

Somerset Waste Board meeting
25 June 2021
Report for information



Update on schools: Education and Behaviour Change

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Forward Plan Reference:	11.06.2021
Summary:	SWP sees our work with schools as crucial to drive behaviour change and has made numerous improvements to how we work with schools to progress this further. Clearly the last year has been very challenging for schools as well as SWP, so whilst we are not quite where we wanted to be, we remain confident in our plans for the future.
Recommendations:	The Joint Waste Scrutiny Panel considers and comments on the following recommendations in this report. That the Somerset Waste Board notes the progress to date and the plans to progress this further.
Reasons for recommendations:	This update report was requested by a Board member and is a timely opportunity to give an update on the important SWP work in this area. Public engagement promoting positive behaviours towards waste and recycling is an important part of the Partnership's remit. This report provides an update on this work with schools, including recent additional on the ground practical support and plans for grants to encourage involvement in the Eco-School process.
Links to Priorities and Impact on Annual Business Plan:	This work supports a number of priorities within the Business Plan 2021-26, including: Waste reduction, Promoting reuse, Increasing recycling, Tackling non-household waste, Working with others, and Enabling activities. These are summarised in action 6.1 in the SWP Business Plan 2021-26.
Financial, Legal and HR Implications:	

	Schools finances are managed separately to ensure that there is no cross-subsidy between District Council collection costs and the costs that schools finance. Accordingly, none of the current or future work set out here impacts on partner costs. Due to legislation, schools do not have to pay disposal costs (the County Council has to pay these) so increasing the schools recycling rate will result in a small saving for SCC. Our Schools Against Waste programme is currently funded from our SWEEP fund (our joint behavioural change fund with Suez) and delivered by Carymoor Environmental Trust
Equalities Implications:	None.
Risk Assessment:	Any future Covid-19 restrictions would continue to impact on face to face school visits as part of the Schools Against Waste programme. The timing of the roll-out of Recycle More to schools will continue to be affected by Covid-19, as we need to ensure that the impact/effectiveness of the roll-out isn't impacted by the other pressures schools face.

1. Background

1.1. Behaviour change, engagement, and schools

As well as the delivery of waste collection and disposal services, SWP is committed to encouraging waste reduction, promoting reuse and increasing recycling. This runs through its rolling five-year business plan and 'Changing behaviours' is one of the plan's three core themes.

