



THE TIDY BRITAIN ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Achieving Carbon Reductions at Scale and Embedding Climate Change in Education through Eco-Schools

24th November 2021, 10:00-11:00

Zoom
Minutes

Speakers

Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy

Peter Kyle MP, Shadow Minister (Education) (Schools)

Lesley Jones, President of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and CEO of Keep Wales Tidy

Graham Frost, representing the National Association of Head Teachers, and Head Teacher at Robert Ferguson Primary School

Present

Kevin Hollinrake MP (Chair)

Peter Kyle MP

Jason McCartney MP

Jane Hunt MP

Afzal Khan MP

Christian Wakeford MP

Mark Logan MP

Office of Kate Osborne MP (representative)

Office of Philip Dunne MP (representative)

Office of James Wild MP (representative)

Office of Liz Twist MP (representative)

Apologies

Sir Graham Brady MP

Simon Fell MP

Caroline Lucas MP

David Simmonds CBE MP

Kerry McCarthy MP

10.00: Welcome and Opening Remarks (Kevin Hollinrake MP)

- **Kevin Hollinrake MP** welcomed parliamentarians and speakers to the meeting.
- Kevin outlined the importance of the meeting topic, climate change. It is the always the number one issue constituents are concerned about, no matter their age.
- Kevin noted that climate change is not embedded in our curriculum and this was passionately debated recently in parliament. He noted the importance of everyone learning about climate change and taking action. He noted one of his predecessors in parliament who said “no one ever made a bigger mistake than him who did nothing because he could only do a little.
- Kevin noted that the Eco-Schools programme is embedded in the education system in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not in England, so there is a very compelling case for it to be supported in England. Kevin also noted that Eco-Schools provides a framework to achieve carbon reduction at scale. He introduced the fantastic panel of speakers who would be discussing this today and explained there would be 20 minutes at the end for discussion.

10.05 : Allison Ogden-Newton OBE, Chief Executive of Keep Britain Tidy

- Allison noted that COP26 recently set the scene for environmental action, however environmentalism is not about reinventing the wheel. We have Eco-Schools, a fantastic global programme, and we want to emphasise how much it could assist us not only in reducing carbon, but also engaging children in this important debate and showing them how they can make a difference. She emphasised that Eco-Schools is the most dynamic, successful and expedient programme to achieve these goals.
- Allison highlighted that currently, there is no mandated education on climate change for children in England. Considering current circumstances, this is a real own goal.
- Allison outlined the importance and gravitas of the Eco-Schools programme – it was established in 1994 by UNESCO and currently engages 20 million students across 72 countries.
- Allison explained how Eco-Schools is a framework to achieve extraordinary carbon reduction.
- She emphasised that while we need big solutions and big leadership to solve climate change, we also need everyone to change what they do every day. Schools are the perfect place for that because they are such a huge network. If every school changes what they do in one small way, they can have big impacts.
- Allison stated that if we instigated the current Eco-Schools programme on energy reduction in the just under 25,000 schools in England, this would save more than 600,000 tonnes of CO₂ per annum, equivalent to taking more than 130,000 cars off the road.
- Allison noted that a single meat free day in one school is extraordinary – by doing this weekly, one school can save just under 3,000kg of carbon, and 1,546 m³ of water a year.
- Eco-Schools also gets students to walk to school and have uniform swaps. Each pupil in England passing on one shirt each year would save 24 million cubic meters of water every year.
- Allison noted that Leicester City Council is doing a huge push on reducing carbon. They are looking to save 2000 tonnes of carbon per annum through their schools network. They are planning to achieve this, and are achieving it, through Eco-Schools.
- Allison also noted the how the Eco-Schools programme helps address eco-anxiety. 75% of children are frightened for their future and 54% think that humanity is doomed – which is equivalent to where we were in the Cold War – and 39% are thinking of not having children. Eco-Schools gives children a way to feel like they're making a difference and feel like they're part of something much bigger.
- Allison concluded that Eco-Schools is the low hanging fruit. Environmentalism is not about reinventing the wheel – we have a fantastic programme, thousands of schools are actively and dynamically engaged in it, and we genuinely believe a student-led programme is the solution as it will engage students much more than anything top down. We know that Eco-Schools is a proven programme. We just need more support. We want everyone to have the same access. Having the support of local authorities like Leicester and MPs encouraging schools to get involved in the programme makes all the difference in the world.

