

'Our City, Our World' ... a framework



Jonathan Cooper, who recently retired as Head at St Luke's primary in wBrighton, has had a lead strategic role in creating 'Our City Our World', a framework for the development of an integrated climate change and sustainability curriculum and sustainable school operations.

With the demise of the education role of Local Authorities we note that this example of significant work raises questions about local leadership for change in other parts of the country.

Jonathan Cooper reflects on the development of a website - core to a Brighton & Hove strategy

Unlike many UK councils declaring a climate emergency in 2019, Brighton and Hove had the commitment and vision to see that education is key to addressing this emergency. They understood the need to educate ourselves out of this crisis and as a result funded the development with and by local schools of ...

Our City, Our World programme -- a framework which enables schools to place learning about climate change, climate justice and sustainability at the heart of the curriculum.

It is a constructive and creative response to the woeful inadequacies of our present curriculum and the 'placebo policy' (BERA 2022) designed by the DfE - *[Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems]*.

Our education system is failing children. In the Inter-climate Network – 'Climate Action Survey 2021', 3800 young people, aged 11-18 expressed strong views that schools and other adults are not doing enough; 50% are unsure of how they can personally help, whilst 80% feel insufficient time is devoted in school to positive environmental, sustainability and climate change education/action.

As a result, they feel dis-empowered, believing their individual actions have little impact without wider structural change, and that their views don't carry much weight in society, school or even their social group.

Learners are demanding a curriculum which is relevant to today's world and the challenges they are facing. Failure to provide this curriculum is a safeguarding issue and is undermining learners' mental well-being.



Reflecting the opinions and concerns of our students, and community,

'Our City, Our World' is based on the following:

1. **Education is the key** to equipping all learners with the skills and knowledge to meet the challenges of the future. It will enable them to live sustainably in harmony with the planet as part of an inclusive, equitable and diverse society.
2. **Aspiration, vision, and strategy** must be driven by all school leadership and be founded upon collective voice and engagement.
3. **Young people must be deeply involved** in planning, decision making and regular action. They need to develop self-belief as change-makers.
4. **An issues-led but solution-focussed programme.** Children and young people should be regularly involved in significant positive action.
5. **Schools should have clear carbon reduction targets.** [\[The website offers a framework of questions\]](#). We should live our school life through a green lens and embrace a circular economy. The emphasis on sustainable whole school system change is a significant shift, from a few pupils acting through an eco-committee to everyone taking responsibility for change.
6. **The present curriculum must be reviewed**, and opportunities taken to set learning in a 'green' context. The present curriculum is packed leaving no real space for additional modules. [Climate change and sustainability should thread through all subjects.](#)
7. **Pedagogical approaches based on an enquiry-based approach** and collective problem solving, with all parties working in partnership. [See web.](#)
8. **A stronger emphasis on outdoor education.** Many learners feel a disconnect from nature. [Outdoor learning is vital.](#) As David Attenborough said,
"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced".
9. **A commitment to climate justice** - and to addressing inequalities in access to opportunities to participate in climate and environmental education.

The success of this initial programme has now led to it being adopted by 48 schools in Brighton and Hove - and we have now entered talks with other authorities and academy trusts.

There are challenges for schools with limited capacity to take on new agendas and most staff reported limited expertise in climate change education.

Emerging from a pandemic, and with significant budget issues to deal with, climate change is not always a priority for school leaders. Therefore, the programme aims to give leaders detailed guidance and extensive resources to facilitate its implementation.

It offers 'Leadership for Sustainability' training for heads, governors, school business managers and site managers. **We train them in curriculum development, carbon literacy and support for eco-anxiety.**

The senior programme lead then rolls out this training in the school to all members of staff. Ongoing support is also provided alongside easily adapted strategy documents, audits, surveys, research, curriculum resources and local contacts all collated in [the project website](#).

Networking between these schools is now very strong, enriching each other's work.

Greta Thunberg said ...

"Avoiding climate breakdown will require cathedral thinking. We must lay the foundation while we may not know exactly how to build the ceiling".

Schools are the place for laying these foundations. We have a moral duty to ensure we do so comprehensively and effectively.

