How Green is my School? – 2019

A survey to examine the challenges and issues that schools face in supporting environmental changes and sustainability.
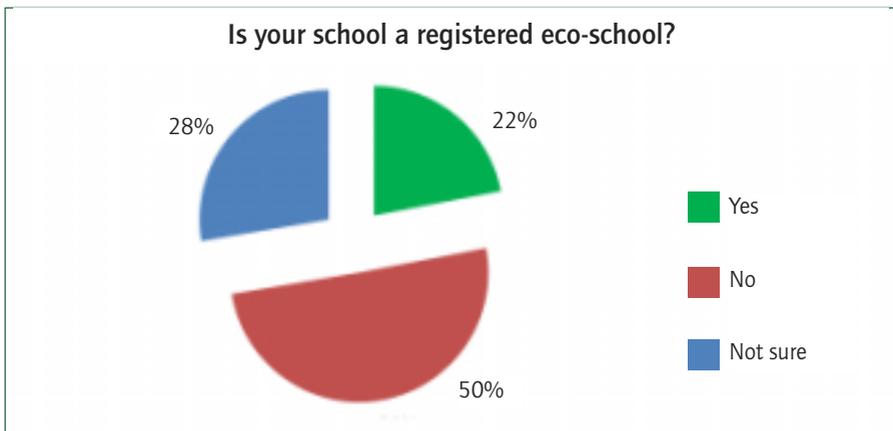
Introduction

In September and October 2019, the NASUWT launched a survey, 'How Green is My School?', for headteachers and school leaders to understand the challenges faced and the progress made by schools in response to environmental issues.

There were 406 responses to the survey from headteachers and school leaders across the UK.

Eco-school/Eco-school awards

Respondents were asked whether their school was registered as an eco-school.[1] Almost a quarter (22%) of respondents said that their school was an eco-school and half said that their school was not. Over a quarter (28%) did not know about their school's status.

For those who said that their school was an eco-school, a quarter (25%) of respondents said that their school held a bronze award, almost a fifth (17%) held a silver award and almost a half held a green flag (49%).

Is your school a registered eco-school?
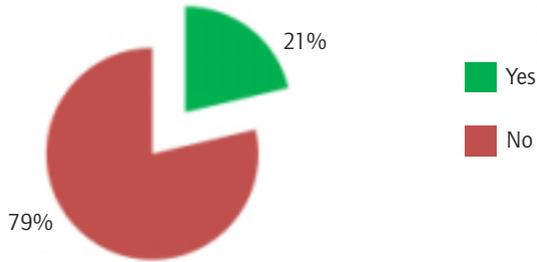
28%
22%
50%

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Advice for sustainability issues

When asked whether their school had received (external) advice on sustainability issues, over a fifth (21%) had received advice, but almost four fifths (79%) had not.

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[1] 'Eco-schools' is an international programme by the Foundation for Environmental Education, designed to empower children and young people into taking part in green/environmental projects and activities. Schools can apply for various levels of award dependent on progress made against set criteria. Information can be found at: www.eco-schools.org.uk.

Have you received advice at school on sustainability issues?

21%

79%

Yes

No

"I would welcome a visit to schools by experts in this, as an awareness raising exercise.

School is still local authority controlled, and at the moment it would cost the school to have recycling bins and collections."

When asked who provided the advice, the responses were as follows:

- Central Government – 3%;
- Local Authority/Education Authority/Academy Trust – 33%;
- School Management Team – 63%;
- Charity/Third Sector – 20%;
- Other – 16%.

Charity or other advisors listed included WWF (UK), Climate Coalition, Forestry Commission and Cafod.

"I think some sort of document needs to be published that is very clear for schools. Something that says 'if you buy [this] then it will cost [this], the benefits will be [this] and will save [this] in the future.' *Schools need education and clarification on what they could do."*

Responsibility for sustainability/environmental issues within the school

Respondents were asked whether the school had any of the following sources of support for sustainability or environmental issues:

- named individuals with specific responsibility for energy efficiency or environmental sustainability – 18%;
- an advisory body or forum on energy efficiency or environmental sustainability issues – 7%;

