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# Leading Sustainable Schools Getting started

Doorway booklet



## Instructions and suggestions for use

This tool was designed with a school's leadership team in mind. The idea is that it is completed collectively so that everybody feels a sense of ownership in relation to this work.

The tool will help you to:

- Identify different strands of sustainability work already underway in your school (most schools find closer examination reveals they are doing more than they realised).
- Think strategically about what more can be done in the short-term and longer term to develop sustainability in your school and community.
- Allocate responsibility for developing action plans (some schools have done this by asking each department head to present their own plan for developing sustainability in their area).

You may wish to include the wider school community in this process. The tool could, for example, be used to introduce governors and/or your school council to sustainability issues.

Including and empowering students at every level of this work is vitally important to its success. Indeed, in many schools students are the ones driving efforts forward because they can see the potential impact on their future.

However, it is worth remembering that the schools that have developed sustainability successfully are those where a senior person or team are committed to driving this forward. Children and young people cannot be expected to take things forward without the backing of a school leadership team that creates the right support structure and enabling environment for that to happen.

That is why this resource is primarily aimed at developing the leadership skills, qualities and behaviours necessary for your school leaders to be true catalysts for change.

## What's included

- 'Getting started' booklet
- Interactive mat (to help structure your discussions)
- 'Why should we?' booklet
- 'Setting your vision' booklet
- vision cards
- 8 doorway booklets
- reflection sheets

The resource is based on the 8 Doorways of the DCSF's National Framework for Sustainable Schools and it is designed to help you audit your current position and provide ideas for action that will enable your school to operate in a more sustainable way.

The doorways are:

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

How quickly you work through the resource is up to you. You may choose to approach each of the doorways individually or as part of a whole school action plan. Bear in mind though that all of the doorways are interconnected so work on one will impact on another.

The purpose of the mat is to provide a visual aid for this exercise that captures where you are and what you want to do.

## Six steps to developing sustainability

One way of approaching it would be through the following six steps, though the order in which you take them is up to you.

**Why should we?** The facilitator shares the information in the ‘Why should we?’ booklet, which is full of facts and figures and is intended to provide the inspiration behind getting started.

**What’s our vision?** Research shows that sustainability is developed most effectively when it is put at the heart of the school’s improvement plan and is reflected in the school’s vision. The group should look at the ‘Setting your vision’ booklet and think about how sustainability could be incorporated into your vision statement. If you’re not yet ready to revise your vision statement, try borrowing one of the three cards with a vision statement already written on it to get you started. You can revisit setting or revising your own vision statement later, at which point you should write it on one of the blank vision cards provided.

**Which doorways do we want to work on?** Choose which of the eight doorways you want to work on first. Remember, it’s meant to be a flexible process so you may choose to look at just one doorway initially or do several at the same time. Each of the doorway booklets includes:

- a brief explanation of what the doorway is about
- case studies of what other schools are doing in this area
- tips for developing sustainability
- ideas for funding, partnership working and encouraging student voice
- quotes from school leaders

It might be a good idea to hand out the booklets to members of the leadership team and give them time to digest the contents and report back to the entire team. The group can then select which doorway or doorways they wish to work on. Alternatively, the doorway descriptions on the mat may be enough to inform this decision and get you started.

**What are we currently doing?** Use the reflection sheets to audit your current position and think about what the school is doing in the areas you have chosen. The group should be encouraged to identify activities already taking place and plot them on the cards under the headings ‘curriculum’, ‘campus’ and ‘community’: the three key areas of school life.

**Campus** is about the buildings and grounds. Sustainable practices can make a difference to the school's own efficiency levels and thus reduce its environmental footprint. It can also impact positively on behaviours outside of school.

**Curriculum** is about teaching and learning. Sustainability can be used to reinvigorate and revitalise the curriculum by focusing on issues that are real and relevant to young people. For example, work around reducing energy usage and recycling waste provides opportunities for very practical learning experiences and activities.

**Community** is about working with people outside the school through effective communication and partnership building. Sustainability encourages schools to be outward looking, to understand the communities in which they operate both locally and globally, and to promote a sense of well-being for everyone.

**What can we do in the future?** Think about what can be done in the future and use the reflection sheets to plot where you would like to be. The doorway booklets will give you some ideas. For example, as a group you may decide you want to do something around travel and traffic. You could give someone in the group responsibility for investigating the possibilities, using the booklet to help stimulate ideas and then plotting goals on a reflection sheet and incorporating them in the school improvement plan.

**What actions can we take now?** Once goals have been identified, the group needs to collectively agree what actions are going to be taken now. It is of course likely that actions emerging under each doorway will overlap with each other. Once actions have been agreed, use the relevant doorway booklets to record them for future monitoring.

Examples of how three schools have used the toolkit are contained in appendix 1.

