

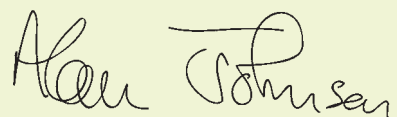
Strategic, challenging and accountable

A governor's guide to Sustainable Schools

Facilitator Toolkit for a 30-minute exploratory discussion

Foreword

Schools are there to give children the knowledge and skills they need to become active members of society. Many children are rightly worried about climate change, global poverty and the impact of our lifestyles on our environment. Schools can demonstrate ways of living that are models of good practice for children and their communities. They can build sustainable development into the learning experience of every child to encourage innovation and improvement.



Alan Johnson
Secretary of State for Education and Skills



Introduction

The future holds many challenges for young people

Global problems such as climate change and poverty are becoming critical. Closer to home, many people are worried about environmental problems such as freshwater scarcity and the build-up of waste, health problems such as the rise of obesity, and social problems that threaten the cohesion of local communities.

Young people have a high stake in the future

Indeed, some of them may live to see the 22nd century. We do not know what that will be like, except that it will be very different from today. Some fuel reserves may be exhausted. The polar icecaps may have melted. World population may have doubled. And much more of Africa may have become a desert. On the other hand, some people may benefit from dramatic improvements in medicine, and drive emission-free cars. Amid the potential dangers are fantastic opportunities.

Schools have a special role to play in securing the future for young people

As places of learning, schools can help pupils understand our impact on the planet. And as models of good practice, they can be places where sustainable living and working is demonstrated to young people and the community. Tomorrow's solutions to the world's problems may be found in our classrooms today.

The Government would like every school to be a sustainable school

In practice, this means integrating high standards of achievement and behaviour with the goals of healthy living, environmental awareness, community involvement and citizenship – the aspirations set forth in Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004).

Schools can prepare young people to take an active role in finding solutions to sustainability issues

To do this, they can teach schools need to take an integrated approach to sustainability and demonstrate it through the curriculum (teaching and learning), the campus (values and ways of working) and the community (wider influence and partnerships). They can prepare young people for a lifetime of sustainable living.

A sustainable school is guided by a commitment to care

This includes care for oneself, care for each other (across cultures, distances and time) and care for the environment (far and near). Care is demonstrated in new ways and in new contexts, opening pupils' eyes to the possibility of sustainable living. Care builds a sense of shared responsibility for a sustainable school and a vibrant local community.

Sustainable Schools can help build coherence among a range of initiatives and school practices

Sustainable Schools looks at the 'big picture' and recognises that a school culture, founded on a commitment to care, may achieve greater things by taking a more holistic approach to school improvement and community development.

There is no single way to become a sustainable school

Many avenues and approaches can be adopted by schools to get ahead with the sustainable schools agenda, based around their individual circumstances, needs and interests.

School governors have a key role

With their responsibility to be strategic, challenging and accountable, governors have an opportunity to introduce and promote sustainable development. Working in partnership with the headteacher and the school leadership team, governing bodies have a central leadership role through which Sustainable Schools can be placed at the centre of school life.

About this exploratory discussion

The Department for Education and Skills launched the Sustainable Schools National Framework through a consultation in 2006. A specialised area on TeacherNet supports all aspects of the framework, including information and tools to support schools taking Sustainable Schools forward.

While school governors will find all or most of the information provided on the website informative and useful, specialised information and training materials have been developed for governors and governing bodies.

Strategic, challenging and accountable: a governor's guide to Sustainable Schools

This 20-page booklet presents a model of school development and explores the role of governors in taking forward the Sustainable Schools National Framework (DfES, 2006). The Framework's eight 'doorways' are introduced and complemented by six 'big-picture' questions that can be used for self-evaluation.

Sustainable Schools: a workshop for governors

This facilitator's guide outlines a two-hour workshop that picks up where this exploratory workshop leaves off.

Managing the exploratory discussion

This discussion is designed to be led by a facilitator. The facilitator may be a member of the governing body, but need not be.

The activity is designed to be run as part of a regular meeting of the governing body. It could be conducted at any time during the school year. To optimise its usefulness, careful thought should be given to events or discussions that will precede and follow this exploratory discussion, or how it may fit into the annual planning and review cycle.

In this activity, participants will bring their own knowledge and experience, and will build their knowledge and skills through their interactions with one another. As such, the role of the facilitator is to support participants in:

- developing an awareness of the knowledge and skills they bring to the discussion
- reflecting on areas for further developing their knowledge and skills
- learning collaboratively
- identifying good practice
- staying on-task and completing the activity in the allotted time.

If you are facilitating this introductory activity, you should be familiar with the Sustainable Schools National Framework and Sustainable Schools on TeacherNet. One of the tools featured on the site, 'Pathways' (WWF-UK, 2005), offers a process for engaging the entire school community in a strategic discussion about ways to take sustainability forward.

Many of the schools whose good practice is reported in the case studies featured on TeacherNet have taken a 'whole-school approach' to sustainability. This has included involving all the stakeholders in developing the practice, as well as developing good practice across all aspects of school life – the curriculum, campus and community.

