



Taking the yellow brick road together

ALPINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL, EXETER

Alpington's scheduled change from combined to primary school presented an opportunity to look at things afresh. Previously, environmental activities and projects had depended on committed individuals to take them forward: as a large primary, the school had not found a way to develop a cohesive approach. Staff now wanted to put sustainability at the heart of the curriculum, and to get the whole school to think and plan holistically.

"We want to see ESD embedded in the curriculum – as a natural part of our learning process. We want to be able to monitor and evaluate the success of our initiatives."

Brick by brick

Four enquiry groups were established based on an action research model, one with a focus on education for sustainable development (ESD). WWF's School Support Scheme seemed like a great opportunity, and the enquiry group welcomed *Pathways* which they felt offered a ready-made process to kick-start and facilitate whole school involvement. If the school already had the 'Tin man' and 'Straw man' with their recycling and sustainable ethics, what they now needed was the 'Lion within' to find the courage to take this forward, as well as the sense of adventure that Dorothy would bring!

The ESD enquiry group developed a series of INSET sessions (photo). The first explored what sustainability meant to them, what it could bring to their new curriculum, and how they might define it as teaching staff. Later on in the year, in a larger session including parents, non-teaching staff and governors, they spent a whole day reflecting on sustainability, before going on to identify what practice the school had already undertaken and, finally, how the school would like to take this forward.

The work was captured in a display showing their school journey – ending with a display of hands highlighting what pupils wanted for their future (photos). The outcomes and outputs from the INSET sessions were also used by the enquiry group to inform curriculum development. Further benefits followed, for as the school now had a clearer understanding of what activities and projects they would like to take forward, Devon County Council and their ESD working group were able to coordinate the variety of expertise from its 40 members to support the school in improving their practice further.

The emerald city

Through this very inclusive process they have *'been able to talk with people they don't normally talk to in this type of depth, resulting in brilliant discussions due to all staff being present'*. And, in spite of their large staff numbers, they worked in an open and democratic manner – something which has carried through into the whole school community.

The process 'validates each persons experience, knowledge... and what each of us are doing'



The school has also broadened its understanding beyond environmental issues: they now see the bigger picture of social justice, economic security and civil democracy, and *'even though these are hard terms, [the process] forced people to think about what words meant, leading to a clearer understanding of what sustainability means.'* These wider concepts and their associated key skills, that they have identified as being vital to Learning for Sustainability have formed the basis of a new curriculum, leading to effective tools for the children to use in their understanding of the world around them.

The next challenge they have set themselves is not to use their red shoes to go home but to keep moving forward, and to look at how they can involve the pupils in this continuous process.