

The Eco-Schools programme extends from kindergartens to universities and is implemented in 67 countries, involving 51,000 schools and institutions, and over 19,000,000 students. It is the largest international network of teachers and students in the world. FEE EcoCampus is the name of the programme at university level.

Eco-Schools is the largest global sustainable schools programme - it starts in the classroom and expands to the community by engaging the next generation in action-based learning.

MEANING OF ECO SCHOOLS

Eco-Schools is a fundamental initiative which encourages young people to engage in their environment by allowing them the opportunity to actively protect it. It starts in the classroom, it expands to the school and eventually fosters change in the community at large. Through this programme, young people experience a sense of achievement at being able to have a say in the environmental management policies of their schools, ultimately steering them towards certification and the prestige which comes with being awarded a Green Flag. The Eco-Schools programme is an ideal way for schools to embark on a meaningful path towards improving the environment in both the school and the local community while at the same time having a life-long positive impact on the lives of young people, their families, school staff, and local authorities. The focus throughout is on the process and on education, however, many countries also combine it with other programmes, as it provides an integrated system for environmental management of schools based on an ISO 14001/EMAS approach. Hence the programme's great advantage is its flexibility

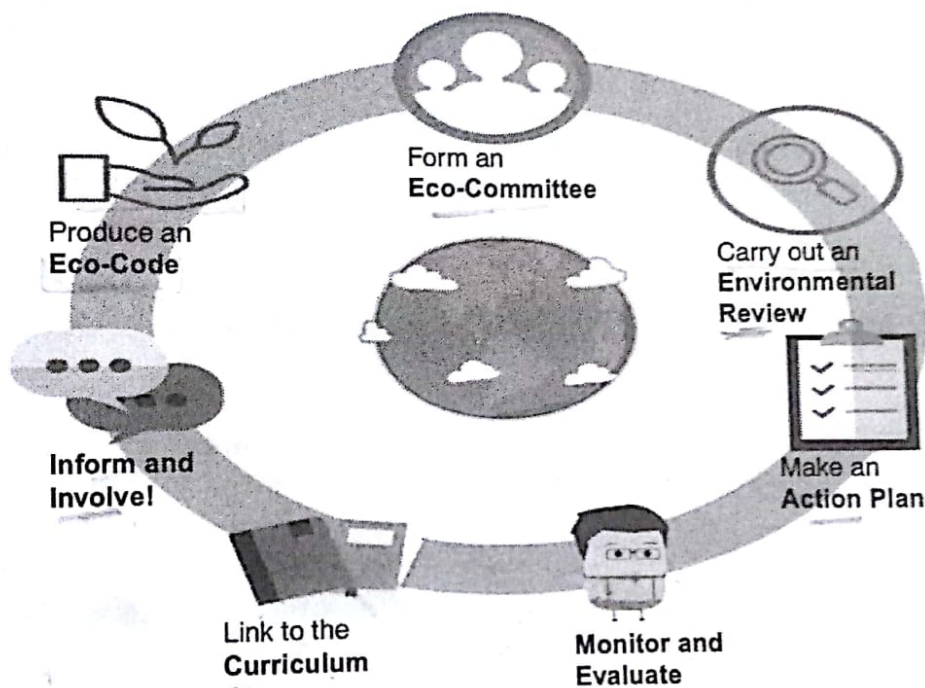
HISTORY

The programme was developed in 1992 in response to the need to involve young people in environmental projects at the local level as identified at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development of 1992.

Eco-Schools was launched in 1994 in Denmark, Germany, Greece and the United Kingdom with the support of the European Commission. When the Foundation for Environmental Education became global in 2001, countries outside of Europe began joining the Eco-Schools programme, as well. South Africa was the first country to do so. In 2003 Eco-Schools was identified by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as a model initiative for Education for Sustainable Development.

SEVEN STEPS TOWARDS AN ECO-SCHOOL

The Eco-Schools Seven Steps methodology is a series of carefully engineered measures to help schools maximise the success of their Eco-School ambitions. The method involves a wide diversity of individuals from the school community - with students playing a primary role in the process.



1. Form an Eco Committee

The Eco-Schools Committee is the driving force behind the Eco-Schools process and will represent the ideas of the whole school.

- It is student-led
- The Eco Committee ensures that the entire school knows about Eco-Schools and will receive regular updates
- Composition can be: Students/Teachers/The Principal/Non-Teaching Staff (e.g.

Secretary, Caretaker, Cleaner)/Parents/Members of the Board of Management/
interested and relevant members of the wider community

- The Eco Committee meets regularly to discuss environmental actions for the school

2. Carry out an Environmental Review

Carrying out an environmental review helps the school to identify its current environmental impact and highlights the good, the bad and the ugly.

- The aim is to investigate the environmental issues in your school/community.
- All 10 main themes should be reviewed annually (the school is free to choose other areas of environmental concern that are more relevant to its needs and to devise appropriate checklists accordingly)
- Make sure that the wider school community works as closely as possible with the Eco Committee to carry out the Review. It is essential that as many pupils as possible participate in this process
- The results of your Environmental Review will inform your Action Plan

3. Action Plan

The Action Plan is the core of your Eco-Schools work and should be developed using the results of your Environmental Review.

