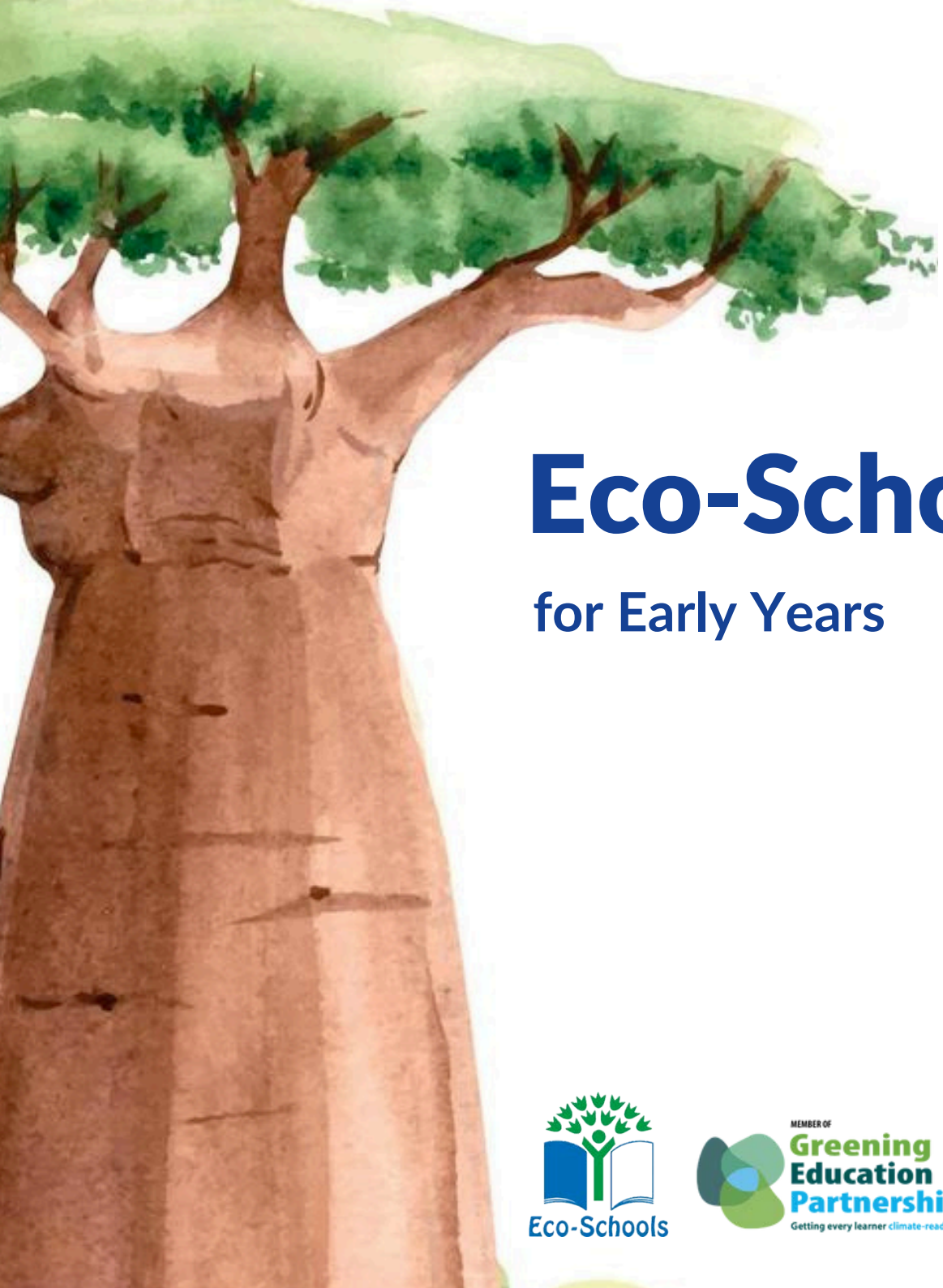


Eco-Schools Handbook

for Early Years

Eco-Schools

MEMBER OF Greening Education Partnership
Getting every learner climate-ready

FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
FEE

This publication was developed by the **Foundation for Environmental Education for Eco-Schools programme**.

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Foreword

By bringing the real world into the curriculum, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in early years helps children to make connections and find personal meaning and relevance in learning. Early childhood is an optimal time to teach knowledge and values that set the optimal foundation for lifelong sustainable attitudes and behaviours (UNESCO, 2022).

Operating in over 100 countries, and celebrating its 30th year in 2024, Eco-Schools has a long history of supporting best practices in Early Childhood Education (ECE): child-centred learning, learning through inquiry, project-based learning, learning through play, early critical thinking skills, and positive education. Eco-Schools employ a holistic 'whole school' approach which establishes deep connections between learners and the place where they live, as well as the community members and the other species they share it with.

This handbook will help you to establish the Eco-Schools programme in your early childhood education setting and contribute to achieving the target of the Greening Education Partnership. Our simple seven-step framework will guide you to explore five Eco-Schools Early Years themes of waste, water, biodiversity, energy, and health through action-based learning. This approach bridges the gap between school, community, and environment, empowering young learners to become environmentally aware and active participants in creating a more sustainable world from the very start of their educational journey.



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Getting every learner climate-ready

Eco-Schools

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR GREENING EDUCATION

The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) is a lead partner in the Greening Education Partnership (GEP). Initiated by the United Nations (UN), GEP seeks to transform education systems to foster sustainability and environmental awareness. It focuses on integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into curricula, encouraging schools to adopt sustainable practices, and promoting global citizenship among learners.

Coordinated by UNESCO, the partnership aims to empower educators, enhance learning environments, and ensure that education effectively contributes to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly regarding climate action and sustainable living. FEE is co-coordinator of pillar one of the partnership which aims to green 50% of the worlds schools by 2030.

MEMBER OF Greening Education Partnership
Getting every learner climate-ready

PPG is proud to support the development of this Eco-Schools handbook for Early Years, which draws on the collective experience from across the Eco-Schools global network. As educators, you play a vital role in shaping the minds and values of the next generation. Your dedication to nurturing curiosity and responsibility in young learners has a profound impact, we hope this resource not only supports your important work but also inspires you to bring environmental education to life in your classrooms.

Together with the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), PPG is committed to supporting the greening of education from early years to adulthood. We encourage you to utilise these materials fully and continue inspiring your learners to become the environmental champions of tomorrow.

FEE extends our sincere gratitude to PPG for their generous support which made the production of this handbook possible.

Contents

ECO SCHOOLS FOR EARLY YEARS 7

- Why do Eco-Schools for Early Years 7
- Get ready for Eco-Schools 8
- Your Eco-Schools Journey to the Green Flag 9

LEARNING WITH THE ECO-SCHOOL SEVEN STEPS 10

- Principles of Eco-Schools for early years 11
- A Whole Institution Approach 12
- Building lifelong sustainability competencies through Eco-Schools 13

7 STEPS OF ECO SCHOOLS 14

- Step 1- Form an Eco-Committee 15
- Step 2- Carry out an Environmental Review 17
- Step 3- Link to the Curriculum 19
- Step 4- Create an Action Plan 22
- Step 5- Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation 25
- Step 6- Inform & Involve 26
- Step 7- Produce an Eco-Code 28



ECO-SCHOOLS THEMES 31

- Water 33
- Waste 34
- Energy 36
- Biodiversity 37
- Health 39
- Climate Change 40

APPLY FOR YOUR ECO-SCHOOLS GREEN FLAG 41

CONTACT DETAILS 42



Eco-Schools not only engages learners and staff in addressing environmental issues but also inspires families and local communities to collaborate for the benefit of their local environment.

