

Eco-Schools Inspiration

School Grounds



Teaching
Resource



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“ AT HAZELWOOD IPS WE ARE VERY LUCKY TO HAVE A WOODLAND, ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND, LOTS OF GRASS AREAS, A SENSORY GARDEN AND VEGETABLE PLOTS. WE TAKE CARE OF OUR SCHOOL GROUNDS BY LITTER PICKING, LOOKING AFTER WILDLIFE AND PLANTS. THIS MAKES OUR SCHOOL A SAFER AND HAPPIER PLACE. WE LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORLD WHEN WE GET TO SPEND TIME OUTSIDE. ”

ECO-COUNCIL, HAZELWOOD INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOL.

Introduction

The way school grounds are developed, used and managed can have a significant impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour towards school, each other, the wider environment and society. Pupils can spend as much as 25% of their time in the school grounds. That's more than one day a week, so it's important that the experiences they have there are the best and most positive they can be. Young people read messages and meanings from the quality of their surroundings. They interpret the condition of their surroundings as a reflection of the value adults place on the environment and the children who are the main users.

Children can receive mixed messages from adults. For example, they may be taught that “the environment” is important and that they should take care of it and then see grounds that are poorly designed and badly cared for. In order to support what is said inside the classroom, practical ideas need to be applied outside. School grounds are also rich in heritage and can be a source of inspiration for learning about changes in society, why and how these have happened and their impact on the environment.

Getting started

In order to learn outside, children need their grounds to be developed and managed accordingly. Pupils learn in different ways and for some, sitting at a desk will be a difficult task. For many of these pupils, the chance to go outside will make lessons more interesting just because they are free from the constraints of sitting indoors. This requires suitable places for pupils to gather; seating for different sizes of groups; shade and shelter from the sun, wind and rain; seating that is created for the young people who are going to use it and is appropriate for how it is to be used. You may wish to contact your local council or some of the Eco-Schools partner organisations who may have some

ideas on local projects that your school could take part in that lead to improvements of the school grounds.

To provide you with some ideas on how to approach the School Grounds topic in your school, a case study that aims to provide inspiration, contacts for organisations that play a role in improving school grounds, and links to the Northern Ireland Curriculum that may prove useful for schools in planning their School Grounds Action Plan have been provided.

The School Grounds topic may be used as one of the three topics covered for the Green Flag Award.





Case Study

School: <i>Hazelwood Integrated Primary School, Newtownabbey</i>	Teacher: <i>Rachel Agnew</i>
No. of pupils: <i>Approx 470</i>	Eco-School status: <i>Green Flag</i>

Background Information

Q: Why did you choose School Grounds as an Eco-Schools topic? What was your Action Plan?

A: Hazelwood Integrated Primary School was the first Forest School in Northern Ireland and places a large emphasis on developing the curriculum through outdoor learning. The Throne Wood adjacent to our school is an excellent learning resource which enhances the learning experiences of our pupils. This outdoor classroom provides opportunities for children of all ages to engage in active learning contexts across the curriculum. The Forest School ethos is firmly embedded into everyday life in the school. As many as 200 pupils explore the woodland each week, identifying trees and flowers, learning about animal habitats, building dens and creating natural art.

Our school has its own wet room, a sensory garden, vegetable patch and willow dome. There is a gardening club. We have an annual Great Bug Hunt during which each class gets a bug to look for and study. They get containers, microscopes, nets, go exploring and make mini-beast hotels. Each class is

fortunate enough to have a trolley with mini-beast kits and make use of charts for wildflowers, seeds, fruit, leaves and birds.

Hazelwood Integrated has made good use of links with other organisations such as Blue Peter Garden, the local council, RSPB, Forest School, and Throne Woodland Trust.

Hazelwood Integrated also worked in collaboration with Stranmillis University College. The PGCE (Early Years) students recently had the opportunity to visit Hazelwood Integrated Primary School to see some of our work in Outdoor Learning and hear about Forest Schools.





Case Study

Q: How do you integrate School Grounds into the curriculum?