- access to other sources of advice on energy efficiency or environmental sustainability issues – 4%;
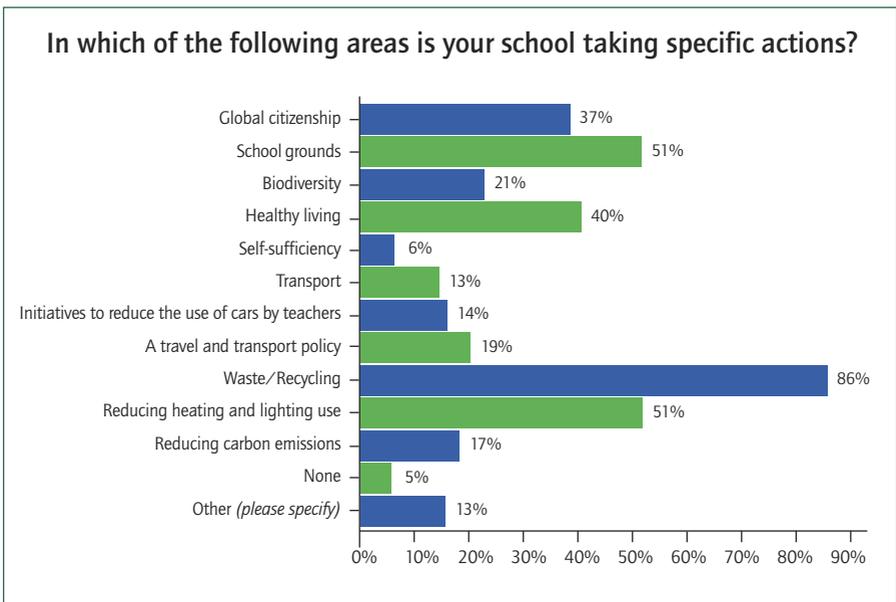- none – 77%.

This meant that over three quarters (77%) of respondents did not have any internal or external sources of support for environmental or sustainability issues within their school.

> *"Our Climate Action Group has only just formed, so I am hoping the school will be doing much more quite soon."*

A variety of internal sources of support were listed in the response of named individuals, including bursars, headteachers, teachers, support staff and even pupil eco-councils.

Actions to be taken by the school

Respondents were asked what specific actions were being taken by their schools. The vast majority carried out recycling (86%). The other areas in the top five listed were improving school grounds (51%), reducing heating and lighting use (51%), healthy living (40%) and global citizenship (37%). Only 6% of respondents said that their schools were aiming for self-sufficiency and 5% said that their schools were not taking any actions.

In which of the following areas is your school taking specific actions?

Area	Percentage
Global citizenship	37%
School grounds	51%
Biodiversity	21%
Healthy living	40%
Self-sufficiency	6%
Transport	13%
Initiatives to reduce the use of cars by teachers	14%
A travel and transport policy	19%
Waste/Recycling	86%
Reducing heating and lighting use	51%
Reducing carbon emissions	17%
None	5%
Other *(please specify)*	13%

> *"The council will not support recycling for plastic etc. They want to charge the school for the privilege of recycling.*
>
> *Plus, the new catering company has everything packaged in single-use plastic containers.*
>
> *It should be compulsory in schools: no plastic waste or food composting."*
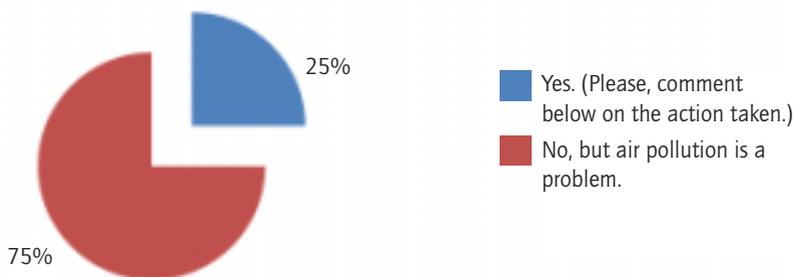
'Other' actions taken by schools included:

- gardening and wildlife clubs;
- plastic waste – school will be zero-tolerant of single-use plastic bottles this year;
- making people aware of food waste;
- this year, the school council will be an eco-council;
- cycle-to-work scheme, county offered.

> *"Our school is an old building and we have little control over issues such as controlling heating. Windows are poor in many parts of the building. The science dept work hard to promote eco-sustainability but it is difficult to put into practice."*

Respondents were asked specifically about whether any actions were taken about high levels of air pollution in their school, if it was indeed a problem. 61% of respondents identified pollution as a problem. Of those who said yes, 25% said that they had taken action and 75% had not taken action.

Has your school taken any action as a result of high levels of air pollution near your school?

25%

75%

■ Yes. (Please, comment below on the action taken.)

