IMPACT REPORT

GOOD LIFE SCHOOLS
GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

OCTOBER 2026

SALLY FORT
MOOR IMPACT LTD.

GOOD LIFE SCHOOLS IMPACT EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Good Life Schools

Good Life Schools (GLS) 2024-2027 is a programme for secondary schools created and run by Global Action Plan, funded by the Climate Action Fund (administered by the National Lottery Community Fund). Building on an earlier pilot in London schools, GLS aims to help young people improve their wellbeing by investigating consumerism, advocating for, and making their own decisions, and taking action to reduce negative environmental impact. Rather than focusing on the latest must-haves, the programme encourages young people to explore what makes a genuinely "good" life, developing more empathetic relationships and a greater sense of ownership over the choices that matter to them.

Schools were provided with a toolkit of resources, a small project budget, and support from regional staff and partners. Working within this model, young people formed teams, researched relationships between consumerism and environmental impact, decided on a practical project, put their ideas into action with the support of a community partner, and shared their work across the school and beyond. Projects ranged from uniform and bike repair services to school allotments, wellbeing gardens, plastic recycling schemes, and cosmetics packaging collection points.

The programme was delivered in partnership with local authorities and strategic partners across Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Durham, Redcar & Cleveland, Leicester, Merthyr Tydfil, and Sheffield, with regional Community Engagement Leads coordinating delivery on the ground. The model was designed to be flexible, running through lunchtime clubs, after-school clubs and nurture groups, with young people self-selecting into projects in most cases. As the programme evolved to include SEND schools and groups, some teachers chose specific students and groups to include.

Moor Impact Ltd. was commissioned to carry out a qualitative evaluation using a participatory, triangulated approach, including in-depth interviews with teachers, community partners and strategic stakeholders, and creative, participatory focus groups with young people. 23 schools are represented in the data collection, including eight in-person focus groups, ten teacher interviews, and nine community partner interviews. Fourteen interviews took place with local authority staff and strategic partner organisations. Careful steps were taken throughout to distinguish outcomes attributable to GLS from those that might have happened anyway, giving confidence that the impact described below can be largely credited to the programme itself. This report aims to provide a concise, accessible presentation of the impact and ingredients for success, for teachers and other professionals interested in running Good Life Schools or other similar projects.

The Impact for Young People

The evidence points to a consistent and meaningful impact on young people across three interconnected areas: wellbeing, youth voice and agency, and environmental understanding.

1. **Wellbeing.** Pupils repeatedly described a strong sense of pride and achievement, particularly where they could see tangible progress in their work, whether a garden transformed, clothes repaired or a t-shirt design completed. Many also spoke about the positive effect on their mental health, describing the process as stress relieving and calming. For pupils with additional needs in particular, projects were linked to noticeable growth in confidence and emotional safety, with teachers observing pupils stepping outside their comfort zones and expressing themselves more freely than in lessons. Social and communal belonging was a further consistent theme, with new friendships forming across year groups and some projects evolving into safe, informal spaces at lunchtimes.
2. **Youth voice and agency.** A defining feature of the projects was the degree of genuine choice and ownership given to young people, rather than being directed by pre-set tasks. Staff consistently identified this as a key point of difference from other school activities, and it gave pupils responsibility and pride in decisions that were genuinely their own. This ownership also revealed qualities in pupils not always visible elsewhere in school, with staff reporting surprise at how clearly and confidently pupils could express their views. Some pupils gained their first experience of leadership, particularly through mentoring younger year groups, while others identified the ability to disagree constructively as one of the most valuable things they had gained.
3. **Environment**. Waste reduction and recycling was the most frequently discussed theme, with pupils translating their learning into practical action such as converting plastic bottles into 3D-printing filament, repairing school uniforms, and sorting plastics by recycling code. The direct impact of environmental change on nature and biodiversity was also prominent, with pupils shocked by the effects of plastic pollution and palm oil production, and others witnessing first-hand how growing food attracted wildlife back into school grounds.

Ingredients for Success

The report identifies twelve ingredients for successful delivery. These include building in hands-on activity early on, putting student voice genuinely at the heart of the project, supporting young people to take on their own leadership roles, and helping them persist through challenging moments. Practical ingredients include building in project visibility, keeping participation flexible while maintaining a consistent timetable slot, involving a community partner and planning proactively with them, securing senior leadership and colleague buy-in, checking budgets and timelines early, and making full use of the specially created GLS resources.

The Impact for Schools, Communities and the Wider System

Beyond the young people directly involved, Good Life Schools generated a significant ripple effect.

1. **Teachers**. Almost all teachers interviewed described gaining new knowledge and connections to community partners and organisations they had not previously known about, with some also developing new skills themselves. The project shaped broader teaching practice, encouraging more student-led decision making, giving teachers greater confidence in creative approaches, and highlighting the benefits of working outdoors.
2. **Schools.** Reducing waste and encouraging reuse and recycling became a common theme across many schools, in some cases extending well beyond the immediate project into whole-school purchasing habits and ethos. Several schools created lasting physical legacies, including new outdoor learning spaces, sensory gardens, allotments and equipment such as plastic-melting machinery and smoothie bikes, which will continue to benefit pupils and staff beyond the funded project.
3. **Communities.** The projects extended wellbeing benefits into local communities, from reducing loneliness among care home residents to providing practical financial support to families through uniform repair services in areas of deprivation. Community partners and practitioners reported valuable opportunities to test new ways of working and, in several cases, the start of ongoing relationships with schools.
4. **Policy.** Finally, Good Life Schools was recognised for its contribution to strategic priorities at regional and national policy level. In Carmarthenshire, one school's involvement was embedded into local authority practice and is now being rolled out county-wide at no additional cost to schools. Representatives from other local authorities noted how the programme aligned with wider priorities including climate action planning, curriculum reform, and wellbeing agendas, and highlighted its distinctive combination of youth voice, wellbeing and a consumer-focused approach to environmental issues as filling a gap not addressed by other programmes, particularly at secondary level.

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE PROGRAMME

This evaluation explores the national Good Life Schools (GLS) 2024-2027 pilot programme for secondary schools, created and run by Global Action Plan, with funding from the Climate Action Fund (administered by National Lottery Community Fund). It was based on an earlier London specific pilot project.

GLS aimed to help young people **improve their wellbeing** by **investigating consumerism**, **advocate for and make their own decisions**, and **take action to reduce negative environmental impact**. Exploring what makes a 'good' life rather than a 'good**s**' life, young people researched, designed and brought to life projects in partnership with their local community. They became champions for a more knowledgeable and discerning way of life. Less focused on the latest must-haves and screen addiction, and more appreciative of empathetic relationships, the impact our choices have on each other and the planet, and greater ownership of the choices about what matters in life.

Good Life Schools were provided with a toolkit of resources, a small project budget, and support from regional staff and partners to work through the GLS model in which young people:

- Form a team and decide on their roles then research the relationship between consumerism and environmental impact.
- Discuss ideas about practical steps they can take to make a positive difference and decide on a project.
- Put their ideas into action, inspired or supported by a community partner. Examples included a uniform repair lab after school, a club to help repair bikes, a school allotment growing fresh food for the school kitchen and wider community, willow weaving a wellbeing space for when students need calmness, a make-up packaging recycling station, a cycle-powered smoothie making machine, and many more.
- Spread the word throughout school and beyond, sharing their work through project visibility in school, display boards, school assemblies, regional events with other schools and local councillors, or documentary film-making and media features.

This programme was delivered in partnership with local authorities and other strategic partners in Bridgend; Carmarthenshire; Durham; Redcar & Cleveland; Leicester; Merthyr Tydfil and Sheffield. These partners supported school recruitment, information sharing, finding local community partners and co-developed and maintained strategic support as things developed.

