

Sustainability Policy Statement

Our Lady's N.S., Nurney

Introduction

The purpose of this Sustainability Policy Statement is to outline how Our Lady's N.S., Nurney promotes sustainability and climate action through our teaching, actions and everyday school activities.

Sustainability can be defined as the ability to exist and develop without depleting natural resources for future generations. We believe it is important that everyone in our school community develops an awareness and understanding of how our actions affect the environment in which we live, learn and play.

Our Lady's N.S. is fortunate to be situated in a beautiful rural environment, surrounded by nature and native trees. This gives our pupils a unique opportunity to experience and appreciate the natural world as part of their everyday lives. We believe that experiencing the beauty of nature first-hand helps children to understand why it is worth protecting. We aim to foster a sense of responsibility and care for our local environment and for the wider world.

Our school has participated in the **Climate Literacy Programme**, which has been an important part of developing our pupils' understanding of climate change and sustainability. Through this programme, pupils have explored the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and considered how these global goals relate to their own lives and communities.

Pupils have learned about **climate justice**, exploring how the effects of climate change are not experienced equally throughout the world and considering issues of fairness and responsibility. They have investigated their own carbon footprints and identified realistic actions that individuals, schools and communities can take to reduce their environmental impact.

The programme has also encouraged pupils to think critically about consumption. Pupils have explored issues such as **fast fashion**, considering where clothes come from, the resources involved in producing them, working conditions within global supply chains and the environmental impact of buying, using and disposing of clothing.

Through these experiences, we aim to help our pupils understand that climate action is both a **local and global responsibility** and that their everyday choices can contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future.

Scope

Sustainability is a whole-school and community issue. This policy applies to all pupils, teachers and employees of Our Lady's N.S. Parents and guardians are encouraged, where possible, to support and promote its principles.

The Board of Management will endeavour to ensure that decisions made in relation to the school are consistent with our commitment to sustainability.

Vision and Values

At Our Lady's N.S., we aim to create a happy, inclusive learning environment where every child is encouraged and enabled to develop their full and unique potential.

We want our pupils to recognise that they can make a positive contribution to their school, their local community and the wider world. By giving children opportunities to participate in sustainability initiatives and make decisions about their environment, we aim to develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and active citizenship.

Our rural location is an important part of our school identity. We are surrounded by nature, mature and native trees, plants, wildlife and agricultural land. We recognise how fortunate we are to learn in such an environment and want to **protect, preserve and enhance the natural environment surrounding our school.**

We believe that children who have regular opportunities to observe, explore and enjoy nature are more likely to understand its value and be motivated to protect it. We therefore aim to use our school grounds and local environment as a living classroom in which pupils can develop curiosity, knowledge and respect for the natural world.

Our mission is to actively engage pupils, staff and the wider school community in developing a sustainable environment that fosters responsible choices and empowers children to contribute to a more sustainable future.

Whole-School Approach to Sustainability

- Our school has adopted this Sustainability Policy Statement, which outlines our commitment to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).
- Education for Sustainable Development is recognised as a **cross-curricular theme** within our school.
- Opportunities are identified across curriculum areas to explore sustainability, climate change, biodiversity, global citizenship and responsible consumption.
- Our participation in the **Climate Literacy Programme** has supported a whole-school understanding of climate change, climate justice and sustainable development.
- Pupils learn about and engage with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals** and consider how these can be applied within our school, community and everyday lives.
- Pupils are encouraged to consider the environmental consequences of everyday choices, including food, energy, transport, waste and clothing.

- Sustainability is considered, where appropriate, when reviewing school policies and making decisions about resources and the school environment.
 - The school endeavours to keep informed of developments and opportunities relating to Education for Sustainable Development.
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Environmental Sustainability

Our Lady's N.S. actively promotes an attitude of care and responsibility towards the natural environment.

Our location provides us with significant opportunities to learn directly from nature. We aim to protect the existing natural features of our school grounds, including our mature and native trees, while also creating additional habitats and food sources for wildlife.

The school has engaged with the **Heritage in Schools Programme**, giving pupils opportunities to learn from experts about their local natural environment.

Pupils have explored **local biodiversity** and learned about the variety of plants, insects, birds and other wildlife that share our environment.

