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Creating a sustainable environment: The Academy of St Francis of Assisi

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Brief description

The Academy of St Francis of Assisi is the first academy with environment and sustainability as its specialism. This example shows the success of an integrated whole-academy approach to these issues.

Overview – the provider’s message



‘Sustainability and the environment is the Academy’s specialism. It fits very closely with our Christian ethos and values. We want to care for our students, our community and the wider population, to contribute to community cohesion and to improve the local environment. We want our students to make a difference and to contribute locally, nationally and globally through entrepreneurship, ground work, initiatives with other schools and institutions and by reaching out and raising awareness of the sustainability agenda.

St Francis of Assisi Academy was established in Kensington, a deprived area of Liverpool, at the request of the local community and with the support and cooperation of the Anglican and Catholic Dioceses of Liverpool, with the express purpose of making a difference by caring for the community and contributing to the regeneration of the area. And that’s what we have strived to do.’

Dermot McNiffe, Principal

The good practice in detail

Vision and mission

The school’s four guiding values are:

- to create a caring community

- show compassion to all
- show respect for all creation
- and work for peace and reconciliation.



Julie McDermott

These are closely aligned to the principles of sustainable development: to care for oneself, care for others and to care for the environment. 'We want our students to see the importance of these **values** and to put these values into practice,' says Julie McDermott, the Assistant Vice Principal for Sustainable Development.

Provide leadership from the top

Julie leads the specialism. This commitment at a senior level gives the specialism status; and by planning centrally she ensures that

everyone is involved and able to contribute. Allocating time to this role enables her to support staff initiatives and encourage innovative and exciting developments.

Empower and involve all staff

Sustainable development objectives are clearly stated in job descriptions, selection criteria and in the performance objectives of all staff, not just teaching staff. The site team gives great support in managing energy and water use, making this information available for teaching, and encouraging and supporting the use of the grounds, and even the roof, for growing crops.

Unleash the potential of students

Students have great ideas and passion, their voice is powerful and their contributions innovative. The representative student committee, known as Student



Student voice – representative committee

Voice, has established the Environmental Action Team. Groups of Year 8 pupils work in a rota to pick up litter after break-times to keep the school tidy and to ensure that everything is recycled properly. Members of Student Voice are currently involved in lobbying the Council and MPs to introduce traffic calming measures around the school. Well-rehearsed arguments are informed by a detailed and thorough traffic survey the students have completed.

'We've benefited from the commitment and energy of our champions but that is not enough. To reach our ambitious objectives we have embedded sustainability in our staffing structure, roles and responsibilities'.

Dermot McNiffe

Make the results visible

St Francis is a purpose built school, with many sustainable features such as solar energy, rainwater harvesting, concrete walls to store heat and reduce maintenance, a subterranean gym with light tunnels, and sedum roofs and even gardens on the rooftops. The grounds, while not extensive, are green and have many gardens.

But that's not enough! The atrium doubles as a gallery and there are a number of displays of students' art work usually using recycled materials and on the theme of climate change and the environment.



Recycled materials used for displays on climate change

Every classroom has a wall or corner themed to sustainable development and linked to the subject taught in the room. Students have painted murals on outside walls; each conveys a message and each new group of students will replace the art work with their own. The students have also chosen to name the house groups after endangered animal species.

Embed into the curriculum



Sustainable development themed wall

Every subject delivers the message. The environmental specialism provides the context in information communication and technology (ICT) lessons, for example for work on web design. It is the focus of mathematics lessons where students present arguments about aid and famine relief based on real data for rainfall, water supply and use. In English, sustainable development is the basis for poetry and in media studies students critically assess filmmakers' techniques in environmental disaster movies. Mike Summers, Assistant Vice Principal for Science and Technology, says, 'We very much see ICT as a core skill which is delivered in the context of our

environmental specialism. Using examples such as recycling, global warming or animal welfare, it is very much about students persuading others to change their views and behaviour. Often the students change their own views in the process. In this way every single student is touched by our specialism.'



Students painting murals

Vocational courses such as the Diploma in land and environment reinforce the message, and construction students learn to value conservation techniques and to re-use materials. The Prince's Trust curriculum, provided in the Assisi Centre for a group of learners whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, is based on the

environment and they are working to renovate homes in the local community. A formal audit of the curriculum ensures that every student receives an input in every subject.

Enrichment



Sedum roofs

Every class in Years 7 and 8 has its own garden to maintain. The crops and plants from these gardens are used in the kitchen, given to community groups or sold to raise funds. Students have won a number of business competitions including 'Make your mark with a tenner'. Their entries always have an environmental theme, such as a wildflower bomb! (A ball of clay impregnated with wild flower seeds, and attractively wrapped by the students. The idea is to bomb bare patches of soil so that they will burst into bloom.)

Contribute to the local community

The school hosts many events both in the school and in the local park. These always have community and environmental themes - a 'Spring Fling', followed by a community Summer Arts Festival in the local Victorian Newsham Park, adjacent to the Academy, the Autumn festival and the 12 days of Christmas celebrations. Students use performance to spread the sustainability message, stalls in the fetes sell Fairtrade produce and fresh produce grown by students. Students help to maintain the local park by tidying up and planting trees and bulbs. They help local regeneration projects carrying out home and garden renovation and maintenance. Members of the community have allotments on the school roof and help with gardening and other environmental tasks. A local group supports the Peace Garden and works with students who may be suffering bereavement or whose families are refugees or seeking asylum. The Peace Garden is an oasis of calm where students can take time out and reflect.

A member of the local community, comments, 'We learn from the students and they learn from us. It is about learning to respect across ages.'

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Act global

Student Voice is promoting the school's application as a Fairtrade school. All tea and coffee are fairly traded and the students regularly sell fair trade gifts at fetes. There are a number of partnerships. Some are well established, such as links with Jubavu and Tanzania, while others are developing such as the links with 'Kensingtons' around the world. Students will compare and contrast climates, ecosystems, culture and attitudes of Kensingtons in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Students raise money to support a school in Tanzania and in

2010 a group of staff and students travelled to the school where they redecorated the classrooms, made desks, and put in windows and floors. A second group of students is already making plans and raising funds for the next stage of this project. One student, who went to Tanzania in 2010 says, 'Although we had researched and prepared, it was more challenging and rewarding than we had anticipated. I hope to return as a mentor with the next group and I plan to take a gap year as a volunteer.'



Students have also worked with a group of students in Brooklyn and the environmental theme has made a difference there too.

Celebrate success at every opportunity

'The building and our management processes are all as sustainable as they can be. Every student learns about our building, its environmental feature and the benefits these bring. We display our energy and water use, and water saved by harvesting rainwater, we are a Fairtrade academy, and our virtual learning environment has replaced paper handouts,' says Ursula Penarski, Vice Principal, Resources.

Provider background



St Francis of Assisi Academy is of an average size. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is well above that seen nationally and represents over half the school population. Students are predominantly of White British heritage with an average proportion from other backgrounds. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.

The academy is sponsored by the Anglican Diocese and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool.

The specialism is 'The environment and sustainability.' The academy has received a number of awards including; the International School award, the Eco-Schools Green Flag award and it has achieved Healthy School status.

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