Why do Eco-Schools for Early Years ?

BRINGING THE REAL WORLD INTO LEARNING

Eco-Schools for early years inspires exploration, fuels curiosity, and nurtures children's natural desire to ask questions about the world around them. Using the Eco-Schools seven steps and themes, children will connect what they learn with the real world. This approach is a crucial basis for building the emotions, attitudes, values, behaviours and skills which will help them build positive relationships with their environment and each other.

CREATING CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE

To foster a love for the environment, it's essential for children to observe, experience, and enjoy nature. This direct interaction is the first step toward developing a lifelong commitment to sustainability. Children who have meaningful interactions with nature are more likely to value and protect the environment as adults. Role models in their lives, like parents and teachers, who appreciate nature can significantly influence this connection.

ECO-SCHOOLS FOR EARLY YEARS IS ALL ABOUT:

- Making Observations
- Having Fun
- Exploring
- Learning in the Process

Get ready for Eco-Schools...
Connecting with nature and the environment

""What's important is that children have an opportunity to bond with the natural world, to learn to love it and feel comfortable in it, before being asked to heal its wounds"

– DAVID SOBEL-

Prior to starting the Eco-Schools programme, provide children with an opportunity to get up close with nature and develop a love and affinity for it. This could be done as free play in nature or could be guided: encouraging the children to explore their five senses using the outdoors. What textures, scents, sounds, sights and tastes do plants and other life forms bring to a garden or outdoor space?

This pre-phase will connect children with nature. It could last for a couple of hours or over the course of 1-2 months.



Have free play time with sand, water and other materials like leaves, flowers, seeds, etc found in nature.

Explore the nursery/ outdoors through a nature walk. Children could be prompted to listen to the sounds in nature, or observe different shapes in nature and associate these shapes with things they use.

Guide children to touch and feel things for their texture and associate with colours.

Consider installing a bird feeder and provide time to observe the birds that visit.

Your Eco-Schools journey to the Green Flag!



Welcome to your Eco-Schools journey! You are joining almost 50,000 nurseries, schools, and colleges around the world who are working towards the prestigious Eco-Schools Green Flag Award.

The International Eco-Schools Green Flag is an acknowledged symbol for environmental excellence developed and owned by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). It usually takes up to two years for a school to get ready for the Green Flag.

1. Get your senior management on board.
2. Contact your Eco-Schools National Operator to register with the programme.
3. Engage all learners, staff, families and members of the wider community in establishing the Eco-Schools Seven Steps.
4. When all steps are up and running, you can apply to your national operator for your Green Flag!

Look online at eco-schools.global/national-offices to find the details of your Eco-Schools national operator. If you do not have a national Eco-Schools programme in your country please contact info@fee.global.

Learning with the Seven Steps

The Eco-Schools Seven Step process will enable you to integrate environmental care in the teaching, learning and everyday practices at your Early Childhood Education setting.
We call this a 'Whole School Approach'.





The Eco-Schools Seven Steps should be used alongside the existing curriculum framework or in your unique context. The aim is to create new knowledge, attitudes and values that transform into lifelong sustainable action.

Principles of Eco-Schools for Early Years

To effectively introduce environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development (ESD) in your early childhood education setting, consider these learning principles:

PLAY-BASED

- **Playful Pedagogy:** Play should be central to learning.
- **Free Play:** Children lead their play based on their interests.
- **Guided Play:** Adults provide direction while allowing children to explore.

CREATIVE

- **Incorporate creative activities** to help children express their understanding of the environment.

PLACE-BASED

- **Engage directly** to establish a connection to the places, family, communities, cultures and eco-systems in which children are learning.

AGE APPROPRIATE

- **Tailor** the Eco-Schools process to match the developmental stages of the children.



Governance:
Create a sustainability vision and make sure that sustainability is reflected throughout the heart of your practices and policies. Everyone takes pride in being part of an Eco-School.

Facilities and Operations:
Ensure that your buildings and grounds are eco-friendly and operating safely and sustainably. Nurture environmental habits and routines everyday.



A Whole School Approach (WSA)

Teaching and Learning:
Learners will engage in hands-on projects to learn about their environment and its sustainability. Nature connection and outdoor learning are prioritised.

Community Engagement:
Engage families and community members in your learning and become involved in local projects to help young learners feel part of creating positive change.

Building lifelong sustainability competencies through Eco-Schools

Exploration - Communication - Agency - Empathy - Belonging

I can make decisions about my own actions.

I can solve simple problems using creativity and imagination.

I can share my own ideas and listen to others.

I care about my friends, family and teachers.

I can talk about my own feelings and understand the feelings of others.

I can work in a group and cooperate with my peers.

I can ask questions.

I can talk about the things we do every day and think about how to do things better.

I demonstrate good environmental behaviours at school and at home.

I know how to be gentle and love other forms of life.



THE SEVEN STEPS OF ECO-SCHOOLS

Eco-Schools Committee

A broad range of members from the ECE centre are represented on the Eco-Committee.



Environmental Review

Children complete the environmental review with adult support.



Activate the Curriculum

Key themes are chosen and are incorporated in the learning activities of all classes.



Action Plan

Learners, staff and families work together to set up projects and plans designed to address key themes identified.



Measuring impact

The Eco-Schools projects are constantly peer monitored to ensure continuous learning and improvement



Informing and Involving

Extra efforts are made to involve all learners, families and wider community in the Eco-Schools projects. Learners get involved in local events and campaigns.



Eco Code of Values

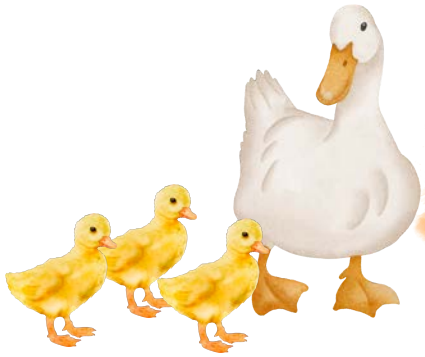
Sustainability and environmental care is synthesized and adopted as a core value and culture of the centre.



Transferable skills

Empathy

Reflection



Cooperation

Taking turns

Communication

Negotiation

To help engage learners you can consider renaming your Eco-Committee or including an Eco-Schools mascot (eg. a soft toy or puppet). Each time the committee meets the mascot is there too!



Step 1
Form an Eco-Committee

In every early childhood education setting, a range of people -both children and adults - help it to function effectively. The Eco-Schools programme values everyone's perspectives, so the first step is to establish an Eco-Schools Committee. This committee will lead the programme, overseeing each phase and keeping learners at the heart of all activities.

Involving young learners at every stage is a key part of Eco-Schools, though we recognise this can be challenging in early years settings. There are many ways to include young children: your Eco-Committee could be the whole class, a group self-nominated by the children, or representatives nominated by parents or staff. Parents should also be invited to join the committee to encourage a whole-school approach.

Green Flag performance indicators

- The Eco-Committee is active and everyone knows who they are.
- At least half of the committee are learners.
- Adults in the committee should stay for at least a year.
- Keep records of meetings.
- Learners play a central role in the Eco-Committee.

What is an Eco-Committee ?

Think about your ECE setting as a community. Who do we have in our ECE community and what do they do? (children, teachers, assistants, managers, janitors, parents, grandparents).

Who is responsible for keeping our nursery clean and safe, and looking after our environment? We all are!

So, we need to have an Eco-Schools committee that represents us all.



