



Mainstreaming Sustainable Schools Reports from the English Regions: North East

North East

1. SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS AND THE REGION

We sent questionnaires (please see appendix one) to the Children's Services Advisor at Government Office for the North East and the Education Partnership Coordinator of the North East Strategic Partnership for Sustainable Schools in order to get a snapshot into the delivery of the Sustainable Schools Framework at regional level.

Government Office for the North East (GONE) has a good understanding of the Sustainable Schools Framework and is actively promoting it to local authorities in particular. They have commissioned research to identify key barriers to the delivery of the agenda and they have established a pilot scheme in partnership with Government Office Yorkshire and the Humber to work with six pathfinder authorities (three in each region) in order to develop corporate strategic approaches to deliver the framework. In the North East the three local authorities are Redcar and Cleveland, Newcastle and Durham; each has received £2,500 funding from GONE, which the authority must match, plus £1,000 pump priming from Healthy Schools North East. Activities undertaken by these three authorities with this funding include presentations at headteacher cluster meetings, bursar and governor training, youth conference events, teacher training and awareness-raising twilight sessions. The aim of these events is to raise awareness of the Sustainable Schools Framework and consult stakeholders on the contents of the corporate strategies.

NESPSS, the North East Strategic Partnership for Sustainable Schools, engages with and supports public, private and third sector organisations who engage with schools on the sustainability agenda. It's role is to build infrastructure, capacity and understanding of the sustainable schools framework and how it contributes to school improvement and local authority priorities.

The Region as a whole has a mixed response to Sustainable Schools Framework, with some areas well positioned to deliver the Framework and others struggling to find a way forward. As can be seen below we studied four local authority areas in more detail.

Key recommendations for future action as identified by the respondents at regional level -

For Local Authorities

- One named Sustainable Schools Champion in each authority
- Support in understanding how the SSF can deliver wider goals.

For Schools

- Better communications to schools

- Joined-up, holistic approach from government departments who impact on this agenda
- Stronger understanding and emphasis from Ofsted

By DCSF

- Consolidate existing policies
- Schools are aware that aspirations are for 2020 – which seems a long way away; possibly set interim targets?
- Continue to work with other departments to ensure a coherent approach to make it easier for schools to plan and deliver this broad agenda.
- “This agenda is broader than DCSF and it is important that all government Departments work together to ensure that the agenda is not lost during the economic downturn and that the opportunities are identified and taken”.

2. SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

We sent questionnaires (please see Appendix two) to a wide variety of staff across directorates from the following local authorities in the North East – Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Gateshead City Council, Sunderland City Council and Northumberland County Council. We received ten responses from a variety of staff, see below

- Schools Liaison Officer, RCBC
- Senior Sustainable Travel Officer, RCBC
- Healthy Schools Coordinator
- Healthy Schools Officer, RCBC
- Recycling Officer, Sunderland CC
- School Place Planning Officer, Sunderland CC
- Building Schools for the Future Manager, Sunderland CC
- Healthy Schools Coordinator, Sunderland CC
- Member Sustainable Schools Steering Group, Gateshead CC
- School Travel Advisor, Gateshead CC
- No response from Stockton Borough Council

The information we gathered in each authority is very different from each other and so it has been summarised below by area.

Redcar and Cleveland

Redcar and Cleveland has 45 primary, 11 secondary and 3 special schools. There are several members of staff in the local authority who promote the sustainable schools framework, including Healthy Schools staff, School Travel Plan Coordinator, the Schools Liaison Officer and one School Improvement Advisor, although there is not one named individual responsible for it. There are three third sector organisations in the area who take a lead role in driving the Sustainable Schools Framework forward; namely Groundwork South Tees, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Teesside One World Centre. These organisations were identified by the schools and local authority staff questionnaires as the source of up-to-date information on the framework and a key driver to implementing the framework in the Borough.

