



Innovation: designing for a sustainable future

Recycling action groups in school.

Narrator

This is Canon Palmer School in Seven Kings in North East London.

It seems to have much the same sort of litter problem as most schools.

But at this school, students and teachers are taking steps to improve the environment and develop a sustainable policy on waste.

Dan Foster

We were contacted by the London Borough of Redbridge Environmental Officer and he said we were not using our recycling bins particularly the cans and plastic bottle recycling bins, and if we didn't start using them they'd take them away.

Narrator

The environmental charity Global Action Plan is working with the school, through one of its initiatives, the Action in Schools programme.

Jenni Wiggle

Action in Schools is a programme where we work with schools on projects such as energy, water, waste and transport and we help to over a period of time look at ways that they can make changes, practical changes, in the school that they're going to be able to sustain.

Narrator

Students have different reasons for joining the Action in Schools team.

Girl

I got involved because I thought there was too much rubbish lying around the floor and I knew it could be recycled, so it's just a waste and I thought something needed to be done about it.

Boy

I got involved in Action in Schools because people came to my primary school and showed pictures of landfill sites and I thought we can't go on like this for very much longer.

Boy

I recently moved house and found that we had to recycle, so I thought I might as well get involved to see what it's about.

Narrator

One element of their action plan involves audits of the waste produced in a single day.

The bags come from different areas of the school.

Weighing and sorting the contents allows the team to identify problem areas, and come up with suggestions for improvements.

Anything that can be recycled goes into the appropriate recycling bin.

Jenni Wiggle

A lot of the students we work with are learning about some of the issues in their geography lessons, they're learning about them in their science lessons.

I've had students say to me, we know, we've been informed, we now need an opportunity for action, so Action in Schools does give them that opportunity, empowers the student to make the changes in the school.

Afro-Caribbean Boy

I try to get my friends encouraged and tell them about it. I explain to them what I've been doing, we sort through the rubbish and how much rubbish there is, I tell them we're trying to improve it by 25 percent and I asked them to help. Normally they kind of laugh but then they actually help as well.

Girl

I think if a group of people try to recycle then the rest, other people will as well so it'll have a greater impact on cleaning the school up and making it better.

Narrator

The drive to reduce waste is paying off. There's been a 25 percent reduction since the last waste audit was done, and they're hoping to reduce it by a further 20 percent. It's not just pupils that are creating the change - everyone in the school is involved to a greater or lesser extent.

Jackie Tuck

Well obviously I'd been reading about it in the paper and obviously working here there was so much and I just couldn't bear to put it in the black bag and then throw it in the bin. I call it gold dust. And I just started a couple of years ago and because we have the recycling bins anyway and not a lot was going in there.

Narrator

Now she collects several bags a day to go in the recycle bins.

Jackie Tuck

And that's just me, one cleaner. But you can't ask all the cleaners to do it because it's very time consuming.

Narrator

Dan's office is also a recycling collection point.

As well as used printer cartridges, staff and pupils bring in old mobile phones, yellow pages and Tetrapaks to be sent off for reprocessing or re-use.

Large quantities of paper are still used by the school, but the reprographics department has been trying to find ways to reduce the amount consumed by using paper more efficiently.

The partnership with Global Action Plan is also helping the school to look more carefully at water and energy use.

Through students and staff, the messages are travelling beyond the school gates.

Boy

Now we've stopped using the dishwasher and now wash in the basin because it wastes less water, as well we're getting a shower fitted soon because we've realised how much water is wasted by the bath and from now on my mum washes the car herself rather than going to the garage and getting it washed because it saves water.

Dan

We've a staff of 120 people and if they learn a little bit themselves and take it away then that's quite a large number of people.

Girl

Now at home we've got a recycling box so we're putting bottles and cans in there, we've got a water butt to re-use the water on our garden, we give our clothes to charity shops, re-use them rather than just throw everything away.

Narrator

Action in Schools is far from being just another educational project.

It provides opportunities for change not just in schools but in their surrounding communities.

Jenni

As part of the programme some schools have assemblies, they may have a design show where they're inviting members of the community, members of the council, different key figures in the community in to see what they're doing and to learn from some of the practices that students have come up with.

Narrator

Community action like this is being taken all over the UK.

The question is, can small-scale initiatives lead to enough change to ensure a sustainable future?