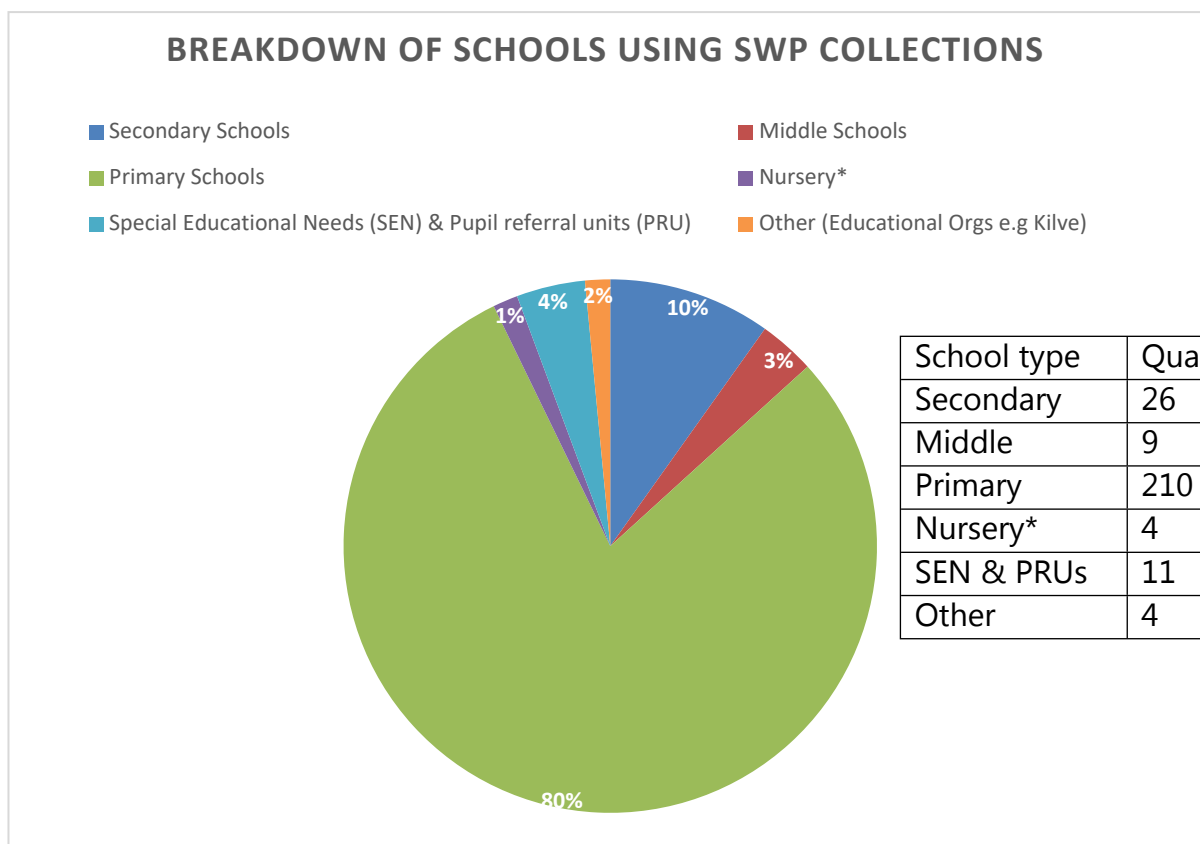
The Partnership works with its members and other organisations to encourage positive behaviour change through its business as usual communications and engagement, as well as specific campaigns and projects. Engaging with schools is an important part of this, both to educate and inform pupils so that they develop positive waste management habits, but also encourage good practice within the schools themselves. For example, the Slim My Waste, Feed My Face campaign in early 2020 linked closely with schools. Through our lead on the Resources and Waste workstream of the joint Climate Emergency plan SWP is also exploring how we can work with partners to reduce litter, and a key part of that plan is our Eco-Schools grant programme – details set out below.

The main area of activity has been the successful Schools Against Waste programme, which has been running for three years working with primary schools across the county (see below). SWP is committed to expanding its work with schools, putting in more resource and practical support.

Schools have, historically, not performed as well as domestic residents in terms of recycling – with recycling rates at the lower end of national business recycling rates,

despite the range of materials (inc. food) that they can already recycle. A number of changes were made to our service when we contracted with Suez in order to help address this. The expansion of school collections as part of Recycle More in 2022 (timing TBC) should be a catalyst to drive up performance. But, as with all services improvements, behaviour change will be needed to get the most from the new offer.

The number of schools SWP provides waste collection and disposal services to by type is as follows:



**Please note that Nurseries listed in blue are standalone sites that are serviced. There are other schools with nurseries or preschools sharing the sites with Primary or Secondary schools.*

2. School Against Waste

2.1 Work to date

The Schools Against Waste (SAW) initiative was launched in February 2018 and sees Carymoor Environmental Trust delivery free assemblies and workshops for primary schools across the county. Based just outside Castle Cary on a 100-acre nature reserve, created on top of capped landfill, Carymoor is an environmental education and nature conservation charity providing outdoor learning for schools and community groups.

The SAW work is currently funded from the SWEEP fund – the jointly SWP/SUEZ funded (from a top-slice of recyclate income) and managed behavioural change fund.

Since the launch of SAW programme, on behalf of SWP Carymoor has completed over 248 visits to 168 schools (80 repeat visits) and introduced around 39,500 youngsters to the ideas of waste reduction and recycling (correct as of 31 May 2021).

