

Learning for Sustainable Futures: Project Summary

Who was involved?

Mrs McDonald (Geography and Outdoor Learning teacher and school sustainability lead) and 'One Planet Party', our Eco Team.

The project did however involve all the teachers in the school taking a lead in their own classrooms to encourage sustainable behaviour, and a buy-in from all their classes.



The Learning Context

We are Portobello High school; we are based on the outskirts of Edinburgh and only a 15 minute walk from Portobello beach.

We are a large school with over 1,500 pupils and we are really lucky to have a whole school focus on outdoor learning and sustainability, allowing us to do lots of projects and school community improvements.



Portobello HS Eco Team planning

SECONDARY PHASE: Portobello HS

Learner Outcome Focus: Conscious choices around waste and the circular economy

I can monitor the environment by collecting and analysing samples. I can interpret the results to inform others about levels of pollution and express a considered opinion on how science can help to protect our environment.

SCN 4-18a

Curriculum for Excellence:
SCN 4-17a; MTH 4-11b; RME 4-05b; SOC 4-08a

Related policy & initiatives:
[Eco-Schools Scotland](#)
[Fairtrade Schools](#) (with a focus on sustainable packaging)
[Zero Waste Scotland](#)

Practitioner Reflections

Gently introducing small changes has led to a larger than expected culture shift in the school which has been exceptional to see!

It was really important to be part of a community of practice for this project as it allowed us to connect with others to bounce ideas around and hear from others about similar projects to learn from their experiences.

-Emma-Jane McDonald

Waste and Recycling at Portobello HS

Our project focused on reducing waste at its source and then ensuring that all waste that was generated went into the correct bins to be appropriately used again or recycled.

We started by delivering a workshop at the in-service day after summer 2025, which involved all staff. Our Eco Team delivered quizzes and thought experiments about our use of resources, over-consumerism and waste reduction. We also looked at where the waste that we recycle ends up, focusing on waste exports to other countries, which creates large social and environmental ethical debates.

After these sessions we started our Re-Use Hub. Pupils and the local community collected in clothes and other items they no longer needed, and in the winter we pushed in particular for warm clothing, which we then distributed to the local primary schools through clothing swaps.

We issued recycling bins to all classrooms with signs which explained how to recycle and what to put in each bin.

We then started the main campaign: 'Battle of the bins'.

This involved us collecting in the recycling from a department daily on a rotational basis and counting the number of non-recyclable items that had been placed in the recycling bins. The number was then added to the relevant department's total count and divided by the number of classrooms; at the end of each month we announced a winner for the department with least recycling contamination.

Evidence and Impacts

The project allowed our pupils to engage with a range of knowledge and understanding, including:

- Investigating the decomposition rates of plastics and other materials in order to understand waste storage (landfill) and environmental impacts.
- Calculating the efficiency of material use and analysing food packaging to suggest waste minimisation methods.
- Analysing the implications of excessive plastic packaging on people and the environment.
- Finding appropriate ways to promote a more just and compassionate society.

A few months into the Battle of the Bins competition, one pupil said:

"I had no idea that the waste I produce would have such a big impact on others around the

world, it made me really think about my choices and how little things might make a big difference".

The nature of the project also allowed us to turn the measuring element of our Eco Schools Action Plan into a whole school competition, in which everyone was actively involved with monitoring our progress.

Next steps

We plan to continue our focus on waste into the next session.

We are also planning a large expansion of our Re-Use Hub, including re-use areas and school events.

In the next session, we also aim to deliver Sustainable Choices workshops to the whole of S1 through the Social Subjects faculty.