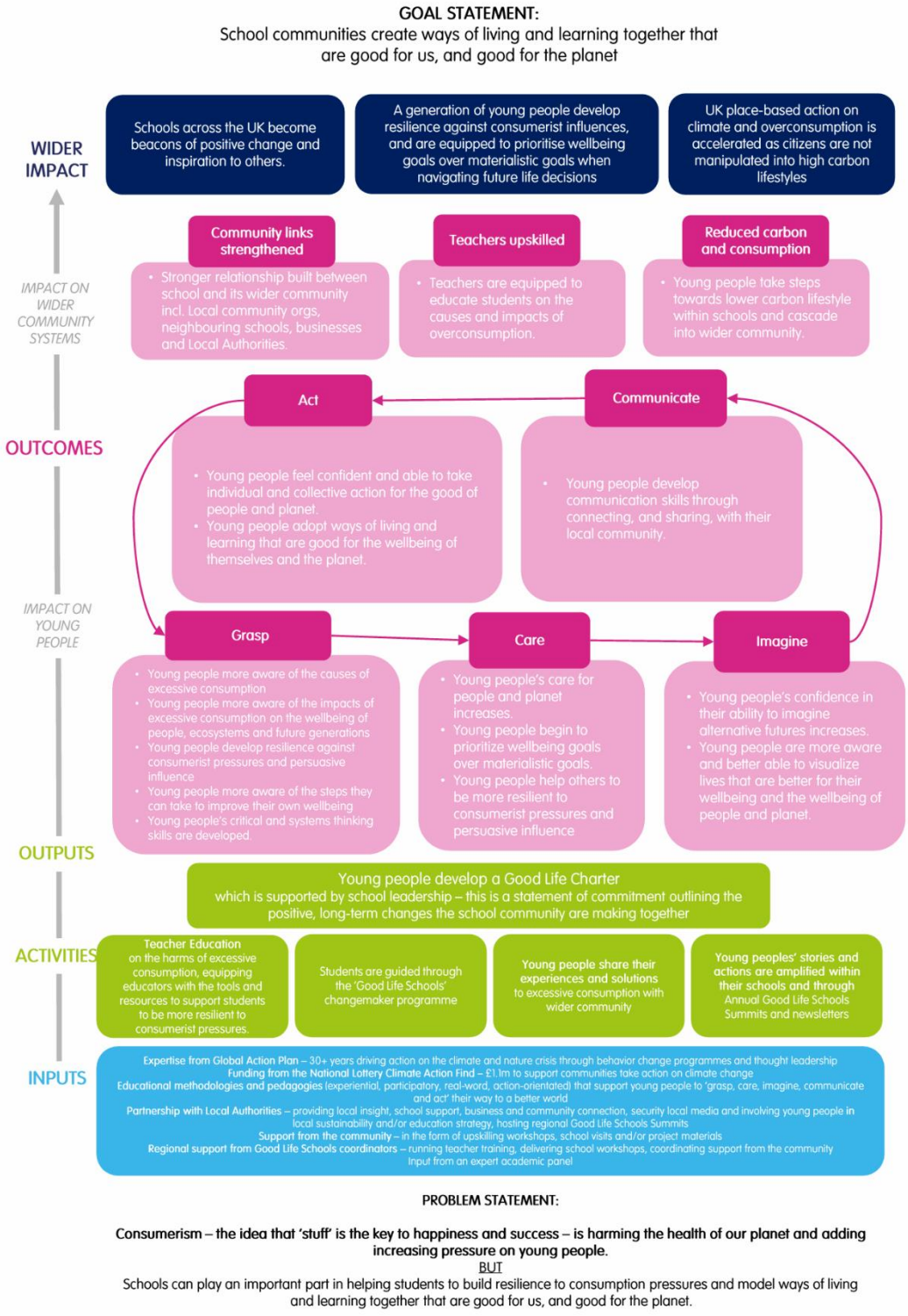
Three Global Action Plan Community Engagement Leads (in the NE, Yorkshire and Midlands, and Wales) facilitated the programme's delivery with on the ground support, logistics, connections and strategic focus. They worked closely with the strategic partners in each region.

The model was designed to work flexibly, running in off-timetable / extra-curricular sessions such as lunchtime clubs, after school clubs and nurture groups, with young people self-selecting into the projects.

APPROACH TO EVALUATION

THEORY OF CHANGE

Global Action Plan created a Theory of Change to show how Good Life Schools is intended to make a difference to people and the planet. It informs the whole evaluation approach, guiding what we ask about and look for.



THE EVALUATION BRIEF

Moor Impact Ltd. was commissioned to carry out independent qualitative evaluation through focus groups and interviews with teachers, young people, community partners and local authority and other strategic partners, looking at impact and learning. The brief for this report was to provide a concise, accessible presentation of the impact and ingredients for success, for teachers and other professionals interested in running Good Life Schools or other similar projects. Separate evaluations carried out by Global Action Plan are also available.

METHODOLOGY

A 'realist evaluation' approach was taken i.e. to explore "*what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how*?"[1] Our triangulated and participatory, approach combined:

- In-depth interviews annually with local authority and strategic partner leads.
- In-depth interviews with GLS teacher.
- In-depth interviews with community partners.
- Participatory documentation incorporating elements of Most Significant Change and Photo-Voice methods, so young people could reflect on what mattered to them throughout their projects, whilst simultaneously answering questions about the main aims of the project.
- Focus groups with young people drawing on their documentation, and using conversation, and creative consultation methods.
- Regular critical friend meetings (minimum quarterly) between Moor Impact and the GLS team.

Teachers and partners were asked about impact on the school; young people; partners and professionals; challenges and successes of how the programmes are set up and run including partnerships between teacher and community partner and the extent of young people's freedom in decision making; use of Good Life School resources; uniqueness or added value of the project, and possible legacies of the work.

Young people were asked four key questions - what happened, what was surprising, what made them proudest, and what the biggest challenges were. Follow-up questions drew out more detail, examples, and if or how much experiences and impact were new or different for them.

Local authority and strategic colleagues were asked about strategic and added value of GLS, the nature of their roles and involvement in the programme, successes, challenges, and legacies.

For this final report feedback was analysed according to the evaluation brief: when projects are successful – what does that look like? What is the impact on wellbeing, the environment and community impact, any other outcomes, and what is needed for success to happen in terms of project design and delivery. This follows an interim report looking more at process and how the programme could be improved. Recommendations from which were adopted at the end of Year 1.

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[1] HM Treasury (2020). *Magenta Book. Supplementary Guide: Realist Evaluation*. London: HM Treasury. Retrieved April 18th, 2024 from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book/supplementary-guide-realist-evaluation-html

DATA AVAILABLE

The GLS team recommended schools to include in data collection based on their progress in the work. Together we shortlisted schools to include in this evaluation based on:

- Those nearest, or at the end of their full projects.
- A spread across the different local authority areas involved.
- A range of mainstream and SEND schools and groups.
- A range of different themes, topics and project ideas developed by the young people.

46 schools completed GLS projects. 23 schools are represented in the data collection, via:

- 8 in-person focus groups and site visits across Bridgend, Carmarthenshire, Durham, Leicester, Redcar & Cleveland and Sheffield including one specific SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) / ALN (additional learning needs) setting, three SEND / ALN nurture cohorts in mainstream settings, and four mainstream mixed age secondary pupils. A total of 62 young people joined the focus groups, with an average 8 young people per session (between 4 and 12 in each group).
- 10 in-depth teacher interviews across schools in Carmarthenshire, Durham, Leicester, Merthyr Tydfill, Neath Port Talbot, Redcar & Cleveland, and Sheffield.
- 9 in-depth interviews with community partners working with schools in Carmarthenshire, Durham, Leicester, Redcar & Cleveland, and Sheffield.

Annual interviews with leadership stakeholders across local authorities and strategic partnerships, totalled 14 interviews with 9 stakeholders across: Bridgend, Carmarthen, Durham, Leicester, Merthyr Tydfil, Redcar & Cleveland and Sheffield local authority staff; and partners from Sheffield University and Redcar & Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency.

