco-Schools Scotland.

The improvements to the outer landscape of the school have also led to improvements in the inner landscape too. Before the journey started the school had a poor attainment and attendance record and a falling school roll. Now, the school reports high levels of attainment and attendance, high staff satisfaction and rising rolls with placing requests from more affluent areas. A constant theme has been involvement and participation of learners, teachers, parents and the wider community in transforming the school.

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child plays a central role in the life and ethos of the school. This is exemplified within the curriculum and in the way young people are encouraged to participate fully in decision-making and also in the school's support for Fairtrade, Philosophy for Children<sup>49</sup>, restorative practices and UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Programme. A link with the Temi orphanage in Eastern Georgia has flourished over a number of years leading the school to establish a Georgian choir and to fundraise to protect the rights of children with disabilities by installing a suitable access ramp at the orphanage and providing medical treatment for one child.

The school has been recognised at a national level for its work in social enterprise and international education and learners have presented their work at conferences across Scotland. In 2009 it won the Touchstone Award for Inspirational Learning and Teaching and in 2012 it was awarded an 'Outstanding' level from Keep Scotland Beautiful Neighbourhood Awards, as well as given an honorary certificate for its high levels of effective participation over the previous three years. These awards have all been based on learner involvement.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.philosophy4children.co.uk/>

## What difference does it make?

*A number of stakeholders participated in conversations including the headteacher, principal teacher, class teachers, parents and both former and current learners. Those participating in the conversations were of the opinion that the school's approach to learning for sustainability had led to a number of positive outcomes including:*

*Learners are more motivated, engaged and learn better*

- 'In this school, they know the trick to make you learn and pay attention. Here the learning is so fun that we forget that we are learning.' *Learner*
- 'Instead of being stuck in side and being given a book, we get to actually do it and build dens. We do maths outside and all that good stuff. Other schools should give it a chance – other kids will want more maths. They'll like coming to school more.' *Learner*
- 'My child enjoys school. From my point of view this is fantastic. It helps them learn better and makes them more motivated to learn. It improves learning and teaching.' *Parent*
- 'I would definitely say learners are more motivated outdoors. We went outside and made skeletons from the loose materials. It was totally their idea – using stones and grass. We made a film – it was brilliant!' *Teacher*
- 'Kids have ownership of learning and have a say in what they want to achieve and can do. That has a direct impact on attainment and achievement.' *Principal teacher*

*Enhancing skills for life and work and positive behaviours*

- 'We offer genuine leadership opportunities to pupils. They have never let us down. The bigger the occasion, the bigger the challenge, the better the pupils have done.' *Principal teacher*
- 'The headteacher didn't just do it himself – he wanted *us* to have a choice in it. This has given us confidence in everything. This has been an amazing school – everyone is so friendly and nice. We will always have these memories.' *Former learner*
- 'Yes, attainment has improved. We're not just learning from a textbook. If we encounter problems we can solve these because of what we did at primary school.' *Former learner*
- 'The impact of the focus on Georgia was evident – there were children who shone throughout this period. At that point they were burning brightly and there was a sense of possibility. People saw that and were moved by that.' *Headteacher*

*Enhancing motivation and skills of staff*

- 'Staff are being really encouraged and find it really motivating to take on responsibility. Your job is different every day and exciting and really challenging. We need to be the same way as we expect of learners.' *Teacher*
- 'Our authority do anonymous staff surveys. We have really high levels of staff satisfaction – as high as you'd get in the authority. This is connected to what we do and the atmosphere it builds.' *Headteacher*
- 'The headteacher encourages us to be creative and imaginative and take risks in the way we teach. I definitely want to come to work each day.' *Teacher*

*Enhancing ethos, school reputation and community spirit*

- 'Parents are much more likely to send their kids here now. I think every school should be doing similar so everyone can benefit. I love the way they work together.' *Parent*

## Bo'ness Academy, Falkirk Council

Bo'ness Academy is a non-denominational, secondary school located in the town of Bo'ness within Falkirk Council. The roll of the school is currently 650. The free meal entitlement is 11%.

The school's extensive international and global citizenship programme grew out of a desire to expand the horizons of learners and connect them to the wider world. A link with Xiamen, China, provided the initial impetus in 2006. This partnership has grown to include reciprocal learner and staff visits to China and the granting of Confucius Hub status in session 2012/13. Four other secondary schools and a range of primary schools within Falkirk Council are also supported through the Confucius Hub programme.



