

KEEP NORTHERN IRELAND BEAUTIFUL

Report on the Eco-Schools Programme

For supporting councils

April 2017 – September 2017

Eco-Schools Northern Ireland is operated by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and supported by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Introduction

Eco-Schools is an international award programme that guides schools on their sustainable journey, providing a framework to help embed these principles into the heart of school life.

Eco-Schools in Northern Ireland is administered by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful with financial support from the DAERA and 10 of the 11 local councils to date. It is also supported by 3 sponsors, 13 Delivery Partners and 5 Resource Providers, without whose practical support the programme could not have achieved the success and recognition it has received.

FEE

Eco-Schools is one of five environmental education programmes run internationally by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). In addition to Eco-Schools, FEE runs Green Key, Young Reporters for the Environment, Blue Flag and Learning about Forests. In 2009, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (formerly TIDY Northern Ireland) became a full Member of FEE.

The Eco-Schools programme is an internationally recognised Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) programme operating in over 60 countries worldwide – this represents more than 1.5 million teachers and 15 million students.

Present situation of the programme

At 30th September 2017, the programme had 1152 schools registered in Northern Ireland which is 100% of schools. The number of schools in Northern Ireland has decreased since last year due to closures and mergers and the new schools have all registered with the programme.

The total number of live Green Flag awards is 287 which represents 25% of schools.

In addition to the Green Flag, schools can also achieve intermediate accreditation by obtaining Bronze and Silver status, with at present 147 schools sitting at Bronze level and 195 sitting at Silver level.

Eco-Schools currently has 1 permanent full time Coordinator, Ruth Van Ry (Environmental Education Manager), and is administered by a permanent part-time Eco-Schools Officer, Cathy Gorman. The National Operator is Ruth Van Ry.

Green Flag Schools

We assessed and awarded 110 schools with Green Flags from March 2017 – September 2017. The graph below shows the percentage of live and lapsed Green Flags within each of the supporting council areas in relation to the averages.

