

Case Studies from the Our Schools Our World Suffolk Hub Review Meetings 2025

Biodiversity

All OSOW schools had lots of work for nature happening on their grounds with a mix of wild areas, allotments and gardens. All schools had exciting plans for developing their outdoor spaces.

Most spaces were accessible to the pupils. These spaces are utilised for lessons, gardening or wildlife clubs and as spaces to be enjoyed during break times. Some spaces were reserved for wildlife and protected from wandering feet and stray balls with low fences.

Some of the planted areas were celebratory spaces (e.g. a Queen's Platinum Jubilee Garden), some were memorial, quiet reflection spaces, some were designed as sensory spaces.

Often the pupils supported in the design and creation of these areas. The creation or installation of features such as polytunnels, large planters and ponds, was often supported by the PTFA/ HSA through working groups at weekends or in school holidays.

Many schools had also accessed support from their school community or local organisations to assist with resourcing materials and labour for the outdoor areas.

During the review visit, Birchwood had asked a highway maintenance team working on a nearby road, if they might be able to drive their digger onto the school field and prepare a space for a new sandpit. The team were happy to oblige, and the pupils enjoyed watching the digger at work. Proof that it is always worth asking!



Digger on the school field at Birchwood



All schools had fantastically resourceful ideas when it came to creating planters. Great Barton's planters were made from upcycled products such as car tyres and railway sleepers. The wooden planter is made from a hollowed-out branch from a school tree that had to be felled.



Kyson bug hotel and hedgehog house.

The school grounds also had lots of bird boxes and bat boxes. Kyson sits in a key area for bats and the school has worked with local experts to study the bats living around the school site.



Great Barton Pond. The pond was created in an area of the school grounds that had been unused for years. The platform is designed to allow pupils to pond dip.



Broke Hall hedgehog doorway. A small but important action to support local hedgehogs and something easy to replicate at home.



Broke Hall pond. This pond is full of tadpoles in the early spring, fantastic for teaching about the metamorphosis in the life cycle of the frog.

Ponds can require a lot of maintenance to remove excessive plant growth, cut back overhanging branches and to ensure the water is sufficiently oxygenated. Health and safety measures must also be taken for any ponds on school grounds. Support from the wider school community for a large project like a pond, can be very helpful.

Outdoor Learning and Connection to Nature



Great Barton Forest School Area.

Some schools had an area on their school grounds that they could utilise for forest school. The majority of OSOW schools offered Forest School to all their pupils, across the key stages.



Helmingham forest school area. This area sits adjacent to the school grounds and is used with permission from the landowners – Helmingham Estate. It sits close to a public footpath, which the pupils regularly use for Woodland Walks. Pupils are responsible for collecting forest school resources from the school's storage area and bringing them up to the forest school area.



The forest school area at Birchwood.

One issue shared by many schools with forest school areas comes as a result of their regular use: soil compaction. The footfall of the pupils who use these areas has led to some degradation of the land, largely through soil compaction and destruction of new shoots.

The impact of pupil footfall is also evident on school fields, particularly during periods of drought. This year's hot, dry summer has had an impact on grass areas, killing the grass and leading to bald spots and fine, dusty soil.

One OSOW school is planning to address this problem by rotating the green areas that are accessible to pupils.





Wild corners, strips, plots and beds and dead hedges at Birchwood, Kingsfleet, Great Finborough and Claydon.

It was great to see planters used not only for growing fruit and vegetables, but also to grow wildflowers and herbs. A number of schools had created dead hedges and wildflower areas. Good communication with grounds maintenance teams was key in ensuring the success of any newly planted areas.

Many schools also highlighted the importance of considering practical issues like the proximity of a planted area to a tap for ease of watering, storage for gardening tools and fencing to protect nature areas or keep pupils safe from potential hazards like ponds.

Some of the OSOW schools have worked with, or are working with, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Wilder Schools programme. The programme supported them in auditing their school grounds and considering the best action for nature in different areas of the school site. The programme has also delivered outdoor learning sessions: training a teacher and a class/year group in how to care for and use their newly created nature spaces.

Other schools have started working with the resources on the [National Education Nature Park](#) website to help them audit their grounds and plan for future nature projects.

There is interest from OSOW schools to engage with Natural England's curriculum programme, particular the [Wildlife Wise](#) course.



Great Barton Garden Club Space.



Great Finborough Outdoor Classroom.

Sails, parasols and canopies are helpful in creating shade and enabling outdoor areas to be more amenable to outdoor learning and/or dining in the sunnier months.



Helmingham outdoor classroom and bird hide.



Wellies galore in all schools!