Feedback from schools continues to be extremely positive despite the switch to virtual format during the pandemic. Since September 2020, of schools responding to the feedback survey 88.5% rated the Schools Against Waste visit as excellent, with 11.5% as good (n=26). When asked what three descriptive words characterize SAW sessions, the top five words respondents suggested were: 1) informative, 2) engaging, 3) fun, 4) interactive, 5) interesting.

The SAW sessions focus on the 3 Rs of reduce, reuse and recycle, giving children the grounding in how to responsibly deal with the waste we create and reduce it where possible. Each visit starts with an introductory assembly to raise awareness before the children take part in a choice of interactive workshops assisted by teachers. Children can learn to reduce, reuse and recycle with a recycling relay, learn about recycling their food waste with Burpy the Bin, better understand food miles/food waste or find out about the environmental impacts of single use plastics. Schools can choose sessions which are tailored to different primary age groups.

In their book bags children are normally given a roll of food waste caddy liners and pledge against preventable plastic/reminder of what can be recycled to encourage pester power of their parents. During the pandemic, the distribution of caddy liners and pledge cards was suspended (virtual visits only). Similarly, some activities such as the recycling relay were not part of the virtual session but could be facilitated by the class teacher as an additional activity if they wanted.

Working closely with SWP the sessions are regularly updated to support specific campaigns or initiatives, such as Slim My Waste. The SAW visits are currently supporting the roll-out of Recycle More.

2.2 Supporting Recycle More

The SAW assemblies and workshops have been tailored to support the roll-out of Recycle More service. All primary schools in each district will be offered a visit in advance of the arrival of the new service, so they can take home and share knowledge and enthusiasm about it.

Covid-19 restrictions had a significant impact on the Mendip SAW visits with on-site visits clearly not possible. Working with SWP, Carymoor successfully adapted

to a virtual way of working, taken the sessions online, giving schools the chance to host fully interactive virtual visits using Zoom or Teams, video content and materials in the classroom. These were warmly welcomed and received excellent feedback.

*"Thank you - it was a great day of waste workshops.
I thought so long virtually would not work but it did,
and the children enjoyed it."*

Butleigh C of E Primary School in Mendip

Despite the challenges of Covid, SAW has managed to reach 30 of the 52 Mendip primary schools. Recycle More sessions are already underway in support of the South Somerset roll-out. So far 31 of the 70 primary schools in the district have booked a visit (data correct to 31 May 2021).

2.3 Future work

SAW activity will be driven by Recycle More into the spring of 2022.

For the first time, at home Recycle More Family Sessions hosted by Carymoor are being developed to take place during the school holidays. Four sessions are planned, targeting Mendip and South Somerset families, and being promoted via the schools for summer 2021.

In light of their success, the virtual visits are likely to become an additional SAW offer even once all Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

SWP continues to be keen to understand how we can engage more effectively with secondary schools, which is challenging because the curriculum restrictions make it much harder for us to reach sufficient children/young people. Working with Carymoor Environmental Trust, Suez, SSE and schools we will continue to explore how we can develop in this area.

3. Supporting schools to improve their own recycling/collection service

As part of our engagement with schools ahead of contracting with Suez, we identified a number of barriers that schools felt they needed support with overcoming to help them improve their recycling rate:

- SWP had no dedicated capacity to engage with the c260 schools, both to address operational/service issues and to carry out the detailed engagement necessary to help individual schools improve their own recycling rate
- Schools had to buy recycling boxes for inside the school and with the constraints on school finances this was a barrier to them effectively recycling. This was addressed by including the 'free' hire of recycling boxes

for inside the school within the charges schools pay.

- Whilst we knew that schools recycling rate were low and contamination of recycling levels were high, we did not have data on individual schools to enable us to identify high performers (and hence understand what works) and to identify low performers so that we can target support. This has been addressed through in-cab devices and through requiring collection staff to report on bin fullness, enabling us to develop a rough recycling rate for individual schools.
- We have more clearly delineated the roles SSE undertakes and those undertaken by SWP to ensure the customer journey is clearer and are working to enable online reporting for schools. SSE has been wholehearted supporters of our work to improve environmental performance and are developing a dedicated Environmental website.