Installing a new water tap in their link community in Gambia

The school also has a link with a number of other countries: a link with The Gambia in Africa began in 2012 and has led to a series of reciprocal learner and staff visits along with fundraising activities to build a toilet block in their link school and provide water to nearby villages. In addition, engagement with the Comenius<sup>50</sup> project has enabled close curricular links in science to be developed with a school in Assen in the Netherlands. The activities of the Religious and Moral Education Department have also led to a partnership with schools in India. Over 40 staff and hundreds of learners have participated in international visits and the school's achievements were acknowledged nationally when it received the British Council's International Schools Award 2012–2015.

In partnership with the headteacher, the international programme is led by the international co-ordinator who is also principal teacher for modern languages and social subjects and has whole school responsibilities for citizenship and personal achievement. Along with co-ordinating foreign trips and international links, the co-ordinator leads the development of curricular initiatives, including interdisciplinary and transition programmes, to ensure learning about the languages and cultures of other countries are embedded at all levels across the curriculum.

With respect to sustainability, the school's Eco-Schools group has helped to develop a local woodland as an outside learning area. A pathway constructed by staff and learners has provided easier access to the site. An orchard has been planted and further plans are in place to develop a seating area in the woodland as an outdoor classroom. The school is also engaged in fair trade activities and achieved Fairtrade School<sup>51</sup> status in 2013.

More locally, Bo'ness Academy also has a number of links with the wider community including with the Rotary Club and local businesses.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations were conducted with the headteacher, three parents, four learners and a former learner, and six members of the teaching staff which included a principal teacher and*

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/llp-and-youth-in-action/comenius>

<sup>51</sup> <http://schools.fairtrade.org.uk/>

acting deputy headteacher. It was clear from all those who participated in the conversations that they felt that the school's commitment to international education had made a significant contribution in the following ways:

#### *Enhancing behaviour and attitudes*

- 'The number of exclusions had fallen to 19 in session 2013/14 compared with 162 exclusions twelve years ago.' *Headteacher*
- 'Behaviour has dramatically improved in the school.' *Parent*
- 'Over 150 pupils have been involved in developing the woodland area. They now have ownership of the woodland pathway and are self-motivating when it comes to looking after it. They are minded about their environment and their responsibility for it.' *Teacher*
- 'Pupil attendance has improved.' *Headteacher*

#### *Enhancing motivation, confidence and engagement*

- 'Self-esteem has grown in the school – it's tangible.' *Principal teacher*
- 'I was quite shy before I went to China. Now I'm more confident in talking to larger groups of people.' *Learner*
- 'It has developed enterprise and increased motivation and self-confidence among the pupils.' *Headteacher*
- 'It improved my people skills – being with others from the school on the trip, and from other schools who came with us ... they're like my family now.' *Learner*
- 'Our kids have a deep understanding of what fair trade is, including the environmental aspect of it.' *Teacher*

#### *Enhanced outcomes for learners*

- 'There have been improving trends in attainment since 2007. S5/6 results in the 2014 examination diet were the best ever.' *Headteacher*
- 'The number of positive destinations has improved significantly over the past five years. 46% of school leavers went on to further or higher education in session 2012/13.' *Headteacher*

#### *Enhanced school ethos and reputation*

- 'Our school consistently receives a very low number of complaints from parents.' *Headteacher*
- 'Negative reporting by the local press was previously a regular occurrence. It's always good news stories now.' *Headteacher*
- 'We have pride in our school and the reputation of the school has been enhanced within the local community and more widely across the local authority.' *Teacher*
- 'Young people have had their global awareness opened up. It has made them want to visit other places and to make travel a part of their life experience. They learn to bond and communicate with people from other culture. They also appreciate their own culture, education system and lifestyle more.' *Parent*
- 'There's a buzz about the school now.' *Parent*

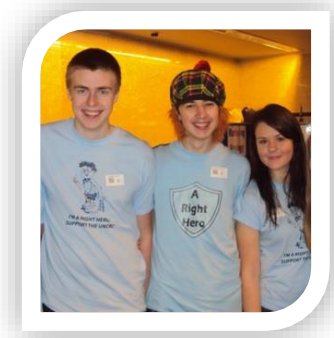


A visit to No. 3 Middle School, Yuxi, China

## Dumbarton Academy, West Dunbartonshire Council

Dumbarton Academy is non-denominational secondary school serving a mixed catchment in the Dumbarton area. The school roll is 580 and the free meal entitlement is 16.5%.

