

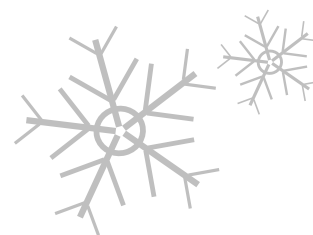


# Celebrating Christmas sustainably

Christmas is an exciting time, especially for children. The momentum gathers from the arrival of the first Christmas card in the shops in August, until the start of December when Christmas really arrives in a primary school. Nativity plays, making cards and decorations – as well as maintaining coverage of the curriculum – make this one of the busiest times of year for both teachers and pupils. The annual school party comes at the end of term, when most other activities are completed, and is usually eagerly anticipated by the children.

As a school committed to sustainable development we decided that we could enhance the enjoyment of this very special time of year by reviewing our approach to the Christmas festivities to reinforce values that we believe to be important. This leaflet deals with how we went about this process and made the season more fun, less stressful, more sustainable and a valuable learning experience.

"Christmas activities with the children were not quite so hectic this year and the children really did learn about sharing and thinking about others." *Teacher*



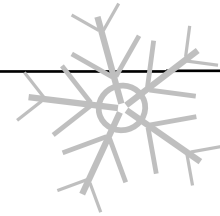
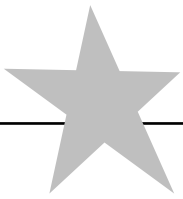
## What has this got to do with Education for Sustainable Development?

### Skills

- co-operative working
- critical thinking
- negotiation
- problem solving
- reasoned discussion
- informed decision-making
- creativity – an ability to envision alternatives

### Values and attitudes

- empathy and awareness of the views of others
- an understanding of the place of individual and collective rights and responsibilities
- a desire to participate
- a belief that, working with others, they can make a difference.



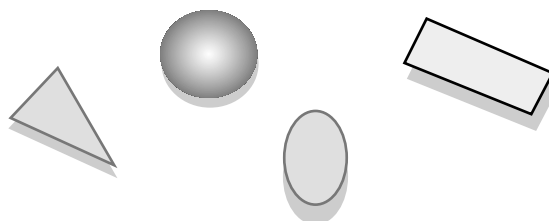
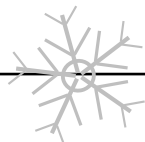
## Decorating the school

Throughout the year, Ridgeway School encourages pupils to be actively concerned for the environment in a variety of ways. Groups of pupils volunteer to work in teams to collect and recycle paper and cans; to keep the grounds free of litter; and to ensure lights are switched off in empty rooms and taps are turned off. 'Reduce, re-use and recycle' is a message we promote throughout the year. It is an important message, but one that is often neglected in the Christmas season as schools reflect the high streets by producing wonderful and extravagant displays. The art stock cupboard is in constant demand and materials are quickly used up. It was decided, for one year at least, to challenge each class to find ways to create attractive displays for the corridors and entrance hall by re-using materials.

This year the children had to be inventive in order to create attractive displays. Newspaper sculptures of a circus scene and large scale flowers decorated the entrance hall and display board. Red milk bottle tops made Santa's hat and robe, whilst curled paper was used to make his beard. Green and red crisp packets were used to create shiny Christmas trees. Saved silver foil made stars. Used brown envelopes and red stamps were stuck down to make huge robins. Shiny sweet wrappers and oddments of ribbon and material made collages of Christmas scenes. Even the cards and calendars the children traditionally take home at the end of term were made from recycled materials.

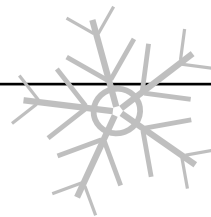


The art stock room door remained closed. For several weeks everyone saved the materials needed and brought them into school. Bits and pieces were swapped. One class needed red bottle tops, another silver tops and another green crisp packets, so resources were shared. The displays were completed and the children admired their work and were eager to see how other classes had used the materials.



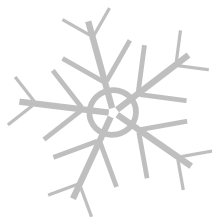
"I think Santa looks lovely. We all brought in our red bottle tops and lots of children in the other classes brought us bottle tops too. I took my green crisp packet to another class because I knew they needed them to make their trees." *Year 1 pupil*

"I thought the newspaper sculptures were really well made, especially the elephants and the seals, but I would have liked to see more sparkle so I went to get some silver strands to make it sparkle more." *Teacher*



When the children were asked what they thought of their finished work, they were delighted with their efforts and viewed the displays with excitement. Only a few adults were less sure; they felt more glitter and sparkle was needed and wanted to buy some bought decorations to 'improve' the displays. No child could be prompted to be so critical, as they valued their own efforts and the efforts of others.

Sharing was as an important part of the project, as was the reinforcement of the 'reduce, re-use, recycle' message.