92% of the schools in the borough are registered as ENCAMS eco-schools, an environmental management system for schools, making Redcar and Cleveland the highest ranking English local authority area for schools taking part in the scheme. The authority is also in the top 10% of schools achieving the challenging Green Flag Eco-School Award, awarded to top performing Eco-Schools. The Healthy Schools Programme is highly developed with 100% of local schools participating and 65% having achieved National Healthy School status (October 2008). Another national target is for 100% schools to be participating in the national healthy school programme again Redcar and Cleveland have already achieved this. The Borough has also had successes with School Travel Planning, which encourages schools to adopt safe and sustainable travel policies. In addition to this, seven schools are involved in piloting KS1/2 diversity teaching and learning materials in partnership with Teesside One World Centre and the One World Network North East. Seven schools (3 Secondary and 4 Primary) are involved in a National College of School Leadership community of practice focusing on sustainable schools in partnership with Groundwork South Tees and Teesside One World Centre. Two of the community of practice schools will showcase their pupils' learning and their involvement with the NE Climate Change Schools Project at the Tees Valley sustainable schools conference in December.

The local authority funded, through Neighbourhood Renewal, an eco-schools support project between the years 2004-2008. This involved schools being allocated an advisor to support them through their eco-schools work, it was delivered as a partnership between Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Groundwork South Tees and was worth £320,000 over the four years.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is one of the six pathfinder authorities for Sustainable Schools described above. The local authority has a Sustainable Schools steering group, comprised of local authority, third sector and school staff. The group meets termly to discuss matters relating to implementing the framework in Redcar and Cleveland, organise awareness raising events and it will be involved in writing the corporate strategy.

Of the local authority officers we spoke to, they all said they had a working knowledge of the DCSF Sustainable Schools Framework, and they had heard about it through the activities of the Redcar and Cleveland Sustainable Schools Network, the Healthy Schools team had also heard about it through Healthy Schools North East activities. They all said that although officers directly involved in the framework implications were aware of it, the majority of local authority staff were not.

RCBC is promoting the Framework to both schools and relevant stakeholders through the Redcar and Cleveland Sustainable Schools Network activities:

- Attendance at Headteachers clusters, bursars clusters
- Training for teachers, governors and bursars
- Awareness raising such as
 - Presentation twilight session open to all
 - Youth Conference
 - Press – internal and external mailings
- Delivering the SSF documents to all schools through the clusters
- Close links with the above voluntary sector organisations to coordinate delivery of the SSF

All of the local authority officers agreed that the strategy did relate to their work, although this tended to be related to only one or two doorways rather than the framework as a whole. They recognised how the framework could help them to achieve targets, such as linking Healthy Schools to the Food and Drink doorway, the Travel Plan to the Travel and Traffic doorway and so on. There was a consensus that linking initiatives in this way was easier for schools. However, none of the officers used any of the key literature produced by DCSF to support the delivery of the framework.

To improve the uptake by schools, officers had the following suggestions for the LA:

- Awareness and training sessions (planned)
- Engage cabinet members, elected officers and senior staff
- Wider promotion of events
- Relate it to existing programmes (although this has been done by DCSF in their document relating the SSF to national recognition schemes)
- Incorporate the targets from the SSF into the remits of key staff, including reporting on achievements.

Gateshead

Gateshead has 69 primary schools and 10 secondary schools. The council has a team of school travel advisers and in August 2008 Gateshead produced a sustainable modes of travel strategy which made specific reference to school travel. The strategy aimed for all Gateshead schools to have a school travel plan by 2010 and set out current barriers and solutions in Gateshead for sustainable travel. The council also has a local agenda 21 officer and a LA21 strategy; Here Today; Here Tomorrow, which aims to integrate the principles of sustainable development into the day to day working of the Council and its partner organisations, looking at issues such as climate change, air quality, noise

management, biodiversity, energy conservation, green purchasing, sustainable transport, waste management, water conservation, education and community involvement.

In Gateshead we spoke to head teachers and school business managers at a selection of Primary Schools as well as a Health Education Adviser and school travel advisor at Gateshead Council. Many officers from Gateshead Council who are directly involved in schools and the environment, recently attended a sustainable schools conference, and so generally it is felt that currently levels of awareness are high. Gateshead Council is developing and delivering a range of strategies to make schools more aware of sustainable schools, for example promotional materials such as mouse mats and banners are being produced and distributed to schools and teacher training centres. The council has also lead schemes designed to share best practice, in particular by enabling a green flag school to partner with other schools in the area. Officers within the council feel that they have strong links with other organisations that help them to spread the sustainable schools message more widely- eg climate change project, food for life partnership, one world network, Newcastle University. Officers felt that the message is getting through to schools but because sustainability is such a wide, varied area, schools find it a challenge and really need support. There was also a suggestion that by involving the wider community more (perhaps through parents etc the message would get through better).