10.12 Lesley Jones, President of the Foundation for Environmental Education and Chief Executive of Keep Wales Tidy

- Lesley described the scale of the Eco-Schools programme. It is the largest student teacher network in the world, with 20 million students and 1.5 million teachers involved internationally. This is so important because it's empowering and exciting for young people to be a part of.
- Lesley emphasised that it is a unique programme because its student-led and it's based on taking actions. She also noted that it has a structured framework which helps it be delivered consistently across the world.
- In Wales and Scotland the programme is funded by national government. This makes a difference because it allows the Wales to have a team of expert educators who have in depth education and experience, allows us to provide education and training for students on the 3

biggest challenges facing the world – biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change. Lesley noted that many teachers want to include this in schools but they don't have the knowledge to do so - Eco-Schools provides that valuable training and resources, supports teachers and provides interactive and inspiring student sessions.

- Lesley said that education has been recognised as one of the most important tools to help us mitigate and adapt to climate change. David Attenborough said that no one will protect what they don't care about.
- The Eco-Schools student-led action focused approach, gives students the experience, the skills, the knowledge and the confidence to actually do something and take action. At COP Cymru recently, Lord Deben said “education will empower young people to move from the angst and frustration they feel to taking informed action and influencing others”.
- Lesley noted that through pester power – young people influence their friends and families – the programme has huge reach.
- She concluded that young people are the future decision makers and policy makers and Eco-Schools' help provide the tools needed to combat the environmental crises facing our world, and she encourages and urged MPs to support the vision of all schools in England becoming Eco-Schools.

10:20 Graham Frost, representing the National Association of Head Teachers, and Head Teacher at Robert Ferguson Primary School

- Graham noted that eco-anxiety is a very real thing in schools, and children's anxiety is elevated when they're asked to take actions. There's an opportunity for teaching climate change in the curriculum – but it's not well enough mandated.
- Graham noted that through Eco-Schools he has worked in collaboration with other organisations and local businesses, increased recycling, grown own vegetables of school kitchen, rewilded areas of the school grounds, trained staff, and done things to reduce the estate's carbon footprint, including installing 83 solar panels.
- He noted that the elevation of eco-anxiety is often short lived. Children expect there to be more change. Pester power has an influence on friends and family but it only goes so far.
- Graham said politics need to be taken out of environmental considerations. There is a feeling for some of his colleagues in schools they're delving into political issues by discussing climate change – but this is an issue for all of humanity .
- Graham noted that that there are obstacles to reducing the carbon impact of the school estate because of costs. He encouraged MPs to consider how we encourage schools to move away from a system where we go for the cheapest tender, and instead go more for invest to save. He provided the example of new taps installed at his school which were meant to save water but they were cheap so they leaked; in comparison to the installation of solar panels which were expensive but will save costs and carbon in the long term.
- He concluded by asking MPs to support Eco-Schools and that there's lots that policy makers can do to help young people feel empowered and listened to and to lead to system change.

10:28 Peter Kyle MP, Shadow Schools Minister and Vice Chair of the APPG

- Peter noted that despite belonging to different parties, MPs on the call today are open-hearted about how we deal with environmental issues.
- He noted he is currently the Shadow Schools Minister but has previously helped set up schools in his constituency. Two of them became Eco-Schools at the very beginning. They became Eco-Schools because they the children asked for it. He also echoed what Kevin said about climate change being the most popular topic children ask about.
- Peter noted that young people have a real ambition and too often that is written off as youth and idealism, but people underestimate the sense of determination that underlies this and too often the system beats it out of young people. In our system and particularly in politics, we don't match the scale of ambition that young people have for themselves and their generation, this is something we have to wake up to

- Peter noted he was a Governor of two schools that have become Eco-Schools, so he has seen first-hand how it puts young people in the driving seat. He also outlined the importance of involving aspects climate change into different aspects of the curriculum (social science, humanities, maths, sports as well as science) instead of having one session on climate change.
- Peter said that as Shadow Schools Minister, his party has taken on board the Eco-Schools narrative – and would like to it more formally recognized by government. Eco-Schools is a part of Labour’s policy making. What Labour would like to do is see this embedded into the curriculum in a more formal way.
- Peter stated that we must start investing in the career development of teachers - ensuring that climate change as well as local environmental issues are included in their training. Post pandemic, we have a once in a generation opportunity to include the climate change agenda in schools and improve the training for teachers.
- Peter concluded by saying he has a lived experience of the importance of Eco-Schools, and we must ensure that politics incorporates climate change and the environment. He said we need to capture the insight of this group and take it forward.