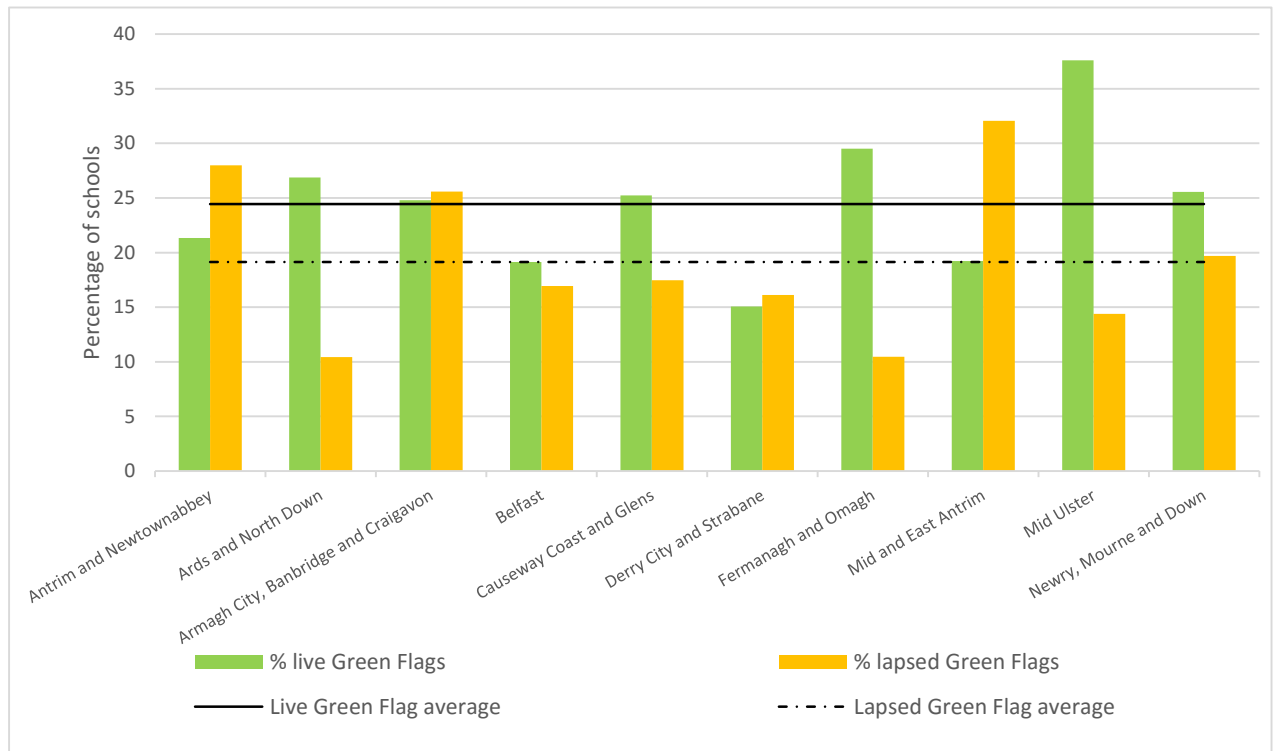


Figure 1: Percentage live and lapsed Green Flags in each of the supporting council areas. The solid line represents the average percentage of live Green Flags and the dashed represents the average percentage of lapsed Green Flags, across supporting council areas.

Eco-Schools Newsletter

The monthly Eco-Schools newsletter is aimed at all Eco-Coordinators in Eco-Schools in Northern Ireland. It is sent to all registered schools, delivery partners, Green Flag assessors and council contacts. The newsletter contains news, examples of good practice, statistics, case studies and latest awards. Monthly issues of the Eco-Schools Newsletters are published on the Eco-Schools website at <http://eco-schoolsni.org/cgi-bin/blog?instanceID=5>. There is a section dedicated to Council News with the aim to increase awareness of councils' support of the programme and provides an opportunity for you to share any news also. Please send through any content by the 20th of the month for inclusion.

Green Flag Assessors Training

There are now over 70 fully trained and Access NI checked Green Flag assessors for the programme. Most Green Flag assessments, organised by the Eco-Schools Officer, is currently undertaken by two assessors. A newly trained assessor is always accompanied by an experienced assessor. There will be an assessor training day towards the start of 2018. This training is also available as a refresher for those who have not assessed recently or who were trained more than 3 years ago. Please contact Cathy Gorman if you or a member of staff is interested.

Eco-Schools cluster group meetings

Two cluster group meetings were held in the last 6 months, attended by over 20 teachers from over 30 schools.

Cluster group meetings are a great opportunity to interact with schools in your area and to let teachers know what services the council can provide. We would suggest some of the following:

- Set a date and time well in advance so that as many schools as possible are able to attend – many schools would prefer to attend after school hours to avoid having to get cover for teachers;

- Contact **all** the schools in your Council area – send out an email invitation detailing the date and time and what will be happening at the event and request that schools RSVP by a certain date;
- Consider asking your local biodiversity officer/recycling officer/schools education officer to give a short presentation on ways in which the council can assist schools in their Eco-Schools and environmental work.
- Invite a member of Eco-Schools team to attend and give a short presentation on Eco-Schools;
- Perhaps think about inviting a Delivery Partner along to give a short presentation on how they can assist schools in working on one of the ten topics;
- Consider inviting a Green Flag school to give a short presentation on their Eco-Schools work;
- Allow time for teachers to ask questions and share ideas.

Eco-Schools Awards Ceremonies

All local councils are encouraged to host a Green Flag Awards ceremony in their council area each year for schools who have achieved their Green Flag in that academic year. We hope to continue with the councils taking ownership of the Green Flag presentations as this is an excellent opportunity for both schools and councils to publicise their environmental activities and to reward the pupils who have undertaken all the hard work over the year.

Eco-Schools staff joined award ceremonies in June 2017 hosted by Belfast City Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Eco-Schools Northern Ireland Website

Eco-Schools Northern Ireland has its own dedicated section for [Delivery Partners](#) on the Eco-Schools website and a [Resources](#) section to which we are continually adding curriculum based teacher information and classroom activities linked to all key stages and school case studies sharing best practise. The content of both of these areas is to be reviewed and renewed in the next 6 months.