The business managers and heads that we spoke to were aware of sustainable schools and all said that they had found out about it from the local authority. One school had used the documents available on the Sustainable Schools site and had found them most useful in making staff more aware and encouraging an integrated approach to Sustainable Schools. This was something that came through from both schools and local authority officers in Gateshead, they felt that by showing schools how to integrate the sustainability work throughout the curriculum and ethos of the school it could be seen as an advantage rather than an extra demand on time and resources.

When asked about how schools could be better supported to implement the sustainable schools strategy, officers and school staff made the following suggestions:

- funding would help schools. Schools appreciate that savings can be made over time but feel that initial outlay of some resources for sustainability is too much.
- Needs to be joined up at local authority, which it is in Gateshead
- DCSF should disseminate to schools directly, links with ofsted would help. Schools have initiative overload and can feel like its too much. In order to appreciate the importance of the strategy it needs to be fully integrated into the inspection process.
- Ensuring that schools see this as an integrated idea and so don't look on it as an extra burden.

Conclusion

There is a general feeling in Gateshead that as an authority they are quite far ahead with this and feel that they have achieved good awareness of Sustainable Schools by strong communication between local authority and schools.

Sunderland

Sunderland has 83 Primary Schools and 17 Secondary Schools. Sunderland City Council sets out its vision for sustainable communities in the Sunderland Strategy. The strategy makes reference to the building schools for the future programme, which will see the city update a number of secondary schools and gain three new Sunderland Model Academies, which will be more sustainable and provide pupils with opportunities to learn about sustainable living.

Sunderland City Council has a Sustainability team who work both with schools and the wider community to develop and implement Sunderland's approach to sustainable development. Currently, amongst other project and initiatives, the sustainability team are working with Groundwork East Durham on an eco schools project that involves 19 schools throughout the city. As part of the project, officers from both SCC and Groundwork, raise awareness of Sustainable Schools and promote links through eco schools and healthy schools. The sustainability team also has partnerships with the regional climate change project and runs its own awareness raising and involvement events such as environment week. In all of the team's work with schools, they promote and raise awareness of sustainable schools.

Despite the work of the sustainability team; both on meeting school staff for the eco schools project and during one to ones, we found that schools have a low level of awareness of sustainable schools. In some schools, head teachers are aware of the project and informed us that they have plans to integrate it into the school curriculum and campus. Mostly, however, teaching staff themselves appear to be unaware of the strategy except for a few enthusiastic teachers with a personal interest in environmental issues.

During one to ones, Groundwork spoke to officers working in building schools for the future, school planning, healthy schools and environmental services. The officers we spoke to within environmental services and building schools for the future had not been made aware of the strategy (although the BSF officer thought it likely that others within the team knew about Sustainable Schools). In general, the officers we spoke to felt that there was a good awareness of the strategy amongst officers for whom it was a major part of their role (e.g. the sustainability team and the healthy schools team). But that for others, awareness of the strategy was probably low. Teams such as environmental services were unaware of the strategy but do have some links with school recycling. One comment from a Sunderland school was that council services did not support schools becoming sustainable, perhaps through a more widespread awareness of the strategy, officers could see where links can be made and schools could be better supported.

When discussing the sustainable schools framework during one to ones with school staff, those who had heard about it had found out about it through the internet. Most schools we have worked with have not used any of the documents relating to sustainable schools, although many are already doing environmental work in schools which link into the sustainable schools framework. 47 schools in Sunderland have already achieved healthy schools status and around 25 schools are working on eco schools projects, with one school having achieved green flag status. Lots of schools in Sunderland have an interest in environmental issues and many are involved in activities and projects such as recycling, tree planting and gardening.

When asking schools and local authority officers about how schools could be better supported to implement the sustainable schools strategy and about how to raise awareness, the following suggestions were made:

- Council services need to be more supportive of schools who are striving to be more sustainable. When trying to recycle a wide range of materials, schools find that they have to use private companies because the council only recycles certain materials for schools
- Target local authority but ensure that there is a method for filtering down to school level. If schools thought that the local authority was fully on board then they would take more of an interest.
- Through tapping in to school bulletins, heads networks and email groups.
- Agenda reports to governors are a good way to get the message across and there are links to be made through school meal teams, as with things like healthy schools.
- The information is slowly filtering through but schools need more funding to implement the strategy.

Conclusion

Where the message is getting through, it is mainly connected with curriculum. To make more community and campus links, more joining up and awareness raising at local authority level may be needed.

