

## Birchwood Primary School – Eco-Schools case study

### A Centre of Expertise:

Birchwood Primary School is fast becoming a centre of expertise in green issues and an important focal point in Suffolk for helping other schools.

The children and whole school community are involved in a range of projects, both inside and outside the classroom, and they are proud holders of the internationally recognised Eco-Schools 'Green Flag Award'. (They recently achieved their second Green Flag - the award needs to be renewed every 2 years.)



Birchwood Primary School, School / Eco council 2010/2011 with our second Eco-Schools Green Flag

The school was also winners of the 2010 'Suffolk's Creating the Greenest County Schools' Awards' in the Buildings, Energy and Water category.

### Why is Eco-Schools important?:

The Eco-Schools scheme is at the heart of their work and the head teacher and staff are committed to involving the children throughout the entire programme, including planning, monitoring and decision-making. This enables the children to learn in a variety of ways and contexts – all of which contribute to an engaging and relevant curriculum and raised attainment in mathematics and English as well as other subjects.

The scheme is designed to help reduce the impact of the school on the environment whilst encouraging young people to take responsibility. And at Birchwood the children are doing exactly that. Caring for the environment and each other is a tangible part of the ethos of the school and can be seen (and felt) as you walk around the building, see the classroom displays and talk to the children and teachers

### Whole school involvement & participation:

The school Eco-council meets every other week and is led by the Eco-Schools' Co-ordinator Mrs Sandra Doman, who runs the Eco-council and helps guide the whole process.

Two children from each class are council members and after each meeting they give feedback to the whole school at an assembly. They decide on the 'Big Question' to ask the rest of the school for that week and everyone has a chance to think about and discuss the question back in class. Ideas and thoughts are recorded and then taken back to the next Eco-council meeting; results are then fed back to whole school. Minutes are frequently sent home with newsletters.



A noticeboard and the school's web site keep everyone up to date too.

As Mrs Doman says, *'It works well and is an effective way of involving the whole school, with a quick turn around between deciding on the Big Question and feedback from the whole school. It also means that the Eco-Schools work is integrated into the ongoing life of the school'*

### **Recent successes – and ideas for sharing:**

A recent big success is the school's solar thermal project. The school received a 50% (BRE) government grant and 50% (CSEP) lottery funding, and solar panels were installed in October 2009. Everyone in the school has been following the progress and benefiting from free hot water. This has been a real community project – in which the School/Eco council delivered a power-point presentation about the solar project, inviting parents, governors, the local community, the press, individuals and members from Suffolk County Council, including the portfolio holder for the Suffolk Greenest County.

The whole project has been a valuable learning resource and if you visit the school it's likely that your Year 5 or 6 guide will impress you with their knowledge of not only the data on the energy display but also how it all works!

Whole school involvement is key to the success of the Eco-Schools scheme and at Birchwood everyone is involved, for example:

- ❖ A range of materials are recycled including paper, batteries, ink cartridges and mobile phones; plastic bottles/cartons are either reused or recycled; money raised goes to the Eco-Council to decide how it should be spent; the compost bins are used for the fruit and veg waste at break/lunchtimes; and Key Stage Two children were recently runners up in a paper saving competition held at BT, Adastral Park.
- ❖ The children know it's important to minimise waste too. Recently they became aware that lots of plastic drinks bottles were being recycled but decided it was better for the environment to reduce the waste in the first place. They held a 'Make Water Cool in School' event and now have personalised reusable bottles.
- ❖ Eco-helpers help to monitor activities around the school - and every effort is made to reduce litter - the recent 'Litter free' poster competition helped too.
- ❖ Regular litter picks take place involving children from all classes, making them aware of their environment and giving them a sense of pride.
- ❖ It is the responsibility of everyone to switch off lights if they are not needed and to close doors and windows to save energy; there is also a 'SWITCH OFF' fortnight for the whole school – and the 'Lights Off' learning resource helps the children learn about saving energy.