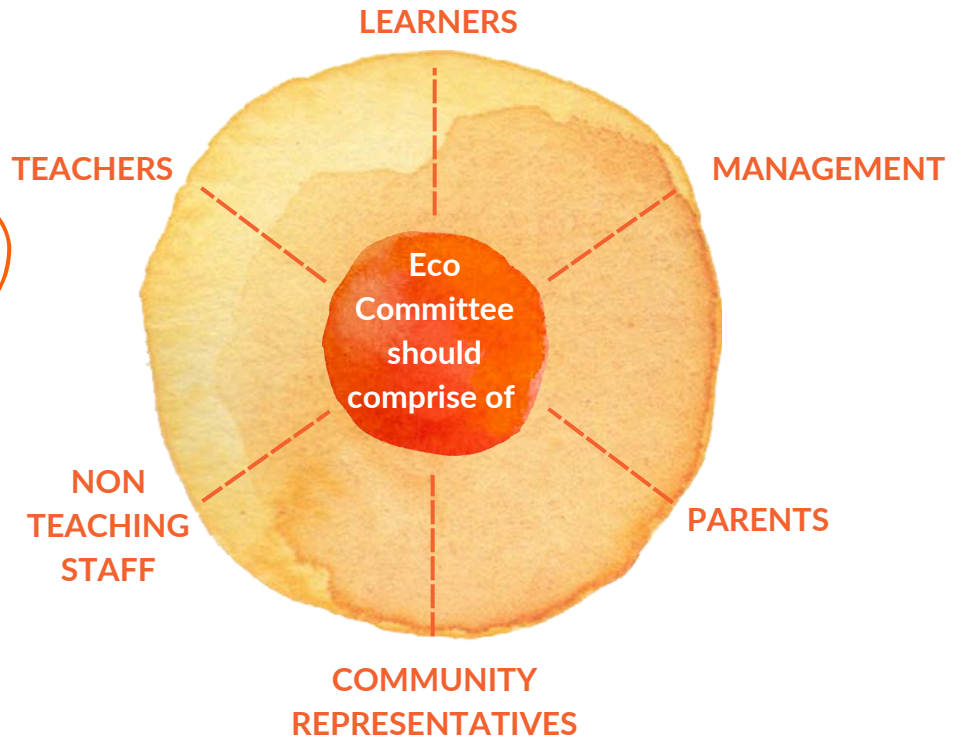
How to run your Eco-Committee?

- Choose meeting timings based on your schedule. Initial meetings can be more frequent for a strong start.
- Create a secure space for children to express themselves openly.
- Set ground rules for effective collaboration.

Who should be included?

At least half of the Eco-Committee should be children, with the rest made up of teachers, staff, and parents. Choose a selection process that works for your setting and try to involve children as much as possible.

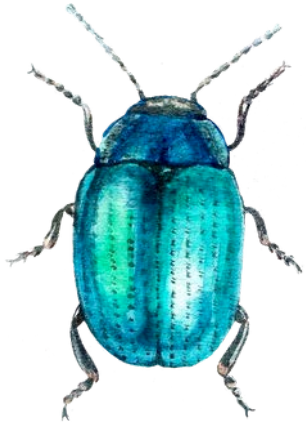
- Children aged 5+ can self-nominate or nominate a friend
- For children under 5, teachers can select members or use simple voting, like thumbs-up
- Re-elect committee members as needed in early childhood settings, involving families is key- invite parents, grandparents, and carers to join as speakers, event organisers, or partners in eco-friendly activities.



Transferable skills

Curiosity

Independent Learning



Number Sense

Reflection

Creativity

Scientific Investigation

Use simple expressions like smiley/sad face or thumbs up/down for feedback

Step 2
Carry out a Environmental Review

The Environmental Review checklist for Early Years settings includes all aspects of the school's impact on the environment and society in relation to the five Eco-Schools Early Years Themes.

As with all of the Eco-Schools Seven Steps, the Environmental Review must be done with the learners. It forms the first part of the project-based learning cycle.

The aim of the Environmental Review is to identify the status of sustainability in the Early Years setting and identify priorities for action. Important questions are asked, and the topic of focus is agreed together with the children. The review findings will shape the action plan and curricular linkages in the next steps.

Green Flag performance indicators

- **Record your energy and water usage, and identify any health issues.**
- **Repeat the review at least every year.**
- **Involve your learners and different staff members in the review.**
- **Record measurements in understandable ways.**
- **Include environmental behaviours, attitudes and knowledge.**

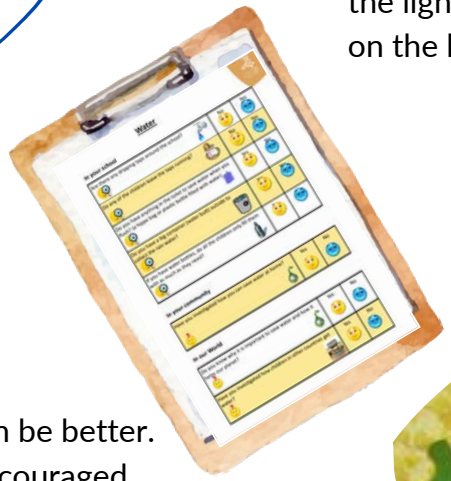
Carrying out your review

Group children to conduct the environmental review in various ways

During the review, encourage children to observe and report everything, even items not on the checklist. After the review, gather in a circle for a follow-up discussion on their observations, noticing what's important to them.

Eco-Schools in Action
Smiley faces and Sad Faces in Wales

In Wales a 'simple' environmental review form is given to Early Years settings. These 3-year-olds used happy and sad faces to monitor whether the lights or appliances were left on. More photos on the happy face board = success!



Who should be included?

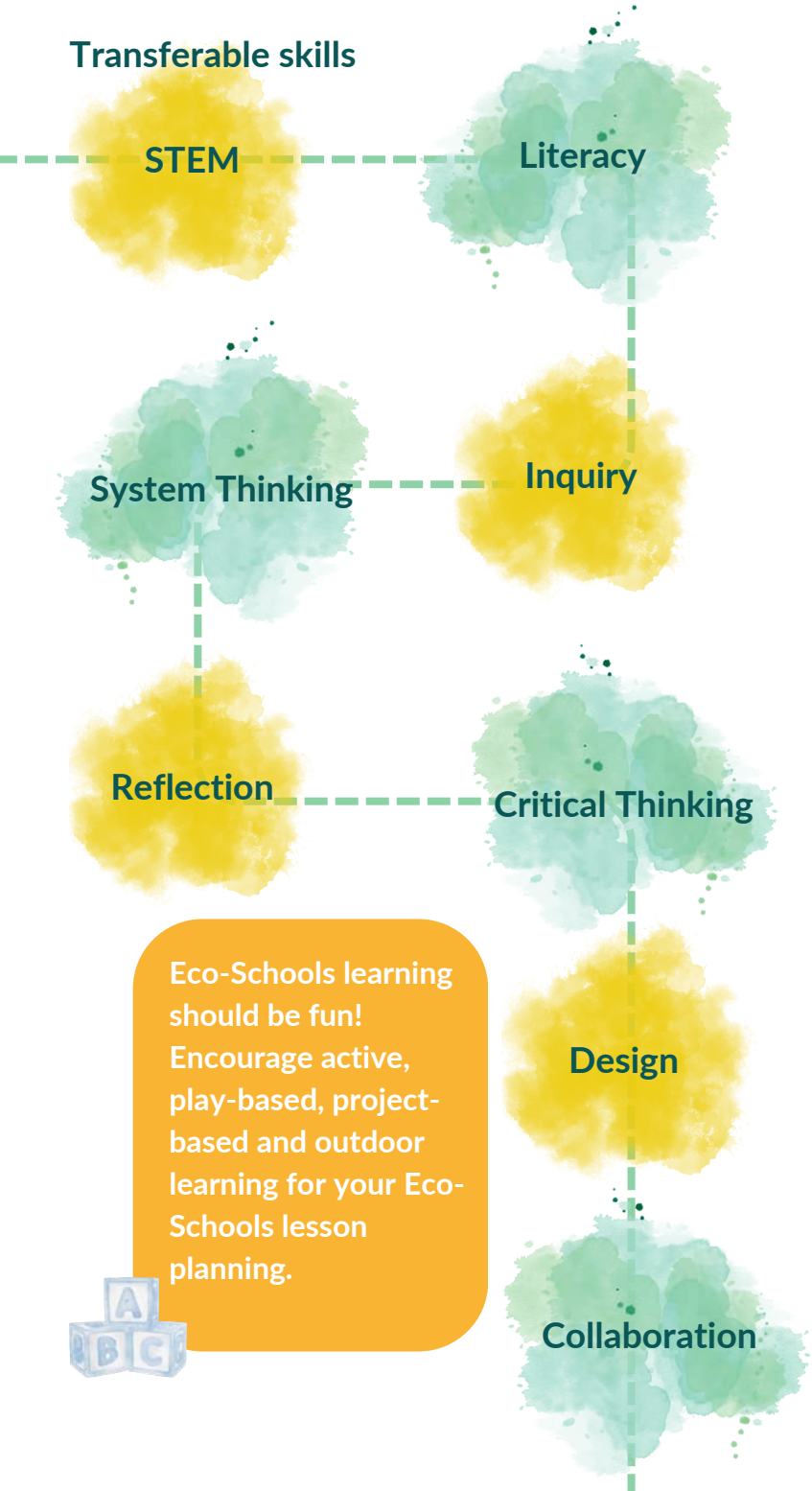
The Environmental Review is led by children, emphasising creativity over organisation!

