

St Francis Special School Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Policy

1. Introduction

At St Francis School, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that promotes sustainability, environmental stewardship, and the development of responsible global citizens.

Our Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) policy aims to integrate sustainability into all aspects of school life, aligning with the national ESD to 2030 strategy and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to outline how we, as a school, will educate and empower students, staff, and the wider school community to live and act sustainably. The policy provides a framework for embedding sustainable practices in our curriculum, daily operations, and community outreach efforts.

3. Policy Objectives

The objectives of our ESD policy are to:

- Promote environmental awareness and responsibility among students, staff, and parents.
- Embed sustainability across all areas of the curriculum, especially in science, geography, and civic education along with our L1LP, L2LP and QQI programmes.
- Encourage critical thinking and active participation in sustainability initiatives.
- Reduce the school's environmental footprint by implementing energy, water, and waste management strategies.
- Collaborate with local and global partners to support sustainability in the wider community.
- Align school activities with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. Implementation of the Policy

To achieve these objectives, St Francis School will focus on the following areas:

A. Curriculum Integration

We will integrate sustainability themes into teaching and learning activities across various subjects. Teachers will include lessons on climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity, and conservation, ensuring that sustainability becomes a key element in students' overall learning experience.

B. Sustainable Practices in School Operations

Energy Management: Implement energy saving measures such as using energy efficient lighting, installing sensors, and reducing overall energy consumption.

Water Conservation: Promote water saving initiatives, including rainwater harvesting and awareness campaigns to reduce water wastage.

Waste Management: Encourage recycling, composting, and waste reduction strategies. We will introduce a system for sorting waste into recyclables, compost, and general waste.

School Garden: Develop and maintain a school garden to promote biodiversity, teach students about growing food sustainably, and integrate horticultural learning into the curriculum.

C. Student Engagement and Leadership

Students will have opportunities to lead sustainability projects through the Green School Committee, environmental clubs, and specific ESD related events.

These initiatives will foster leadership and advocacy skills, empowering students to take an active role in sustainability within their school and community.

D. Staff Training

We will provide staff with professional development opportunities related to ESD, ensuring that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and resources to effectively integrate sustainability into their teaching practices.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

The success of the ESD policy will be reviewed annually by a dedicated Sustainability Committee. This committee will be led by a coordinator to monitor progress in achieving ESD goals.

Assess the effectiveness of curriculum integration and schoolwide sustainability practices. Recommend improvements and updates to the policy as needed.

6. Community Involvement

We recognise that sustainability is a shared responsibility. Therefore, we will actively engage parents, local businesses, and community groups in our ESD initiatives. Workshops, school events, and outreach programs will be organised to extend the impact of our sustainability efforts beyond the school gates, including fostering links with Laois County Council, Laois Education Centre, Heritage in Schools, An Taisce Green School.

7. Conclusion

At St Francis School, we are committed to cultivating a sustainable future by preparing students to be informed, engaged, and responsible citizens. Our Education for Sustainable Development policy reflects our dedication to building a more sustainable world through education, action, and community collaboration.

Signatures:

Principal: John J. Moran Date: 10/04/2024

ESD Coordinator: Alma Fingleton Date: 10/04/2024

Ratified by Board of Management 01/03/2024

Signed: John J. Moran, Secretary Board of Management
St. Francis School Roll No. 19337Q

Report on School Garden and Education for Sustainable Development Progress to date.

Introduction

Since receiving funding from the Department of Education for Sustainable Development, we have made significant strides in transforming an underutilised space at our school into a thriving hub for environmental education and biodiversity.

This report outlines the achievements we have accomplished to date, as well as our future goals for further developing our school garden and outdoor learning area. We are seeking additional funding to continue building upon these initiatives, ensuring the space can serve all students and provide meaningful learning opportunities in sustainability and biodiversity.

