

Birmingham Curriculum Statement.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM. (Education for Sustainable Development).

Within the rationale for the school curriculum in the revised National Curriculum is the following quote:

“It (*the curriculum*) should develop their (*pupils*) awareness, understanding, and respect for the environments in which they live, and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level.”

The inclusion of this statement is one reflection of the impact of the Governments concern that ‘Education for Sustainability’ should be a key dimension in the new curriculum.

An Advisory Panel was established in Feb. 1998 to advise both the DETR and DfEE as to how to develop and promote Sustainable Development Education throughout our society. The Panel has a long- term remit, but in the first year has focused on the ‘Schools Sector’ in order that the curriculum revision could reflect the environmental concerns of the era.

Both within the new subject orders and within the curriculum that is recommended for PSHE and Citizenship will be found references to sustainable development and to Local Agenda 21. The significance of the Local Agenda 21 reference is two-fold; that it links education within the schools sector to lifelong learning and; that it intends any ‘environmental’ work to take account of the inter-relationships between the environmental, social, economic, and political dimensions within any issues based learning or decision making process.

The definition of ‘Education for Sustainable Development’ (ESD) that was developed for the schools sector is:

“Education for Sustainable Development enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the way we do things individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future.”

This definition reflects well the Birmingham City Council’s existing strategy for Local Agenda 21 which has the memorable title ‘Living Today with Tomorrow in Mind’.

A list of the key concepts recommended by the ESD Panel, and some of the ‘values and dispositions’ linked with each of these is given at the end of this curriculum statement.

For subject leaders in schools, it is particularly important to identify the opportunities to build ESD into schemes of work, for some subjects this will be explicit within QCA and other guidance published for schools. The ESD dimension is particularly strong in geography where the structure of the subject order and the wording of level descriptions are significantly altered in order to incorporate ESD. References are also significant in science, design technology, (e.g. “..the global, environmental impact of products and their sustainability” and in citizenship.

Curriculum managers also need to take account of how the environment features within the ‘Statement of Values by the Forum for Values in Education and the Community’ that has been included with the National Curriculum Compendium document. One of the four sections of the ‘Forum for Values’, called Environment states:

We value the environment, both natural and shaped by humanity, as the basis of life and a source of wonder and inspiration.

On the basis of these values, we should:

- accept our responsibility to maintain a sustainable environment for future generations
- understand the place of human beings within nature
- understand our responsibilities for other species
- ensure that development can be justified
- preserve balance and diversity in nature wherever possible
- preserve areas of beauty and interest for future generations
- repair, wherever possible, habitats damaged by human development and other means.

How to include ‘Environmental Learning’ in the curriculum.

- ‘Environment’ is a cross-curricular theme which should be studied and interpreted from a range of perspectives;
- Environmental Education is more an approach to the curriculum than additional content - which has significant implication for the co-ordination and monitoring of the curriculum content and the teaching styles adopted;
- Taking Environmental Education seriously has implications for all aspects of a school’s life and work - the ethos of the school, how it manages its resources and how it interacts with other schools and the community.

The aims and purposes will include:

- raising awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence;
- providing young people with opportunities to develop knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment and achieve more sustainable development;
- promoting responsible patterns of behaviour towards the environment by individuals and communities.

Environmental Education in schools supports the City Council's Environmental Strategy that is based upon the Council's commitment to:

- save, protect and enhance the environment within Birmingham and ensure it is a healthy and attractive place for people to live and work, with its heritage and wildlife preserved;
- respond positively to wider responsibilities by pursuing action which will not only prevent or minimise damage to the earth, but will restore damage that has already been done, and enable and facilitate others in their efforts to lessen harmful effects on the environment.

The schools as significant consumers of goods and services can by the choices made about what to buy and the behaviour of members of that community benefit the environment. For example, our energy management and conservation practices can reduce both the consumption of energy and overall emissions of carbon dioxide.

The origins of 'Education for Sustainable Development' as a significant 'movement' within education internationally came about following the Earth Summit in 1992, at which it was recognised that the experience in the fields of Environmental Education and in Development Education could be brought together under one heading. To give just one example of the outcome, this would be the recognition that work relating to the environment often also needs an anti-poverty dimension.

Central to an 'Education for Sustainability' approach is the recognition of the importance of four inter-related concepts: futurity (the well being of future generations); environment, quality of life and equity. Questions of equity are widely recognised in relation to the relative wealth of different parts of the world, but are also linked to the distribution of benefits and the costs of development both socially and economically within industrialised countries such as Britain. Environmental issues, and responses to them, affect different groups of people

differently, and doing what is best for the environment may not always be an option as some peoples circumstances lead to unsustainable behaviour.

Environmental learning across the curriculum involves the examination of issues, many of which may be controversial. Managing debate and controversy, based upon an appropriate foundation of knowledge, is an essential component of successful Environmental Education.

Ways in which children learn

The processes fundamental to environmental learning can be summarised in three categories:

- Enquiry and Critical Reflection
- Communication and
- Participation and Action

They will typically involve collecting, analysing and interpreting information, asking questions, appraising evidence, evaluating solutions, and clarifying and reflecting on one's own values and beliefs and those of others. Involvement in debate and discussion of environmental issues, leading to personal decisions about positive action in response to perceived environmental needs often in co-operation with others are other characteristics of environmental learning.

If another aim of Environmental Education is to enable young people to develop a practical capability, to make thoughtful choices then there is a need to focus on the attitudes and personal qualities that should be the outcome of effective environmental education.

These attitude and personal qualities will include:

- curiosity and wonder and an aesthetic appreciation;
- respect for different cultural groups, attitudes and values concerning the environment;
- a sense of personal responsibility; a concern for the present and future; and a commitment to just and sustainable development for all;
- a readiness to evaluate and modify one's own lifestyle, to co-operate in responding to environmental problems, and to be confident in one's own ability to contribute to improving the environment;
- a critical and discerning attitude, including tolerance of uncertainty and recognition that there are no easy solutions to many issues.

Teaching and learning will provide direct experience that is relevant and purposeful; give opportunities for exploring personal feelings on issues; include investigative opportunities and learning through 'sensing' the environment. How the class is organised to achieve the desired learning objective is an important consideration as environmental education is also linked to the development of citizenship and economic and industrial understanding. Environmental learning will often involve pupils in planning and implementing projects or action programmes that include the involvement of parents and the wider community.

However a school organises its provision, it will be important to have environmental learning experiences built into schemes of work, in a way that is co-ordinated and open to effective evaluation. As part of the 'informal curriculum', a school can develop itself with an ethos that is 'environmentally friendly', indeed what a school teaches and the way it is organised and managed will be in harmony with each other.

Developing an environmental action plan and in some cases a 'charter' following an audit of practice is often an effective way forward, enabling for example the development of the school site and the curriculum to be undertaken together. Often this is with pupil participation in design, construction and care contributing to their growing self-respect, self-esteem, and links with the community.

In addition to Advisory Support from BASS, schools should utilise the network of services available through the Environmental and Outdoor Service and the Birmingham Museums Service. Both these services offer expert advice and the opportunities for educational visits.