The school registered with UNICEF's Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) Programme in 2009 to support the development of the school's ethos and values. Associated primary schools participated in the launch as did Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Tam Baillie. The feedback from learners at the launch event provided the school with a useful baseline and showed that there was work to do to promote learner voice and the rights of young people.



Taking an ethical rights-based approach to enterprise

An action plan was developed and the school consulted and involved all stakeholders in the creation of a school charter in 2011 in which the rights of the child were embedded. The charter included seven articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and focussed on two key articles – Article 28, the right to education, and Article 29, the goal of education. The profile of these was raised across the school through registration classes, assemblies, parental newsletters and homework diaries. Each department in the secondary school was also asked to identify a specific article relevant to their own curriculum area and to promote this regularly with learners.

In 2012, the school reached an important milestone on its journey when it gained UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Level One Award. In the process of pursuing this award, language around rules, dos and don'ts was replaced with a rights-based approach. The school anti-bullying, behaviour and assessment policies were also reviewed to ensure that they were consistent with this approach.

In March 2014, actions were taken to further increase the role of learner voice and participation within the decision-making processes in the school to promote a change of language and culture, open up dialogue and win hearts and minds. To complement the work of the Pupil Council, the school held learner focus groups on the curriculum and in session 2014/15 a further ten focus groups will be established to discuss priority issues identified by learners.

The school is keen to continue on its journey and has established new goals to embed rights in the whole school learning and teaching and health and wellbeing policies. They also plan to share their ideas and approaches with other schools and authorities through a training pack developed, sold and delivered by learners as part of the Young Enterprise Company Programme. Throughout 2014/15 the school will also seek to further develop its global citizenship and parental engagement programmes and to continue to establish a whole school approach to restorative practices.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations were held with the headteacher, depute headteacher, eight staff from various departments, 10 learners and three parents. Those participating in the conversations felt that the school's approach to children's rights had led to a number of positive outcomes for the school community including:*

*Enhancing learning*

- 'S6 attainment increased from 19% to 31% between 2009 and 2013 for those taking more than five qualifications at Higher level. Attainment is up at S6 level too.' *Depute headteacher*
- 'It is refreshing to have common values. Pupils learn better as the learning environment has less interruptions. I would say that this has lifted staff and motivated them.' *Parent*
- 'It has reduced low-level disruption. We're now more willing to try things now such as cooperative learning and new pedagogies.' *Acting depute headteacher*
- 'Previously joining maths supported study was not seen as a cool to do. We promoted it through rights. This did have an impact – our numbers went up.' *Acting depute headteacher*
- 'Pupils have more of a voice now and can negotiate preferred learning styles. As a result they are ten times more involved and are working in groups to support each other.' *Teacher*

*Enhancing ethos, values and reputation of the school*

- 'By the time you get through school you've been living the values for six years. You naturally take this on to university or work.' *Learner*
- 'We are getting to know more about our classmates and building a community. Teachers are making more effort in classes and after school support because of RRSA. We're all given responsibility. This has definitely changed and enhanced our values.' *Learner*
- 'The school ethos is great now. Pupils are proud of their school and stick up for it. There is a huge difference in my daughter's maturity. She changed overnight when she came to secondary school.' *Parent*
- 'My son is in primary six and is coming here with a very positive attitude due to the enhanced reputation of the Academy in local primary schools as a result of the RRSA.' *Parent*
- 'We are seen as an inclusive and safe school. ASN learners come here as a result and we get placing requests even from outwith our catchment.' *Headteacher*

*Enhancing behaviour, attitudes, motivation and enjoyment*

- 'Staff absence rates fell from 105 to 63 per year from 2009 to 2014. Exclusions also fell from 322 to 126 from 2009/2010 to 2012/13. The restorative practices and charter have made an impact.' *Depute headteacher*
- 'There is a teacher section in the charter too. This is important as we need to coexist peacefully. It doesn't take away their authority but it definitely improves relationships.' *Learner*
- 'You get praise for helping others learn. Teachers focus on positives. There are loads of different steps they take to show you how to act and handle situations better. It makes you much more willing to learn.' *Learner*