A: There are many curriculum opportunities in which the school grounds can be integrated. For example, P.7, in literacy, wrote letters to local businesses to ask for help with gardening equipment for our school. P.5 have looked at biodiversity in the school grounds and local area. The after school gardening club designed and made a scarecrow for our school grounds, which we then entered into IEF's Scarecrow competition.

Most classes have made bird feeders or bird lard and seed food to hang around the school. We link these lessons and many more into our topic, literacy and numeracy work, e.g. graphs and tables of birds spotted in the woodlands, observing seasonal changes or going for a senses walk in the woodlands or around the school or lessons about value for money when purchasing equipment for the school playground.

Q: How do you co-ordinate with other teachers to ensure a whole school approach?

A: The Eco-Committee is representative of the school community with a teacher, support staff, pupils and parents represented. Dissemination of information from the committee takes place via assemblies, class reps and the school buddy scheme. The coordinator will often lead Key Stage and Whole School staff meetings to update information and suggest ideas for our Eco-Schools project. The school website and emails are also useful tools in linking with others.

Q: How did you encourage pupil participation? How did they have ownership of the project?

A: Eco-Schools is a whole school approach. Pupil participation is encouraged through the Eco-board, star charts and wall of shame and Eco Eve mascot. The Eco Swat Team will regularly go around to assess whether classes are being eco-friendly, e.g. lights are switched off over lunch. They wear special vests so that everyone knows when the Green Swat Team are carrying out an audit.

The Eco-Committee carries out a yearly environmental audit using our own templates and were also involved in completing the Green Flag renewal application form. The Eco-Committee meet once a month to discuss the projects we are working on and further action. The pupils from P4-P7 are buddies to the younger

classes and so will disseminate the key points from the meetings to both their own class and a Key Stage 1 class. Any decisions to be taken, e.g. equipment to buy, will be discussed with the Eco-Committee, who then carry out votes with the same classes to decide on what the whole school wants.

Additionally, throughout the school, pupils will participate in Eco-Schools lessons, taught through their topics in class.

The whole school was also involved in developing our Eco-Code below.

ECO-CODE

Environmentally friendly

Caring for our world

Operation "clean-up"

High five for making a difference!

Everyone plays a part

Reduce, re-use and recycle

Ozone layer needs protecting

Energy- save it!

Switch it off!





Case Study

During Implementation of Eco-Schools Inspiration case study

Q: How will pupils/whole school benefit from the Eco-Schools Inspiration project?

A: Developing our school grounds helps to create a sense of ownership and pride within the school and local community. The children have a say in decisions regarding the purchase of equipment, the design of the sensory garden etc. We hope that this will encourage the children and parents to become involved in protecting and maintaining these areas.

Building up links with Eco-Schools groups or local business helps to promote a positive image of our school, its pupils and staff. By entering and winning competitions or completing campaigns we are establishing ourselves as a school involved in good practice of Environmental Education and Outdoor Learning.



Our pupils thrive on opportunities to learn outdoors. They love playing and learning up in the woodlands, whether it is building huts with woodland materials, litter picking or bird watching the children gain understanding and respect for the world around them. They also benefit hugely from the fresh air and physical activity involved in outdoor learning such as pond dipping, planting vegetables or using the playground equipment.



Q: What is your overall aim and what actions are you going to take?

A: This year we aim to complete our Wrigley Litter Less Campaign and make our school gardening and sensory area even more child friendly and sustainable. We wish to purchase resources that will further allow our children to become involved in outdoor learning. We are also having a Morning of Action in which we will take part in a BIG Spring Clean.

Our Eco-Schools Inspiration Clean-up.





Case Study

Q: How are you going to spend the £500 funding?

A: We are planning to buy a picnic bench made from recycled materials for our playground, which will allow the children to work and play outside more often. We also hope to buy a musical play panel for our sensory garden area.



Q: Are you going to receive any support or resources from parents, staff or outside agencies?

A: Yes, we are going to be involved with the BIG Spring Clean campaign, the Wrigley Litter Less Campaign, the RSPB and The Great UK Bug Hunt. We also ask for parent volunteers to help to maintain and develop our gardening area and willow dome each spring.





Case Study

Reporting on impact of action(s)

Q: Did you encounter any problems and, if so, how did you overcome them?

