

EkoSkola

Environmental Management in Schools





Contents

Introduction	3
Background	4
Project Objectives	5
The EkoSkola Process	6
Launching EkoSkola in Malta	8
Project Implementation Plan	10
The infrastructure	11
International dimension	12
Assistance required	14
Conclusion	15

Introduction

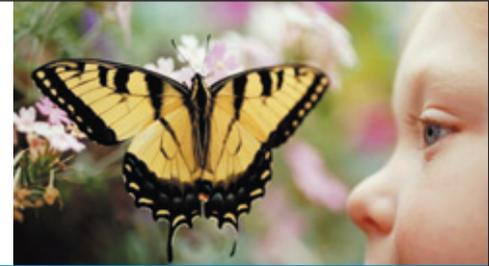
The development of environmental education in schools has evolved significantly. School communities have become more receptive to the idea of infusing environmental education initiatives within their school life.

Besides the regular tree planting activities, participation in the World Environment Day and the 'Clean Up the World' campaign, schools are now engaging in work that requires sustained dedication and commitment. This success is the result of initiatives that adopt non-invasive implementation strategies that respect the diverse school cultures, acknowledge constraints and build co-operation bridges between the various stakeholders involved.

In an effort to consolidate these developments, the Ministry for Rural

affairs and the Environment is actively supporting the next step in the development of environmental education in the schools: the implementation of whole school approaches to environmental education. The EkoSkola programme, co-ordinated by Nature Trust (Malta), provides the framework through which this target can be achieved. EkoSkola is being viewed as an essential component in the ministry's strategy to promote the adoption of local Agenda 21 initiatives.





Background

EkoSkola is the Maltese edition of an international programme called Eco-Schools. Launched by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) with the support of the European Commission in 1994, Eco-Schools has rapidly expanded in 26 countries with around 12,000 schools participating in the Programme.

Eco-Schools was conceived as a response to the need, identified at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Earth Summit, 1992), for involving young people in



finding solutions to environmental and sustainable development challenges at the local level. Established in 1981, FEE is an umbrella organisation whose members are national not-for-profit non-governmental organisations that are active in the field of environmental education and management. FEE member organisations are expected to set up networks with public institutions, organisations and experts to ensure appropriate integration with existing national policies, programmes and curricula, and work to establish a good support and resource base. Besides Eco-Schools, FEE offers other very successful programmes: Blue Flag, Learning About Forests (LeAF) and Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE). All FEE programmes recognise the importance of both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to environmental education, as detailed in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21.

Project Objectives

EkoSkola aims to raise pupils' awareness of environmental and related sustainable development issues through classroom study together with school and community action.

It provides a flexible and integrated system for environmental management of schools based on the models of ISO14001 or EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) as well as opportunities to foster participation, democracy and citizenship education.



- create and raise awareness among the pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community on the environment and sustainable development through school and classroom activities and extra curricular events,
- encourage pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community in taking a more active role in environmental decision making,
- demonstrate the benefits of environmental management in areas such as waste, energy, water, air quality and landscaping,
- develop in participants the required skills to facilitate the implementation of local Agenda 21 processes, and
- initiate networks with local authorities, organisations and businesses to facilitate school-based community development.

The EkoSkola Process

When a school community decides to embark on the EkoSkola Programme, it commits itself to follow these seven main steps:

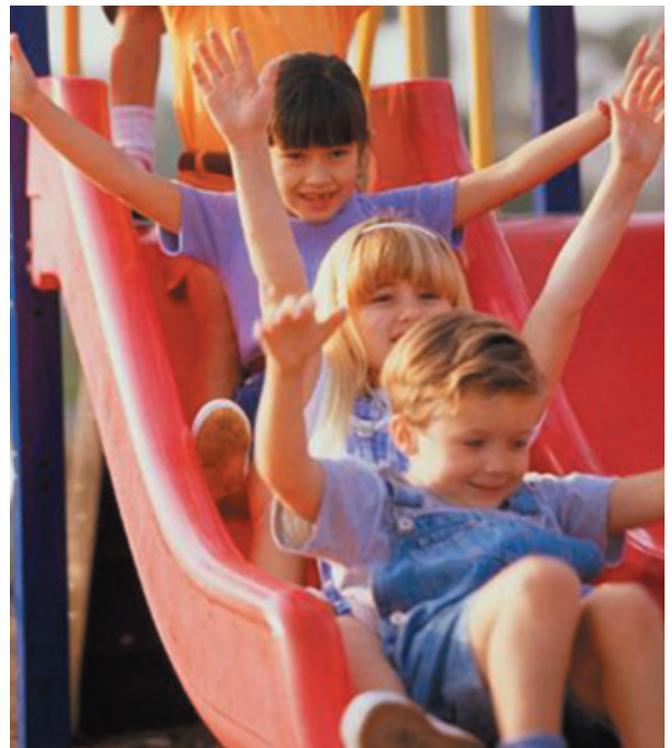
1. Set up a Committee that manages the EkoSkola process. The committee should be made up principally of pupils and other members of the school community, such as the head teacher, teachers, parents, caretakers and local council representatives.
2. Carry out an Environmental Review of the school grounds to assess the environmental impact of their school.
3. Identify priorities that emerge from the environmental review and draw up an Action Plan, setting achievable targets and deadlines on how to address these priorities.
4. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the action plan to ensure that progress is made towards the targets set.