Despite all this, SWP/SSE were able to lower the charges to schools by 10% in 2020/21 due to the better value secured through our contract with Suez.

The current schools service provides access to a waste management officer, who oversees the collection service, manages queries and visits schools, and works to develop the SWP offering. Schools can benefit from access to free internal recycling containers to help aid the sorting of recycling in classrooms, and primary (and middle) schools have access to free educational workshops through Carymoor Environmental Trust.

Up until now, the Schools officer role has focused largely on the support of the collections function. As the service provision continues to improve and embed, it is hoped that this will free up the officer's time to develop partnerships and move towards further positive and proactive engagement. Within the next few months, a combination of ongoing work and completion of small projects (alongside the easing of pandemic restrictions) should help recycling within schools to gain momentum and increase the visibility of these services. This work includes:

- Site visits to schools – Visits to continue to schools across Somerset. These are opportunities for schools to have face to face contact with the waste officer, and discuss current waste and recycling provision, arrange additional bins, provide feedback and discuss issues or concerns.
- Schools information packs – designed in conjunction with Carymoor Environmental trust and will provide hints, tips and information about maximising recycling within schools.
- Developing communication channels for information dissemination – Developing regular and engaging email correspondence, communication through SSE and Academy trust and School boards. Also looking into other methods to share best practice between Schools.
- SWP participation in SSE's new Environmental Website Launch – A directory style website where schools can access information on partner

organisations to help boost their environment friendly practices.

- Internal recycling bin distribution - There has been an increase in interest regarding internal recycling boxes. A few schools have now requested extra 44ltr boxes, and food caddies have also seen a small rise in requests due to classes currently eating within their own rooms (COVID restrictions). While these boxes haven't actively been advertised, both SWP and SSE are generally receiving small but steady number of requests. These containers are now (and will continue to be) mentioned and offered as part of the school's bin/ waste audit. Further communication or advertisement will be developed prior to the Recycle More roll out.

The schools recycling rate is currently hovering around the 22% mark. The pandemic will have no doubt affected this, with schools being shut, sites running on fewer staff, combined with the other responsibilities put on school leadership. Recycling is, for some, not likely to not be at the forefront of current activities. Increased handwashing has also upped the refuse volumes at some schools, with them consuming record amounts of paper towels, in particular. A schools recycling contamination tag has been designed and produced and help tackle persistent contamination issues. The double-sided tag provides feedback on why the waste was not collected, and a reminder of the materials collected on the school's service. These tags are due to go live in the first half of June and should provide further insight into specific contamination problems.

However, it is important to note that a number of schools and academy trusts are still keen to up their recycling efforts, and there have been multiple queries regarding the roll out of the Recycle More program to schools. SWP's new Schools Waste Management Officer has begun to conduct site visits, visiting schools and assessing current recycling provision. While only a small percentage of schools have been visited so far, it remains clear that most primary schools are engaging with recycling and want to do what they can to get their school community recycling as much as possible. While Secondary schools share this opinion and often have keen eco committees, they appear to be lacking direction, and feel lost as to how to improve their recycling. Upcoming plans for visibility on bin fill levels will help identify high performing schools, but equally highlight those which require more support, and this will drive SWP in prioritising support.

SWP now undertakes an annual customer satisfaction survey with schools to help us continuously improve. It has been recognised that service quality for schools has not been at the level that it should be. The past couple of months have seen fluctuations in the standard of service received by schools across Somerset. The latter half of April exhibited particularly poor performance, with multiple vehicle breakdowns, which resulted in a two-week period of daily route incompletions. As a result, several schools voiced their disappointment on the quality of service.

Following this, concerns over the service were raised with Suez as a matter of urgency, who have been able to introduce measures to prevent the return of high

numbers of missed collections and round incompletions. This has since seen a noticeable improvement on the day to day number of route/ school completions.