You may also find it useful to be familiar with the 'Leading Together' programme (DfES, 2005). 'Leading Together' is a school-based programme for improving teamwork among governors, the headteacher and school leadership team.

Facilitation information

Learning outcomes

- Understand the Sustainable Schools 'care' agenda and 'doorways'.
- Be aware of the role of governors in taking them forward.

Suggested timings

This activity can be completed in 30 minutes. It can be expanded, if the governing body would like to have a more in-depth discussion around the reflection questions.

Materials needed

- slides 1–9 and presentation notes
- overhead projector or LCD projector
- copies of Handout 1 and Handout 2 (one of each for each participant)
- pencils or pens for each participant
- postcard-size pieces of scrap paper
- flipchart and marker pens
- copies of *Strategic, challenging and accountable: a governor's guide to Sustainable Schools* (DfES, 2007)
- one reference copy of *Sustainable Schools for pupils, communities and the environment*
- one reference copy of *Government Response to the Consultation on the Sustainable Schools Strategy* (DfES, 2007).

Key notes for facilitator

- One of the key messages to impart is that many schools are already well on their way to becoming a sustainable school, although they may not have used this term to describe the work they are doing as part of Every Child Matters, Extended schools, Healthy Schools, Eco Schools or other initiatives or programmes.
- It would be useful to highlight that Sustainable Schools could offer an 'umbrella' under which schools can draw together a range of otherwise unrelated activities, in order to achieve added value and reduce costs.
- Although a sustainable school will probably be championed by an individual or team, it benefits from whole-school participation.
- As many governors have other roles in the school – headteacher, teachers, staff, etc. – it is important to remember that governors have key responsibilities to be strategic, challenging and accountable. This exploratory discussion focuses on these roles.

Presentation notes

› **Key ideas** are shown in bold.

Display slide 1 (2 minutes)

Thank the governing body for the opportunity to make this presentation. Explain that Sustainable Schools is not a new initiative or another statutory requirement. It is a new way of thinking about **a joined-up approach to school improvement and development**: one that is grounded in the biggest challenge of our time – maintaining social cohesion and economic security while addressing global issues like climate change and poverty.

Explain that the **Sustainable Schools National Framework** was introduced in a consultation, 'Sustainable Schools for pupils, communities and the environment' launched by Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills in May 2006. It attracted more than 850 responses, including more than 350 from young people. A ministerial response followed in January 2007 and then, in April 2007, the DfES published an action plan outlining its commitments to help schools take this forward.

Distribute copies of Strategic, challenging and accountable: a governor's guide to Sustainable Schools (DfES, 2007).

Explain that there are two ambitious **outcomes** to be achieved over the next half-hour:

First, you would like everyone to **understand the basic structure behind the Sustainable Schools National Framework**, and be familiar with where they can go for additional information.

Second, you would like them to be **aware that governors have key roles** in taking the Sustainable Schools National Framework forward.

Explain that this exploratory discussion has been designed for governing bodies with a range of knowledge about or experience with school development and the Sustainable Schools National Framework. **Everyone will have something to contribute to this discussion.**

Display slide 2 (1 minute)

Explain that The Sustainable Schools National Framework defines a sustainable school as a school that places the principle of care at the centre of everything that it does.

The principle of care has three dimensions:

- **care for oneself**
- **care for each other** – this includes people near and far, and current and future generations
- **care for the environment** – the built and natural environment, from the school and grounds to the world.

Display slide 3 (4 minutes)

Ask the participants to **describe a 'caring' school**. What does a school that places the principle of care at the centre of everything that it does look, feel, or sound like?

Begin by giving participants some time to reflect individually on this question.

Then ask them to **brainstorm** key words or phrases they would use to describe a 'school that cares'. **Record** these on a sheet of flip chart paper. Continue until you have filled one sheet.

Display slide 4 (2 minutes)

Ask them consider their responses, and to **reflect** on these two questions:

- To what extent do these paint a picture of what the school could or should look like?
- How do you get from where you are to where you want to be?

Explain that you will not discuss these questions now, but participants will come back to these later on in this exploratory discussion.

Display slide 5 (2 minutes)

Explain that it is likely that they will develop this caring school by **building on a range of programmes or initiatives already in place** in the school. They are not just starting out, but well on their way.

The slide lists just a few of the programmes or initiatives they school may already have in place:

- Every Child Matters
- Extended schools
- School travel plans
- Healthy Schools
- Eco Schools
- International School Award
- add your own.

Ask participants to think about whether they approach each of these as a **separate and distinct piece of work** – each with its own accountable person or team.

Or, have they thought about how all these work together, and how a **joined-up approach** can **add value** and enhance the contribution of each to the school improvement or development plan?

Display slide 6 (1 minute)

Explain that Sustainable Schools is not another programme or initiative. It is offered as an effective way to **build coherence** among a wide range of important programmes or initiatives, with a similar focus on the principle of care.

Mention that you will be explaining the basic structure of the Sustainable Schools National Framework. Could it offer an **umbrella** under which the school could build a more joined-up approach to school improvement?

Display slide 7 (2 minutes)

Explain that the care agenda – in all its dimensions – is best developed using a **real-life context**, and that the Sustainable Schools doorways represent areas of action that schools have used and continue to use to do this.

