

# A climate for change

## Greener Governance case studies

**First featured in our [Governing Matters members' magazine](#) in March 2022, Megan Tate, NGA policy and research assistant, reports on the inspiring work going on in schools.**

The green agenda is here to stay. In January's *Governing Matters*, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced its draft strategy to reduce the environmental impact of education and increase knowledge of climate change and sustainability. Leading on environmental sustainability was the topic for our governance leadership forums earlier this term when we heard from a whole range of schools and trusts.

The DfE also attended to hear the experiences and thoughts of governors and trustees. Although some of those who spoke had been working on sustainability for years, many had begun with small projects which have extended into a whole-school or trust approach. It was clear no matter what type or size of school, and whatever the age of the pupils, there are things you can do to benefit the future of the planet and the young people. Some cover all the four Cs of sustainability – culture, community, campus and curriculum – while others begin with one or two.

### **St Christopher's CE High School, single academy trust in Lancashire**

Environmental sustainability touches on all St Christopher's does, with pupil voice and the school council at its centre. The governing board has invested in the leadership post of director of sustainability, filled by Wendy Litherland. There has been an emphasis on threading the topic through the curriculum, but also instilling social responsibility towards the planet and its people among pupils. In November, over 100 students took part in a homeless sleepout, raising money for charity and drawing attention to fuel poverty. St Christopher's works hard to create local networks to encourage a culture of social and environmental awareness. Wendy has also led across the region, coordinating the North West Eco Schools Conference to share skills, knowledge and experience in promoting education for sustainable development.

**“By appointing a specific governor to have responsibility for sustainability and Wendy Litherland as director of sustainability, we are able to have a regular agenda item at each full board meeting. Wendy briefs the eco-governor, who brings issues forward and on occasion the students come to tell us of their experiences. So, it's very much an interactive process.”**

**Frank Whitehead, chair of trustees, St Christopher's CE High School**

## **South Farnborough Infant School, maintained school in Hampshire**

Sustainability has been embedded within South Farnborough’s curriculum and classroom practices. It adopted the Harmony curriculum that teaches children how the seven principles of harmony (wellbeing, diversity, oneness, adaptation, geometry, interdependence, and circles and cycles) shape their relationships with nature and each other. Pupils are encouraged to use them to consider how to contribute responsibly to a sustainable future. For example, ‘interdependence’ was recently demonstrated through a Fairtrade fortnight, learning how their choices as consumers affect others, combined with children learning a rainforest dance routine that relies on teamwork.

**“We are broadening children’s perspectives. We go from teaching about what’s happening locally within the community to what’s happening across the world.”**

**Helen Fletcher-Davies, headteacher, South Farnborough Infant School**

## **South Molton Community Primary School, maintained school in Devon**

With a motto of ‘excellence through outdoor learning’, environmental sustainability is a core part of learning and development at South Molton. This is demonstrated by termly ‘no electricity’ days, inspiring children to get interested and involved in energy usage. They considered how electricity is created and technology has been invented and developed through history by British and international scientists. It was also an opportunity to expose children to future careers in STEM areas that they may not have been aware of.

**“I joined the governing board due to the school’s drive for sustainability, including its approach to encouraging children’s imagination through learning outdoors and to make a difference in our world. The board’s role is to facilitate the ideas senior leaders bring. Budgets and resources are restricted so enablement comes from a mental outlook which the boards can develop and encourage.”**

**Chris Brown, chair of governors, South Molton Community Primary School**

## **St Edmund Campion Primary School, Maidenhead, part of Frassiti Catholic Academy Trust**

Headteacher-turned-foundation governor Patricia Opalko began the school’s sustainability journey in 2001 by creating a school eco team. This quickly progressed to embedding sustainability within the curriculum by introducing sustainable doorways in the shape of a topic (such as travel and traffic, energy, global citizenship, school grounds, food and drink) that each year group is taught throughout the year, either discretely or cross-curricular.

“The beauty of each year group learning a doorway topic is that teachers don’t have to become experts in every area of sustainability, only the particular area that they teach. But by the time children reach Year 6, they have a good understanding of a wide range of sustainability issues, empowering them to consider how they can make a difference to the world.”

**Patricia Opalko, foundation governor, St Edmund Campion Catholic Primary School**

## **Hotwells Primary School, Bristol, part of Cathedral Schools Trust**

Sustainability at Hotwells began over a decade ago after achieving the silver eco schools award in 2010. Upon joining the board in 2020, parent governor Michael Martin aimed to make sustainability, specifically carbon neutrality by 2030, part of the School Charter. The board agreed that sustainability be a regular agenda item and Michael was designated governor for sustainability. As an urban school, Hotwells is monitoring air pollution, and ‘Big pedal fortnight’ resulted in an increase to 72% of children walking or biking to school. A range of smaller initiatives – children switching off lights and recycling pens and paper – fit alongside plans such as choosing a green energy supplier to help long-term change.

“I completed a roadmap outlining the school’s work from 2010 to 2030 to acknowledge what had already been done before I joined but also to show that not everything has to be done immediately. It can happen at a different stage of the plan when it may be more manageable.”