We have learned about the vital role played by **bees and other pollinators** within ecosystems. Pupils have explored why pollinator populations need protection and have considered practical ways in which our school grounds can provide food and habitats for them.

We have planted **wildflower seeds** to increase the range of pollinator-friendly plants within our school environment and to provide additional sources of food for bees, butterflies and other insects.

Pupils have also been involved in **building bird boxes for the school grounds**, encouraging them to consider the needs of local bird populations and how we can create suitable habitats for wildlife within our own school environment.

Through these practical experiences, pupils can see that biodiversity is not something that exists only in distant environments – it is present all around them and can be protected through relatively simple actions.

The school also uses appropriate SEAI resources and energy-management tools where relevant to support responsible energy use and awareness.

Litter and Waste

Our school seeks to reduce the amount of waste we produce and encourages pupils and staff to reuse and recycle wherever possible.

- Classrooms and staff areas have appropriate recycling facilities for materials such as paper, plastic and cans.

- Battery recycling facilities are available within the school.
 - Staff are conscious of the environmental impact of photocopying and aim to photocopy only what is necessary and use double-sided printing where appropriate.
 - Pupils engage in art and creative projects which make use of recycled and reused materials.
 - Children are encouraged to reduce unnecessary waste and to consider whether items can be reused or recycled before being disposed of.
 - Sustainability and responsible consumption are discussed through classroom activities and cross-curricular learning.
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Energy Saving

Our school aims to use energy responsibly.

- Lights and heating are turned off when they are not required.
 - Laptops, Chromebooks, interactive whiteboards and other devices are placed on standby or switched off when not in use.
 - Devices and switches are turned off at the end of the school day where appropriate.
 - Staff aim to photocopy only what is required.
 - Outside doors and windows are kept closed when appropriate to conserve heat.
 - Heating systems are maintained to operate as efficiently as possible.
 - Energy-efficient and sensor lighting is used where available.
 - Pupils are encouraged to understand that small everyday actions can collectively reduce energy consumption.
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Water Saving

Our school aims to minimise unnecessary water use.

- Taps are not left running when not in use.
- Push taps are used in children's toilets to help reduce water waste.
- Water-saving flush options are used where available.
- Staff and pupils are encouraged to report leaking or dripping taps.
- Cleaning staff are encouraged to use only the amount of water necessary and environmentally friendly products where appropriate.

- Pupils are encouraged to recognise clean water as a valuable natural resource.
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Sustainable Transport

Our Lady's N.S. promotes **sustainable travel to school**, including walking and cycling where this is practical and safe for individual families.

The school has participated in **Bike Week**, providing opportunities for children to develop their confidence and competence in cycling. Through Bike Week activities, we aim not only to develop cycling skills but also to encourage children to view cycling as a healthy and sustainable form of transport.

We encourage pupils to consider the environmental impact of different forms of transport and promote walking and cycling where possible.

Outdoor Learning and Biodiversity

Outdoor learning is an important element of sustainability education at Our Lady's N.S.

Our school actively promotes and fosters an attitude of care and responsibility towards the natural environment. Our rural setting provides valuable opportunities to move learning beyond the classroom and allow children to investigate nature first-hand.

Our school grounds and surrounding area can be used to support learning across many areas of the curriculum, including Science, Geography, SPHE, Art, English and Mathematics.

Children are encouraged to:

- observe seasonal changes;
- identify plants, trees and wildlife;
- investigate habitats;
- learn about native trees and plants;
- study pollinators and other insects;
- explore food chains and ecosystems;
- consider human impacts on the environment;
- observe weather and climate;
- participate in planting and biodiversity projects;
- appreciate and care for the natural environment surrounding our school.

We aim to continue developing our school grounds as a resource for **outdoor learning, biodiversity and climate education**.

Social Sustainability

Our school ethos recognises the importance of equality, inclusion, fairness and respect.

We strive to prepare pupils for life as responsible citizens of both their local community and an increasingly interconnected global community.

Pupils explore issues relating to **Fairtrade** and learn how consumer choices can affect farmers, workers and communities in other parts of the world.

Our Climate Literacy Programme has further supported pupils in considering **climate justice** and understanding that communities around the world experience the causes and consequences of climate change differently.

The needs of all pupils, including those with differing physical and learning needs, are considered and accommodated.