LIMITATIONS

We recognise some limitations on the data available. The programme design is intended to be flexible, student-led and specific to each school's community, so every project in the programme is different. Global Action Plan recommended projects which were mostly or entirely complete and relatively successful. Not all schools, settings and community partners fed into this evaluation. To mitigate this, Moor Impact prioritised examples representing a broad geographical and subject range, and variety of types of settings. Case studies and individual quotes show the experiences of the different examples; and cross cutting themes show the overarching findings.

Good Life Schools is a new programme, where the evaluation brief and methods were designed to capture feedback at the end of each delivery year, i.e. at the end point of projects in schools. So, a retrospective baseline approach was embedded into data collection, prompting people to compare their current situation with what things were like before.

RESULTS: ATTRIBUTION OR CONTRIBUTION

How do we know if the project created these outcomes, compared to what might have happened anyway, or how much credit Good Life Schools can take for any changes? Firstly, thanks to the careful stewardship of the Good Life Schools team, efforts were made to ensure schools undertook innovative new projects that were different from what the school would normally do, even if working with an existing group of young people like an eco-council or gardening club.

In our data collection, students were asked clarifying questions based on their responses, to check whether there were things they would have done or learned anyway. For instance, questions like: Is this something you do anyway? Do you learn this with your teachers? Were you already interested in this? Did you know any of this before? What made you want to do that?

Where young people talked about learning, changes or other impact, only answers relevant to these specific sessions and activities were included. If students mixed these projects up with others, teachers clarified and differentiated during the focus groups so that responses stayed on track.

With professionals such as teachers, community partners and local authority leads, checks were embedded into the questions along the way, using wording like ‘thinking about this project specifically’ or ‘what did this project do that was different to other partnerships’.

Of course, the school’s teams, systems, resources, grounds, buildings and infrastructure are all major contributing ingredients, in particular the energy and commitment of individual teachers, and the creativity and courage of the young people. Without which, the projects simply could not happen. Beyond that, because of the measures above, we are confident Good Life Schools has helped achieve results which would be unlikely to have happened otherwise.

IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

1. SUMMARY OF IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The evidence gathered across Good Life Schools projects points to a consistent impact on young people, spanning wellbeing, voice and agency, and environmental understanding.

Wellbeing

Pupils repeatedly described pride and achievement, particularly where they could see tangible progress in their work, whether a garden transformed, clothes repaired, or a t-shirt design completed. This was often tied to a feeling of personal capability and contributing to something worthwhile, such as helping the environment or saving others money. Many pupils also spoke about the positive effect on their mental health, describing the process as stress relieving and calming.

For pupils with additional needs, projects were linked to noticeable growth in confidence and emotional safety. Teachers observed pupils stepping outside their comfort zones, for example visiting unfamiliar parts of the school to gather resources and becoming visibly more comfortable expressing themselves than in lessons.

Social and communal belonging was another consistent theme. Pupils and staff described new friendships forming, particularly across year groups, and a stronger sense of connection to the wider school community. Other projects evolved into safe spaces where pupils could build confidence and friendships, particularly at lunchtimes.

Youth Voice and Agency

A defining feature of the projects was the degree of choice and ownership given to young people. Rather than being directed by set tasks, pupils were encouraged to research issues themselves and shape their own response. Staff consistently identified this as a key point of difference from other school activities, giving pupils responsibility and pride in decisions that were genuinely their own. For some, this freedom was unfamiliar and, at first, daunting, but was ultimately experienced as a welcome change from the usual structure of school life.

This ownership also revealed qualities in pupils not always visible elsewhere in school. Staff reported being genuinely surprised by how clearly pupils could express their views once given the opportunity.

The projects also gave some pupils their first experience of leadership, particularly through older pupils supporting and mentoring younger year groups, fostering cohesion and encouraging pupils to think more critically about the impact they could have.

Closely linked to this was the experience of respectful disagreement and shared decision-making. Several pupils identified the ability to disagree constructively as one of the most valuable outcomes of the project, describing how differing opinions were worked through as a team without conflict.

Environment

Waste reduction and recycling emerged as the most frequently discussed environmental theme. Several schools translated their learning into direct practical action, such as converting single-use plastic bottles into filament for 3D-printed items, repairing school uniforms to prevent them going to waste, and sorting plastic materials by recycling code with a community artist. Pupils showed a clear grasp of the wider implications of waste, including the environmental cost of fast fashion and the low recycling rates of everyday packaging such as cosmetics.

The direct impact of environmental change on nature and biodiversity was the second most prominent theme. Pupils described being shocked to learn about the effects of plastic pollution and microfibres on marine life, and by the scale of palm oil use in everyday products and its impact on forests and wildlife. In other projects, pupils saw for first-hand how home grown food also benefited biodiversity in the form of wildlife.

Summary

Together this evidence shows that Good Life Schools projects are having a meaningful impact on young people across the three interconnected areas. Pupils are developing greater confidence, pride and emotional wellbeing; they are exercising real voice, choice and leadership distinct from their usual school experience; and they are building a practical, first-hand understanding of environmental issues, translated into tangible action. Across all three areas, pupils and staff alike pointed to the significance of genuine ownership as the foundation for these outcomes.

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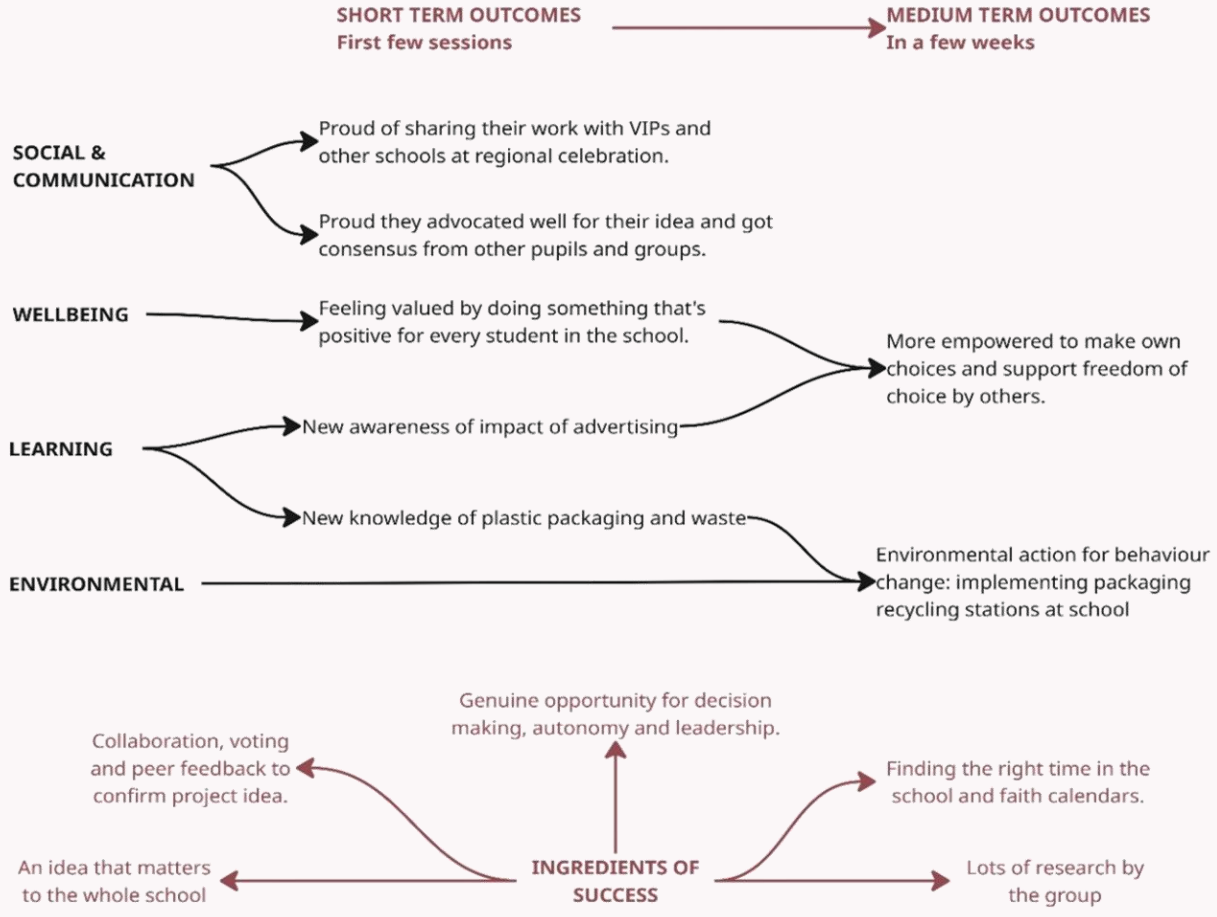
2. CASE STUDIES