The primary goal is for the process to be understandable and relevant to the learners. Encourage observations and think about how things can be better. Expressing learning through drawing, building, writing, and talking is encouraged. Document your progress using notes, photographs, art projects, video, audio recordings, or an Eco-Schools storybook.

Share these materials with all staff, parents and carers, display them on the Eco-Board, or store them as evidence in the Eco-Schools file. These documents track progress toward the Eco-Schools Green Flag and individual growth.



Try to find ways to gain children's active involvement in this step. In England for example, nurseries split the environmental review into two. The childrens review is fun and interactive while the staff focus on the site operations and policy.



Eco-Schools learning should be fun! Encourage active, play-based, project-based and outdoor learning for your Eco-Schools lesson planning.

Step 3
Activate the Curriculum

At the end of the Environmental Review use the main issues identified to choose a theme for action. It is possible to decide on more than one theme, but a maximum of 2-3 is ideal in early years.

At this point the Eco-Schools process returns to the staff room where all teachers should be asked to think about how they can use the chosen themes to help achieve the learning objectives for their group.

This will embed the Eco-Schools programme across all nursery activities and ensure all learners and teachers are engaged and working together to explore, understand and take action.

Green Flag performance indicators

- Review the developmental plans to include the chosen themes.
- Make themes visible across learning activities.
- Identify key learning goals.
- Use the information collected during the review in learning.
- Use extra-curricular events as Eco-Schools learning opportunities.

Using Developmental Domains

Consider different areas of development (social, emotional, physical, cognitive) as you plan your learning activities. This holistic approach will help create enriching experiences that foster a love for the environment.

A curriculum audit will help teachers to find ways to adapt, expand and deepen existing schemes of work, reorientating the learning activities around your chosen themes.

Key Goals

The Seven Steps are aligned to the four pillars of learning – learning to know, to do, to be and to live together.

1 **Building Connection**

The program helps children develop a sense of care and connection to their learning environments.

2 **Grounding their learning**

This connection then extends to their local communities and surroundings.

3 **Positive Engagement**

Together with staff and families, children discover their own role in making the environment better.



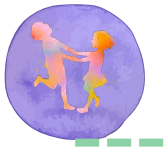
Eco-Schools in Action
Get... Set... Ready to Go!

At ***Zaježov School*** in Slovakia, Eco-Schools students are always prepared for outdoor learning adventures. Each child has a backpack filled with drinks, snacks, a mat to sit on, crayons, pencils, and glue.

To spark curiosity, they also have 'spy bags' filled with tools like ropes, magnifying glasses, identification keys, books, and scissors.

Using Project-Based Learning with Eco-Schools

The Eco-Schools cycle is also a project-based learning cycle which can be used to guide curriculum work on individual themes and projects. It complements the seven essential characteristics of project-based learning (PBL).



The Eco-Committee empowers learners to collaborate, think critically, and practice democratic values to create sustainable solutions for the school.



The Environmental Review promotes sustained inquiry in PBL, as children observe their environment, identify issues, gather data, and analyse causes to address environmental challenges.



Activating the Curriculum through PBL helps learners connect topics to real-world applications and grasp the relevance of sustainability in daily life.



Action Plans strengthen goal-setting in PBL, guiding children to set meaningful objectives, consider various factors, and collaborate—emphasising that the real learning lies in the process of engagement, problem-solving, and insight.



The Eco Code fosters self-expression of values and commitments, building identity and community while reinforcing PBL's focus on creative solutions and shared goals.



Informing and Involving focuses on creating a creative solution that improves PBL learning outcomes by engaging others and encouraging responsibility for the environment.



Measuring Impact encourages learners to evaluate outcomes and modify strategies based on feedback, fostering resilience and adaptability.



Start small and focus on one or two activities. This helps track progress, keeps motivation high, and ensures both short- and long-term success for children and staff.

Step 4
Create an Action Plan

Now it's time to create your Eco-Schools Action Plan, based on your Environmental Review. This step focuses on the planning process, which is just as important as the outcome. It's learner-centred, encouraging learners to think through each step, while developing critical thinking and decision-making skills.

The action planning should involve learners and the Eco-Schools Committee. Family or community members with specialist skills can help. This is a great chance to use project-based learning and see your learners apply sustainability skills in real-life situations. The Action Plan should also align with your setting's curriculum or early childhood education guidelines.

By finding ways to adapt everyday routines and practices, nursery staff and carers set an example which will build responsible habits in learners from an early age.

Green Flag performance indicators

- Include environmental, social, and cultural issues in your action plan.
- Share tasks between learners and adults.
- Continuously update your plan and share it widely.
- Link your plan to your learning objectives.
- Make clear targets, goals, and plan how they will be measured.

Action Plan has SMARTER Goals

Effective goals are realistic, achievable, specific, and measurable. It is also important to include learning objectives as well as Eco-Schools is foremost a educational process. When possible, add proposed dates for when the action will be completed and be prepared to adapt your plans as you experiment and learn.

Make sure your action plan is SMARTER....

Specific	Exactly what do we wish to achieve? By how much?
Measurable	Can we measure improvement in this goal? What evidence of change can we observe?
Achievable	Something realistic - start with small actions and build from there!
Relevant	What is the current situation? What difference do we hope to make?
Time-bound	How long do we expect this action to take? When will we next review it?
Educational	What learning outcomes can we realise through this work?
Responsive	How are we adapting our plan as we experiment and learn?