*Enhancing skills*

- 'A lot of the skills we are taught in school carries on outside of school. The school always expect us to help out in the community too. This will help us for jobs.' *Learner*
- 'Everyone is more willing to learn. We are learning skills – discussing, debating, leadership and how to communicate.' *Learner*

## Hazlehead Academy, Aberdeen City Council

Hazlehead Academy is a non-denominational, co-educational school located within Aberdeen City Council. The school roll is 840 and rising due to an increasing number of placing requests. Learners come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and attainment in the school is increasing against comparator schools. Behaviour referrals and exclusions have been decreasing and 91% of learners in the school leave to positive destinations.

The school places a lot of importance on sustainable development education and global citizenship and two promoted members of staff have whole-school responsibility for these areas. The school has been involved with the Eco-Schools Scotland programme since 1999 and has now achieved five Green Flag Awards. The ambition for all of this activity was to ensure that sustainability and global citizenship were not seen as an add-on but rather part and parcel of everyday life in the school.



Getting the school grounds in shape

The school benefits from being situated next to Hazlehead Park and Den of Maiden Craig nature reserve and the school undertakes activities in both of these places in partnership with a local community group, Friends of Hazlehead Park, and the local countryside officer. The school also houses the boiler for the community's combined heat and power system.

A whole school approach has been adopted in relation to citizenship. The school's rationale for this commitment is to ensure that learners leave school with good qualifications and, just as importantly, skills for life. An extensive and well-established programme of extra-curricular and inter-house activities were linked to the curriculum to ensure that all pupils were engaged and benefitted. In the junior phase, all learners take part in the Youth Philanthropy Initiative (YPI)<sup>52</sup> which the school uses to help break down social barriers. Provision is made within the senior phase timetable to promote achievement both within the school and the wider community. Learners gain recognised accreditation for these courses such as the Scottish Qualification Authority Leadership Award and the Creative Industries Award. The use of learner voice is encouraged throughout the school and has now been embedded in the whole school self-evaluation procedures.

Learners have also led local campaigns on reducing waste and participated in the Aberdeen Schools Hydrogen Challenge and a Comenius Regio partnership with Bucksburn Academy and schools in Italy to explore the benefits of sustainable energy production.

### What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and two principal teachers. Staff, parents, partner organisations and a group of learners also participated. The last phase of the visit involved a showcase of wider achievement which was kindly organised by the school.*

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.govpi.org/>



All those that spoke felt that the school's approach to sustainable development education and citizenship had led to the following positive outcomes:

#### Enhancing learning

- 'The pupils are more confident and articulate and learners are more motivated, engaged and learn better.' *Depute headteacher*
- 'There has been a dramatic increase in the number of pupils taking social subjects, as a result of the learning for sustainability approach adopted, and attainment has now increased.' *Headteacher*
- 'Committee members develop the skills of chairing, minute taking and project management. This has increased pupil confidence.' *Headteacher*
- 'We have a positive reputation in terms of the offer we make to pupils and the wider range of experiences they can gain. Placing requests sit at 40% of the school population.' *Headteacher*
- 'The Youth Philanthropy Initiative helped me learn to talk in front of other people.' *Learner*

#### Enhanced reputation of school

- 'The drift away from Hazlehead Academy to other schools has been stopped as a result of the improvement in the school's reputation. The community talks up the school now.' *Parent*
- 'Local companies are more willing to be involved in partnership activities with the school now.' *Teacher*
- 'We won the Aberdeen Eco-City Awards in both the schools category and as overall winner in 2013. The school is now recognised across authority as a leader in sustainable education.' *Principal teacher*
- 'The school is now a more exciting place for the primary seven children to come up to. Senior pupils now support younger learners.' *Learner*

#### Improved community spirit and engagement

- 'Learners support events at weekends, and develop skills in the process. These community events couldn't have run without this. Wider community involvement has increased.' *Local councillor*
- 'Learners develop leadership qualities: the school works for the pupil and this makes an impact in the community.' *Parent*
- 'Learners are involved in the management committee of the school. Local issues such as littering and fire raising can now be resolved. We have seen increased participation in ranger activities.' *Countryside ranger*
- 'Team work and getting involved in the community are the best things about what the school does.' *Learner*



Fifth Green Flag from Eco-Schools Scotland

### Wallace Hall Academy, Dumfries and Galloway Council

Wallace Hall Academy is a non-denominational, secondary school serving Thornhill and its surrounding area. The school recently became a 3–18 school incorporating Wallace Hall Primary, which includes a nursery class. The secondary school roll is 577.