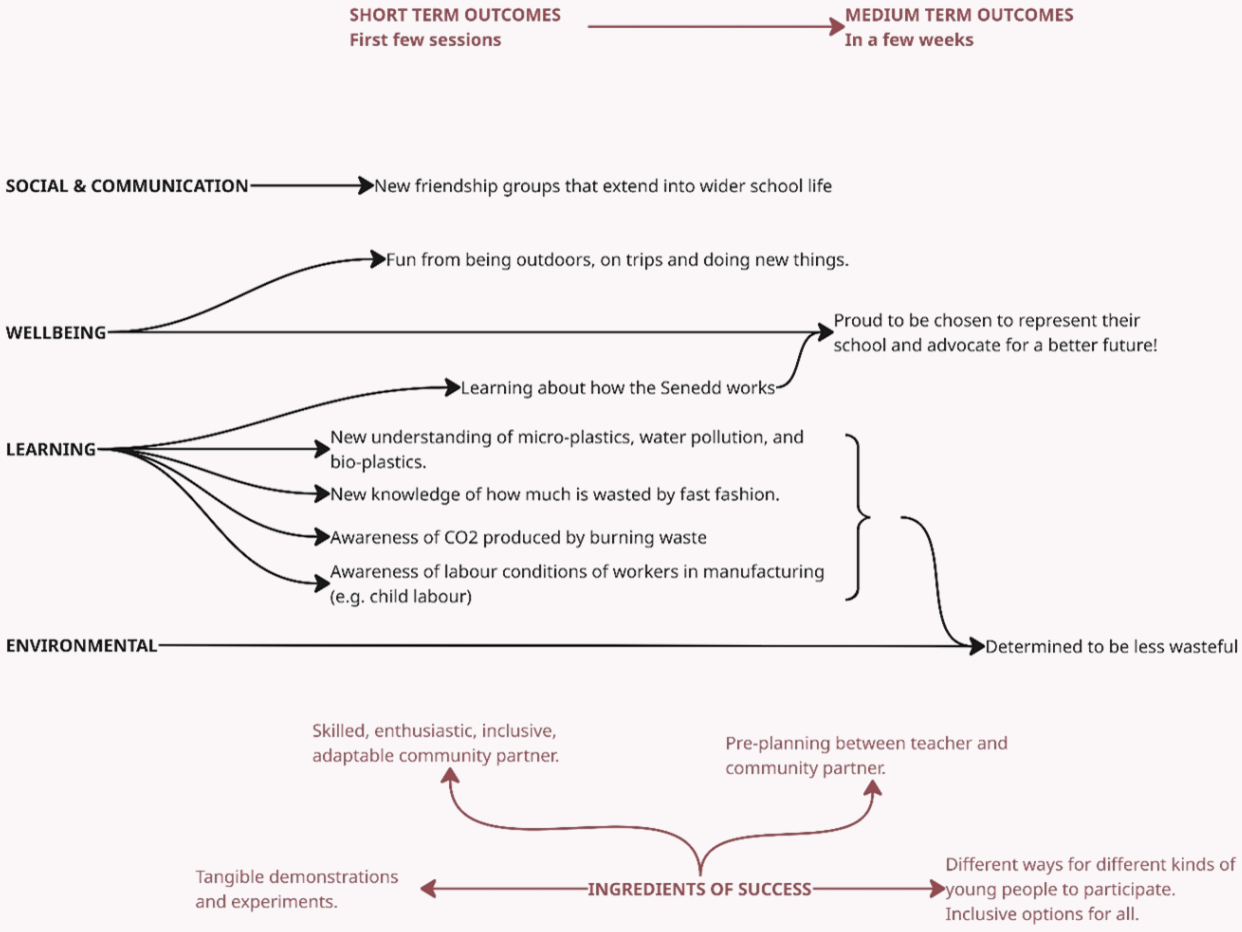
Sir Jonathan North School, Leicester.

This all-girls school's project began with pupils researching and analysing advertising, including make-up and perfume marketing, before narrowing down from a wide range of topics to focus on the make-up and cosmetics industry, chosen because it felt personal to them and their school. The group researched the environmental and health impacts of make-up, including packaging waste and skin-safety concerns, and rated their shortlisted ideas out of five stars before pitching their chosen focus to the school's Eco Club. Their delivery plan had two strands: running a workshop with the cosmetics retailer LUSH to make a sustainable lip gloss, open to all year groups; and setting up a collection point in school for recycling make-up packaging. They presented their work to local councillors and other schools at a regional Good Life Schools celebration event.



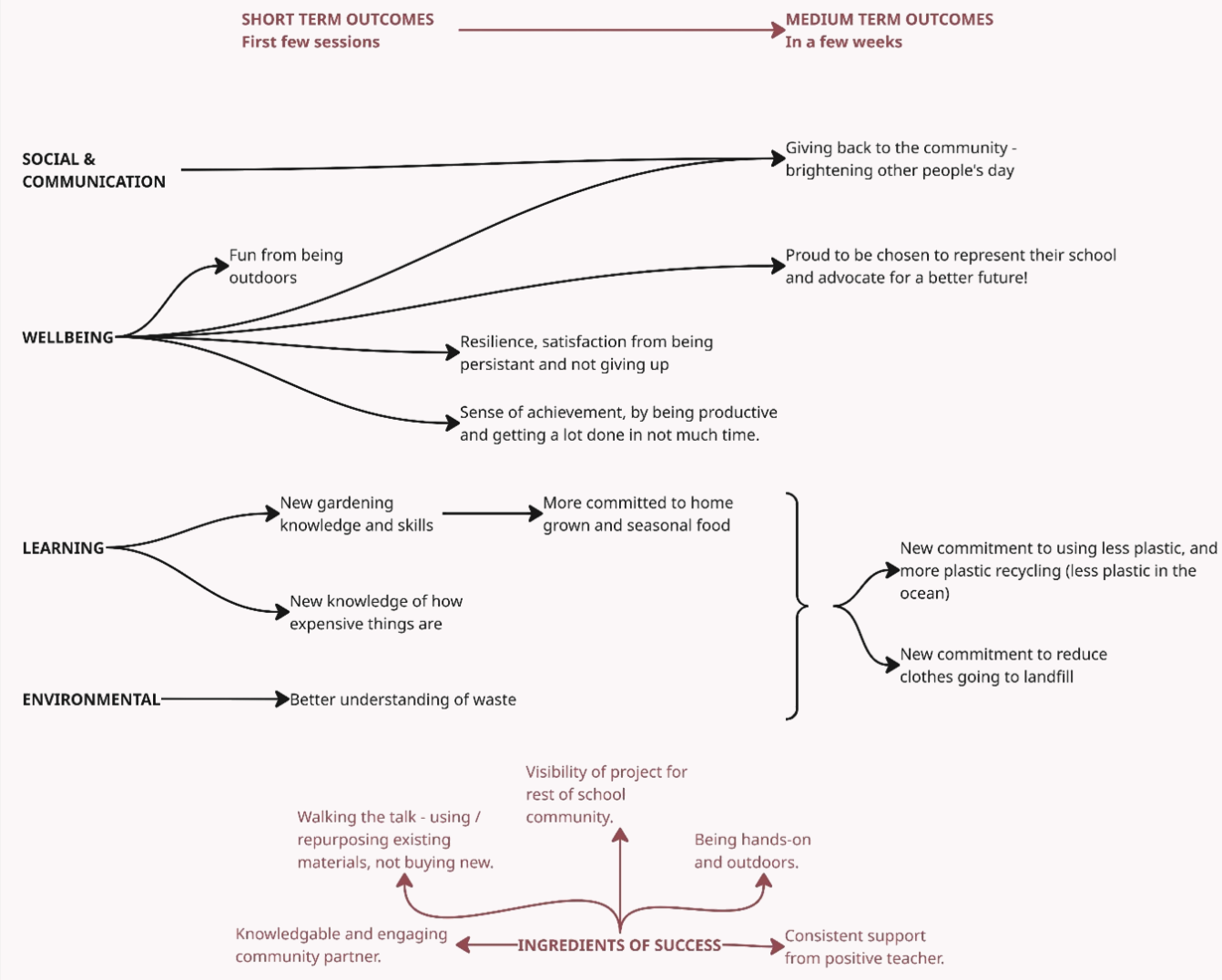
Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth, Carmarthenshire.