**Michael Martin, governor, Hotwells Primary School**

## **Durrington High School, Worthing, West Sussex**

The school has fully committed to environmental sustainability, including it in its school improvement plan, which is mirrored by its trust’s strategic priorities. The journey began by replacing pipes in its 26-year-old heating system, improving energy efficiency and comfort levels for staff and students. In 2020, the school built a new sports hall and incorporated 414 solar panels. To date the panels have generated 140,000 kW/hours making the building carbon-negative, meaning it actually creates an environmental benefit.

Durrington is focusing on ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’. Understanding that not all schools can access such large-scale changes, Durrington stressed the smaller changes it has made, including requiring a PIN at the printer to confirm you want to print, drastically reducing waste paper; auto power-off at 8pm on all PCs; cleaners using powdered chemicals to reduce plastic and chemical waste; and meat-free Mondays. It has recently sought a new sustainable catering contract.

This will add to its existing and compostable vegware packaging, with the company offering ‘generation juice’ where children use reusable bottles for drinks.

“Through heating system upgrades, solar PV and LED light replacement, our energy has cost £30,000 less than in 2019, meaning we can reinvest that money into our students.”

**Matt Angell, director of operations, Durrington High School**

## The Education Alliance (TEAL), Humberside

In 2019, TEAL identified environmental sustainability as a key challenge for the next 10 years and added it to its strategic priorities. The trust funded a carbon footprint survey that set a baseline and informed a plan for future work.

It identified opportunities for improvement, such as LED lighting, which is underway, and also phasing out single-use plastic, heating plant upgrades, electric vehicle charging points and a new waste contract. Some will require more funding to complete.

TEAL has integrated several UN sustainability goals into the curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. Thinking long-term, green careers have also been a focus, securing partnerships with Siemens and Yorkshire Water, offering school leavers the chance to take advantage of new sustainable industries. There is much more planned, including training teachers to link the curriculum to sustainable job opportunities.

**“As trustees and trust leaders there are three questions we need to ask ourselves: what can we do that is within our gift; what could we possibly do by reprioritising and not doing something else; and what might we achieve if policy expectations and grants were available to create uplift to this topic?”**

**Paddy Hall, vice-chair of trustees, The Education Alliance**

## Eynsham Partnership Academy (EPA), Oxfordshire

The focus on climate change and biodiversity is included in the trust’s five-year strategy, and a working group gains insight into how to tackle this. Students came up with their own manifesto as one of the ways they will hold the trust to account. The trust has begun to address energy and carbon emissions by connecting with local initiatives such as Project Leo (Low Energy Oxfordshire).

By completing an energy and carbon audit, EPA hopes to create accessible baselines. Last year, the trust undertook a biodiversity survey of the school estates, followed by actions which they hope to see results from in the coming years. This work is accompanied by a grant from Nature England and the creation of nature recovery networks. It requires community resource to be successful, and the trust is building links outside the schools to harness additional knowledge and capacity and to create wider culture change.

**“EPA wants to achieve a trust-wide culture, leading from top-down and bottom-up, and also inside-out and outside-in. It’s partly about thinking creatively, and bringing in experts and enthusiasm from the community who want to get involved with schools, and give their advice and time on specific projects.”**

**Rain Newton-Smith, trustee, Eynsham Partnership Academy**

## Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, Devon

Ten years ago, with the help of Keith Webber, a science teacher who became school sustainability director, Dartmoor secured grants from energy companies that funded monitoring equipment, sustainable food initiatives and solar panels, resulting in large cost and energy savings. Most recently, the trust team secured £350,000 through the public sector decarbonisation scheme. This has resulted in other schools gaining air source heat pumps, solar panels and building management systems.

Dartmoor has seen great results from management systems, remotely spotting leaks and controlling heating. Susanne Kiff, chief finance and operations officer, has ensured that procurement of contracts meet sustainable criteria. For example, the executive chef is encouraged to buy locally where possible. The trust has recently appointed Derrick Brett as executive director for civic leadership; he intends to use the local farm to increase pupils' understanding of sustainability and in the future incorporate green careers. The trust has also appointed a lead in learning outside of the classroom and established links with the Devon Wildlife Trust and Dartmoor National Park to encourage primary pupils to experience their local countryside.

**“It was a positive choice we have made as a board of trustees to invest in the civic leadership position. I see our main function with environmental sustainability as ensuring the leadership team has the capacity to deliver what is needed. We will support them.”**

**Tania Skeaping, chair of trustees, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust**

### “So positive and rewarding”

It was fantastic to hear from schools and trusts leading the way in this crucial area, providing advice to others at the forums. Having listened to our members discuss what will move the sustainability dial, NGA responded to the DfE's draft strategy: our key point was that government needs to provide funding for necessary changes, especially in terms of premises and leadership capacity, so that change can happen in all schools.

This shouldn't require lengthy bids for small pots of money. Boards also need more advice on what to usefully monitor. Thank you to all those who have been championing this agenda which we now need to see as mainstream across the school sector. The message coming over loud and clear is that work to tackle the climate crisis is possible as well as so positive and rewarding for children and their communities; full of hope, joy, beauty and fun!

**Emma Knights, chief executive, NGA**

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