

Schools, Young People, Churches and Environmental Projects - some hints and tips on getting started

Help! I haven't set foot in a school in donkey's years. Why will they want to talk to me?

If your church wants to develop its care for creation, and build links in the community, I recommend contacting your local school. Here are some practical tips for starting a project with them.

Starting points:

First and foremost - talk to your incumbent and your PCC. You need their blessing. This work is integral to the mission of the church - the oversight of which is their responsibility. Your work needs to complement anything that is already happening. Of course, you must talk to your safeguarding lead about what's needed for any work you decide to do.

Have a look at the school's website - they have to have one. What are they doing? What environmental issues are they focussing on? Do they have an eco or gardening club? What could you add to, join with, or invite them to use the church for?

Also - and particularly if there aren't active links between school and church at present, contact the Diocesan Joint Education Team (JET)

<https://www.durhamdiocese.org/joint-education-team/>

They know our CofE schools well, and could put you in touch with a relevant person.

Schools want to be active in their community

Schools are expected, by both state and church inspectors, to demonstrate active engagement in the local community. It is part of their responsibility to develop the children's sense of respect for one another, their community and environment. Schools are on the lookout for community projects that are fruitful for them and for you, their community.

Schools want to work with you and serve you. There does also have to be payback for them in educational and formational terms - pupils need to be learning skills, and growing as individuals and as good citizens.

Some examples:

Primary schools:

- Your nearest primary school may want to develop their pupils' awareness of their local environment, by making short trips on foot to places they might not usually go.
- They will be learning about food chains, life cycles and climate change. Your church may fit their history syllabus, and be a source of inspiration for art work. Mapping, planning and recording data in charts will satisfy parts of their maths and science curriculum. Your church could be the basis for an exciting cross-curricular project.
- Any local school is likely to have an environmental group as a lunchtime or after school club.

Secondary schools

- Your nearest secondary school may be interested in using your churchyard for Geography or Biology fieldwork.
- Secondary schools may be running Duke of Edinburgh's awards.
- They may be concerned about a lack of community cohesion or the isolation of older people, and their pupils' lack of confidence in talking to those older than them. A cross-generational project may be perfect for their school.

Who will pay for this?

Schools are usually stretched for funds for anything that might be considered extra-curricular, so any sources of funding that you can locate or offer as you make first contact, will help get a project off the ground.

- Does your parish have any restricted funds that could be used for educational purposes? Could any that are restricted to the building be used for work in the churchyard?

- Can you identify any grants that you could apply for with the school?
Would school involvement give you access to grants for a project involving them?

(Your Creation Care officer can supply a separate document on funding sources).

“I phoned but no-one ever gets back to me”

Schools are very busy - it may take some time to make contact with the most relevant person. If making first contact - give a short summary of why you are calling and ask for the contact details of the subject lead, head of the relevant department, or the head of sixth form. Email is often the best way, as actually catching someone when they're free to talk during the day is a challenge. You will probably need to be politely persistent. It's unlikely your email will be the most urgent issue in their inbox.

If you already know a member of teaching or leadership staff in the school - that is often the best place to begin, even if they aren't the relevant subject teacher. Personal introduction is best. Ask them to put you in touch with the person who is most relevant.

When cold-calling, timing is key. Call within the main body of the school day, but not the times when pupils are arriving and leaving (so between 9:30 - 2:30). Obviously, teachers work after the end of the school day but are often in training, not at their desks, or working at home.

If you are thinking of more than a one-day visit, allow plenty of run-in time, before you want to start your project. Schools need time to plan, and have to work around immovable things like exams. Planning tends to begin in July, and September (after the term has got in to swing) is less pressured, on the whole. Make your first call then.

Scouting and Guiding

Your local uniformed organisations may be interested in a project with you. Scouts and Cubs have environmental conservation badges. Guides and

Brownies have Conscious Consumer, Upcycling, and Campaigning badges.

Making a biodiversity map of your churchyard could also contribute towards their navigation skills awards, in a roundabout sort of way.

And again, as Christian organisations, community service is at the core of their purpose.

Making contact with your nearest uniformed organisations:

Scouting

<https://www.scouts.org.uk/groups/>

Guiding

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/get-involved/finding-your-nearest-unit/>

Boys Brigade

<https://boys-brigade.org.uk/find-a-group/>

Girls Brigade

<https://www.girlsbrigadeministries.org.uk/>

For both schools and uniformed organisations, volunteering and community service or challenge are part of **Duke of Edinburgh's award**. Find out whether your local Secondary School, Explorers (what used to be Venture Scouts) or Rangers are taking part in DofE. Could you be a volunteering opportunity?

Do let us know how you get on, and what fruits are born of working with your younger parishioners.

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