## Moving forward

Use of the toolkit is not meant to be a one-off event. Your leadership team should try to revisit the process regularly – perhaps every six months – in order to monitor progress and plan for future sustainability work. This should be captured in the school's self-evaluation form or by using the S3 tool (sustainable school's self-assessment tool [www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools)).

Some smaller primary schools have elected to work in a cluster, appointing their own champions of sustainability to a central team in order to increase capacity for this work.

This tool can also be used by groups of schools in order to share good practice and generate new ideas.

Even the most sustainable schools have room for further improvement. Conducting regular audits and revisiting your vision statement will enable you re-evaluate, plan for the next stage and, importantly, celebrate your success so far.

For further information about developing sustainability and examples of how schools have used this toolkit please visit [www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingsustainableschools](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingsustainableschools).

## A brief guide to facilitation

Using the tool with a group will require a facilitator. The facilitator will be the one to call the meeting, share the instructions with the group and to inspire the group to work on this together using the 'Why should we' booklet.

The facilitator may wish to ask others in the group to take responsibility for individual doorway booklets, but will need to be the one to ensure that actions are clear, captured and completed. The facilitator will call further meetings to review actions and progress.

Below are some facilitation guidance notes:

A facilitator acts as a neutral group assistant who, rather than telling people what to do, continually challenges individuals and groups to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions.

Facilitators do this by providing the structures and processes necessary to help people determine their own needs and develop their own solutions, offering gentle guidance and keeping things on course but relying on the team to provide the momentum in time, energy, and commitment.

A facilitator's aim is to build an effective and mutually supportive team in which communication is direct, open and honest.

### **What are the basic characteristics of a facilitator?**

If you are considering being a facilitator for such a workshop, you should understand that your key business is to focus the group's energy on its common task by:

- dealing with meeting logistics
- remaining neutral
- keeping the meeting on task
- helping to set ground rules
- dealing with problem behaviours

You should:

Clearly define your role as a facilitator so participants know what to expect.

Establish group ownership by getting agreement on the meeting agenda and process.

Check for agreement with the group whenever you make a statement or propose a process.

Inform the group about the process not the content.

Avoid process battles by sharing dilemmas and highlighting the options available to the group.

Maintain the focus of the group.

Avoid defensiveness – bounce challenges back to the whole group.

Admit mistakes when they are made and move on.

### **Bringing the group together**

In designing a workshop or event, you should start by breaking the session into segments, including time for an introduction, clarification of objectives and drawing the workshop together.

Use an agenda to help structure the workshop and provide a clear framework for each stage, including start and finish times, but build in time for an activity to overrun slightly or to respond to participants' needs.

Be clear in your mind about what outcome you are trying to achieve – a presentation of ideas, an action plan, a decision made, a policy agreed – as this will influence your process design.

Once at the workshop, start by outlining the objectives and agenda to manage expectations. It might be helpful to begin with an investigation into expectations. What are people hoping to get out of the workshop? Why have they come?

It's important to establish ground rules to keep the meeting on-task and to clarify procedures for handling discussions that deviate from the agreed agenda. Involve stakeholders in establishing the ground rules and setting the tone for respectful group behaviour.

Remember to re-visit the agenda and objectives throughout the workshop and at the end. This will enable you to establish what has been achieved and to evaluate the session in order to improve future workshops and bring the learning together.

## **Communicating with the group**

Effective communication is a fundamental requirement for successful projects, but this should be communications for 'learning' not 'telling'.

As a facilitator you should model 'active listening'. You can guide the discussion by listening, reflecting back, clarifying, exploring, focusing and testing back.

Asking the right questions can do more to guide a discussion than any other facilitation skill. The best questions are open-ended as they help participants reflect, elaborate, dig deeper and develop ideas further.

Paraphrasing will help in clarifying and ensuring comprehension, highlighting a point or valuing a comment, while summarising will allow you to pull important information together to guide the discussion further.

Always be sure to offer encouragement, be positive and compliment the group.

Pay attention to the group's process and watch for indications that people are getting stuck. If this happens, try to determine the nature of the problem and identify ways to facilitate movement into a more productive state. It's worth remembering though that periods of discomfort or tension – or 'sticky patches' – can indicate that real thinking, moving beyond participants' comfort zones, is occurring and so can be valuable.

Don't assume you need to keep everyone happy throughout the whole process but do be sensitive to individual anxieties in the group which may need to be managed.

And remember, non-verbal communication can be just as important. Body language needs to be open and sensitive and written communications must be easily readable and universally accessible.

# Appendix 1

## Examples of the six steps at work

Here are three examples of how different schools have approached the six steps.

### **Coombeshead College, Devon**

By the time it began using the toolkit, the senior leadership team at Coombeshead College, Devon, had already carried out its own research into education for sustainable development and made a commitment to embedding it within the specialist media arts and training school.