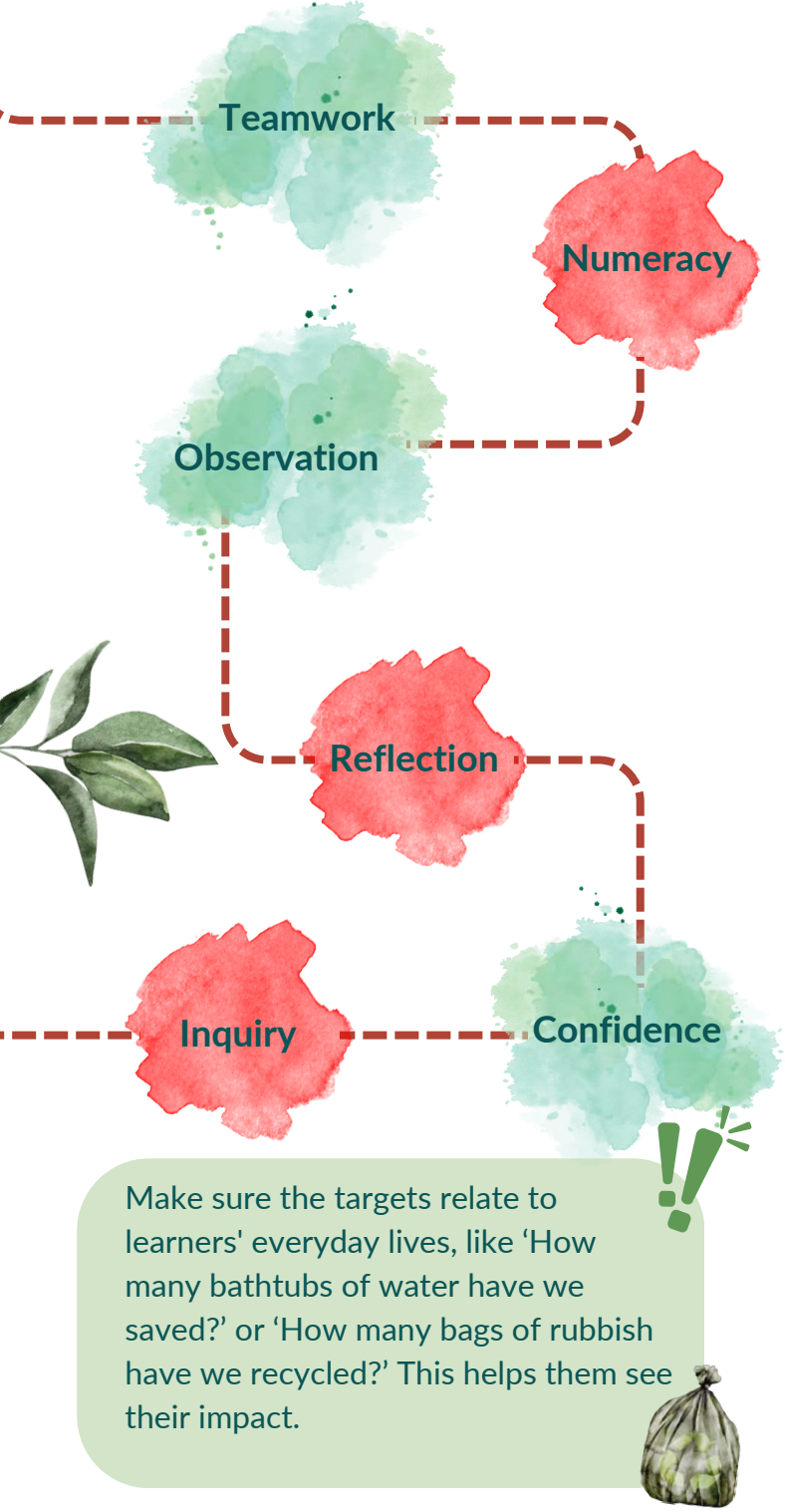




Example SMARTER action plan for early years

ECO SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN *for* .....

Specific	What we hope to achieve:
Measurable	By how much:
Achievable	
Relevant	What evidence of change we will collect:
Time-bound	By when will we do it:
Educational	What are our learning outcomes:
Responsive	What we have found and what we will do next:



Make sure the targets relate to learners' everyday lives, like 'How many bathtubs of water have we saved?' or 'How many bags of rubbish have we recycled?' This helps them see their impact.



Step 5
Measure Impact

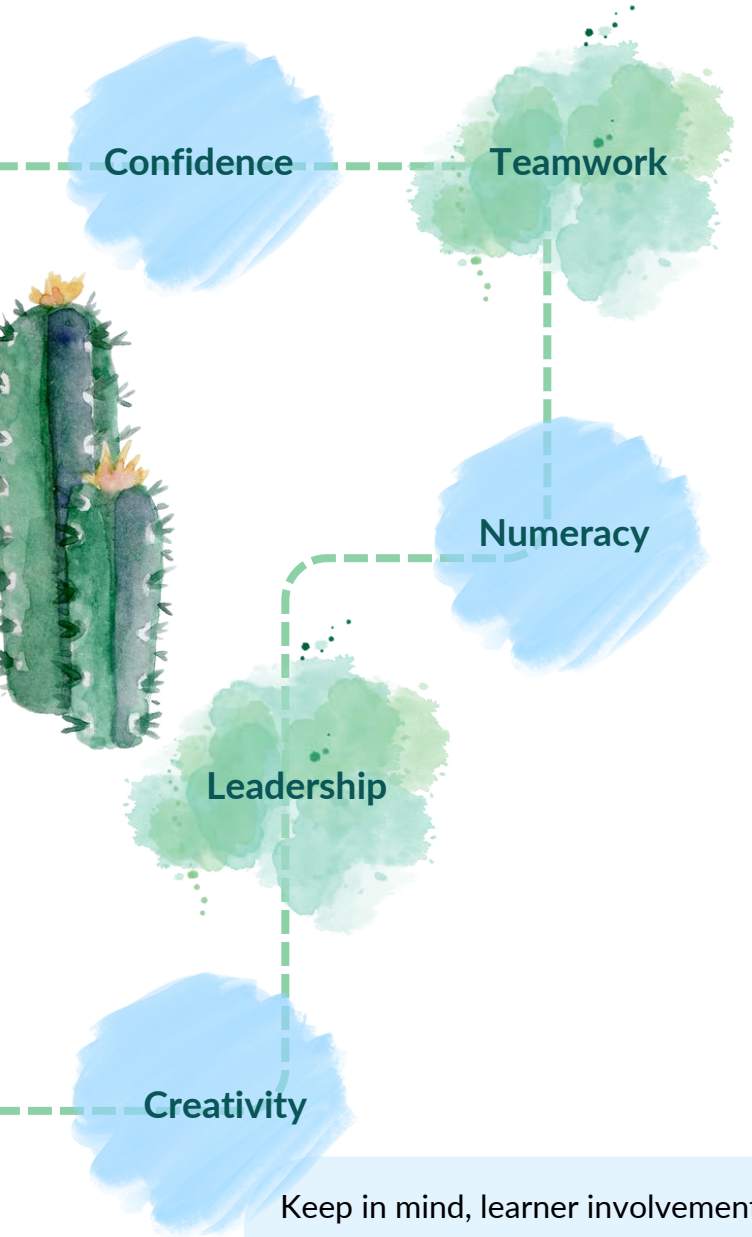
As with the other six steps, the involvement of learners is critical during step five of your Eco-Schools journey. This is where your action plan is brought to life. The implementation of your Eco-Schools action plan should be an active learning process of trial and error, where learners test their ideas, observe the results, suggest changes, and introduce new ideas along the way.

This means that not only does your Eco-Schools programme become a cycle of continuous improvement, but your whole early years community can celebrate achievements as you progress. For this reason, it's important to put measurement and monitoring in place at the start of this step.