The website also includes a News section with up-to-date information about events, initiatives, competitions, campaigns and newsletters etc.

The Eco-Schools website is regularly updated with new stories and schools competitions and initiatives and we are currently working on ways to improve this resource with the developers to further enhance the experience.

Councils have been asked to provide information so that we can update individual pages for each council. Details of council contacts can be found at the following link: <http://www.eco-schoolsni.org/partners.aspx>

Green Flag applications

A new log in area, "School Zone", was developed last year for teachers and includes a Resource Library and Data Zone. This area has been designed to allow teachers to upload documents and data throughout the year, making the Green Flag application and renewal process simpler and more streamlined.

As of September 2017 all Green Flag applications must be made online through the School Zone, with schools submitting data for at least one topic through the Data Zone. We are doing our best to encourage schools to think of the assessment as a year round process and not just something restricted to the final school term. With the continued growth of the programme we have made a few changes to our deadline system this year: schools renewing their Green Flag have a deadline of 10th January and will be assessed during February – May; schools applying for their first Green Flag have a deadline of 15th March and will be assessed from April – June. As always schools can submit their Green Flag application at any time of the year but these are the deadlines for a guaranteed assessment in the 2017/18 school year, schools applying after these dates might not be assessed by the end of June.

Additionally, not all schools renewing their flag will receive a site visit for assessment. Decisions on who will receive a visit will be based on the information included in the application, familiarity with the school, if the school is an Ambassador Eco-School, whether requirements from previous assessments have been met, regularity of renewal. Schools may be asked to supply a little more detail in some areas to clarify if they require a site visit or not. The maximum time between site visits will be four years.

Bronze and Silver awards are self-assessed online and schools can download and print their certificates from their School Zone.

Eco-Teacher of the Year Award

Eco-Schools are delighted to once again invite pupils to nominate a teacher for this annual award. The winning teacher will be presented with their award at the Teachers Conference. Closing date for competition is 1st February 2018.

Future plans

Teachers Conference - Eco-Schools are in the planning stages of a Teachers Conference to be held at the beginning of March 2018. The Conference will include speakers, workshops and school exhibits.

Next Report

The next report to supporting councils is due in March 2018. Contact will be made in March 2018 to request financial support for the up-coming financial year (2018-19). Reports will be distributed to councils whose financial support has been received at the time of reporting.

Mid Ulster Eco-school Green Flag successes

By STAFF REPORTER
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Mid Ulster District Council has the highest percentage of Green Flag Eco-Schools of all 11 councils in Northern Ireland.

There are 45 Green Flag Eco-Schools in Mid Ulster, a percentage of 47%, 22% higher than the average across all the councils.

Eco-Schools is an internationally recognised initiative which promotes sustainable living by empowering our local schools to take real action for the improvement of their local and global environment.

The Council's Recycling Officers work closely with local schools to initiate real change



Cllr Ronan McGinley with Chris Callan, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful; Lisa Brown, Vice Principal, Kilronan School; Michelle Shiels, Eco-Schools coordinator and pupils from Kilronan School, Magherafelt, three times awarded the Eco-Schools Green Flag

under a range of environmental topics such as waste, water, energy, biodiversity and litter to make their school, their communities and the environment more sustainable.

Schools that achieve this

goal are awarded the Eco-Schools Green Flag which is the highest award that Eco-Schools can obtain and acknowledges that the receiving school has implemented real change to make

their school more sustainable. Chair of the Council's Environment Committee, Councillor Ronan McGinley, is delighted at the statistics. "I am delighted with the news that Mid Ulster District Council has the highest percentage of Green Flag Eco-Schools out of all 11 councils here.

Once more it is testament to the work council staff are carrying out on the ground and the level of engagement that is taking place with our local schools.

"The schools do an incredible job in reinforcing the Council's recycling and eco-friendly messages which proves, once again, the dedication and commitment there is in our district to being more pro-active and environmentally friendly."