

## MAKING THE LINK

*Selwood Middle School, Somerset*

### Setting the scene

Selwood Middle School is an 800-pupil, seven-form entry, co-ed, middle school in Somerset. With over 200 pupils in each of the four years, it has been a challenge to make every pupil aware of the need for sustainability. Following the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum, and more recently the Department for Education and Skill's emphasis on literacy and numeracy, we have continued to develop the curriculum, trying to ensure education for sustainable development (ESD) is imbedded in many areas.

An enthusiastic teacher had given up many weekends taking pupils on visits to environmental centres, but if ESD was to become part of the entitlement for all children, it had to be built into the curriculum. The school realised that the task of developing ESD was a whole school task that required the involvement of a greater number of teachers, so a working party was created. The ESD Working Party generated a number of innovative, curriculum-based projects.

### Eco-Dome

Eco-Dome is an exciting creation of Year 5 pupils (9 – 10 year olds). The idea behind it is that children have ownership of an area of land that is sealed off from the rest of the world. The children have the responsibility for making the land sustainable. The land has to meet their needs for food, water, shelter, warmth and energy as well as their need to be happy. The waste they produce must not have any detrimental effect on the environment. Children are encouraged to grasp the idea that all aspects of life are interdependent and that we must strive for balance.

Eco-Dome is an area of land about five miles in diameter. It is in an area like ours, with a temperate climate; it could be somewhere near our town. The area has hills, valleys, various types of woodland, meadow, marsh and shore.

Anything needed in Eco-Dome must be taken in when entering. This will include hardware such as tools and seeds, and farm animals to develop a sustainable farm. After that, everything needed – including energy – must be made or grown in Eco-Dome.

Assessment of this topic is very simple. Every week there are one or two eco-queries to answer, to determine whether or not children have understood the theme of the week. When they answer these they will get their Eco-Passport stamped. At the end of the topic, with their card fully stamped, they are living sustainably in Eco-Dome. The passport forms the assessment for the topic.

### Questions on the Eco-Dome Passport

- Where is Eco-Dome?
- If our planet started as bare rock, where did the soil come from?
- Why don't the rivers dry up?
- Why does the sea not overflow when the rivers keep running into it?
- Why are animals or plants found in some places and not others?

- What kind of living thing starts a food chain?
- What do plants need to grow?
- What happens to plants and animals when they die?
- Will we run out of air to breathe?
- Is Eco-Dome sustainable?

Links with the curriculum

**Year 5 (9 – 10 year olds)**

Year 5 pupils watch a video on how much waste is produced by an average family and the effect this has on the environment. After discussing the issues raised, the pupils work on a number of worksheets which encourage them to consider what we mean by 'environment' and ways they can look after their environment.

**Year 6 (10 – 11 year olds)**

Year 6 pupils interview a relative or elderly person who they know has lived in the area for a number of years. The idea is to find out what changes have occurred locally in their time and offer an opinion or view on whether the changes have been for the best. The guidelines for this come from a leaflet which has a range of suggestions linked to sustainability. Examples include waste, shopping habits and methods of transport.

Year 7 (11 – 12 year olds)

Year 7 produce individual tourism charters. This unit is introduced to the whole year in an assembly where various members of staff each tell of their favourite place. The idea is that pupils are encouraged to take on the ownership of somewhere special to them and make a charter which they sign and strive to abide by.

In geography, pupils study areas of outstanding natural beauty. The main themes that are covered represent different aspects of ESD:

- ESD requires a large-scale perspective on the challenges facing an unsustainable society. We look at the use and abuse of land through damaged footpaths. Zoning and some closure of road access is helping to create a sustainable environment.
- ESD requires sound stewardship of the countryside. Time-share is helping to solve the issue of holidaymakers buying up village properties. By changing the nature of EU subsidies, the farmer can make the land sustainable and focus on wildlife conservation.
- ESD requires community involvement whilst pursuing economic and social progress. By evaluating the costs and benefits of tourism, we look at local communities and see the implications large numbers of visitors have throughout the year.

Year 8 (12 – 13 year olds)

Year 8 consider two fact files on people who are faced with the prospect of having a windfarm built nearby. The pupils have to enact a role-play situation where they take on the argument for or against the wind farm. This is done once they have studied the issues in geography and science about the need for alternative energy sources, reinforcing their learning and helping them to understand the implication of energy choices.

### **The vital link...**

What was now needed was a way of linking all the units together to show children that the environment can be studied in various ways and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own environmental impact. We also wanted to make explicit the values and attitudes underlying the knowledge base pupils had gained in other subjects. The 'glue' that joined it all together was the Green Book. This is a folder into which environmental PSE work is put.

A unit needed to be taught in each of the four years. Each unit would complement the environmental unit taught in that year.

The Green Book now forms part of each pupil's Record of Achievement, and passes through the school with them.

What has this meant for our school?

Some of the activities that took place as part of our Environmental Day:

- The profile of education for sustainable development has been raised among the pupils and staff at the school. As a result, more curriculum areas are including topics which address environmental issues.
- Pupils have taken on environmental challenges locally, both school lead and on their own initiatives. A group of Year 7 pupils (11 – 12 year olds) who have expressed an interest in environmental issues have formed a 'Global Footprint Group'. They have contacted several 'green' organisations and asked for details about when campaigns are planned. They intend to raise awareness in school, locally through newsletters and through the press.
- A web page has been created on the school website, and is being updated by the Global Footprint Group, who are reporting on initiatives which they feel are important to the local and global community.
- Pupils have been involved in an annual country Youth Forum lead by Sustainable Somerset, in which schools from around the country met up to look at topical issues such as transport and waste. These pupils have given school assemblies to tell everyone about the concerns of other young people.
- A trip to Uganda is planned for the millennium year for several teachers to develop cross-curricular links with a school out there. This includes raising money for solar power to enable the Ugandan school to have an Internet link with us.
- An Environment Day was held in the Spring, and this is hoped to become an annual event. Each year group had its own theme and various workshops, activities and debates took place. Members of environmental organisations and several school governors took part. As a result of one Year's debate, a group of pupils have been asked to make a presentation to the school curriculum committee on their findings.

A tutor's guide to the Green Book

The Green Book is a four year record of how pupils begin to learn about living the sustainable lifestyle that is increasingly going to be needed next century. It will be part of the pupil's Record of Achievement at Selwood and one that they will add to during their time at school.

The book will be given to them as they start Year 5 and when they encounter an environmental issue, pages will be worked on and put into the book.

The work for the Green Book will be undertaken during PSE time, and should reinforce work which has been taught in an area of the curriculum. The main themes will be under the following headings.

- Year 5: What is the environment?
- Year 6: Become a 'green witness'?
- Year 7: Tourism charter
- Year 8: Role play and wind farm debate

*This case study was developed in consultation with Selwood Middle School in Somerset. It participated in CMAS from 1994 – 1996.*