A: We didn't encounter any real problems. The only thing is the time needed to gather resources, lesson ideas etc. for other teachers. However, Eco-Schools and/or other linked agencies can provide workshops, websites and resources that are helpful.

Q: Is there any advice you could offer to schools undertaking the School Grounds topic? Do you have any useful suggestions for other teachers embarking on the topic?

- Get your PTA, local businesses and Eco-Committee involved. They can offer ideas on action that can be taken and fund raising opportunities.
- Assign each year group in the school a manageable activity, which can be built on each year. For example, Primary 5 could carry out an investigation into the preferences of mini-beasts in a suitable area of the school grounds. Primary 1 could make bird feeders to hang around the school. Primary 7 could design a vegetable or gardening area somewhere in the school. Primary 6 could write letters to local businesses to ask for help with gardening equipment. We had great success with this and some local businesses were very generous.
- Often parents have untapped expertise and knowledge that they would be willing to offer, e.g. gardening advice.
- Research competitions, campaigns, available funding. For more information visit the campaigns and competitions section at www.eco-schoolsni.org



Q: Has doing this topic driven other Eco-Schools ideas? What are your future plans regarding Eco-Schools?

A: The topics are all very much linked. School Grounds connects well with Biodiversity and Litter. This year we want to work to reduce the number of cars in our school grounds at certain times of the day. Whilst Transport isn't an issue we have tackled yet, it is linked to the work that the Eco-Committee are currently carrying out to encourage parents to leave their cars at home. Also to improve our school grounds further it was beneficial and necessary to tackle litter, so the Wrigley Campaign was an obvious campaign to for us become involved in.

This year we aim to achieve our 3rd Green flag by continuing work on Litter, Energy, School Grounds, Waste and Biodiversity. We have participated in the Wrigley Litter Less Campaign and hope to improve the amount of litter in our school grounds. We hope to also encourage our children to take the message about negative effects of litter into their homes and local community.





Curriculum Links and Skills

The School Grounds topic allows you to incorporate and promote **Thinking Skills & Personal Capabilities** and **Cross-Curricular Skills** into your lessons.

World Around Us Suggested Learning Intentions

(taken from W.A.U. strands on Northern Ireland Curriculum website)

Strand 1: Interdependence

'About the jobs people do within the local community (G); that there is a wide variety of plants and animals in the locality (G) (S&T); to be aware of some of the ways people use the environment every day (G); to be aware of the changes in their local environment over time (H); some of the ways people affect the built and natural environment (G); about issues associated with the conservation, preservation and regeneration of the environment (G).'

Strand 2: Movement and Energy

'About the safe use of mains electricity and the dangers associated with electricity (S&T).'

Strand 3: Place

'To be aware of where their [school] is (G); to recognise some basic features of their [school] (e.g. window, door, roof, chimney, garden) (G); about some of the special events which are important in their lives and the life of the locality (G); some of the jobs of familiar people in school and in the locality (G); how some features of their locality may be different now than in the past (H).'

Strand 4: Change Over Time

'How the weather changes through the seasons (G); that people and places change (G) (H); about some of the changes of familiar things over time (H); some of the ways we can change our immediate environment, both positively and negatively (G)(S&T); about desirable and undesirable change at home and in the environment (S&T).'

Managing Information

Example: Produce a series of design plans for more complex models showing how they are made such as proposed changes to plots of the school ground for biodiversity spots or playground equipment.

Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Example: Make reasoned inferences from a range of primary and secondary sources. For example, research and compile pros/cons, differing points of view and arguments for a proposed school car park extension.

Using ICT

Example: Design leaflets/posters on litter issues on the school grounds, using word processing or publishing software, encouraging the use of text and image formatting.

Being Creative

Example: make ideas real by experimenting with different designs, actions, and outcomes e.g. use recyclable materials to design murals for school building external walls and fencing.

Communication

Example: Pupils take instructions in the field and in the classroom such as during a listening walk or data collection on litter outside school gates.

Using Mathematics

Example: Pupils work systematically and check their work when, for example, making observations and collecting data outside the school buildings on tree and plant species.

