

Making an impact beyond the classroom

New research has for the first time revealed the true extent of the benefits of Keep Britain Tidy's sustainable schools programme, Eco-Schools.

The independent study, carried out by family research specialists Kids Industries, highlights how the environmental charity's flagship programme not only leads to dramatic environmental advantages, but also achieves far-reaching personal, social and educational benefits for children and young people.

These not only have an impact on the pupils and school results, but also ripple out beyond the confines of the school, into families' homes and the wider community, acting as a catalyst for positive changes in behaviour.

The in-depth analysis found that the Eco-Schools programme can lead to significant improvements in a child's wellbeing, increasing their self-confidence, their ability to build relationships and their awareness of others. Positive changes in children and young people's behaviour, motivation and cognitive skills were also reported.



Keep Britain Tidy has run the international Eco-Schools programme in England for more than 18 years. It aims to support and inspire schools to put environmental education and actions at the heart of their school life, placing pupils at the centre of the programme and giving them a powerful voice. The Kids Industries research also mirrors evidence from OFSTED, DCSF, the Scottish Government and several leading academics that show how schools that place importance on environmental and sustainability issues are also schools that do well across the board.

Results

"Today, 70% of schools are registered with the programme – more than any other country in the world," says Keep Britain Tidy's Sustainable Education Manager Morgan Phillips. "That means nearly 17,000 schools have made a commitment to embed sustainability in their curriculum reaching an astonishing six million children, while almost 2,000 have achieved the highest Green Flag status. In the past two years, 28 schools have also been made Ambassador Schools due to their long-term dedication to the Eco-Schools ethos. The combination of the level of scale and the impact of the programme means that we are having a huge impact on the behaviours for future generations," said Phillips.

Kids Industries researchers visited a representative sample of schools across England and held in-depth interviews with children, teachers and the wider school community including school leadership teams. They also conducted an online survey with more than 520 Eco-coordinators, school management and staff.

Unsurprisingly, the environmental advantages are unequivocal. Eco-Schools have reduced their carbon footprint by, on average, 30% between 2008 and 2013. They also send less waste to landfill, use less water and

energy and are litter-free. In fact, 79% of management said adopting the Eco-Schools programme had enabled them to cut energy costs, while waste was reduced by 77%. These savings and efficiencies are also supported by some of the additional services that are brokered for schools, for example for LED lighting and solar energy.

But, it is clear from the research that becoming an Eco-School goes beyond a shift in attitudes and awareness of environmental issues. The findings reveal that 91% of senior staff said pupil wellbeing was an overall benefit, with participants detailing how children gained the confidence, with examples of how they have overcome their fears, to present at school assemblies and even at political meetings.

Eco-Schools also help to instil a strong sense of pride and achievement in the children. Eco-Committee children speak with impressive detail, passion and confidence about the importance of the natural environment, learning about energy efficiency, biodiversity and the use of resources. Embedding a culture of not dropping litter in the school grounds is a powerful example of this ethos. As a result, teachers are proud the programme has helped produce well-rounded, caring, responsible children.

This passion and commitment in turn enthuses parents, governors and the wider community. The flexibility of the Eco-Schools programme means it is well-suited to connecting with other initiatives and with local authorities, to the extent that 87% of senior staff felt the programme had helped them develop relationships with the wider community.

Keep Britain Tidy's Morgan Phillips is clear about the value of Eco-Schools and the charity's determination to make it even better. "Ultimately, at a time when government is removing its support for environmentalism in the curriculum, this survey found that 89% of those surveyed believed that all schools, their pupils, staff and the community beyond the school gates would reap the rewards from becoming a Green Flag Eco-School," he said.

"As a charity, Keep Britain Tidy is keen to maintain and enhance Eco-Schools and strengthen its impact. Our partnership around energy issues with EDF Energy is just one example of how we're looking to add value to the schools we work with. With this report, we're looking forward to building on the proven success of the programme to increase that value to schools even further," Phillips said. ■

Part of the Keep Britain Tidy Family



For further information on the Kids Industries Eco-Schools report visit www.keepbritaintidy.org/eco-schools or contact Morgan Phillips, Sustainable Education Manager at Keep Britain Tidy, at morgan.phillips@keepbritaintidy.org