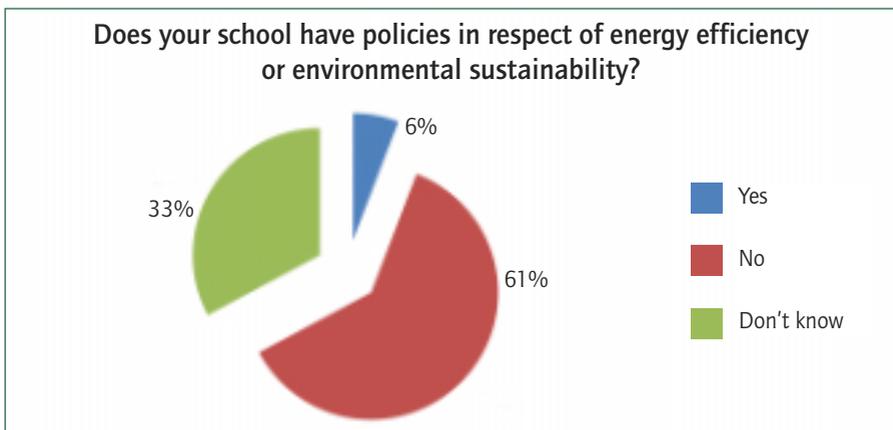■ No, but air pollution is a problem.

Actions taken in response to pollution concerns included:
- tree planting;
- bike to school days;
- encouraged parents to not leave car engines idling – no parking at school;
- encourage staff to car share;
- walking routes planned and walk-to-school days being set up.

Policies for energy efficiency and environmental sustainability

Respondents were asked whether their school had policies in respect of energy efficiency or environmental sustainability. Only 6% said that they had policies, 61% said that they had no such policies and 33% did not know.

Does your school have policies in respect of energy efficiency or environmental sustainability?
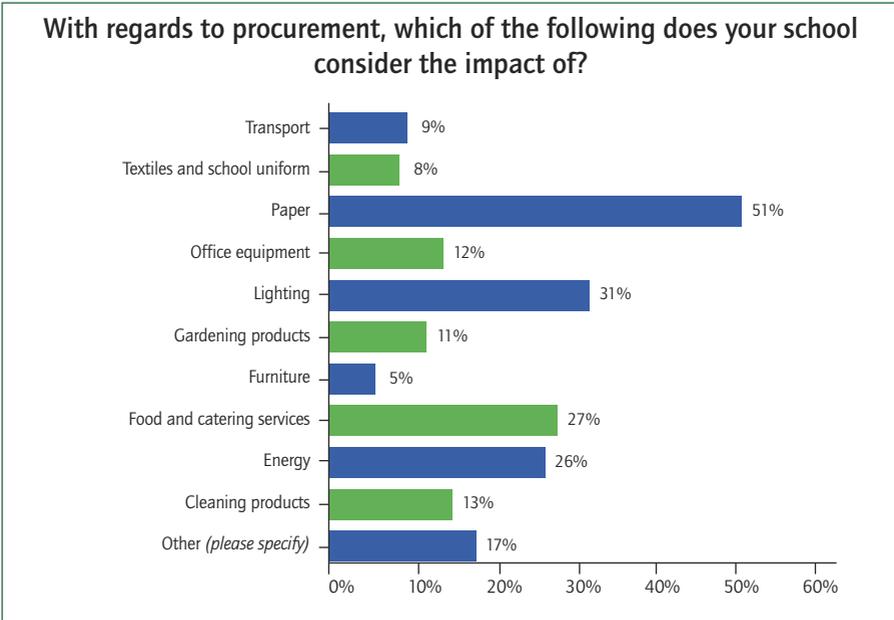
6%

33%

61%

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

"A list of 5-10 key ideas to implement in schools or in the classroom. I would like to set up a sustainability group in our school, but with 43 hours of teaching a fortnight, I do not feel I have time, sadly."

When asked how the policy was drafted, over a third (36%) said that only senior managers were involved, and just under two thirds (64%) had a combination of teachers and other staff involved.

Over half of respondents (56%) saw the policy as effective and under half (44%) saw it as having no impact. No respondents saw such a policy as having a negative impact.

"There is virtually nothing in our school. We copy 1.3 million worksheets a year and none of them are recycled. There is one recycling bin in the staffroom and none anywhere else in the school."