## The Key Stage 1 party

An eagerly anticipated event at Christmas time is the school party. The Key Stage 1 staff (working with 4–7 year olds) decided that this event could also be used to increase understanding of sustainability by encouraging children to work co-operatively, share ideas and resources, and understand the needs of others. In school, children are encouraged to be involved in decision making through an Eco Committee. This committee meets each half term to discuss matters of concern, and comprises of elected representatives of pupils and governors, administrative and teaching staff, dinner ladies and the janitor. The Key Stage 1 party was discussed at an Eco meeting.

Although popular with most pupils, Christmas parties had been seen as a seasonal necessity to be got through with the least amount of trouble to harassed staff. Ready-prepared blue, purple and red drinks in plastic cartons, cheaply wrapped chocolate flavoured biscuits and brightly coloured sweets were purchased from the warehouse to make preparations as easy as possible. The children were not involved in the preparations and so made few choices. As a result there was often waste. A few children found the party rather daunting and there were some tears from the over-excited or the timid.

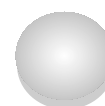
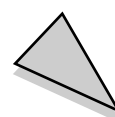
### Food, glorious food

We began with a discussion of what the children really like to eat at a party. They were asked about their favourite drinks and whether they enjoyed the chocolate flavoured biscuits. The parents were genuinely surprised that no child on the committee really liked the coloured drinks or biscuits. They did, however, like the sweets. Several adults then expressed concern about the high amount of 'E' numbers in the food and drink provided, and discussed whether these accounted for some children getting over-excited. They said that they had not said anything before because they did not want to spoil the party fun. The children were then asked what they would like to eat – after all, it was their party. They all agreed that they liked home-made items best. We considered asking parents to provide food from home, but past experience has shown that this is often not home-made, and either too much or too little arrives.



"Why can't we make some food ourselves? Mums come in and help us when we do some cooking in class. We made chocolate crispie cakes a few weeks ago and we all really liked them."

*Year 2 pupil*



"If you don't like something you don't have to eat it, but you mustn't say you don't like it because your friend might have made it. You can just say 'no thank you!'" *Year 2 pupil*

"Can we share the party food with the children in Reception? If I make chocolate crispie cakes my little brother will want to try one." *Year 2 pupil*

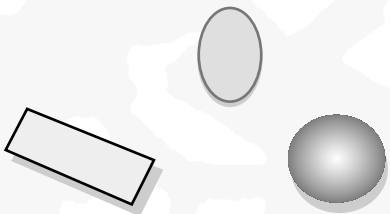
Everyone agreed this was a good idea. Several adults on the committee said that they would be able to help for an hour in party week. The children on the committee went back to their classes and discussed their favourite party foods. They were excited about planning a party menu but decisions had to be made. Not only did they have to decide what they liked, but also what it was possible to make in school. Money could be made available for the purchase of ingredients, but this was limited, so the children had to consider not only the preferences of the group, but also what they could afford. They discovered that they all liked different things, but there were some foods that nearly everyone liked. In planning the menu they tried to ensure that there was something for everyone to enjoy, but had to recognise that not everyone would like everything.

Cooking is part of food technology lessons and the children had experience of making a few things, so it was easy for them to choose some of their favourites to make for the party. Hygiene and health and safety issues relating to food were also discussed.

Making several different items on a busy party day could have been a problem. As we had six classes in the key stage it seemed sensible for each class to be made responsible for cooking just one item and then sharing the food on party day. Chocolate crispie cakes, peppermint creams, mince pies, shortbread and iced biscuits were chosen. The children also wanted to include something savoury but could not decide what to have. Sandwiches were not popular as children often have these for school lunch and they didn't seem very special. A parent suggested making pizza slices with one of the classes. She often made them at home with her own children, and was willing to make them in school on party morning.

They also discussed what they would like to drink. Pop and Cola were first choice for many children but there was a budget to consider. They researched the cost of cans and bottled drinks and soon became aware of the expense involved. Alternatives were sought and the children decided that everyone liked either blackcurrant or orange squash. Jugs could be borrowed from the school kitchen and paper cups bought.






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Some children questioned buying paper cups and plates and considered bringing their own cups and plates from home. However, as these items would probably get mixed up, some children were sure to forget and all the crockery would need washing up, it was decided that it was probably better to use paper ones. They could, after all, be recycled, a Year 1 child reminded us.

On party day jugs of blackcurrant and orange squash, together with the food prepared by the classes, was put out on long tables set around the edge of the hall. At 2.15 pm, after playing party games in their own rooms, and to the sound of Christmas music, the children entered the hall to meet their friends. When everyone had arrived there was a game of pass the parcel with a specially wrapped parcel for each class. The present inside each parcel was a secret and had been chosen and wrapped by children from another class. When it came to sharing the food, each child was allowed to take one portion of anything they liked. No-one was allowed to say they didn't like something, but they could say 'No thank you'. They sat with whomever they liked anywhere on the hall floor, to share their party food.



