

## **One School at a Time – A Decade of *Learning for Sustainability***

Making the case for a participatory, whole-school approach to Learning for Sustainability in Primary and Secondary Schools in the UK

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### **Executive Summary**

WWF-UK has been working with education professionals since 1981. Recently in the UK, the distinct fields of development education, global dimensions education, environmental education, citizenship education, peace education and others have been challenged by education for sustainable development (ESD). WWF continues to recognise and promote work in all these fields, but has developed its own unique approach to integrating them – an approach it calls *Learning for Sustainability*.

*Learning for Sustainability* refers to all the different processes that advance the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower individuals, schools and communities to pursue social justice, economic security, environmental stewardship and civic democracy as complementary goals – now and in the future.

*Learning for Sustainability* is a lifelong process, or journey, influenced by the social and environmental contexts in which it takes place. It's not a new field or merely a cross-cutting theme; it's the essence of a whole school or community ethos that helps people of all ages make better sense of their world.

Each school's *Learning for Sustainability* journey is unique. *Learning for Sustainability* is different in each place it is practised. Its key concepts, processes and design practices reflect the character of the local community – its environment, social setting, economic development practices and links to the global community. Each school sets off on its journey with a unique set of human and financial resources, and a range of institutional capacities to embrace and develop a whole school approach to *Learning for Sustainability*.

From 1994 – 2004, WWF-UK sponsored school award schemes as an incentive for interested schools to use an action research approach to advance *Learning for Sustainability*. In each of five award schemes, we selected a small number of schools and worked closely with them to both support and learn from their experiences. Participating schools were offered professional development services, technical support and funding. These schools developed innovative practices that focused on many individual aspects of ESD in schools, including school culture and ethos, school assessment, teaching and learning, pupil involvement, community links, school leadership and school estate management.

We have used what we learned by working this way to inform and influence government and non-governmental organisations with an ESD remit in England and Scotland. In England, our schools' case studies have inspired and contributed to the development of national curriculum requirements for ESD, government-sponsored ESD websites, and a range of classroom resources and professional development opportunities.

What we viewed initially as independent levers for advancing *Learning for Sustainability* in schools – school culture and ethos, school assessment, teaching and learning, pupil involvement, community links, school leadership and school estate management – we now recognise as a system of levers that can be addressed together. Although we always acknowledged the systematic relationships among these, our experiences with schools revealed a framework through which schools successfully could advance a whole school approach.

WWF-UK has and continues to learn from the experience of educators. We have collected more than 33 individual school case studies and continue to support schools' *Learning for Sustainability*. In the past 10 years, an ESD-focused community of professional practice has emerged in the UK. The experiences of this community have and continue to make *Learning for Sustainability* accessible to a growing number of schools in England and throughout the UK. In the coming decade (2005 – 2014) – coined the 'Decade of education for sustainable development' by the United Nations – the formal education sector in the UK and around the world will face new opportunities and challenges. We hope to support the efforts of UK schools, to learn from them, and to share their learning as they continue to build whole school approaches to *Learning for Sustainability*.

The complete publication is available on-line at [www.wwflearning.co.uk](http://www.wwflearning.co.uk).