- Use the Environmental Review to identify the priority areas in your school. To keep it manageable we suggest focusing on not more than three Themes at a time.
- Create an Action Plan to resolve or improve those problems. It should include: the necessary tasks, the people responsible and time frame for actions in order to achieve your goals/targets
- Make your action plan SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely)
- As with every aspect of the Eco-Schools process, pupils should be involved as much as possible in the drawing up of the Action Plan.

4. Monitor and Evaluate

To find out whether or not you are successfully achieving the targets set out in your Action Plan, you must monitor and measure your progress.

- As always, pupils should be given the responsibility for carrying out monitoring activities wherever possible

- Results of monitoring should be regularly updated and displayed for the whole school to see
- The monitoring methods that you use will depend on the targets and measurement criteria decided on in your Action Plan for the topics you wish to look at and the age and ability of the pupils and other individuals who carry it out
- Evaluation follows on from monitoring. Evaluating the success of your activities will allow you to make changes to your Action Plan if required.

5. Curriculum Work

Besides increasing the status of the programme, linking Eco-Schools activities to the curriculum ensures that Eco-Schools is truly integrated within the school community.

- Integrating the programme into the curriculum can be done, either directly through science, civics and environmental classes or indirectly in other subject areas through innovative teaching
- Pupils from throughout the school should gain an understanding of how real life environmental issues are dealt with in a real life setting

6. Inform and Involve

Getting everyone on board! Actions should not just be confined to the school: for example, pupils should take home ideas to put into practice.

- It is essential that the whole school is involved in, and the wider community aware of, the schools' Eco-Schools programme.
- Means of information provision and public relations to tell about their work can include: school assemblies, school notice boards, school newsletters and websites, school plays, dramas and fashion shows based on environmental issues, letters to businesses and corporations, local and national press, radio and television, etc.
- Global Action Days

7. Produce an Eco Code

A statement that represents the school's commitment to the environment

- It should be memorable and familiar to everyone in the school
- The format is flexible, it can be a song, drawing, model, poem, etc.
- The Eco-Code should list the main objectives of your Action Plan

- It is crucial that pupils play a key role in the development of the Eco Code, as this will give them a greater sense of responsibility towards the values the Eco Code represents
- The content of the Eco Code should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it continues to reflect the school's ecological aims and targets
- The Eco Code should be prominently displayed throughout the school

The Green Flag

Usually after two years of implementing the programme and reaching a high level of performance in complying with these seven steps (sometimes national mandatory criteria also applies), schools can then apply for and be awarded the Green Flag.

Before receiving their first Green Flag, schools must be assessed by means of a visit. After the first Green Flag, other means of assessment are allowed, although visits are always recommended. Assessment should be carried out on a yearly basis.

Benefits of Eco Schools

Eco-Schools is a democratic and participatory programme that provides an excellent opportunity for pupils to experience active citizenship in school. It brings many benefits both to schools and the wider community. Following are the benefits of eco schools.

1. Eco-Schools Green Flag

This is an opportunity for your school to work towards the prestigious and internationally recognised Green Flag award. Pupils love to receive the flag – it's a tangible way to show your pupils how well they have done!

2. Increased Environmental Awareness

Students (as well as teachers and other school staff!) are encouraged to use their new environmental knowledge in the everyday life of the school. This helps pupils to see the relevance of what they learn in the classroom.

3. An Improved School Environment

Students and staff can work together on such issues as reducing litter and waste and run the school in an environmentally conscious way.

4. Involvement of the Local Community

Local businesses have expertise in many areas of environmental management and may

be willing to cooperate in the Eco-Schools initiative. The result is a more integrated community.

5. Access to a network of support agencies

Eco-Schools Delivery Partner Organisations offer support to registered Eco-Schools, delivering on each of the Ten Topics of the programme.

6. Curriculum Links

Teaching resources, curriculum materials and ideas for projects, activities and events are available for all registered Eco-Schools. For further information view the information how Eco-Schools links with the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum.

7. Pupil Empowerment

Through the democratic process involved in Eco-Schools, pupils can take control of their own environment, learning and taking decisions about how to improve both their home and school environments.

8. International Contacts

International links not only give a chance to share environmental information between schools but can also be used as a means for cultural exchange and improving language skills.

Benefits of Eco-Schools to Councils

- A ready-made scheme to assist the council to deliver their educational programme in schools;
- A reduction in the amount of litter on the streets surrounding the schools and in the district;
- Reduced traffic congestion and increased safety surrounding the schools;
- Increased awareness and use of council recycling facilities to improve district recycling rate;
- Increased use of council leisure facilities via the healthy living aspect of eco-schools; and
- A reduction in energy consumption within and the schools and pupils' homes therefore causing a reduction in pollution levels throughout the district