The eight doorways represent **entry points for learning**. They are familiar to schools already engaged in Healthy Schools, Eco Schools and the DfES International School Award programmes. Although they are presented as separate topics, schools will recognise them as **parts of an integrated whole**. It is a short time before engagement in food and drink raises questions about food transport, school kitchen facilities and fair trade, for example.

The slide presents the eight doorways in relation to individual pupils and how they relate to the school, the community and the world.

At the **individual level**, **'food and drink'** issues are central to health.

At the **school level**, a range of issues contribute to a learning environment in which all learners are safe, have the opportunity to achieve their potential, and are prepared for their later family and working life. These include **'energy and water'**, **'travel and traffic'**, **'purchasing and waste'**, **'buildings and grounds'**, and **'inclusion and participation'**.

At the **community level**, **'local well-being'** offers opportunities for making positive contributions to the school and local community. This level also recognises that community well-being is a powerful determinant of the success of learners in school.

At the **global level**, **'global citizenship'** challenges injustice in all its forms and emphasises the interconnectedness of people and environments around the world.

Display slide 8 (2 minutes)

Explain that the doorways – individually or in combination – can be explored or developed through:

- the **curriculum** – teaching and learning
- the **campus** – the design, construction, management and maintenance of the buildings and grounds
- the **community** – the school's relationships with its stakeholders (however the school defines this group).

Suggest that whichever doorway or doorways these are used to explore or develop, a range of benefits may be realised.

For the curriculum, this could mean improvements to teaching and learning, and enhanced pupil achievement and well-being.

For the campus, this could mean reduced operating costs, higher levels of pupil involvement, improved staff morale, a more efficient building, and a healthier natural environment with greater biodiversity.

For the community, this could mean greater trust between the school and the community, higher levels of parental involvement and a better understanding of how the school influences the community and the community influences the school.

Display slide 9 (2 minutes)

Explain that governors have a distinctive role to play in using the Sustainable School National Framework to cultivate a school that places 'care' at the centre of everything that it does.

Generally this role has to do with being:

- strategic
- challenging
- accountable.

Distribute Handout 1

Handout 1 looks in more detail at what being strategic, challenging and accountable might mean within the context of the Sustainable Schools 'care' agenda and doorways.

Being **strategic** suggests that governors consider the doorways when reviewing and updating policies, developing the school improvement or development plan, developing the asset management plan, setting objectives, and identifying the need for governor training, the terms of reference for existing committees, or the establishment of new committees (permanent or time-limited).

Being **challenging** suggests that governors have important roles as critical friends at the management and practice levels. Through school visits, governors can see first-hand how the school is developing its Sustainable Schools practice. Governors should challenge headteachers, the school leadership team, teachers, staff and pupils to demonstrate how their actions enhance achievement, improve school environmental performance, and contribute to school improvement and community development.

Being **accountable** suggests that governors are actively involved in Sustainable Schools self-evaluation. The DfES has developed a tool, called the 's3' (DfES, 2006), to support this. Governors are also responsible for communicating outcomes and impacts to the greater school community and for completing the cycle by feeding self-evaluation findings back into the review of strategy and the school improvement or development plan.

Distribute Handout 2

Display slide 10 (8 minutes)

Ask participants to take a few moments to **grade their governing body's performance**. They should keep in mind that their judgement should be based on their knowledge of the governing body's activities.

Note the distinctions among the grades.

- **Outstanding** implies **evidence** of contributions to school improvement and/or community development.
- **Good** implies **evidence** of contributions to **pupil achievement** or improvements to the **school's environmental performance**.
- **Basic** implies that the governing body addresses this area in the **school improvement or development plan** and in all relevant **policy** areas.
- **Getting started** implies that the governing body has not addressed, or is just beginning to address this area.
- **Don't know** indicates that you do not know enough about this area, or what the governing body is doing in this area, to make a judgement.

Allow participants up to **two minutes** for this individual task.

Now ask participants to **form pairs** and discuss the grades they have given for each question. Ask them to consider: 'What's next?' Should the governing body be more strategic, challenging or accountable to advance practice in this doorway? Ask them to record their ideas in the last column.

Allow participants up to **four minutes** for this paired discussion.

Ask the pairs to reflect on what they have learned by doing this quick activity. Ask them to report this back to the group. Again, if you are trying to keep to the 30-minute time period, responses will need to be quite brief.

Display slide 11 (4 minutes)

Draw participants' attention back to the brainstormed list of key words and phrases that describe a 'caring' school. Ask them to think about the grades they have given themselves and the areas for improvement they have just discussed.

Ask participants to take a few moments to think about **what additional information** they might need to use effectively the Sustainable Schools National Framework to help develop this 'caring' school.

Ask:

- How will the governing body collect and use this information?
- Who will do this?
- What is the timeline for completing this?

Record the responses on flipchart paper.

Display slide 12 (1 minute)

Explain that this has been a very brief look at the Sustainable Schools National Framework

Close the discussion by thanking the participants and drawing their attention to the resources available on TeacherNet.

Acknowledgements

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