When considering procurement of products and services, respondents were asked whether their schools considered a variety of services and products in relation to their environmental impact. Over half (51%) considered the environmental impact of paper, and almost a third (31%) considered the environmental impact of lighting. Other product/service impacts considered included food and catering services (27%), energy (26%) and other services not listed (17%).
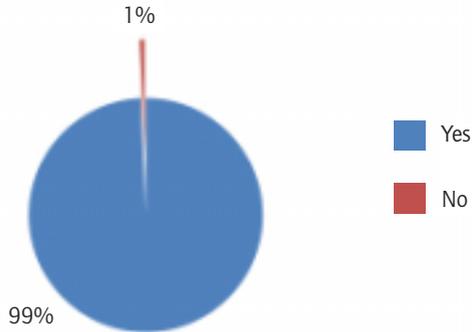
With regards to procurement, which of the following does your school consider the impact of?

Category	Percentage
Transport	9%
Textiles and school uniform	8%
Paper	51%
Office equipment	12%
Lighting	31%
Gardening products	11%
Furniture	5%
Food and catering services	27%
Energy	26%
Cleaning products	13%
Other (please specify)	17%

The other services included uniform swaps and the use of paper towels or hand dryers.

> *"We're working with the terracycle recycling programmes for pens and crisp packets. It's not easy to get on to them, but it has taken off and is sustaining momentum."*

Whether their school could do more to protect the environment

Respondents were asked whether their school could do more to protect the environment. The overwhelming majority (99%) said yes, and only 1% said that there was nothing more that they could do. The response highlights the willingness of schools to do more.
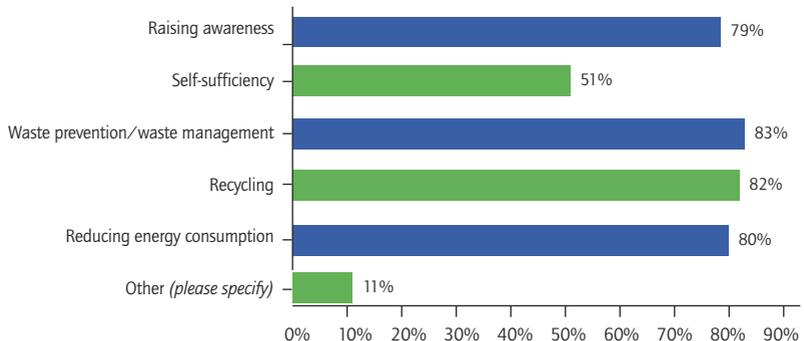
Could your school do more to protect the environment?

1%

Yes

No

99%

> *"Schools ignore sustainability and recycling because local authorities charge extra for schools to recycle waste. In a time of austerity, it only makes matters worse. My school has the heating on one temperature – full, regardless of the weather."*

When asked in what areas their school could do more to protect the environment, over four fifths (83%) said waste prevention/management, over four fifths (82%) said recycling, four fifths (80%) said reducing energy consumption, almost four fifths (79%) said raising awareness and over half (51%) said self-sufficiency. 11% of respondents said that there were other things that they could do.

In which areas could your school do more to protect the environment?

Raising awareness	79%
Self-sufficiency	51%
Waste prevention/waste management	83%
Recycling	82%
Reducing energy consumption	80%
Other *(please specify)*	11%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

The other examples included:

- the issue should be taught cross curriculum;
- transport is still a big issue so we need to encourage alternative uses;

- green procurement;
- sustainability policy;
- modelling environmental awareness to young people;
- greener cleaning products;
- more walk-to-school initiatives for pupils/parents. Ban single-use water bottles for staff and pupils;
- use renewable energy.

> *"We have a five-year-old school with an energy rating of G. It has never been higher than D! It obviously was not correctly planned (e.g. insulation, solar panels) at the initial stage. There is a lot of talk about saving the planet, but very little action."*

Further work on environmental issues and sustainability in schools

The findings of this survey suggest that schools wish to have practical support to help them meet the challenges of climate change and sustainability, with a clear role and responsibility falling to local authorities and central government in the provision of guidance and signposting to expert support. Enabling action by local authorities in relation to carbon reduction and recycling are also highlighted by this survey.

> *"We can talk all we like about oil companies and polluting industries, but there's no doubt that schools, hospitals and other public sector bodies are also doing a poor job (relatively speaking) of protecting the environment."*

Further research and surveys

The NASUWT carries out a variety of member surveys annually.

NASUWT-commissioned research and survey reports are available for download at www.nasuwt.org.uk/research.

> *"It is really hard to do for an individual. It needs more people helping and everyone on-board, plus time to try and achieve these goals. We have been told to be 'more environmentally sustainable' but not how to."*

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