5. Incorporate environmental education in curriculum work ... particularly issues related to energy, water and waste.
6. Inform and involve parents, local authorities, businesses and the wider community in the EkoSkola process.
7. Draw up an Eco-Code, that is, a statement of values and objectives outlining the school's environmental principles.

A school that has successfully followed these steps for a period of at least two years can then apply for the GREEN FLAG, a prestigious internationally recognised and respected eco-label of high school performance. Silver and bronze medals are also awarded to qualifying schools.



Launching EkoSkola in Malta

During the Scholastic year 2002-2003 the Environment Secretariat together with the local authority for Environmental protection - the Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) and the Education Division (Ministry for Education), launched a pilot project with the aim of initiating and monitoring the progress of EkoSkola in six schools.



The schools selected covered the private, the Church and the state school sectors. This pilot project enabled the EkoSkola National Steering Committee (ENSC) to:

- assess the resources needed to set up the organisational framework required to run the Programme on a national basis,
- assess the impact of the Programme on the curriculum and identify particular curricular needs, and
- promote the Programme with other schools.



The pilot project achieved the desired goals and the Minister for Rural Affairs and Environment officially launched the EkoSkola project as a national programme on World Environment Day (5th June 2003). In order to generate more interest in the initiative, information fliers were distributed to over 350 school representatives at a special event organised as part of the World Environment day event. The participants included pupils, teachers and head teachers.

Given its interest in and commitment for environmental education, Nature Trust (Malta) applied for and obtained FEE membership thus enabling Malta's participation in the Programme. Due to the interest EkoSkola has generated in schools, Nature Trust (Malta) is planning to

initiate other FEE projects such as Blue Flag and Young Reporters for the Environment ... once EkoSkola is soundly established.



Project Implementation Plan

Organising a Dissemination Seminar for participating schools

A one-day seminar will be organised for all participating schools at the start of the scholastic year as a yearly introduction to the project. The seminar aims to provide information to newcomers to the project, an opportunity for the sharing of ideas with experienced schools and a chance to exchange examples of good practice and methodologies used.

Assisting schools with the EkoSkola seven-step strategy

Each participating school will be assisted, through regular school visits and the project's website, in carrying out the Environmental Review, the drawing up of an Action Plan, the formulation of the Eco-Code, the integration of environmental education in the curriculum and the interaction with the wider local community.

Monitoring progress in each participating school

Ensuring that the EkoSkola principles are being adequately followed requires monitoring of progress on a regular

basis. Guidance will be provided where necessary and self-evaluation questionnaires will be distributed to facilitate the process. Besides providing feedback about the effectiveness of the actions, monitoring allows the ENSC to critically evaluate the strategy being adopted and identify possible alternative ways of proceeding. Promoting the involvement of parents and other sectors of the community One of the essential components of the EkoSkola process is the dissemination of the activities throughout the school, the children's homes and the community at large. The idea is to inform as many individuals as possible about EkoSkola and to actively involve them in the process hence promoting local Agenda 21 initiatives. Talks with various entities and authorities are planned with the aim of involving other partners in the project. Contacts have been initiated with the Water Services Corporation (to plan visits for the participating schools and provide information leaflets about water issues), EneMalta (for information about energy issues) and





Wasteserv (on waste management issues). Such contacts will aid schools in setting up their environmental policy and provide them with opportunities to manage their resources better. Involving the wider community does not only serve to give publicity to the school's initiatives, but it also brings a range of benefits. Parents, local businesses and local councils can be sources of advice, information, practical help and even financial support... all of which are essential for the success of the Programme. ENSC will support schools in the organisation of open days and other public events and the

distribution of newsletters to achieve this goal.

Evaluating school progress and awarding the Green Flag

Nature Trust (Malta) will evaluate and assess all participating schools at regular intervals. The Green Flag will be awarded to those schools who would have attained the objectives outlined in their action plans and who have given evidence of a sustained commitment to school improvement. The Green Flags will be awarded during a national ceremony aimed at celebrating the achievement of the successful schools.