This project focused on consumerism, fast fashion and plastic pollution. Pupils created a group charter and took part in sessions including a practical workshop with artist Daisy Buckles who showed them how to turn milk into a bioplastic. They then used a heat press and sewing machines to create bunting from beach-collected plastic. Pupils also examined microplastics in sand under UV light, observed plastic particles under a microscope and took part in a session washing clothes in a bucket to explore how synthetic fibres are released into water systems. Looking at natural materials as an alternative, they learned about willow weaving, making large scale willow huts around the grounds for groups of students to sit in. As part of the project's delivery, the group travelled to the Senedd in Cardiff where they proudly presented their work to an audience of special guests and other schools.



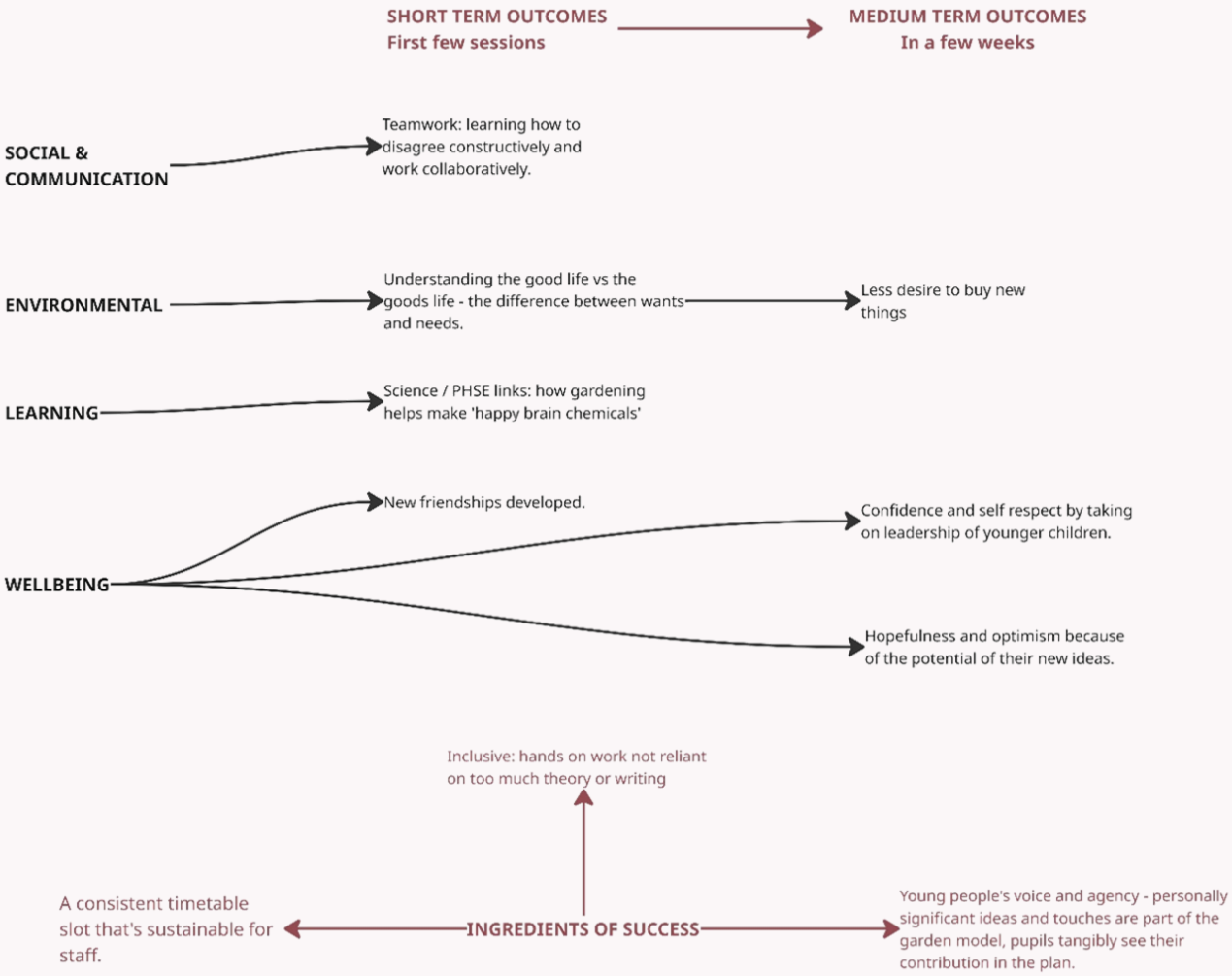
Saint Peter's Catholic College, Redcar & Cleveland.

This project involved developing a previously unused garden space into a kitchen garden, with the long-term aim of growing fruit and vegetables to distribute to the local community. Pupils worked with external adviser, Hazel from Kirkleatham Walled Garden, who helped them plan what to plant and when, deciding on fruit (blackberries, raspberries, strawberries), vegetables (onions, potatoes, rhubarb) and a mixture of edible and decorative flowers. Their work included clearing and preparing the space, building raised beds, planting, litter-picking and watering, and keeping project journals recording their planning and reflections.



