

Eco-Schools Case Study

Name of School: St. Colman's College, Newry

Project : Reduction of litter inside and around the school

1. Why did you choose this particular project?

This project was chosen because it was seen as a chance to try and get the whole student body involved in an issue that every school is plagued with. By adopting a very hands-on project, it was hoped that the desire to put an end to litter inside and around the school, in order to make our college community a cleaner and more pleasant environment, would rub off on more and more pupils. This would hopefully get more students involved and raise awareness of an extremely important matter.

2. Did you integrate it in to the curriculum? How?

Yes. A rap was made by junior students in the music department on the need to recycle any piece of litter once collected, not just throw it any bin. This was then performed at assembly. In KS3 and KS4 Geography, topics such as environmental responsibility, littering and recycling different materials have been included in the syllabus. Also, debates have been held in English and Modern Languages on litter, recycling and social responsibility.

3. Did you encounter any problems and if so, how did you overcome them?

The reluctance of a small minority of the pupils to co-operate with the policy of non-littering was a problem we faced. The large scale of the school meant litter was being dropped over a considerable area outside the school, including the football pitches, which meant the monitoring of this problem was more difficult. However, lunch has now been banned from being eaten anywhere other than in the canteen. Also, more bins have been put in place outside the school over a wider area. These measures have greatly reduced the amount of litter on the school premises.

4. How did you encourage pupil participation? How did they have ownership of the project?

Pupil participation has been encouraged by the ability of students from all year groups to join our Eco-Committee to have the chance to be involved. They are also encouraged by the fact that participation in such matters is seen as showing leadership and responsibility in the school which contributes enormously when the students start to apply for a leadership role which is highly sought after by universities. The pupils have ownership of the project as their names are published on the Eco-Schools notice board alongside the name of their designated area of the school where they pick-up litter. Pictures are also published in local papers with the pupils to highlight to the wider community of their dedicated work within the school.

5. How did the pupils/whole school benefit from this project?

The pupils have benefited from this project as they have gained valuable leadership skills on how to act on an issue that is important to them. They have made new friends by working and co-operating together by setting out a course of action as to how they can tackle a ever-growing problem competently and coherently. Subsequently, they grow in confidence once they see their hard-work flourishing and the positive results from their participation as the amount of litter is reduced. This demonstrates their ability to achieve a level of social responsibility. The whole school has benefited as it has helped us to focus on what we can do through setting targets and taking the steps to achieve them. It has given our students the incentive to get involved and play their part. Many students have been actively involved with a senior teacher who has taken on to lead this work. The amount of litter is negligible at the moment, meaning our pupils are working in a clean and tidy environment, which they are benefiting academically from.

6. Did you receive any support from parents, staff or outside agencies? Did you have to source any funding?

For this particular project, all the support came from within the school. This project would not have been able to gain momentum without dedicated, buoyant and extremely resilient attitude of Mrs. Teresa Mohamed, the pupils and without a doubt the grounds men: Paul McArdle and Peter Kennedy. With thanks to the bursar, we were permitted to install new bins throughout the outside of the school, which have proved to be a huge advantage with the dramatic decrease in the amount of litter dropped. It was not possible to involve the outside school community in this project due to the fact that parents have other commitments such as work. However, the issue was explored.

7. Is there any advice you could offer to other schools embarking on a similar project?

To other schools embarking on a similar project, I would advise them to make sure they are working alongside a dedicated, motivated and ambitious group of students. Also, it is paramount that meetings are held on a regular basis so that everyone is clear about the actions that must be taken and the role that each person is playing in order to make sure things are running smoothly and nothing is disjointed. Planning is vital at the start so as a collective group, you know what you are aiming for, what necessary action must be taken and what realistic concessions need to be made. However, an important point to remember is to remain patient and committed so that your hard work comes to fruition.

8. Has doing this project driven other Eco-schools ideas? What are your future plans regarding Eco-schools?

With regards to our future plans, one would hope that there would be much greater participation in projects of this nature. One would also hope that students would take this awareness with them to third level education and the world of work. We want to continue to move forward with the help of Eco Schools to make sure we are doing everything possible to limit our carbon footprint and set a good example to our young people of how we manage our resources and maintain a healthy and eco friendly environment.