Working with Others

Example: Use a variety of strategies to allow children to work together to develop and use scientific and technological, geographical and historical language, for example, through shared investigations, exploratory visits, fieldwork, games, quizzes etc. on or within the school grounds.

Self-Management

Example: Pupils assist in planning for safe practice and controlling risks when working on the school grounds e.g. digging and planting in the vegetable garden, using climbing equipment.



Primary Activity Ideas

Language & Literacy

Writing

- Create presentations on a School Grounds theme/issue.
- Write an article or report e.g. on potential/proposed changes for school grounds, an event happening on the school grounds, mini-beasts found on the school grounds or about the problem of litter on the school grounds.
- Take notes during observations.
- Write an outline plan for tackling a School Grounds issue.

Talking & Listening

- Perform poetry and take part in storytelling outdoors. Listen to stories while outside about people and places e.g. traditional tales.
- Carry out interviews with staff or organisations. For example, interview the head teacher about proposed changes on the school grounds.
- Talk about their experiences and features in the outdoor environment.

Reading

- Collect a range of reading material for display which focuses on the School Grounds; access a wide range of texts – books, leaflets, catalogues, reference materials, magazines, posters, maps, charts etc.
- Enjoy reading stories, rhymes and songs in the outdoor environment.
- Experience a variety of meaningful print e.g. labels, symbols, signs, and directions.
- Carry out research on how the school grounds have changed over time.

Religious Education

- Stewardship-looking after living things.
- Care for and respect living things and handle them sensitively e.g. a wormery.

Mathematics & Numeracy

Number

- Undertake counts of items in the school grounds.
- Use practical materials to add and subtract, without exchange/with exchange such as pine cones.
- Sort and categorise resources, equipment and naturally occurring objects.
- Identify, understand and use numbers – both cardinal and ordinal, e.g. numbers on parking bays, number lines, number plates, counting games, rhymes, jingle and stories.
- Match objects e.g. match photographs with outdoor features.

Measures

- Undertake monitoring of something in the school grounds e.g. types of birds visiting the school grounds.
- Record measurements of length when for example, measuring a plot of the school ground to install bins. Calculate the perimeter of school ground plots and area of buildings.
- Compare size, length, capacity and weight e.g. playing on a see-saw.
- Experience and talk about the routine and the passing of the time of day, the week, months and seasons.

Shape & Space

- Discuss the shapes used to make the school buildings and surroundings.
- Recognise, explore and create patterns, shapes and colours e.g. with leaves, pebbles.
- Explore spatial awareness through the different types of movement e.g. balance, locomotion and manipulation.
- Use positional and directional words when working in and around the school.

Handling Data

- Applying findings through graphs, diagrams, charts etc. Interpret information and evaluate the effectiveness of the process.
- Carry out a survey in and around the school e.g. colours of cars, litter etc.
- Insert data into a prepared relevant computer database and interrogate.



Primary Activity Ideas

The World Around Us

Geography

- Record what they have seen, made, found out e.g. through drawings, photographs, paintings, models and simple maps. For example, draw a map/plan of the school grounds.
- Use drama/imaginative play to communicate understanding of events e.g. jobs done by people in the school community.
- Talk about environmental issues (e.g. litter and recycling), and how to improve these in the school environment.
- Recognise and experience that some things change over time e.g. trees during autumn and clothes people wear.

History

- Carry out research/collect evidence on what the school grounds were like when they first opened and how they have changed over time.
- Create a log of how the grounds have developed over time.

Science & Technology

- Explore through first-hand experience e.g. properties of materials and sounds in the environment, mini-beast study.
- Become aware of everyday technology and develop the skills to use tools for woodwork, construction and gardening, including cutting, sticking, folding, pouring, joining and taking apart.
- Experiment, e.g. to find out how water will move from one piece of guttering to another or how some objects float and others sink.

Personal Development & Mutual Understanding

- Understand health and safety on site.
- Apply findings to the wider community.
- Develop care for their local environment through playing an active and meaningful part in the life of the community e.g. litter pick.
- Develop independence as they acquire new skills e.g. children plan, choose and organise equipment for the day/week.