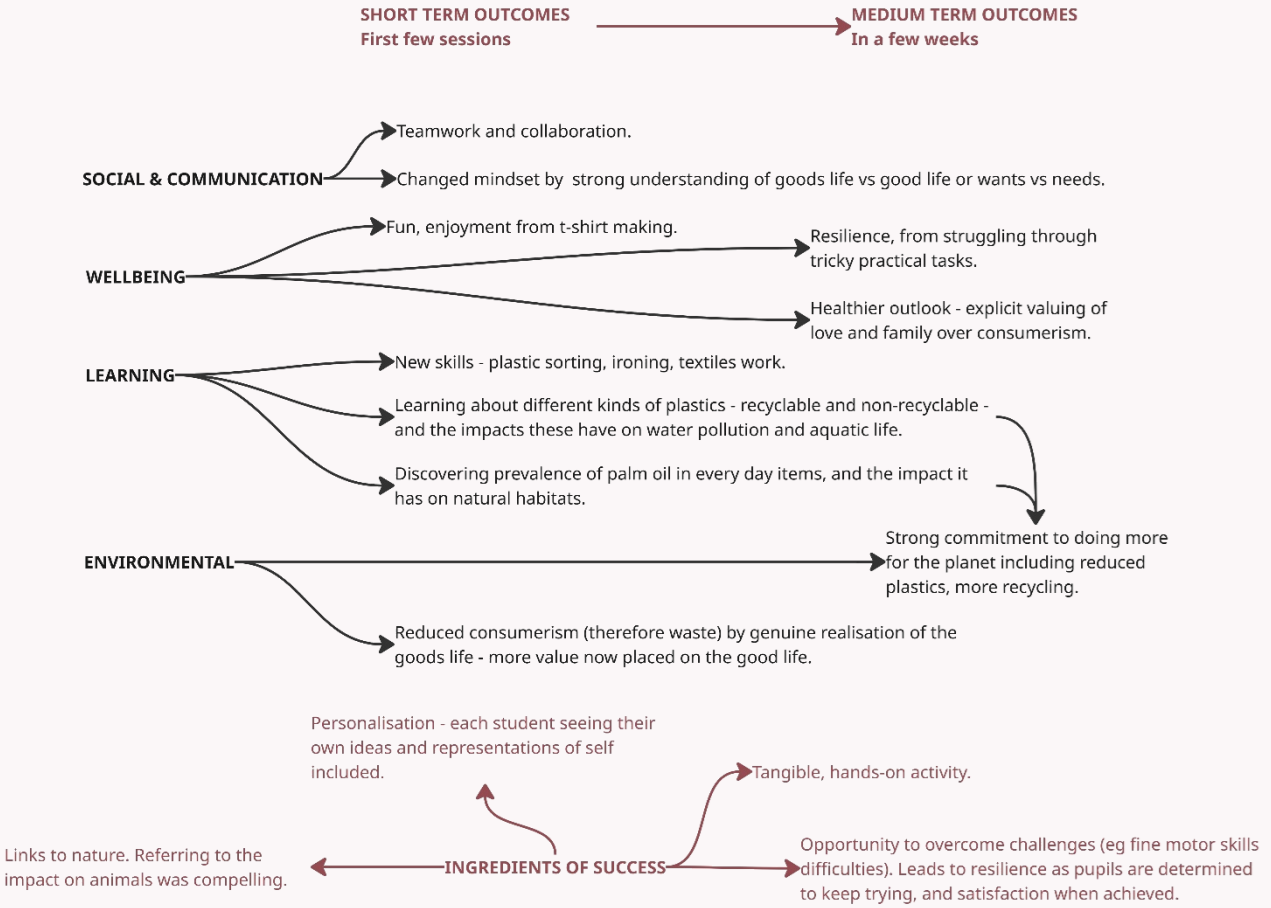
Outwood Academy Normanby, Redcar & Cleveland.

Pupils from the school's Additional Resourced Provision (ARP) for pupils with additional cognitive and learning needs worked alongside mainstream pupils to explore what constitutes 'a good life', discussing needs versus wants and whether money or possessions bring happiness. Some of the group had ideas about creating a gym, others were interested in craft based options. Having researched costs and discussed accessibility and self-consciousness, the group agreed to design a wellbeing garden which could combine exercise with craft type work to suit everyone's interests. Pupils brought personal memories and family links into their ideas, creating a final design in the form of a 3D tabletop model of their planned garden, which was to include a den, an open-air kitchen, a fish pond, a herb and flower growing area, an outdoor classroom space and a shed for tools. The school is now working on the logistics to bring the model to life.



Canolfan Yr Eithin, Carmarthenshire.

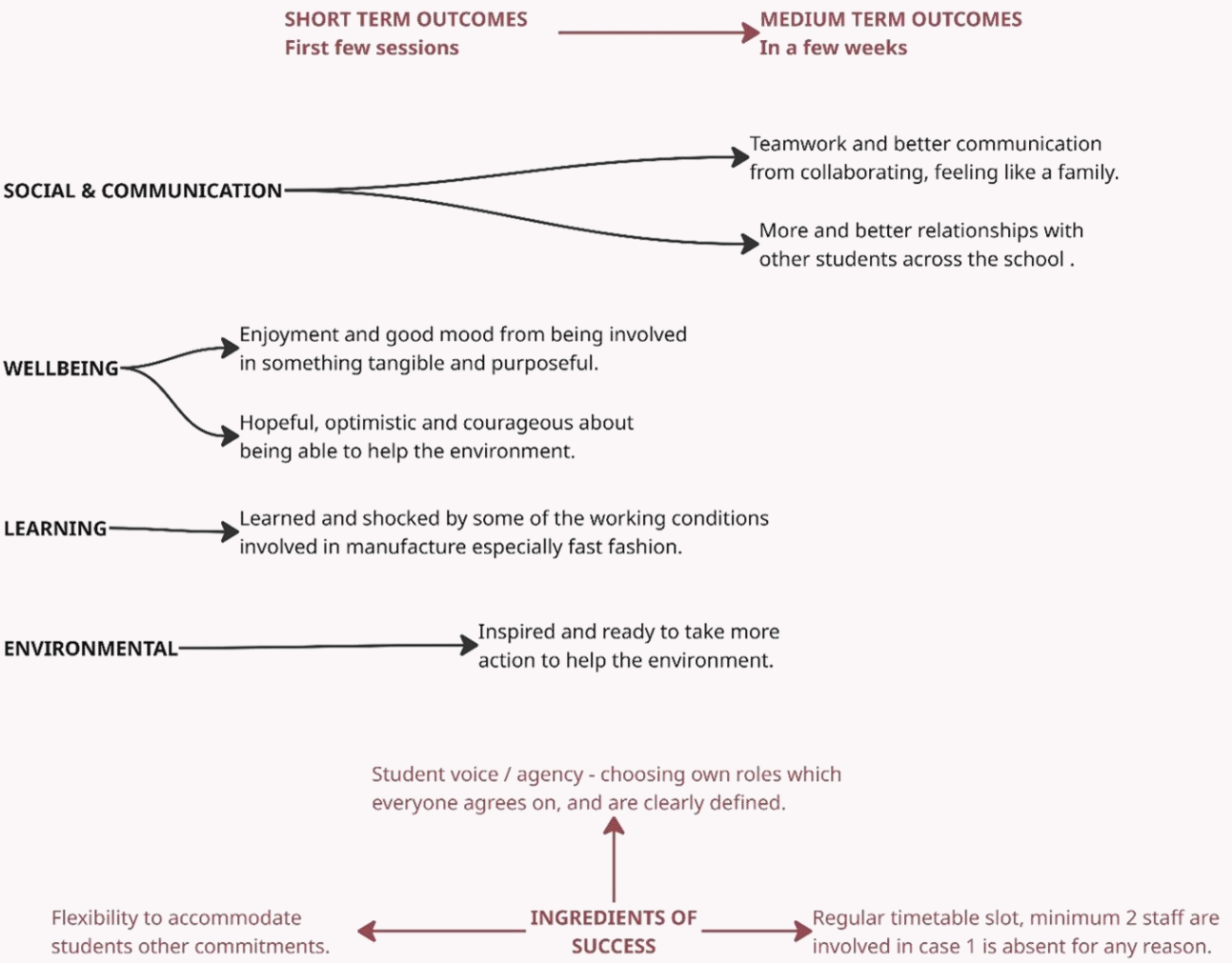
Working with artist Bronwyn Gwillim, pupils from this specialist autism unit explored plastics and recycling, then enjoyed a workshop sorting plastic waste by recycling code. They used the reusable plastic, including bottle tops and bags collected from a beach, to create a large sea life artwork displayed in a school corridor. Pupils also produced their own t-shirt designs using an iron-on heat-transfer process with recycled fabric offcuts from a costume company. The group researched and were shocked by their findings about palm oil, comparing product lists from the UK and USA to identify everyday foods and toiletries containing it, and watched a film about orangutans and habitat loss linked to palm oil production.



Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, Bridgend.