Whilst this is a positive step in the right direction, there are areas which still require addressing. Members of SWP and Suez (along with the support of SSE) are continuing to address these areas and work out resolutions. The imminent launch of the Schools Waste Services portal will reduce query handling and enable Suez to be more quickly aware of schools reporting missed collections. Additionally, it will track the return of crews back to schools and enable SWP to better monitor SLA breaches.

3.2 Supporting schools through Covid

SWP and SSE worked closely to support schools as they had changing waste flows through the times when schools were closing/partially open etc in various stages of lockdown. SWP launched a special waste collection service (and secured the special disposal routes required) at very short notice to support schools with the confusing guidelines on how to deal with Lateral Flow Testing waste. SWP also circulated a number of simple guidance notes. This service was suspended when the national guidance changed. Recognising the pressure on school finances especially given Covid pressures, SWP has not charged schools for the few weeks this service operated and has instead absorbed it within the schools overhead budget.

4. Eco-Schools grant

4.1. Eco-schools

Founded in 1994 by Keep Britain Tidy, Eco-Schools is a well-established framework to engage schools and their pupils in work to drive change and improve environmental awareness in their school and local community.

Schools work towards Green Flag accreditation, achieving Bronze and silver status along the way with a 'seven steps' framework that puts pupils at the heart of decision making and actions.

These steps include forming an eco-committee, reviewing the school's own eco-performance, and developing an action plan. Eco-committees need to choose three topics out of ten to work on as part of their plan.

Over 70 schools in Somerset have registered or re-registered with the scheme since 2016, with less than half having progressed to achieving Bronze, Silver or Green Flag status.

After completing a seven-step process schools can apply for Eco-Schools Green Flag accreditation.

SWP believes that Eco-Schools provides a very important means of embedding improved environmental behaviours within schools, particularly within secondary schools where the appetite to do more is there, but the interface between young people, school management/leadership, teachers and cleaning staff means that this doesn't translate to changes in behaviour. It also includes a litter module (which can be achieved by qualifying as a 'Plastic Free School' through the scheme operated by Surfers Against Sewage, who also oversee Plastic Free Communities accreditation). SWP has discussed our ambitions with Keep Britain Tidy, and noted that those communities where the public sector plays an active role in encouraging take-up of Eco-Schools have significantly higher levels of take-up. Engagement with schools identified that budget constraints are a key barrier for schools choosing to engage with the programme.

4.2. SWP Eco-School Grants

SWP will be launching a new grant scheme in the autumn term, 2021. It will offer grants of £500 to up to 50 schools.

The grants will be available to primary and secondary schools, and applications will be assessed by SWP and the Carymoor Environmental Trust. To be eligible, schools will need to be involved in the Eco-School scheme. SCC procurement have been involved in ensuring that the grants are compliant with SCC's processes.

The grant can be used for anything that helps to improve the school environment and/or progress through the Eco-School process. For example, you could use the fund to pay for your first Green Flag assessment, purchase compost bins, install energy monitors, improve your school grounds or provide litter bins.

Schools will need to undertake the waste topic as part of their Action Plan and be able to provide a simple report at the end of their project. We are considering whether to require schools to also undertake the litter/plastic free schools module to secure funding, and whether to require schools who are already on their Eco-Schools journey to support a local school just starting out. Further details and the plan for launching the scheme will be shared nearer the time.

5. Options Considered and reasons for rejecting them

- 5.1.** SWP could have continued with the status quo on schools and not funded behavioural change work, but this would not align with our vision.

6. Consultations undertaken

- 6.1.** Consultation with schools (e.g. associations of primary and secondary school heads), SSE (Support Services for Education), Carymoor Environmental Trust, Keep Britain Tidy and SMG have all been part of discussions in developing the approach outlined in this report.

7. Implications

- 7.1.** The work underway should lead to an improvement in schools recycling rate and the overall household recycling rate now and in the future – though attributing causality is nigh on impossible

8. Background papers

- 8.1.** n/a