Completed Initiatives

1. Development of the School Garden:

Through the expertise of Paddy Madden from Heritage in Schools and Maurice Madden from Madden Landscaping, we have made remarkable progress in transforming our school grounds:

Leveling of Previously Unusable Space: A significant portion of our schoolyard, which was unsuitable for any practical purpose due to its sloped terrain, has been leveled. This has created a versatile, accessible area for school garden activities.

Creation of Raised Beds: We have constructed two new raised beds in this newly leveled area. These beds provide a valuable learning environment for students to grow vegetables and flowers while promoting hands-on learning in horticulture and environmental stewardship.

Biodiversity Area with Raised Beds: We have also developed an area containing five raised beds, specifically designed to foster biodiversity. These beds are home to a wide variety of herbs and plants, contributing to our commitment to sustainability and environmental education.

2. Enhanced Accessibility

A key goal in our school garden project has been ensuring the space is inclusive for all students, especially those with mobility challenges:

Accessible Pathways: We have implemented a new surface in the garden's tunnel, which allows for smooth access for all students, including our wheelchair users. This ensures that every student can engage with the outdoor learning environment.

3. Composting and Waste Reduction Initiatives

Temporary Composting System: Our school has been utilising a temporary composting system, which has been instrumental in reducing food waste and teaching students about the importance of composting.

Green School Flag: We are proud to have recently received our Green School Global Citizenship Litter and Waste Flag, recognising our commitment to waste reduction and sustainability practices.

4. Global Citizenship Education

We have engaged students in a Global Goals Workshop with GOAL, further enriching their understanding of sustainable development and global responsibility.

Future Goals and Plans

1. To continue our work on the creation of an Outdoor Learning Area with particular emphasis on Biodiversity.

Our vision is to transform the garden into an outdoor learning area, where students can immerse themselves in nature and actively participate in planting, biodiversity, and conservation projects.

With expert guidance, we are making the most of the natural banks and slopes surrounding the garden, which are ideally suited for biodiversity-focused planting.

These areas will be enriched with native wildflower seeds to boost local biodiversity. It will provide a hands-on educational experience that fosters environmental stewardship and an understanding of the importance of conservation and biodiversity.

2. Expansion of the Composting System

We plan to expand and improve our current composting system, transforming it into a more permanent and comprehensive solution. This will allow us to process a larger amount of organic waste, benefiting both the school and the environment while providing a practical learning experience for students.

2. Development of a Wormery

The wormery we have established has been a tremendous educational success for our students, particularly in understanding the natural process of composting and nutrient cycling. We aim to further develop this system, allowing more students to engage with the wormery and learn about soil health, composting, and sustainability.

4. Energy Flag and Sustainability Goals

As part of our broader commitment to sustainability, we are now beginning the journey toward earning our Green School Energy Flag. This initiative will involve engaging students in energy conservation practices and promoting awareness about renewable energy and sustainable living.

Conclusion

We have made substantial progress in developing our school garden and integrating sustainability into the educational experience of our students.

The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) initiatives at St. Francis Special School have significantly enhanced learning for students with complex needs.

Key developments include integrating sustainability across the curriculum, creating a hands-on learning environment through the school garden, and fostering environmental stewardship.

Students participate in activities like planting, composting, and waste reduction, helping them understand biodiversity and conservation.

The accessible garden design ensures inclusivity, allowing all students to engage in outdoor learning.

These initiatives also teach global citizenship and sustainability, equipping students with practical skills and a deeper awareness of environmental responsibility.

However, there is still much more to achieve. We are seeking further funding to:

Develop our outdoor learning space for all students,
Expand our composting and wormery systems,

Continue our Green School journey with a focus on energy and biodiversity.

With this additional funding, we can continue to provide enriching, hands-on learning experiences that empower students to become responsible global citizens and environmental stewards.

Submitted by: *Alma Fingleton*

Alma Fingleton

Green School/Education for Sustainable Development Coordinator

St Francis Special School