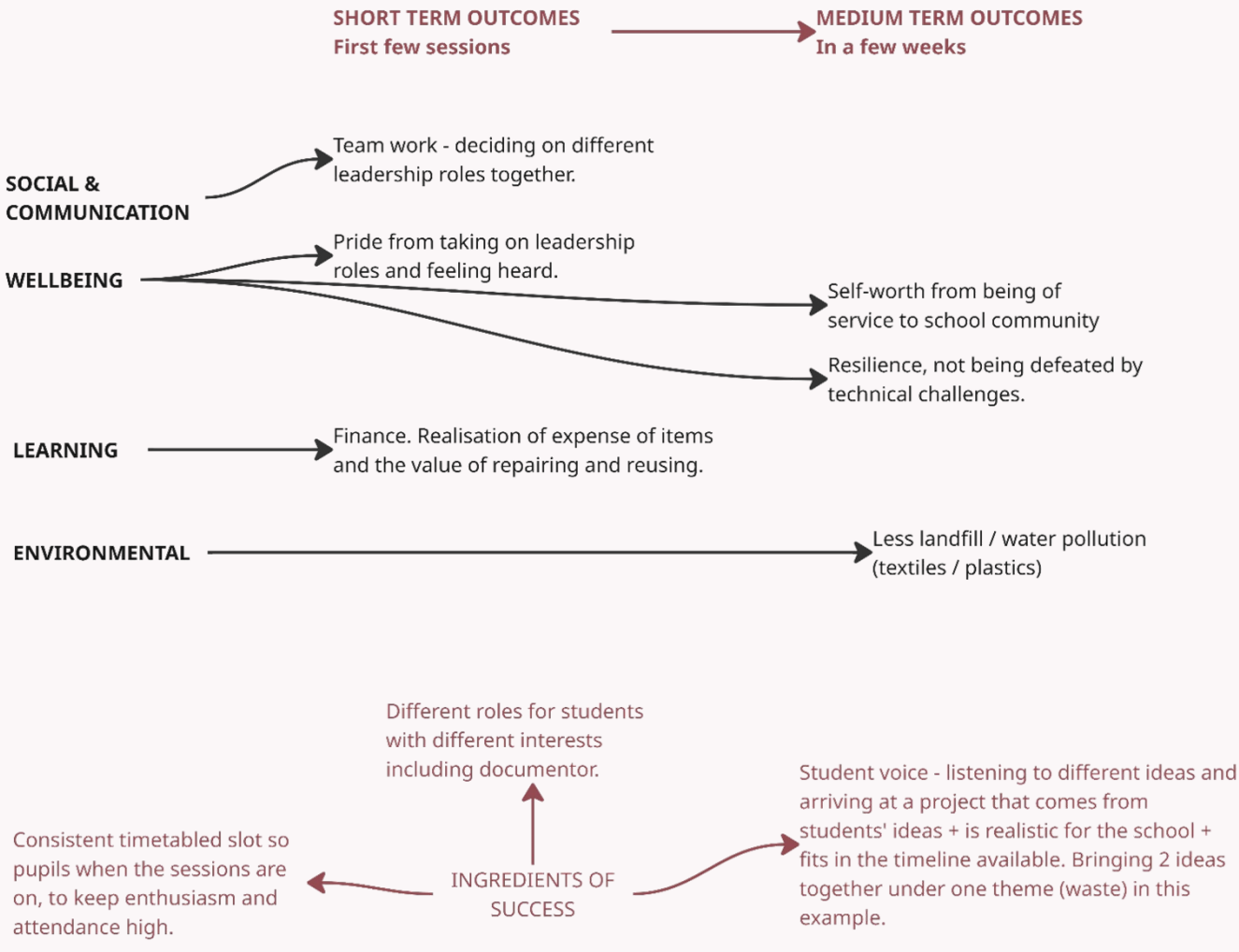
This project ran weekly at lunchtimes and focused on interrogating consumerism. The group investigated online data tracking and targeted advertising, single-use plastic bottles, and fast fashion and labour conditions overseas. As well as delivering the project, pupils took on roles as editor, photographer, researcher and communicator.

"WHAT MADE ME FEEL PROUD WAS THAT WE ALL WORK TOGETHER AND THAT WE DO THINGS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND LEARN NEW THINGS. WE HAVE REALLY GOOD ANSWERS TO THINGS."



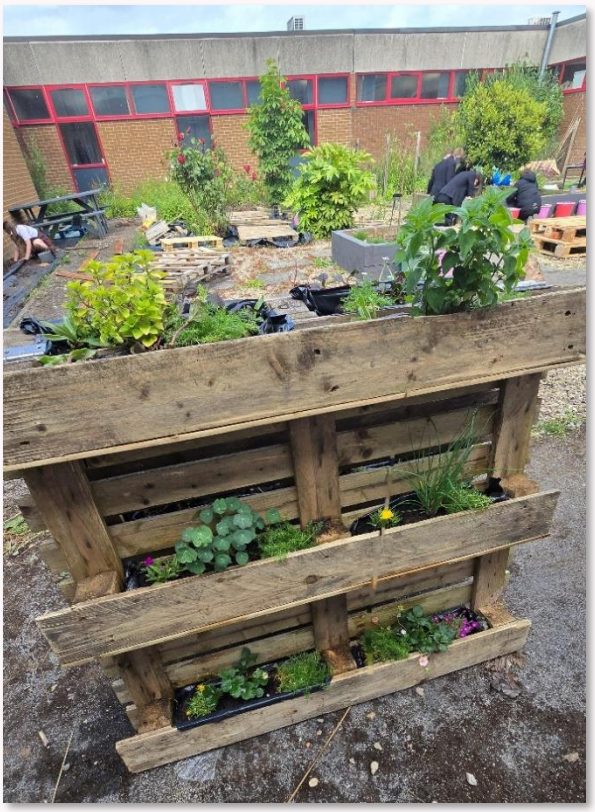
Ecclesfield School, Sheffield.

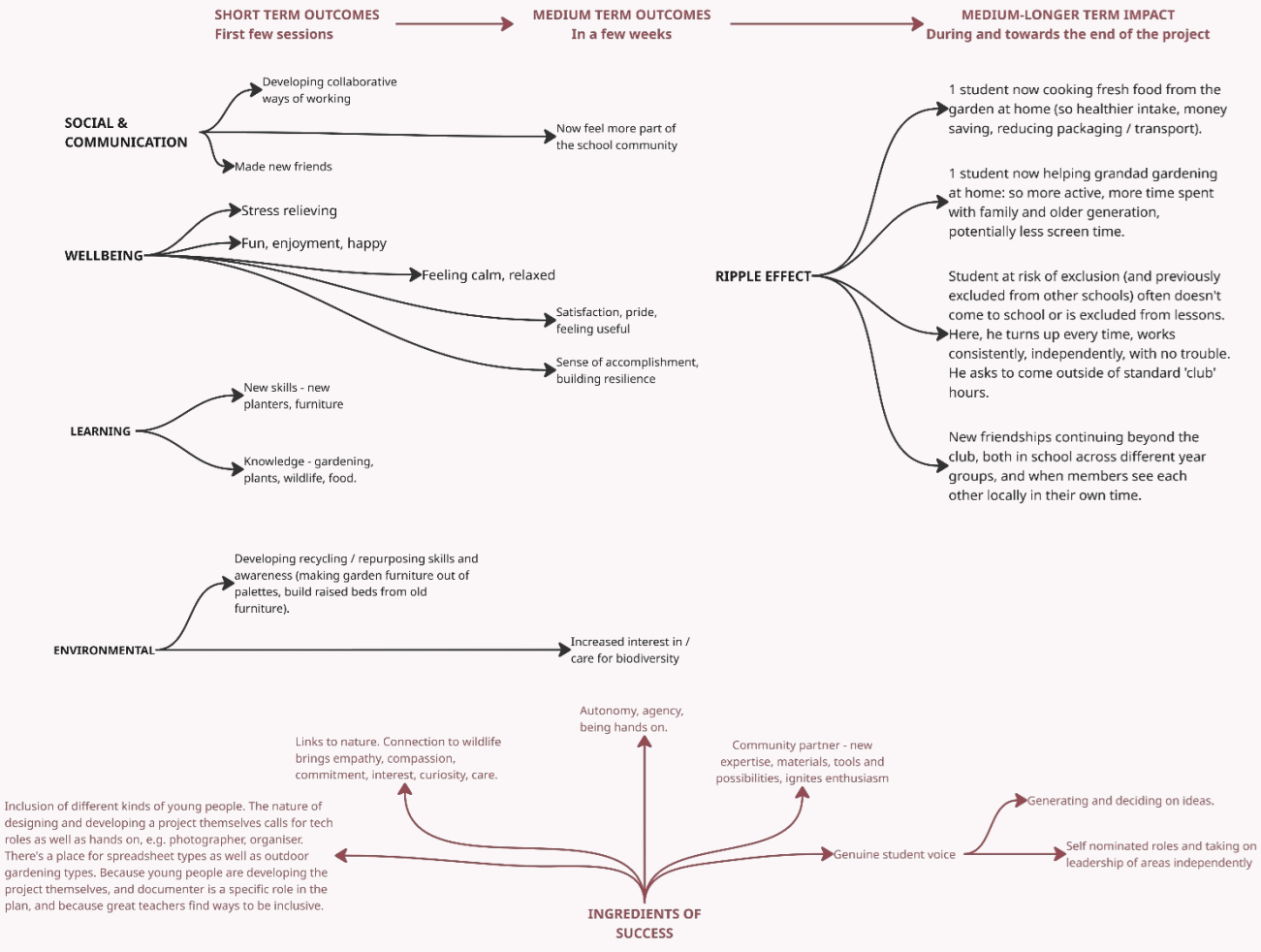
Pupils with additional social, emotional and mental health support requirements combined their various interests into the theme of ‘waste prevention’ with two strands of delivery. The first was a uniform repair service. Pupils learned new sewing skills (including fixing ties, jumpers and other uniform items), made and displayed posters advertising the repair service around school, and researched how other organisations run repair services. The second was a plastic recycling project, where pupils collected used single-use plastic water bottles around school to turn into filament for 3D printing, to producing fidget toys for the school's SEN support area.