At this stage it is important to reflect and reinforce good habits and have conversations about how can we do things better.

Green Flag performance indicators

- Find fun ways to involve learners in monitoring.
- Make sure progress is communicated and celebrated!
- Link monitoring to the sustainability review.



Step 6
Inform & Involve

This step focuses on engaging more widely to expand and share your Eco-Schools projects and learning within your early years community, and beyond.

Involving parents and the wider community helps build strong relationships that support ongoing learning and growth in your Eco-Schools projects. This will strengthen skills like communication, problem-solving, and creativity, while building learners' confidence as they share and celebrate what they've learned. Try to encourage family members to adopt and model the new projects and behaviours to reinforce the learning at home.

This step also encourages you to become involved in local events and campaigns, connecting your learning to the real world, and making a difference in your local environment.

Keep in mind, learner involvement is key in all seven Eco-Schools steps. With a learner-centred approach, they lead the way, thinking, acting, and driving the change!

Green Flag performance indicators

- **Include all learners in Eco-Schools activities.**
- **Share achievements and projects widely.**
- **Create links with community members.**
- **Display information on actions on an Eco-Board.**

Eco-Schools in Action

Spreading the Word: Children's Eco Council Forum, Latvia





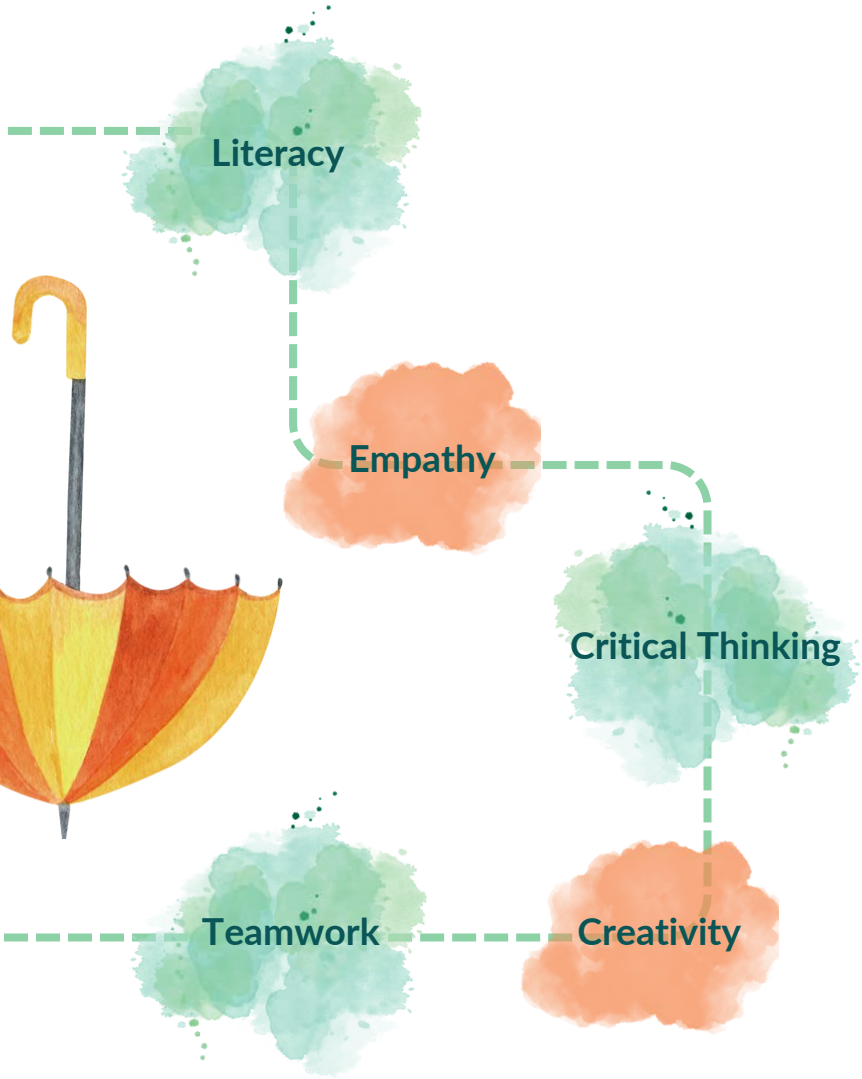
The first Eco-Schools forum for preschoolers in Latvia was organised by the ***Dartija Preschool*** in Iecava. As part of the forum, teams of students and teachers from 10 different kindergartens assembled. Each team comprised of five students accompanied by a teacher.
The activities were largely outdoor, spread across a large area into different thematic activity stations – energy, litter, forest, food and water. Vegetarian soup was served towards the end of the day, proving that meatless soup can also be delicious!

Teen volunteers from Iecava Secondary School vollunteered to help the kindergarteners in their learning sessions, fostering cross-age learning.

Use Circle Time!



'Circle Time' can provide a great opportunity for your young learners to focus on the Eco-Schools themes and share their ideas.



Learning your Eco Code or song by heart and using it daily will reinforce its meaning and lay the foundation for a lifetime of sustainable habits!



Step 7
Produce an Eco-Code

The Eco-Code will embed the Eco-Schools programme at the heart of the values, policies and procedures which are reflected across your Early Years centre. An Eco Code as a synthesis of learning describes your commitment to sustainability education and action. The code should include some detail about your chosen themes and the daily practices that you have chosen to address through them.

Your Eco Code can be:

- **A promise of eco-friendly behaviours to be adopted**
- **Part of the ECE setting's Strategic Plan**
- **Part of the ECE setting's regulations/rules**
- **A poem, rhyme, mural, dance or song that everyone can remember**

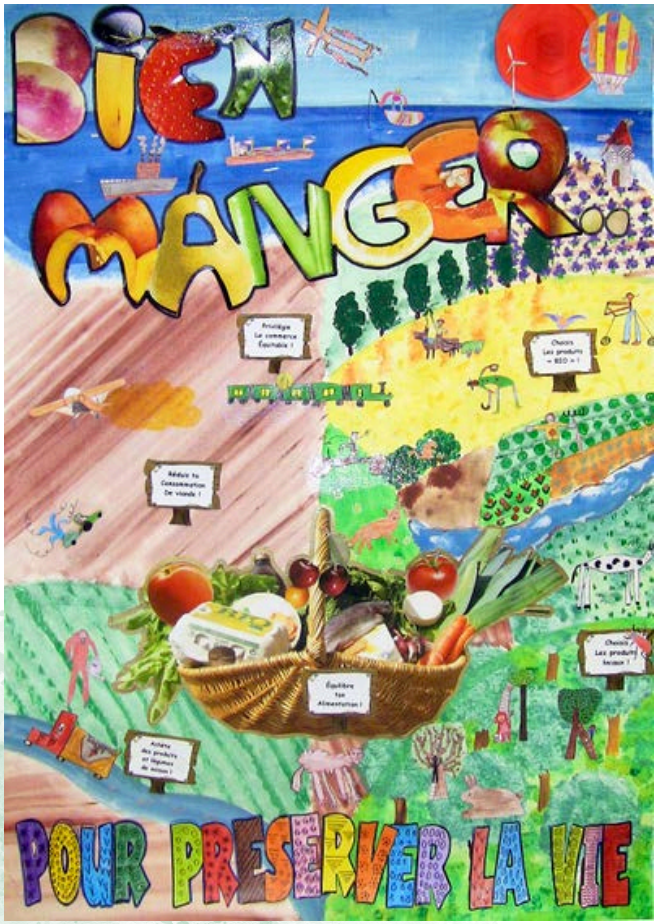
Try to involve as many learners, staff and families as possible in the creation of your Eco-Code.