The Arts

Art & Design

- Collect, examine and select resource material to use in the development of ideas such as leaves and twigs from the school grounds.
- Make sculptures and other pieces of artwork using recyclable materials to display on the school grounds.
- Experience a variety of media and techniques such as painting, drawing, mark making, modelling and printing, both large and small scale using the school playground as a canvas.
- Develop their sense of spatial awareness through the use of 3D and other materials e.g. working with recyclable materials to shape, rearrange and create environments supporting imaginative play.

Music

- Listen and respond to a variety of sounds, rhythms and songs in the outdoor environment.
- Make music by producing vocal sounds, body sounds, singing, clapping and playing percussion instruments with extended volume.
- Participate in simple dances and singing games in the playground. Use outdoor features as a stimulus for music.
- Listen to and recognise sounds in the outdoor environment.

Drama

- Explore a range of School Ground issues by using drama to begin to explore their own and others' feelings about issues, e.g. a proposed change to the playground.
- Plan, design and engage in stimulating role play, which encourages pupils to play co-operatively, negotiate roles, agree rules and act out scenarios.
- Link imaginative play scenes inside and out, providing much more scope for large movement.

Physical Education

- Prepare for outdoor work.
- Taking part in physical tasks outdoors.
- Enjoy physical play and the sense of freedom and well-being it brings.
- Improve understanding of the importance of physical activity for good health and fitness.
- Develop spatial awareness and how to share space safely with others.



Post-Primary Activity Ideas

Environment & Society

Geography

- Map the school grounds noting key plots/sites such as biodiversity spots and learning areas.
- Map local rivers and associated habitats etc. which border the school.
- Carry out a local study. Look at key buildings and events.
- Research a local environmental issue.
- Examine photographs of the locality and features in the school grounds. Make a junk art map of the school and the surrounding areas.

History

- Chart changes to school grounds from past to present.
- Carry out a local study.
- Look at historical maps of the school site. Examine photographs.
- Create a report on how the school grounds have changed from when they first opened.

Language & Literacy

English/Irish Medium with Media Education

- Carry out an awareness raising campaign of an issue found on the school grounds e.g. litter.
- Write a report/article on School Grounds such as proposed changes to school grounds, or a local interest story.
- Identify areas of the school grounds which could/need to be improved – form a proposal.

Modern Languages

- Make and maintain links with other International Eco-Schools. You can find other Eco-Schools through the international connect website www.eco-schools-projects.org

Religious Education

- Research the difference in school grounds of schools with different faiths and cultures. Are their buildings laid out differently? Do they have buildings used for purposes not found here?

Learning for Life & Work

Local & Global Citizenship

- Actively engage and participate in a local project/issue.
- Participate in an action project.

Education for Employability

- Learn about the work of those involved in developing school grounds.

Personal Development

- Manage own personal health and safety when working on the school grounds.

Home Economics

- Cook with produce grown on the school grounds.
- Create a school recipe book using locally sourced ingredients.



Post-Primary Activity Ideas

The Arts

Art & Design

- Communicating graphically, producing engaging presentations e.g. posters, video clips, short movies.
- Use areas of the school grounds to display artwork or to find materials to use in ideas.

Drama

- Employing drama strategies for engaging with and responding to school ground issues and promoting solutions.
- Make use of school grounds for productions.

Music

- Compose and perform music in response to the natural world and waste issues.
- Music composing and performing music in response to observations in school grounds.

Mathematics

- Recording site details, plotting measurements on site etc.
- Record temperature and light conditions within habitats created, under laboratory conditions. Display data in graphs, using data handling software.
- Use School Grounds to compliment work on area, shape etc. making use of buildings and walkways.

Science & Technology

- Carry out a survey, for example, recycling on campus or litter on the school grounds.
- Carry out experiments/studies on the school grounds.
- Observe animals in their habitats on the school grounds. Record using electronic equipment such as cameras.

Physical Education

- Take part in responsible outdoor field work and practical work.
- Develop an outdoor gym/seating area/garden etc.
- Take part in exercise outdoors e.g. aerobics and walking.



Useful links

[Eco-Schools delivery partners](#)



[Eco-Schools delivery partner resources](#)



[Eco-Schools document templates](#)



[Wrigley Litter Less Campaign](#)



Click on the link to visit the website



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