

WorldWise Global Schools: Bringing the True Meaning of Sustainability to Irish Secondary Schools

Pillars of sustainability

Every day we hear something about sustainability. Whether it's the banks, grocery chains, fashion companies, or oil corporations, everyone is bragging about how 'sustainable' they are. Sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is therefore of the utmost importance for us to define the true meaning of sustainability in our teaching and learning, so we do not send that future generation down the wrong track. Wellbeing of people as well as planet should be front and centre of any sustainability agenda.

WorldWise Global Schools (WWGS), Ireland's national Global Citizenship Education (GCE) programme for post-primary settings, considers all pillars of sustainability when it comes to its programme of teacher training, events, resources, and small grant funding. There has been much focus on environmental sustainability in the past decade. This is of course hugely welcome, but it has left social, cultural, and economic pillars relatively overlooked.

With the sustainability element running through both Junior and Senior Cycle subjects, and the government's Education for Sustainable Development strategy, it is essential that we think about what it truly means to be sustainable. The WWGS guiding principles help schools to critically think about and question the world around them and to look at sustainability through a global lens:

1. unlearning and reconstructing
2. finding root causes
3. prioritising human rights
4. making local to global links
5. acting in solidarity.



Lizzy Noone

Education Officer, WorldWise Global
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WorldWise Global Schools, Ireland's national Global Citizenship Education programme for post-primary settings, supports hundreds of schools to take a whole-school approach to sustainability and issues of global justice and equality. It considers all pillars of sustainability in its programme – not just environmental but social, cultural, and economic. This article outlines its work and details some of the projects undertaken by schools.

Case studies

WWGS works with over 200 schools directly to build their capacity to take a whole-school approach to sustainability and issues of global justice and equality through the Global Passport framework. Here is a flavour of what is being done in schools and how it's about the whole school.

Environmental sustainability at North Wicklow Educate Together Secondary School

In May 2022, North Wicklow ETSS launched its Global Garden. Students developed a biodiversity garden area, researching native plants and habitats that will sustain wildlife throughout the year. Students carry out citizen science research by collecting scientific data for Biodiversity Ireland's National Biodiversity Data Centre, recording the plants, flowers, insects, birds, and animals that visit the area.

Students work in a variety of subject areas to develop local and global connections to their project, for example Geography (the harm of industrial agriculture on people and planet, climate, soil depletion), Science (seed germination, genetically modified crops), Art (the work of artist and activist Kui Hua Zi), English (newspaper articles on global food security, in particular the research of Vandana Shiva), and History (famine, monoculture, seeds, biodiversity around the world).

Social sustainability at Naas Christian Brothers School

It's so important to look at racism in mainstream school, to discuss it in class, and to be educated by someone who knows to get to the truth, instead of listening to online information – you don't know where it comes from or what's real fact. —Christopher Young, Transition Year student, Naas CBS, and director and scriptwriter of the film Unity

At Naas CBS, all subject teachers were encouraged to engage with the theme of racism and discrimination in class during the anti-racism week. Messages challenging students to reflect on and critically evaluate racism and its root causes were shared on the school intercom and at assemblies. Discussions also happened at assemblies, centred on rejecting racism, and aligned the Edmund Rice values of care and solidarity with global-justice themes of inclusion, human rights, and empathy. All year groups did workshops with Show Racism the Red Card, Sports Against Racism Ireland, or Kildare Traveller Action Group.

I've seen a real change. Some students can be quite blasé in their language. They don't fully grasp what they're saying and who it affects. This project has given an understanding of the global and local impact of their words. Simple is powerful – it's helped them to think about their language. And they've learned so much about the causes of racism – the Jim Crow Laws. They were

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genuinely shocked. —Denise Fenell, CSPE (Civic, Social, and Political Education) teacher

Social sustainability at Millstreet Community School

Our challenge is to assist our students to see that the reasons why people migrate are complex. To take this on board requires dismantling and reconstructing ideas that may have been held to be the truth in a particular situation for years. —John Magee, lead teacher, Millstreet Community School

Millstreet Community School, a co-educational school in North Cork, has been host to a Direct Provision Centre for over 20 years.

Millstreet CS is a co-educational school in the north Cork town of Millstreet, which has been host to a Direct Provision Centre for over 20 years. Its history of cultural diversity, inclusion, and migration provides a context for the school's engagement with GCE.

When Millstreet CS became aware of the work of WorldWise Global Schools and GCE, it had already been hosting an annual Language and Culture Night, a celebration of cultural diversity. But there had been growing awareness among the event's organisers that it was not reaching far enough into the school and local communities or building solidarity. This was coupled with the understanding that a single annual event lacked the potential to explore in depth the global-justice issues surrounding migration, diversity, and inclusion.

The school was open to rethinking the event and worked closely with WWGS education officers to question and reflect on the impact of the event. The emphasis shifted from a one-night celebration to creating time and space to develop new and different perspectives on migration, diversity, and inclusion, bringing a whole-school approach to this important issue.

More case studies can be found on the WorldWise Global Schools website at www.worldwiseschools.ie/category/case-studies/. The website also includes resources (per subject theme and Sustainable Development Goal), recorded continuing professional development, and much more to help your school get sustainability right! We also offer advice and training, both centralised and in-service workshops, for teachers.