Green Flag performance indicators

- **Reflect your Eco-Schools Action Plan.**
- **Be prominently displayed.**
- **Be created with input from the whole community.**
- **Be updated every year.**

Eco-Schools in Action

Creative Eco-Codes from around the world











Eco-Schools in Action

Pictures speak louder than words - Thailand

Young children, who are still learning to read and write, may need visual support to grasp complex concepts. Icons and pictures can be a powerful tool to establish good habits - when used consistently, they lead to long-term positive actions. For example, simple icons depicting actions like turning off taps, switching off lights, or sorting waste can encourage children to adopt these habits. These images and signs can even be used to create **an Eco-Code**, as seen in Bangkok's example here.





To get the bigger picture, children need to actively engage in the learning process. For example, they could bury waste and check its status after a few weeks, or take part in creative art sessions using recycled materials, helping them view waste in a new light.

Eco-Schools Themes

Focusing on the six Eco-Schools themes for Early Childhood Education, you will bring about change through actively involving your learners in place-based and project-based learning processes.



Water



Waste



Energy



Biodiversity & Nature



Health



Climate & Weather

Don't worry if you are not an expert in the theme to begin with. Here are some ways that you can get started:

- Organise a storytelling session with community elders where they can share traditional stories related to the theme.
- Invite guest speakers with relevant skills or knowledge to share their knowledge, experiences and insights.
- Plan a field trip for inspiring hands-on or real-world experiences.
- Join a relevant community-based project or campaign.



Climate Change is a cross-cutting theme in Eco-Schools. At Early Years level it should be used to help young learners become more aware of their local communities and environments. All Early Years establishments should be aware of the need to plan for and manage extreme weather and climate risks.

Eco-Schools in Action

Focusing on Waste though the Seven Steps - Switzerland

Morges crèche, Switzerland, created powerful change through their chosen theme of Waste. Using the Eco-Schools Seven Steps to structure their activities creates an active and hands-on learning approach while engaging parents through fun activities.

Create an Eco-code

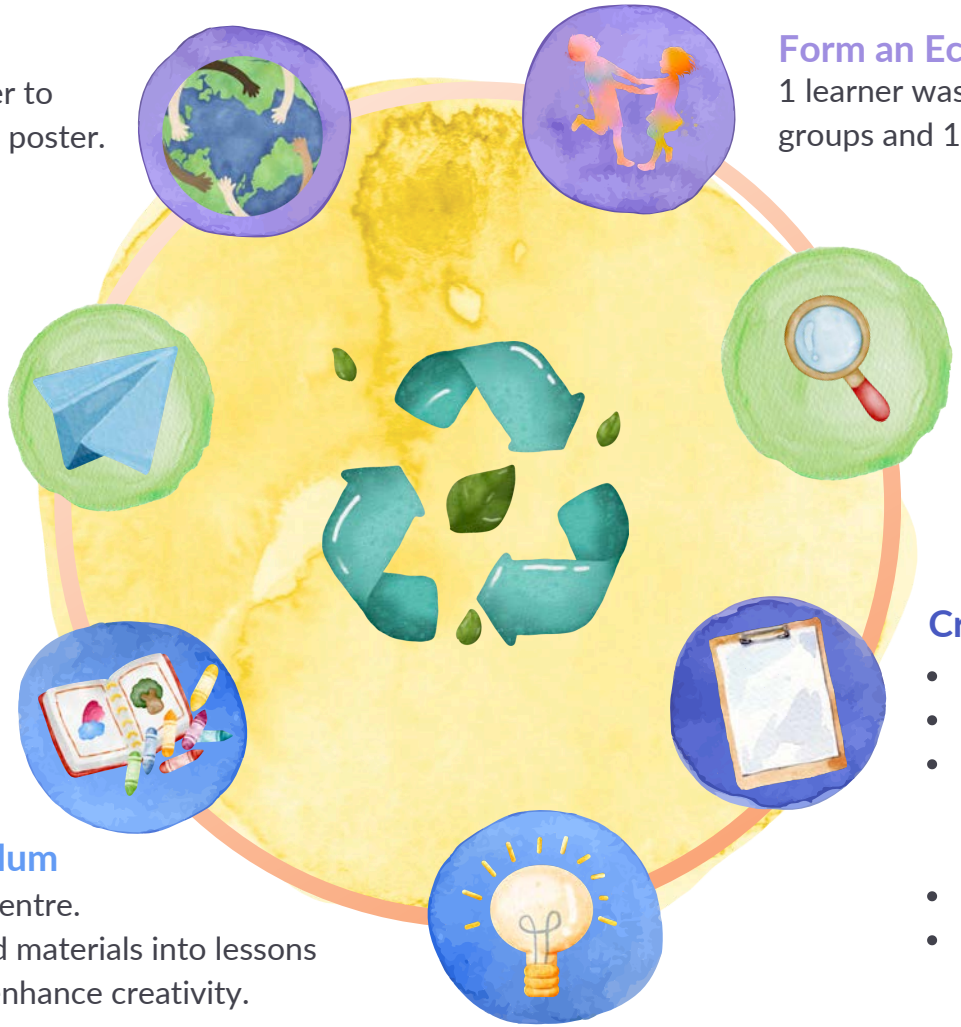
Everyone worked together to create a large information poster.

Form an Eco Committee

1 learner was chosen from each of the three age groups and 1 person from the management team.

Inform and Involve

- Information for teams during conferences.
- Information for parents at meetings and via an online platform.



Environmental Review

Let's weigh our waste: How much are we producing, and where can we reduce it?

Measure Impact

- Reduction of food waste.
- Reduction of food packaging waste (plastic, aluminium).

Create an Action Plan

- Plastic trays reused for paint
- Introduction of pictograms to sort waste
- Raising awareness among staff and families during an Eco-Schools workshop and games on waste sorting.
- Waste sorting by children
- Purchase of wooden and second-hand games.

Link to the curriculum

- Visit to the waste centre.
- Integrating recycled materials into lessons or art activities to enhance creativity.

Water

Water is essential for all living things! It's important to use it carefully to protect our rivers, lakes, and oceans. By learning how to save water and keep it clean, children can help create a healthier, happier environment for everyone. Small steps like turning off taps and keeping water areas clean make a big difference for our planet.

Time to Explore!

- What different things do we use water for at school and at home?
- Can we find out where the water in our school comes from and where it goes after we use it?
- Why is it important not to waste water? What different things could we do to save water?





Eco-Schools in Action

Water Buddy - India

At ***ASN Senior Secondary School*** in India, a special mascot called H_20 Water Buddy is used to create awareness and a connect with water through songs and stories. Through Sensory Exploration children feel, observe, and interact with water, noticing its characteristics. Water Buddy explains that water is not limitless and highlights small actions to conserve it. Through their Eco-Schools Water projects the children remember to turn off taps and reuse waste water for plants. They have immersive art sessions with water and have created a "Water Wonder Wall," where all their artwork is shared with all.

Waste

Waste is a big problem that harms the environment and affects animals and plants. Together, we can make less waste and learn the right way to dispose of it. In this theme, we'll explore how to reduce, reuse, and recycle to help protect our planet and create a cleaner, healthier world for everyone! Let's learn how we can be part of the solution!



Eco-Schools in Action

Reuse Market, Norway

In Norwegian society, Eco-Schools nurseries, and parents organise reuse markets for outgrown clothing, toys and equipment. This helps parents save money and makes sure that children's clothes and other items can be used for longer. These markets also help children learn and understand more about the circular economy and how responsible reuse and reduced consumption benefits the climate and environment.

Time to Explore!