The ‘why should we?’ booklet nevertheless proved useful in confirming the team’s belief that sustainability was about something far wider than ‘green’ issues, and that it would only become truly embedded if the whole school community was involved, including its Trust partners the BBC (media), the British Council (International School Award), Exeter University (training school) and Sustainability South West.

Having made the commitment, the SLT’s next step was to construct a vision statement which would position sustainability as one of the school’s four key characteristics. The resulting statement reads: *“We want our students to learn how best we can achieve a sustainable future life, developing their ecological awareness and their commitment to social and environmental justice.”*

Vice principal Peter Cobbold said: “This brought us to the stage where we were ready to begin introducing sustainability across the school system. The question was who should decide how to do that?”

“It was at this point that we handed the toolkit over to one of our ‘futures groups’ made up of five new or nearly new teachers from a range of curriculum areas across the college. Their role is to meet occasionally to examine issues of importance to the college and be creative about forming new ideas.

“Having digested the toolkit’s contents, they came up with the idea of having a whole day sustainability launch and allocating one of the National Framework’s eight doorways to each of our eight pastoral houses.

“Everyone in the house, including around 140 students across all year groups, teaching and support staff, will be responsible for auditing our current position (what are we currently doing?), mapping the way ahead (what can we do in the future?) and delivering their part of the whole (what actions can we take now?).

Before having its launch day, Coombeshead has decided to hold a meeting of house team leaders to decide which doorways will be tackled by which houses. In order to avoid a 'bun fight' the doorways will, broadly speaking, be allocated according to the most prominent teaching specialties in each house. i.e. humanities teachers together in one house may prefer to work on global dimension, while science teachers in another might focus on energy and water and food technology teachers on food and drink.

Peter said: "The houses will organise their own schedule and rhythm of meetings and, once they have defined where we are at now and where we want to go, they will be given a notional timescale (perhaps a year?) for getting there. If we can develop a visual way to show progress, we might also be able to introduce an element of competition to help move the process forward at a good pace."

### **Whiteshill Primary School, Gloucestershire**

Robert Kempner, headteacher of Whiteshill Primary School, Gloucestershire, used the toolkit to help motivate and empower others in his school to drive forward education for sustainable development.

The four-class rural school was at the start of its sustainability journey and Robert wanted to ensure that any changes effected would be sustainable in themselves, with or without his input.

"There was already a great deal of awareness among staff about the 'why should we' aspects, so we just glanced through that booklet before moving straight to the action part and looking at the eight doorway booklets.

"We also chose to skip the visioning booklet at this stage because we felt we wanted to know more about how we would approach sustainability as a school before deciding how to reflect that in a vision statement."

The booklets were passed around a whole staff meeting at which teachers were invited to choose a doorway for which they, along with their class, would take responsibility. The two infant classes joined together for the project, which meant the school could begin to address three doorways in total.

Robert said: "We dedicated six weeks of curriculum time for every child to look at sustainable development. Whatever we started in those six weeks, we could go on to embed."

The doorways selected were Purchasing & Waste (infants), Energy & Water (lower juniors) and Global Dimension (upper juniors).

First staff conducted their own audit using the reflection sheets to plot what they were currently doing, what they could do in the future and what actions they could take. They then took the toolkit back to their classes and, after explaining the relevance of curriculum, campus and community to the children, they asked them to conduct a similar audit.

Years 5 and 6 were involved in an additional brainstorm session. Robert said: “They were split into eight groups, each of which was given a doorway booklet to study followed by five minutes to write down ideas for development. When the time was up they moved to the next table and repeated the exercise for another doorway. The children proved to be more aware than adults when using the toolkit as an audit tool. They came up with lots of quality ideas about what we could do in the future.”

The ideas will be fed to the school’s eco committee, which is led by the deputy head and includes a child from each year group. The committee will prioritise areas of action but the classes will be responsible for carrying out the work as part of their curriculum studies.

It wasn’t until this initial audit had been completed that Whiteshill turned its attentions to building a vision statement. Pupils read and discussed the sample statements included in the toolkit before constructing a number of possible statements, each with a 30-word limit. The resulting statements will now be fed to the eco committee for consideration.

Among the contenders are:

***“We will achieve sustainability by aiming to save what we have and by not wasting resources unnecessarily. We will persuade others by demonstrating how we are being responsible ourselves.”***

***“To make our school sustainable we will have an eco-friendly school with recycled water gushing through our grounds’ taps. We also will be aiming to have fruit and vegetable patches.”***

***“Whiteshill Primary believes they are aiming towards being a sustainable school by encouraging all children to join in school life, to take responsibility and have fun.”***

Robert said: “When we have made solid progress on the initial doorways selected, we hope to expand our efforts to include the other five. I want to share the toolkit with all our stakeholders – governors, school council, parent forum, eco-committee, parish council, town council, gardening club – then it really will be embedded in our whole school environment.”