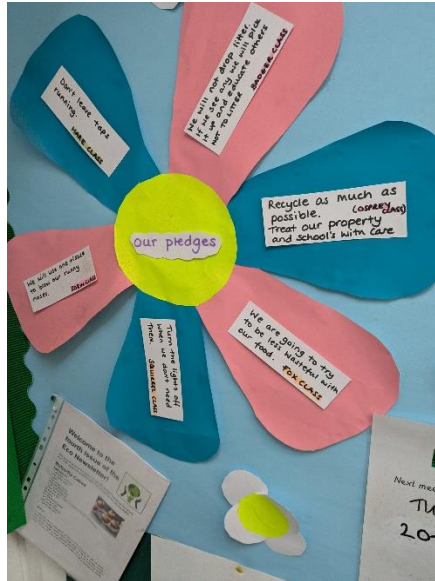
Most schools kept outdoor clothing for their pupils in school. The outdoor clothing came from a mixture of donations and school-bought sets.



Kyson signs to support outdoor play.



Celebrating and promoting outdoor learning at Broke Hall.



Great Barton environmental pledges display board

Displays can be a great way to celebrate activities and learning. They can also be a vehicle to link outdoor learning to the Sustainable Development Goals, a school's values or vision and/or to the OSOW ambitions.

A number of OSOW schools participated in the School Garden competition at this year's Suffolk Show, creating a garden themed on a book of their choice. They reported that this was a great way to engage pupils in learning about and caring for different plants.

Consumption and Waste



Birchwood rainbow recycling bins

Birchwood have a colourful recycling area, where members of the school (and local) community can recycle a variety of things including Babybel packaging, glasses and bras! Much of this recycling is enabled by the dedicated school team who regularly take the contents of the bins to recycling centres.

The rainbow fridge provides the perfect, waterproof storage for preloved books.



A number of schools are accessing various terracycle recycling schemes. Earl Soham is using the terracycle recycling bags to collect and then recycle their old stationery items.

Earl Soham have also revised some of their regular purchases. They have moved over to biodegradable stickers for the front of children's exercise books and are using drawing pins in place of staples for display boards. They have also switched plastic milk containers for glass, dramatically reducing their plastic waste.



Framlingham Sir Robert Hitcham will be keeping any exercise books that still have unmarked pages at the end of the academic year. These books will move up with the pupils in September. This should cut down the number of exercise books required each year and highlights to the pupils the continuous nature of their learning.

Broke Hall school has swapped out pens for pencils, reducing their plastic stationery waste. It is also trialling a new method for gluing, replacing glue sticks with glue pots (made with washing up sponges and a slightly watered down PVA). Pupils now just need to dab the corners of their sheets in the glue pot to stick them into their exercise books.

Many OSOW schools have minimalised photocopying and use of the laminator. Prompting pupils to use scrap paper first for any rough work has also become an ingrained habit in lots of classrooms.

Composting was in action in many OSOW schools. Often pupils were given the responsibility of collecting any old fruit left over from snack and adding them to the compost. Pupils in gardening clubs helped look after the compost bins and make sure other appropriate waste was added.

Great Barton has two wormery units which allowed pupils to get to know these marvellous soil-dwelling creatures up close and marvel at their ability to turn food and garden waste into new soil.

All schools encourage families to send their child to school with a refillable water bottle.

Energy

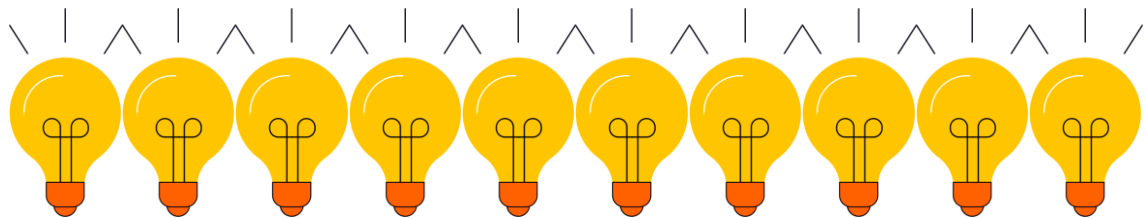
All OSOW schools were reviewing their energy use, through the programme audit or through tools such as Count Your Carbon.

For some schools, this is a tricky area to audit because data is held by the trust rather than the school office.

Many schools have accessed information from [Let's Go Zero](#) and some have had visits from [Let's Go Zero's Climate Action Advisors](#). They are working through suggested 'easy wins': optimising heating systems, checking water pipes and taps for leaks and switching off appliances at the wall.



Some schools have solar panels on their buildings, but not all schools were able to access the data on energy generated by their panels. Some schools had displays showing the Kilowatt Hours generated but found this information wasn't pupil friendly.



Helmingham's Pupil Parliament highlighted energy as an important issue for their pupils and kickstarted a pupil-led campaign on saving energy. Posters reminded staff and pupils to switch off lights and turn off appliances at the wall when not in use. Individual lightbulb icons were used to visualise energy usage and pupils were delighted when they could remove some of the lightboard icons from the display board.

Installing LED lights (when financially viable) was standard practice across all OSOW schools.



Great Finborough Air Source Heat Pump

The OSOW school buildings vary in date, from Victorian to modern buildings. Some of the modern sections of the schools had been built with good insulation and a few had air source heat pumps.