- ❖ Children come to school by sustainable means where possible – a Travel Plan was completed in 2010 and 40% of the children cycle or scooter to school (a high percentage of children are from out of the catchment area); there have been grants and fund raising for a bike shelter made from sustainable materials. A further £4000 grant has been awarded through the Travel plan towards a shelter for the playground to encourage sustainable travel.
- ❖ The school's Eco-code (each class contributed ideas) is on display in every classroom also in the staff room for staff and visitors.
- ❖ The four water butts in the school grounds are used for the vegetable garden and there are plans for harvesting the rainwater from the roof.
- ❖ The catering staff help out with recycling and reducing waste – and have their own kitchen composting bins.
- ❖ The caretaker is involved too and the office staff who shred paper for composting and collect used postage stamps which are then sent to St Elizabeth Hospice.

#### **Using the school grounds:**

The outdoor learning environment is seen as a useful resource, for example:

- the weekly gardening club involves children in all classes;
- Key Stage One enjoy 'Forest Schools' for an afternoon each week;
- the new wildlife committee already has plans for developing more habitats for ladybirds, hedgehogs in the grounds;
- all year groups regularly use the school grounds in lessons.

The school also won the Martlesham in Bloom competition for the 'most unusual planter' (an upside down umbrella!) this year and is a member of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Fruit and veg grown in the school garden and locally produced help children understand where our food comes from, cookery club include seasonal produce in their recipes; they include apple muffins, stir fry and harvest soup!

The schools has recently (October 2010) been approached by Ipswich Orwell Rotary Club who discovered them on the Eco School website. They would like to be associated with a thriving Eco school and have offered their services to help work on their 'Nature/Sensory garden' which they hope to start work on early next year.

#### **Local and global learning:**

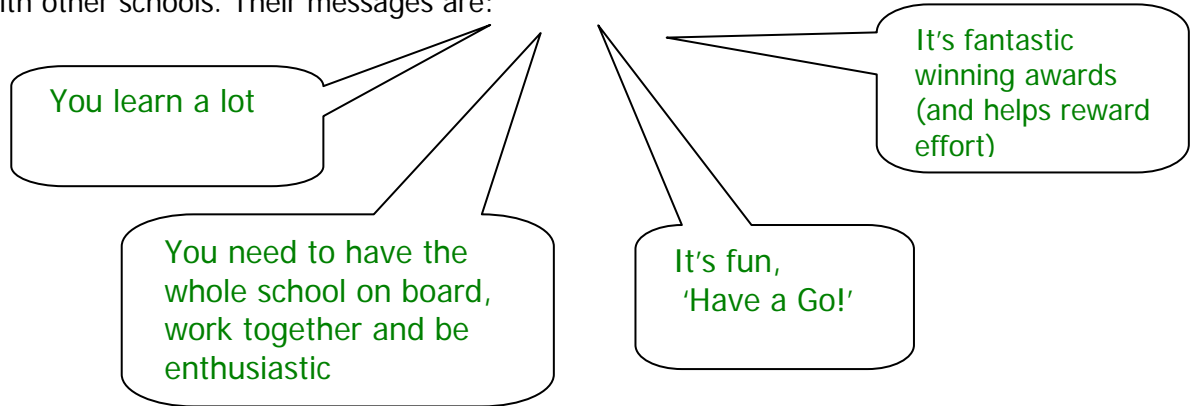
They try at all times to use local companies for work carried out at school. Two recycled plastic picnic benches were purchased from an organisation that employs adults with learning disabilities. The school paid for one bench with money raised from the school/Eco council, the other bench was paid for with the winnings from the Greenest County event. The decision to buy these was voted for at the school council meeting and the PTA raised enough money at the school fair to purchase another six picnic benches for the playground.

Trips and eco-visits are included too, including one which the children and staff thoroughly enjoyed and highly recommend to other schools – to the educational centre at the 'MRF (Materials Recycling Facility) at Great Blakenham. This is free and after finding out about what happens to all our recycled waste, the children created a display for the rest of the school to share and placed pictures on their website.

Although much of the Eco-Schools focus is on the local environment, the global perspective also features regularly in the children's learning. Children in Key stage Two find out global warming and the rain forest in geography as well as rivers and saving water when Anglian Water visit with their outdoor classroom.

**Messages for other schools:**

The children and staff at Birchwood are keen to share their experience and projects with other schools. Their messages are:



And a comment from Cara, one of the Eco-team, *'It's really good doing Eco-schools because we help our school and we do a lot of fun things and we can show others what we're doing too'*.

**Please contact us:**

Birchwood staff and children are happy for you to contact them to find out more (their web site is also a useful source of up to date information):

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