### **Milton Mount Primary School, West Sussex**

Milton Mount Primary School, West Sussex, has been involved in sustainability and environmental education since 1989, working both to make the school's fabric more sustainable and to integrate sustainable learning into the curriculum.

A permanent Green Flag school, it has established many partnerships along the way, including with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Wetland and Wildlife Trust (WWT), the Young People's Trust for the Environment (YPTENC), Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT) and Sussex Trust for Ornithology (SOS). Its intention in using the toolkit was therefore not to build strategy, but to refresh it.

The school's senior leadership team chose to make the toolkit meeting a social occasion, gathering round the mat with a glass of wine and passing booklets between them. Despite being further along the sustainability journey than most, they still found the 'why should we?' booklet useful.

Headteacher Brian Thomas said: "For those of us who had been working on sustainable development for a number of years, the booklet reaffirmed why we do what we do. For newer members of staff it provided a rapid catch up, so that they weren't simply going along with sustainability because that's the way we do things at Milton Mount, but were really buying in to the benefits of change themselves."

Because the team had already established its vision for sustainability, it chose to simply scan the visioning booklet so as 'not to be deflected'. It did however transpose its statement on to the circle in the centre of the mat, as a reminder to all involved.

*It reads: "Our school acknowledges its responsibility to educate its pupils to become caring participants in society – caring for themselves, others and their environment. We equip our pupils with knowledge, skill, attitudes and values that will enable them to achieve their potential and dreams within the limits of the resources they have and the capacity of the environment.*

*"We set, for our community, partners, parents and others an example of good sustainable development and management of our buildings, grounds and resources. We encourage and support our pupils and community to accept their individual and collective responsibility towards the environment."*

The SLT held a 'brainstorm' session, in which it recorded what it considered to be its strengths and weaknesses in relation to each of the eight doorways and to the three main areas of school life – curriculum, campus and community.

It then handed the toolkit to the school's sustainability development team, which is led by the premises officer and the bursar, so that it could do the same. After that, the toolkit was passed around specific development teams working on different areas of the National Framework. These teams include students from the school council and eco council, as well as teachers and support staff.

Brian said: "We collated all the ideas from the different groups and distilled the commonalities to give us a very clear indication of where we should go next. This really increased our confidence because rather than present us with a wide diversity of opinion, the exercise confirmed that we were in fact all singing from the same sheet.

"Using the toolkit really refreshed the things we had done and woke everyone up again. We have now decided to use it regularly to continually review and audit our progress. It's now an integral part of our sustainable development action plan."

## Acknowledgements

Authors: Katy Emmerson (NCSL) and Angela Spencer (Angela Spencer Media Services (ASMS))

Contributions from Professor Colin Burns (Martach Consulting), Liz Jackson (WWF), Amanda Rushen (NCSL)

**NCSL would like to thank all those schools who have worked with us to produce this resource, in particular:**

Andrew Grant, Assistant Headteacher  
Castle School, South Gloucestershire

Anne Lakey, Chief Executive and John Harpin, Principal  
The Durham Federation, Durham

Barbara James, Bursar and ESD co-ordinator  
Long Eaton School, Derbyshire

Brian Owens, Headteacher  
Edwalton Primary School, Nottingham

Brian Thomas, Headteacher  
Milton Mount Primary School, West Sussex

Catriona Stewart, Headteacher  
Kingsmead Primary School, Cheshire

Dave Baker, Headteacher and Catherine Taylor, PA  
Bradley Stoke Community School, South Gloucestershire

David Dixon, Headteacher  
Bowbridge Primary School, Newark

Denise Strutt, Headteacher  
Whitecross School, Herefordshire

Frances Thompson, Deputy Headteacher  
Crispin School, Street, Somerset

Gugsy Ahmed, Headteacher  
Parkinson Lane Community Primary School, Calderdale

Jim Burke, Principal and Steve McElroy, Vice Principal  
Academy of St Francis of Assisi, Liverpool

Kevin Bailey, Headteacher,  
Hagley Primary School, Worcestershire

Margaret Holman, Headteacher  
Bishop Stopford School, Kettering.

Mark Edwards, Headteacher  
Shire Oak Primary School, Leeds

Nina Bernstein, ESD co-ordinator  
Meare Village Primary School, Glastonbury

Peter Cobbold, Vice Principal  
Coombeshead College, Devon

Richard Jones, Headteacher  
Hagbourne CE Primary School, Oxfordshire

Robert Kempner, Headteacher  
Whiteshill Primary School, Gloucestershire

Susan Humphries, Environmental Consultant and founding Headteacher  
The Coombes Infant and Nursery School, Reading

# Notes/actions

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