The infrastructure

Nature Trust (Malta) set up the EkoSkola National Steering Committee (ENSC) to manage the EkoSkola Programme. Besides members from Nature Trust (Malta), the committee includes representatives from the Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment, the Malta Environment & Planning Authority (MEPA) and the Education Division.

Primarily through its national co-ordinator, ENSC ensures the smooth running of the project by:

- monitoring of each participating school to ensure that the correct principles are being adopted,
- producing and distributing support material for schools,
- offering in-school professional development courses for teachers,
- organising activities aimed at disseminating the programme,
- exploring networking opportunities with various governmental and non-governmental organisations, local authorities, civil-society associations, businesses and individuals to add value to the Programme and enrich the resources available to schools, and
- evaluating of school performance for the award of the Green Flag.

International dimension

The strong emphasis on international co-operation and communication involved in the Eco-Schools Programme embodies Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration: “The creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilised to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all”.

A success throughout Europe, the EkoSkola Programme is seen as an invaluable opportunity for other regions not only as a means of addressing environmental education but also in motivating community development. The partnership between FEE and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) provides important technical and institutional capacity to facilitate the introduction of the Programme in other regions, particularly in developing countries and those with economies in transition.

The Programme is recognised by UNEP as among its “preferred school-based / children and youth global model programmes for environmental education, management, sustainability and certification at the international level” (Memorandum of Understanding, 2003, Art 3, 5b). Several international authorities have acknowledged the merits of the Programme:



Mr Klaus Topfer, Executive Director, UNEP: “Lessons learned from the (Eco-Schools pilot phase in the African region) indicate very strongly that the Eco-Schools programme has the potential to enhance practical capacity building for sustainable development.”



Mr Jack McConnell, MSP, First Minister for Scotland: “The Scottish Executive is committed to sustainable development and implementing action following the World Summit in Johannesburg. Promoting sustainable development in schools is an important element of our approach, and we have identified it as a key area within our school improvement framework. The Eco-Schools programme provides an ideal means for us to encourage schools to take this forward, through practical local action as well as an understanding of the wider issues.”

Ms Cathy Jamieson, Minister for Education, Scotland: “The Eco Schools programme is an excellent and fun way for young people to make a difference. Values and citizenship are key aspects of our National Priorities in Education, which all local authorities are developing. Achieving Eco School status is one way of demonstrating practical involvement in promoting citizenship and environmental awareness.”

Mr Sadhbh O’Neill, Environmental Education Officer, Kilkenny County Council, Ireland: “The Eco-Schools programme is the most exciting thing happening in waste management in Ireland. Through the Eco-Schools programme, we can get children involved in the environment at a very young age and that makes a real difference in the long-term.”

Mr Vladimir Strugar, Minister of Education and Sport, Croatia: “The Republic of Croatia officially joins 21 European States in which there are Green Flag awarded schools. Being in the European family of Eco-Schools is a matter of a great importance for our country. Croatia wants to be a part of global activities. The path that you have been chosen is the safest because it is leaning on the educational system of young generations. Congratulations to all schools on their results. I want you to keep on working. I want us to keep working together. It is our assignment to support you.”

Mrs Marija Pejcinovic-Buric, Assistant to the Minister for European Integration, Croatia: “All students who participate in this program have a great influence on the others around them. International Eco-Schools initiatives especially in this part, fulfil the Croatian Government policy and are recognised by the Ministry of Education and Sport. Programs in which young people learn how to act and behave responsibly towards the environment have multiple effects: except knowledge, they give tremendous possibilities for personal influence on environmental protection and joint activities of local community and schools.”

Assistance required

To guarantee the Programme's success at school, regional, national or international level, ENSC will explore and initiate collaboration links with other ministries, local councils, public specialised institutions, non-governmental organisations, businesses and civil-society associations.

This collaboration will provide technical, institutional and financial support to:

- develop training courses for teachers and staff involved in EkoSkola,
- second school teachers to act as EkoSkola officers who will liaise with schools and ensure the smooth running of the project, and
- sponsor the production and publication of educational and promotional materials.





Conclusion:

The EkoSkola project in Malta has had a very encouraging start. Schools have shown a very positive response to the notion of being able to engage actively in school improvement schemes. Schools are eager to try and make the Green Flag award in the shortest time possible. The Ministry for Rural Affairs and the Environment is backing this initiative with the hope that the positive effects of the Programme

will spill over from participating schools into the wider community. As evidenced by several cases studies from other countries who have a long history of participation in Eco-Schools, the EkoSkola Programme provides a tangible opportunity that paves the way towards Local Agenda 21 implementation ... and the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goal to achieve environmental sustainability.



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