**EARLY YEARS ECO SCHOOL VISION**

We believe in a more environmentally sustainable and socially just world where people live healthy, enjoyable lives in thriving environments. What young people learn today will influence how future generations live. Eco-Schools is part of a growing global movement that seeks to nurture knowledge, creativity, kindness, wisdom, critical thinking, empathy and many more of the skills and values that will allow sustainable development to flourish and a better world to emerge.

We face, and will continue to face, numerous inter-connected environmental, social and economic challenges. Climate change, biodiversity loss, natural resource pressure, extreme weather events, water stress and deforestation are all already impacting on the way we organise our lives and economies.

Progress has been made to address these challenges. Despite this, the problems are largely getting worse with implications for social and economic equality both within and between countries. If we fail to overcome these problems we will destroy the ability of the planet to sustain the natural biological, physical and atmospheric systems that support life on Earth. Our current ways of living are environmentally unsustainable and, therefore, ultimately socially and economically unsustainable too. This is the problem we are trying to solve. The responsibility for solving this problem, or at least attempting to, lies with many stakeholders across many sectors. The education sector has a vital role to play. We believe that the approaches that Eco-Schools is built on have a lot to offer.

Eco-Schools was developed in 1992 by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) in response to the UN Conference on Environment and Development. FEE’s aim for Eco-Schools is to “empower students to be the change our sustainable world needs by engaging them in fun, action- orientated learning”. We believe that children of all ages should have the opportunity to learn about their natural environment. We also believe that children should develop the knowledge, skills and values that will help them thrive in a more environmentally sustainable world.

Schools, nurseries, and childminders all have an important role to play and should be supported to deliver effective and inspiring education for sustainability. The Eco-Schools programme helps to realise this vision.

The Eco-Schools programme is successful because it helps passionate children and adults channel their enthusiasm for the environment into a strategic and organised plan of action and learning for sustainability. It is also successful because of the support settings receive from passionate educators who work to improve their sustainability performance and learning.

Who benefits?

We all benefit from education for sustainability. When children, young people and adults develop sustainability knowledge, skills and values they become better equipped and more motivated to create a fairer, greener society. Independent research into the Eco-Schools programme in England found evidence of positive impacts on pupil wellbeing, behaviour, motivation and cognitive skills that benefit the whole school community. These learning benefits were in addition to the sustainability performance benefits that were also confirmed.

Settings benefit from engagement with the Eco-Schools programme, pupils benefit and communities benefit too. It is also important to remember that people, animals, plants, insects, rivers, oceans and skies now and in the future benefit hugely too.