Wallace Hall Academy offers learners a wide variety of programmes relating to learning for sustainability. Perhaps the best known is the Queensberry Initiative which enables learners to better connect with their local communities through outdoor learning and also increases their employability skills through extensive partnerships with local farms and land-based industries.

Since it began in 2008 as a community charity project, the Initiative has grown to become a key partner for the school. Teachers are actively supported and encouraged to use the Queensberry and Buccleuch Estates and surrounding areas for learning, examples of which include Geography lessons using the local river as a real-life context for their studies and English classes staging a performance of Hamlet in Drumlanrig Castle. Learners are also given many opportunities to engage with farmers and forestry staff on the estates and other local employers to gain experience and skills relating to rural industries which are a key part of the local economy.

Through its engagement in the Comenius programme, Wallace Hall is extending learning from the local to global context. The programme has enabled many staff and learners to participate in reciprocal exchanges with schools in Belgium, England, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway and Poland. The focus for this activity has been to develop a better understanding of the impact of climate change and the depletion of the earth's resources by exploring the shared experiences of the participating countries.

Wallace Hall Academy has also sought to embed sustainable development across many aspects of the curriculum. For example, S2 learners are learning how to save villagers from floods as part of an interdisciplinary project to develop creativity, literacy and numeracy skills and to enhance learners' problem solving abilities. These activities end with a mock United Nations General Assembly meeting where young people debate about environmental issues and issues relating to international conflict. Also, in Higher Biology, learners develop their understanding of the practice of local fisheries and how the sustainable harvesting of fish is important to the rural economy and health of local communities.

The school has active Eco-Schools and Fairtrade groups and a Pupil Council. Learners also help to run a community orchard which was established to reduce food miles, encourage healthy eating and to provide opportunities for the community to become more involved with the school. And in 2014, senior learners participated in a Commonwealth Youth Summit linked to the Glasgow 2014 Games.



Learners on their Comenius visit to Iceland

## What difference does it make?

*Conversations took place with the headteacher, representatives from the Queensberry Initiative, teaching staff, two parents and group of learners. Those participating in conversations were all of the opinion that the school's approach to learning for sustainability had resulted in a number of positive outcomes including:*

### *Enhancing learning*

- 'We had a biology day at the castle estate where we carried out sampling techniques – it made it more real.' *Learner*
- 'Having gone on the ghost tour at the castle the pupils were able to produce a much higher quality of writing.' *Teacher*
- 'Using the castle and the grounds of the castle to encourage ideas for their stories makes them much more sensory and creative.' *Teacher*
- 'The way children are learning helps them learn better. It makes them more aware of their responsibilities to their environment.' *Parent*
- 'We had a maths day on the Drumlanrig Estate. We were carrying out measurements, looking at speed equals distance over time. It helped understanding as we were doing it for real.' *Learner*
- 'Being involved with the Comenius project has been great. It's helped me learn more about the environment and has made me want to travel more.' *Learner*
- 'The Comenius project was inspiring. It really highlighted positive cultural differences.' *Learner*

### *Enhancing skills*

- 'The pupil voice is heard more, I feel an impact can be made.' *Learner*
- 'As result of the Comenius visits and involvement in the project, learners are more confident, more responsible and work better together.' *Headteacher*
- 'Being part of the mock UN debate really encourages team working skills as we had to research arguments for and against proposals.' *Learner*
- 'The mock UN debate was really interactive and good fun. It built my confidence in speaking.' *Learner*
- 'My negotiating skills developed and I learned more about other countries.' *Learner*
- 'Young people are enjoying their learning more and are becoming more responsible for their learning. They are also learning more independently, are more confident are more respectful. Staff involved in these areas found that learning and teaching was more enjoyable as well.' *Headteacher*

Learners represent Croatia at the mock UN debate