- What types of waste do we create at our setting and at home, and where do they come from?
- What happens to our waste after we throw it away, and where does it go?
- How can we reuse, recycle, or reduce the waste we create to help the environment?





Eco-Schools in Action

‘There’s no such thing as waste in nature’ - Sri Lanka

At the ***Overseas School of Colombo***, Sri Lanka, Kindergarteners are learning that ‘waste’ is just another resource in nature’s cycle. Through hands-on activities, they collect kitchen scraps for compost, which they turn and use to enrich their garden beds.

By turning waste into valuable resources, these young learners are discovering the power of sustainability and the importance of caring for the environment.

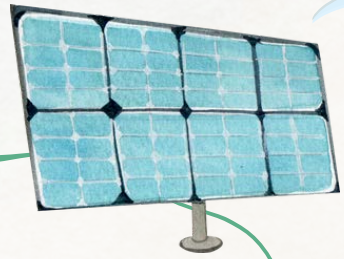
The students also contribute to the school’s bio-gas plant, feeding it cafeteria waste to generate energy for making popcorn. They use the liquid fertiliser from the bio-gas to nourish their plants, and when the crops are ready, they harvest and share the produce with their families or the community.





Energy

Energy powers our world, from lighting our homes to making our toys and gadgets work. It's important to use energy wisely to keep our planet healthy and ensure there's enough for everyone. In this theme, we'll explore different types of energy, how we use it every day, and how we can save it to help take care of the Earth!



Time to Explore!

- What types of energy do we use in our setting, and how do they help us with our daily activities?
- How can we learn about where our energy comes from and why it's important to take care of the environment?
- What are some simple ways we can save energy n our setting, and how can we help our friends do the same?

Eco-Schools in Action

Energy Conservation at *Mary K's Childcare*, Ennis, Ireland

At ***Mary K's Childcare*** in Ennis, children are learning the power of sustainability through daily, hands-on experiences. Inspired by Earth Hour, they practice turning off lights, devices, and chargers each afternoon, sparking thoughtful discussions on energy conservation. With energy-efficient LED lighting, solar panels harnessing the sun's power, and an EV charger for staff, Mary K's is creating a model of sustainable living for the community. Through these actions, Mary K's is not just teaching children eco-friendly habits - they're inspiring families and the wider community.

Biodiversity and Nature

Biodiversity is all the plants, animals, and creatures that make up our world. It's nature's team, and everything works best when it's in balance. When we look after nature, we're also looking after ourselves and the animals. Biodiversity helps keep our planet healthy by providing homes, supporting life, and balancing the climate. This theme invites us to explore how plants and animals depend on each other and how we can protect them .

Time to Explore!

- What types of plants and animals can we find around our setting when playing outdoors?
- Where can you spot insects and pollinators?
- What can we do to protect the special plants and animals in our local area?

Eco-Schools in Action

Bumblebee Detectives - Norway

In partnership with ***La Humla Suse*** and the ***Norwegian Environment Agency***, the 'Bumblebee Project' engages pre-school children in counting and learning about wild bumblebees, raising awareness of their declining populations. Teachers introduce bumblebee traits and habitats through interactive lessons and hands-on counting activities during 'World Environment Day'. Resources like teacher guides, webinars, and creative performances (e.g. bumblebee theatre) fosters a love for nature and biodiversity. By involving families and communities, teachers help instil a sense of stewardship for our planet's vital pollinators.





Eco-Schools in Action

Life in the Stream - Slovakia

In a hands-on lesson about the wonders of water, students at ***Zaježova School*** explore a stream to discover small invertebrates, using care and respect to observe and identify them. Armed with magnifying glasses and an identification guide, they study their findings, draw them, and release them back into the water. Throughout the year, the teacher helps them connect these creatures to food chains and the delicate balance of nature, inspiring the children to understand the importance of every living thing. Their observations culminate in creative posters, highlighting the beauty and fragility of the world around them.

Eco-Schools in Action

Arbor Day - South Africa

During Arbor Week, ECD learners and teachers planted climate-resilient trees, including the Tree of the Year, Buddleja Saligna (False Olive). This activity emphasised the importance of trees in combating climate change and preserving biodiversity. Teachers and students were actively involved, learning proper planting techniques and tree care to ensure survival and impact.

The children also created eco-friendly planters by painting recycled plastic bottles and planting vegetable seedlings. This activity not only taught the importance of recycling but also introduced the children to the basics of sustainable gardening. These small gardens became a platform for ongoing learning about biodiversity and the role of plants in maintaining ecological balance.



Health and Wellbeing

Taking care of our health is key to living a happy life! It's not just about eating well and exercising; it's also about looking after our minds and connecting with nature. In this theme, we explore how staying healthy is linked to the world around us. By learning how to protect the environment, we can also protect our own health. Together, we'll discover ways to stay strong, feel good, and help each other while caring for our planet!



Time to Explore!

- How does a healthy environment help us stay strong and happy?
- What are some things we can do to keep ourselves healthy?
- How can we help keep nature healthy?
- How can we work together to make our community a better place for everyone?



Eco-Schools in Action

Growing Healthy Habits - Estonia

In Estonia, 1,700 children from 42 kindergartens are discovering the joy of growing their own food through an inspiring Eco-Schools project. By tending to organic gardens, including permaculture and no-dig methods, they're learning healthier eating habits and the importance of climate-friendly diet choices, like eating more vegetables and reducing meat consumption. The project, supported by ***Tartu Nature House***, equips teachers with gardening kits, training, and curriculum resources, while also engaging children in creative activities like photography competitions. It extends beyond the classroom, with webinars for parents and micro-greens sent home.



Climate Change

Climate change is when the Earth gets warmer, causing more storms, floods, and rising seas. This can make it harder for animals, plants, and even us to live. But, we can help!
By using less energy, taking care of nature, and making sure our homes and settings are ready for these changes. Climate change is our cross-cutting theme that links all our five themes: water, waste, biodiversity, health, and energy!

When we all work together, we can make the world a safer place for everyone, from the water we drink to the air we breathe.

Time to explore!

- What happens to the planet when we harm our environment and biodiversity around us?
- How does the weather change over the year? When did we last experience extreme weather?
- Ask different people about extreme weather. How do they feel when it happens? Is it the same for everyone, or do some people feel it differently?



Eco-Schools in Action

Sensory Activities on Climate and Weather South Africa

Young learners at ***Ntataise Educare Centre, Thuto ke Lesedi Educare Centre, Qalabotjha Creche,*** and ***Zenzeleni Educare Centre*** explored climate and weather concepts through sensory-based games and experiments. Activities like creating rain simulations with cotton wool helped children grasp natural phenomena and their connections to climate change. The project reached 270 learners and 18 educators across the four ECD centres. Teachers gained tools and confidence to integrate environmental education into their daily teaching practices, ensuring the sustainability of the project's impact.

Qalabotjha Creche earned its Green Flag award, recognising thier great work in implementing sustainable practices accross the centre.

Are you ready for your Green Flag?



It usually takes around two years to get ready for the Green Flag. Check the 'Green Flag Performance Indicators' listed for each step of this handbook. When you are confident that all steps are well established, its time to contact your Eco-Schools National Operator and arrange your Green Flag assessment!

What to expect during your Green Flag Assessment ?

Assessments should be led by young people, assessors are likely to want a tour (virtual or person), they will speak to senior team if possible, they will need to see evidence in a folder and perhaps on your eco-board.
Your assessment will be a positive event - not a 'test' and used as an opportunity to showcase what's been done and ask GF assessor for advice and guidance for development of actions going forward.

In Eco-Schools it's the journey that counts- Good Luck!



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