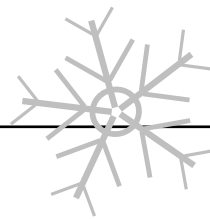
"I liked making the pizza and it was good that the other children enjoyed eating it."

*Pupil*

"I really like being able to share my party with my best friend in the other class."

*Pupil*

"I cannot believe that with over 160 children in this hall no-one has spilt a drink." *Parent*



## Games for all

Party games took place in classrooms before tea. The children were told that they could choose their favourite party games and discussions took place on the importance of ensuring that everyone had a good time. It was recognised that not all young children enjoy the noise and boisterous games that take place at parties. As we had two classes in each year group, the children decided to use the two rooms available: one with toys for those who wanted to escape from the noise for a while, and one for the usual noisy party games. The children were allowed to move between rooms as they wished, but all had to agree to play quietly in the room with the toys. Most children preferred to be in the noisy room most of the time, but several were glad to be able to move into a calmer area on occasion. No one stayed in the quiet area all of the time and there were no tears.

"Sometimes I don't like parties because they are too noisy and I get nervous and want to go home. This time I could go and play with my friend in the other room for a bit, but I could go back in to play musical chairs because I like that game." *Pupil*

## Father Christmas

Traditionally Father Christmas came to the party bringing a small gift for each child – a doll or purse for the girls and a toy car for the boys. These toys were paid for by our Friends' Association who also wrapped the presents. As the toys were almost the same for each child they often got muddled up or lost during the excitement of the party; and because of limited funds available, the quality of affordable gifts meant that some were easily broken leading to a few tearful moments. At an Eco meeting we discussed the possibility of asking Father Christmas to bring a present for a class to share. Some parents were unsure about this, believing that children would be disappointed not to receive a personal gift, but the children thought it was a good idea.

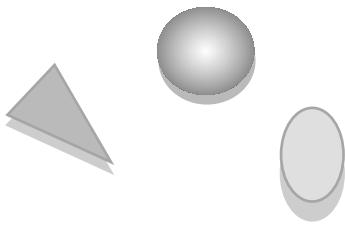
"When I was in Year 1 I had a doll from Father Christmas but I really wanted the toy car like the boy who lives next door to me got."

*Year 6 pupil*

"I lost the purse Father Christmas gave me when I put it down in the classroom. All the girls had a purse just like mine. I think the little ones would have more fun with something like Lego that they could share."

*Year 5 pupil*

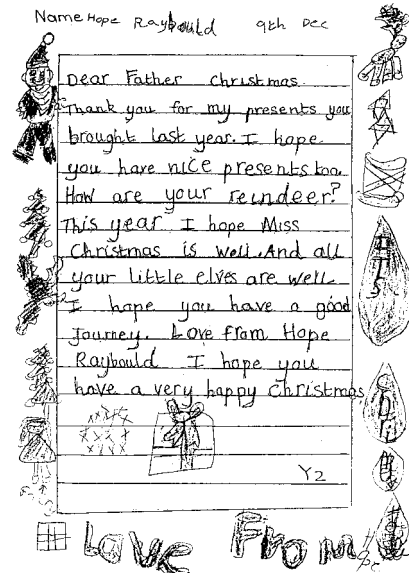




The children convinced the parents that even the youngest children would be happy as long as Father Christmas came to the party. They thought it would be exciting to choose a new toy for the classroom. Each class was told how much Father Christmas had to spend on a present for them all. It was explained that this year, he wanted it to be really special and that they were allowed to choose something that they could all enjoy and that they would be able to share in the classroom. There was much discussion as to what they would like. It had to be suitable for both boys and girls. It had to be sturdy as it would get a lot of use if they chose wisely. Also Father Christmas had a lot of children for whom to buy presents, so cost and value for money were further considerations. The children had to be aware of the wishes of others as well as their own.

Children wrote to Father Christmas as usual to ask for their gift and some decided to include in their letters questions about Mrs Christmas, the reindeer and what Father Christmas was hoping for in his Christmas stocking! When he arrived towards the end of the party the excitement was no less than usual. When the present was opened the children were delighted. Construction kits, Lego people and play mobile were the most popular choices. Next day they learnt to take turns to play with their present, and took more care than usual to ensure no pieces were missing before it was put away. The Friend's Association who funded the presents were delighted and agreed that it had been such a success, that it could be repeated next year.

Our adult classroom helpers also witnessed how the play equipment chosen by the children was both popular and long lasting, and agreed that, with guidance, the children could make sensible decisions.



"Father Christmas doesn't have enough money to buy all of that Lego just for us. We could ask Miss Lines' class if they would like to ask for the other models and then we could share." *Year 2 pupil*

## Acknowledgements

From a report written by Jane Mason, Ridgeway Primary School, Chasetown, Staffordshire.

Published by WWF-UK, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR.

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