Northumberland

A Northumberland School Improvement Officer and the Building Schools for the Future Manager responded to a structured interview, based on the questionnaire in Appendix 2. They said that although they were aware of the agenda, it was not widely promoted throughout the authority and local authority officers had a mixed understanding depending on remit. Again the Healthy Schools team came out as the most aware throughout the authority, although the SSF documents were not used by staff. There was no formal network supporting sustainable schools in the borough that we found, and because it is such a larger area with very small, rural schools spread out from each other it was difficult for schools to support each other too. There was no formal communication to schools on the subject, although both officers were very clear about how the Framework lead to a delivery of their targets and related to BREEAM and National Governments requirements for schools.

They felt that the uptake of the Framework could be increased by the following measures:

- Buildings need to be fit for purpose
- Link to curriculum targets and league tables as these are schools' priorities
- Link to extended schools agenda, school travel plans
- Communicate the benefits to schools
- Funding needs to be available to offer schools a support package – both in capital projects and officer support

3. SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS IN SCHOOLS

Gateshead and Sunderland – see section above

Redcar and Cleveland

Eight schools responded to the questionnaires. Mostly they were from the Senior Management Team. Of these, most (50%) had a 'Working Knowledge', of the SSF, while only one had a Good Understanding, and only one had never heard of it. They had mostly heard of it DCSF publications and website, working with third sector officers from the Redcar and Cleveland Sustainable Schools Network and through local awareness raising events.

Of the schools who responded to the questionnaire, seven were actively involved in delivering the Framework, and outlined how they were taking forward activities under each of the doorways. Examples of these activities are –

- Linking doorways to curriculum
- Allotment
- Renewable Energy projects
- Community eco-footprinting project
- Non-plastic bag village – pupils designed and sold re-usable bags and local shops stopped using plastic bags as much
- Links to learning outside the classroom agenda
- Networking with other schools
- Schools travel plan
- Healthy Schools
- Eco-schools
- Topic days – looking at environmental issues
- Staff meetings

50% of the schools had completed the S3 although there was a more limited awareness of the other supporting documents.

There was a mixed response to how the strategy tied in with their day to day work, one thought it might tie in but would like more information while another thought it was “fundamental to school improvement as it over-arches all other aspects of school development. It helps to support the new curriculum and lends itself to cross-team development” and “the strategy is giving school improvement a holistic approach”. Others saw the strategy as supporting work they were already doing, such as eco-schools and healthy schools, and saw it as an umbrella under which these initiatives could be brought

together. One teacher commented on the positive effects it had had on the personal development of some of the children involved, indicating that it has given them a sense of achievement and improved their care towards other people and the environment in general.

The schools were asked how awareness of the Framework could be increased, and here is are the recommendations

- Whole school approach
- Senior managers need to be engaged
- PFI schools engaging service providers to take responsibility
- Building Schools for the Future to take this into account
- Support available from other agencies – Groundwork, Tees Valley Wildlife Trust, Teesside One World Centre (a DEC)
- Human resources available in schools
- Training of staff
- Time given to staff in schools to do this
- Publicity
- Visiting exemplar schools
- Dedicated funds for this – and dedicated staff instead of teaching staff
- Better support from LA i.e. recycling collection
- More events where both staff and children can meet to share experiences

Northumberland

One school responded to the questionnaire, they had heard of the framework but had had no training, and they were not aware of any of the supporting documents and tools. They covered some of the work in the curriculum, particularly in geography, science and Duke of Edinburgh awards but admitted it was piecemeal and did not know what the doorways were. They were not aware of any relevant award schemes such as eco-schools and had not therefore made links with the SSF.

The school felt the following would enable higher uptake:

- More clarification
- More training
- Too many other initiatives / training so this one doesn't get delivered.

4. CASE STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE

5. DATA COLLECTION

The following methods were used:

- Three Groundwork Education staff did the research, one from East Durham did Sunderland and Gateshead, South Tees did Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton and Northumberland did their area.
- Questionnaires were circulated to all the schools in the authority area by email, and also sent directly to those teachers who were in contact with officers
- One event was held in Redcar and Cleveland – to raise awareness and to find out how schools and local authority staff could be supported in delivering this agenda
- Questionnaires and structured interviews were carried out with key local authority staff, after an introductory letter had been sent asking for their permission to contact them.
- See sections above for details of respondents