10.40am Discussion and Q&A

Kevin Hollinrake MP thanked the speakers for their fascinating contributions. He asked the panellists why we not supporting Eco-Schools in England but the devolved nations are, and what can parliamentarians do to help?

- **Lesley Jones** responded that she didn’t know why this was the case for England, but that in Wales it was because a particular minister many years ago had a passion for environmental education and that’s where it all started. The Welsh Government also sees Eco-Schools as an ideal route to share environmental messages in schools.
- **Allison Ogden-Newton** responded that she has had many meetings with senior officials on this topic over the years which are always bizarre because they feel Eco-Schools undoubtedly offers them the answers to most of their questions of climate education and they end the meeting questioning why we don’t support it unilaterally. She said there were two reasons for this: firstly there is a fear the curriculum needs to be changed. We’ve gone to great lengths to demonstrate the curriculum doesn’t need to change, that would be a huge and difficult undertaking, and is just not necessary because Eco-Schools nicely within the existing curriculum. Secondly there is the question of funding – yet Eco-Schools is such a resource-light way of getting a big improvement in carbon footprint. Although the devolved nations give financial support to the programme, all KBT has ever asked is for the Department of Education to promote the programme and to get support from local authorities - that is what we know what makes the biggest difference. Allison said the Department of Education needs to go out with a strong message on Eco-Schools, as it’s an efficient way of getting climate change on everyone’s agenda in the quickest possible time and biggest possible impact, and at a low cost. It’s joining the dots.

Jason McCartney MP thanked speakers for a fascinating session and echoed what Kevin said about environmental issues being the forefront of young people’s minds. Jason also noted that in his constituency in West Yorkshire, he was a director of a CIC which delivered recycling workshops in local schools and worked with community groups on national projects such as planting. He said a key question is how we blend this all together into a national network. He noted the challenges for the Department for Education as there are so many strong cases for things to be added to the curriculum. He noted he Chairs the Woods and Trees APPG and there is a lot of engagement with that APPG. He said this was an excellent session and he learnt a lot.

Afzal Khan MP thanked the speakers for their suggestions and said he learnt a lot. He noted there is a big interest in society to push the environment agenda. He noted that Manchester, there is a relationship between community groups and schools and they are coming together which is a great example of collaborative working. He said we need schools, institutions and councils to come together and push this agenda, as well as sharing learnings from school to school

Kevin Hollinrake MP asked if there is best practice local authority we can look to?

- **Allison Ogden-Newton** responded that Leicester City Council have put together a strategy to reduce carbon which is paying dividends and Eco-Schools is at the top of the list. They are one of a few LAs that have a goal to make all schools Eco-Schools in order to achieve their carbon goals. Allison noted that schools, local authorities and MPs need to work together. She also emphasised that this is not about curriculum change. This is a cul de sac we've been parked down for a long time. This is not about curriculum change, it's about inspiring kids and using what we've already got effectively, to get a big change. We can do that with support. People can confidently get behind Eco-Schools because it's a fantastic programme.
- **Peter Kyle MP** noted that there are 39 schools in Brighton and Hove. It's infectious - if there are siblings who go to different schools, they talk about the programme and when one becomes an Eco-School, other schools start taking an interest. Shows how aspirational this is.
- **Lesley Jones** outlined that one of the seven steps of Eco-Schools is linking to the curriculum. It actually supports the objectives of the objectives and subject areas of the curriculum.
- **Graham Frost** noted that if we mandate schools to spend more time on teaching environmental education, there has to be a decision about what schools ease off on. There are ways of doing that. Weaving climate education into other subjects is important so you don't lose the scope and breadth you already have in a rich curriculum.

10.55 Closing remarks, Kevin Hollinrake MP

- Kevin thanked the panel and noted there is lots of consensus on what we have to do. Graham's last point about weaving environmental education in is important. This is not about doing something additional but about weaving it in. Inspiring young people is also important. "The mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be ignited".
- Kevin noted this is not just about the government doing more but individuals, companies and public bodies doing more.
- Kevin noted we know we can get carbon reductions by doing more in this space. It makes perfect sense that we need to embed Eco-Schools in England as has been in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and weave it into the curriculum.
- Kevin said to the MPs on the call that we'd like you all to become champions for Eco-Schools in constituencies and parliament.
- He said the APPG will be following up with suggestions about how we can take this forward. The APPG which is an incredibly important voice in parliament, and will be sending a letter to Education Ministers about how we embed this in curriculums without taking away from the incredibly important work teachers and head teachers do already.