Keeping school buildings a stable and comfortable temperature remains a challenge for many schools.

As heatwaves become more prevalent, keeping classrooms cool is increasingly an issue for schools to consider.

Food

There are lots of interesting projects around food happening in the Suffolk OSOW Hub.

Lots of schools had growing areas and were growing a variety of fruits and vegetables. Good thought had been given to which crops worked well with the school termly timetable sowing times had been considered to allow for a September/October harvest.

Heath is growing a bumper crop of pumpkins which will be sold to the school community in autumn, in time for Halloween. They have a gardening club who help look after the school planters and the crops in the polytunnel.

Some schools were able to give a planting bed to each class in the school. Other schools had a variety of beds, pots and (occasionally) poly tunnels, which were tended by pupils from gardening clubs.

Some schools allowed pupils to take food home. Some schools sold their produce. Others were able to contribute to the school dinner menu.

Kingsfleet found that growing herbs was a great way to introduce school-grown produce into the school menu. A taster table with some school-grown salad items was another great way to take school-grown food from the plot to the plate.



Kyson veg beds



Kingsfleet Community Growing Beds (with Edible Felixstowe). These beds sit on a green area in front of the school's main entrance. They are accessible to the public and so form part of a wider community project. The containers next to the planters are filled with water to enable people to water the vegetables.



Birchwood herb garden



Birchwood's allotment



Broke Hall's allotment

Schools were looking at their catering services. For some schools, in-house catering allowed them a little more freedom in designing their menus. Broke Hall have won a *Food for Life* award from the Soil Association for their school menu which offers pupils four meal options every day, encouraging pupils to diversify their diet and enabling the kitchen to procure more food from local suppliers and create a more seasonal menu.

Other schools were thinking about the food that pupils bring in from home in their packed lunches or for their snacks. The waste and litter generated from some of this food was noted and lots of schools are thinking about how they might try offering low-cost, wrapper-free snacks that can replace packets of crisps or cake bars. One idea suggested was to have a popcorn

machine where pupils can fill a reusable tub. Another idea was to create a school recipe book with recipes for wrapper-free snacks, some of which the pupils could try in a cooking lesson. Another great suggestion was to use a bread maker to produce fresh bread for a breakfast club.

Somerleyton are planning a collaborative project with East Suffolk Council's Suffolk Centre's for Warmth to deliver slow cooker lessons for pupils and their families. The aim of this project is to showcase some healthy recipes, using locally sourced ingredients where possible, to teach some key life skills around food preparation and provide a space for quality time between young people and their family/ carers.

Some of the OSOW schools keep a variety of animals. Birchwood have chickens and bees. The Chicken Monitors take care of the chickens and collect the eggs they lay. These eggs are DEFRA registered and are sold at the school gate at the end of the school day. Chicken muck goes into the compost. The beehive is tended by a local beekeeper while pupils help plan what to plant around the school to provide food for the bees. Birchwood's allotment and eggs are part of its 'Plot to Plate' initiative.

Most schools provide cooking lessons through the Design and Technology curriculum.

Some schools have organised trips to local allotments and talks or assemblies from allotment holders, farmers, local growers and food producers to provide pupils with a better understanding of where their food comes from.

Transport

Many schools joined in Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel 2025. Where many pupils commute from some distance, some schools gained permission from local car park owners for parents/carers to park close to the school and then walk, scoot, bike or wheel the remainder of the journey.

Most schools had provision for pupils to safely store bikes and scooters.



Kyson Bike Rack

Most schools offered pupils Bikeability cycling proficiency course.

Some school locations make travel options difficult. Challenges include a lack of public transport, a lack of safe pavements and/or the school site sitting on a busy road. The size of some school catchments also meant many pupils travel some distance, usually by car.

Helmingham reviewed the transport used to take pupils to swimming lessons. The council had provided a full-size coach which was not needed for the number of pupils travelling. Pupils wrote letters to the relevant authority about the inefficiency of using a coach and were able to effect positive change: the coach was changed for a minibus.



Brooklands have EV charging points installed in their staff carpark, making the idea of purchasing an EV more appealing to staff. Other schools are also looking at the DVLA's Workplace EV Charging Scheme to try and install EV chargers in their car parks.

Water

A number of OSOW schools were affected by Storm Babet in 2023. One school suffered flooding, another provided over-night shelter to pupils, teachers and members of the local community who could not travel home due to flooding.

The school which flooded has since installed a flood door and is looking into how the ditch, that runs along the school ground perimeter, might be maintained to help prevent future flooding.

Many schools are looking at how they might save, or reuse water. Heath's gardening club pupils make sure that at the end of lunch, any water remaining in the lunchtime jugs, goes on the garden.

Some schools have water butts enabling them to store and use rainwater. The water butts can offer a good solution where planters or growing beds are positioned away from an outdoor tap.



Great Finborough Water Butts



Broke Hall Water Butts