Our school promotes positive relationships, respect, inclusion and peaceful conflict resolution.

Economic Sustainability

- A non-competitive ethos of co-operation and sharing of resources is modelled in the allocation and use of school resources.
 - Pupils are given opportunities to contribute to decision-making within the school.
 - Fundraising activities aim to reflect ethical and sustainable principles where possible.
 - Our school buildings and grounds are maintained with sustainability and responsible resource use in mind.
 - **Solar panels have been installed at the school**, enabling the school to generate renewable electricity and reducing our reliance on electricity generated from fossil fuels.
 - The school uses a **wood-pellet boiler rather than an oil-fired heating system**, supporting our efforts to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel heating.
 - When purchasing resources, the school aims, where practical, to consider durability, reuse and value over time.
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Cultural Sustainability

Our school ethos aims to foster pupils' self-esteem together with mutual respect, positive relationships and respect for others.

Our school ethos and curriculum seek to prepare pupils for life in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society.

We encourage strong connections between our school and local community and recognise the importance of maintaining a sense of place and connection with our local environment.

Our school supports cultural diversity both within the school and in the wider community.

We also recognise that sustainability includes developing an appreciation of our **local natural and cultural heritage** and encouraging children to value and protect it for future generations.

Teacher Competence

Teachers are supported in developing their knowledge and understanding of Education for Sustainable Development.

Staff endeavour to remain informed about the **National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development – ESD to 2030** and to identify meaningful opportunities to incorporate sustainability into teaching and learning.

Our participation in sustainability, climate-literacy and Heritage in Schools initiatives also provides opportunities for teachers to develop their knowledge and bring this learning into classroom practice.

Student Competence and Pupil Voice

Our pupils are encouraged to recognise themselves as active participants in creating a more sustainable future.

- Pupils participate in peer-to-peer learning.
- Pupils are encouraged to contribute ideas about sustainability and improvements to our school environment.
- Children participate in project-based learning based on real-life environmental and sustainability issues.
- Pupils are encouraged to make connections between **local actions and global challenges**.
- Pupils learn that their choices relating to energy, waste, transport, food, clothing and consumption can have environmental and social consequences.
- Children are encouraged to share what they learn about sustainability with their families and wider community.

- Pupils are encouraged to appreciate the biodiversity that already exists within and around our school and to consider how they can help protect it.
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Our Sustainability Goal

Our Lady's N.S. is fortunate to be surrounded by a rich natural environment, including mature and native trees and a variety of plants and wildlife. We want to protect and preserve as much of this existing natural environment as possible while enhancing the biodiversity of our school grounds.

Our goal is to develop a dedicated biodiversity and climate-learning area within our school grounds.

We aim to create an area where pupils can learn directly from nature and see practical examples of how relatively small changes can support biodiversity and climate action.

Over time, this area could incorporate:

- native and pollinator-friendly planting;
- wildflower areas;
- habitats for insects and other wildlife;
- bird and nesting boxes;
- opportunities to study native trees;
- areas where pupils can observe seasonal change;
- spaces for outdoor lessons and nature observation;
- pupil-designed signs or information boards explaining biodiversity and climate action.

The development of this area will be informed by pupil voice and will provide opportunities for children to participate in its planning, creation, care and monitoring.

Our aim is not simply to create an attractive outdoor space but to develop a **living outdoor classroom** where children can investigate biodiversity, understand the importance of healthy ecosystems and learn practical ways of responding to climate change.

Our location puts us in a particularly valuable position. Our pupils see the beauty of nature around them every day. We believe this provides a powerful starting point for climate and sustainability education: **when children experience and appreciate the natural world around them, they are more likely to understand why it needs to be protected.**

We hope that by developing children's knowledge, curiosity and connection with nature during their time at Our Lady's N.S., they will develop attitudes and habits that will remain with them throughout their lives.

Implementation and Review

This Sustainability Policy Statement will be implemented following its adoption by the Board of Management of Our Lady's N.S., Nurney.

The Statement will be reviewed every two years to ensure that our school continues to develop and improve its work in relation to sustainability, biodiversity, Education for Sustainable Development and climate action.

Gertrine Markes

Chairperson of Board of Management

Date: 30/09/26

Blair Reid

Acting Principal

