

Sustainable Schools

For pupils, communities and the environment

Frequently Asked Questions



The following information is designed to help you answer the questions your members and stakeholders may have concerning the Sustainable Schools initiative.

What is sustainable development?

The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising future generations. This means finding ways to improve our lives without damaging the environment, and without storing up problems for the future, or transferring them to other parts of society or the world.

What is the Sustainable Schools initiative?

The Sustainable Schools initiative aims to encourage schools to take on board the principles of sustainable development in their everyday work, achieving educational excellence alongside the goals of healthy living, environmental awareness, community participation and global citizenship.

This academic year is a Year of Action on sustainable development for schools. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is working with partners to provide resources and materials to help embed sustainable development into all areas of school life. The Sustainable Schools initiative is one element of the wider government programme to combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions.

What are Sustainable Schools?

Sustainable Schools consume less energy, water and materials and produce less waste. This means they are efficient schools and healthier environments in which to learn. In Sustainable Schools pupils can learn about sustainability both in the classroom and from their first-hand experience of how their schools are run. This means they encourage care through all aspects of school life:

- Care for oneself
- Care for each other
- Care for the environment.

How does the Sustainable Schools initiative work?

The Sustainable Schools initiative is designed to support schools on their journey to sustainability, introducing the principles of sustainable development and offering guidance on how to embed these principles into the heart of school life.

The national framework for Sustainable Schools focuses on social issues as much as environmental issues and comprises eight sustainability 'doorways'. Each can play a role in the major areas of school life –

curriculum, campus and community:

- Food and drink
- Energy and water
- Travel and traffic
- Purchasing and waste
- Buildings and grounds
- Inclusion and participation
- Local well being
- Global dimension.

Schools can come into sustainability via any of the eight doorways – or by other routes – based on where they are starting from and what they want to achieve. Many schools are already carrying out activities in the area of sustainability, often with exceptional results. The initiative will provide resources and tools that will equip schools to evaluate their progress more effectively and encourage them to highlight their achievements.

Why do we need Sustainable Schools?

Sustainable Schools empower children to lead sustainable lives, teaching them the skills and behaviours they need to become part of the solution to challenges such as climate change. By becoming sustainable a school can save money, for example on water and energy. At the same time sustainability can help to improve the health, fitness and emotional well-being of its pupils, and ensure their quality of life for the future. Schools are part of the community – sustainability enables schools to help the local community create a healthier, safer and greener place to live. It is difficult to envisage a sustainable community without a sustainable school at its heart.

What does the Sustainable Schools initiative mean to me and my community?

Sustainable Schools are about helping young people at a local level – they are about improving the communities and environment in which families and children live. The initiative will help the school community to contribute to meeting local goals, for example on waste minimisation, energy efficiency and sustainable travel.

What resources are available?

The DfES is working with partners to provide resources and materials to help embed sustainable development into all areas of school life. A comprehensive list of these resources is included as part of this pack.

Where can I find out more?

There are a number of websites that can help embed sustainability in schools:

Sustainable Schools area of Teachernet: www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools

Government web portal: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk

Independent advisor and watchdog: www.sd-commission.gov.uk

Indicators: www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/progress/national/index.htm

DfES policy and action plan: www.dfes.gov.uk/aboutus/sd