Redmoor Academy, Leicester.

Supported by community partner, The Pierce Perspective, students transformed a neglected courtyard space into a food-growing allotment. The group worked hard to carry out weeding and clearing, building and installing raised beds, planters and a compost corner, and painting a bench and beds. They researched wild plants to produce a leaflet on the value of native wild 'weeds'. The Pierce Perspective facilitated young people's design of the space and helped add a sensory garden area with a shelter, water feature and planting for birds and wellbeing. Pupils divided themselves into leadership and delivery roles, have harvested their first early crops, and gave apples to the school kitchen and to staff. Further phases of planting and, eventually, distributing food to the wider community are planned to continue throughout and beyond the rest of the school year.





3. EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL IMPACT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

STORIES OF WHAT GOOD LIFE SCHOOLS MEANT TO SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS, AS SHARED BY THEIR TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

"There was one kid in particular, he normally misses a lot of lessons overall. It's really good that he stayed. It's clear that he was getting something from that session that he's not getting from other classes. He was communicating with other classmates – not just sitting and watching. It was great to hear that it's made such an impact on an individual as well as the whole group."

"We have 3 students in our class that are selective talkers. This project has had a massive difference as one of them has actually started communicating. Whether I can put it down to only this project is hard to say, but that building of confidence, when you're on task with a project like this, you can switch off your brain and just feel calm. Maybe you're more likely to ask, 'will you pass me that pen'? So, you might say it allows for that communication."

"There's one student who was just so enthusiastic. He had additional needs. I love to see the enthusiasm - for someone with additional needs to be treated like a peer in that space. You know you're a volunteer in our community no matter what diagnosis you have or what history you have. To have that person be so enthusiastic and a regular part of the team / class was great."

"A year 10 girl, her attendance is in and out, she's bounced around different schools for years now. This really helps her, she wants to come in, and she wants to do it. Her attendance is up now, and she has attended every session – for these sessions."

“There’s a boy who was like ‘my dad’s got an allotment’ and had never been, but now he goes and he has a patch there and is making a wildlife pond and wants to show me and tell me about it.”

“One student who attends and is amazing, he is on the spectrum and does get into bother sometimes, and he’s starting to come and see me to ask if there’s a garden job he can do, he comes to ask if he can water the plants in class. And his head of year says that club has really saved him over the past year.”

“Another boy is closed off and won’t talk much, but his dad says he’s had to buy things and started growing seeds on the window at home.”

“One of the students particularly struggles. They've got Tourette's, they have a tough time, they have seizures and can become very anxious and agitated at times. Sometimes it’s hard to engage them in a particular lesson or subject and really get that buy-in. But with this project, they've really come alive with it. It's been allowing them to use their passion, show off their skill set, and really be able to show their confidence in art to other people. That's made a massive difference. If they become agitated or stressed, that can tend to mean that they have more attendance issues, whereas with this project having that calm, peaceful atmosphere of doing the arts and crafts, thinking we will be doing it for a positive reason has had a very, very positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.”

4. CROSS-CUTTING IMPACT THEMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

WELLBEING

WELLBEING 1: Pride and a sense of achievement.

A strong and recurring outcome across projects was a clear sense of pride and accomplishment, particularly where pupils could see tangible, visible progress in their work.

> "*Seeing the change from the start to how it is now, you can see the real change of what we've done, you feel accomplished.*" (Redmoor, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*I'm most proud of when we get the clothes, we've fixed them, and then they get them back, and really happy because they didn't have to waste all that money on buying new clothes.*" (Ecclesfield, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*What made me feel proud was knowing that I was capable of being part of something, I can help the environment.*" (Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*It was really hard on the design of the t-shirt and I really enjoyed doing it. I used the iron to melt the design onto the t-shirt. It was a little bit hard for me, but I would never give up, I just keep trying.*" (Canolfan, 2026 focus group)

WELLBEING 2: Stress relief and calm.

Pupils explicitly recognised how the project affected their mental health and overall wellbeing.

> "*Stress relieving. Happy. It's mentally relieving. Relieved that we got lots of stuff done.*" (Redmoor, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*From the start when we first went out there it was really overwhelming and when you start digging in and growing and you realise where you started, to now, it really takes a weight off your chest. It's relieved you of stress.*" (Redmoor, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*Fresh air is good for you and going into the garden would make you feel good*" (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*The smell of nature, grass and wood would release and trigger endorphins which would make you feel good - brain chemicals*" (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)
>
> *“It felt calmer when we worked together than when we were sitting in our ordinary [friendship] groups.”* (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)

> *“It puts you in a good mood if you do something”* (Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, 2026 focus group)
>
> *“Good Life makes me feel courageous because there’s something everyone can do for the environment*”. (Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, 2026 focus group)

WELLBEING 3: Confidence, self-esteem and a sense of safety.

For pupils with additional needs, projects were associated with growth in confidence and a sense of emotional safety.

One teacher explained that students undertook missions around school, visiting unfamiliar departments and staff to collect resources they needed for their model, which significantly supported their confidence. This was echoed in the focus group when pupils were asked to select a card to show how the project made them feel. One pupil chose an emotion image of someone holding their hands over their heart, explaining that the group had felt safe and supportive, and that she really enjoyed the atmosphere of the sessions. (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)

At Ecclesfield, the teacher observed a marked difference in pupils' confidence and self-expression within the project compared with the classroom:

> *“There are particular needs for certain students, and they have massively grown within this group because they've felt comfortable enough so be themselves and take part. Some of them, I teach them as well, and if you saw them in the classroom, they're completely different to what they are now.*" (Ecclesfield, 2026 focus group)

WELLBEING 4: Social and communal belonging.

Students and teachers alike noticed the project helped young people feel more connected in their community. For some, that meant making new friends, especially across different year groups. For others it was about being able to give back and make a tangible difference to those around them.

At Outwood Academy Normanby, Miss Abbas reflected that one of the loveliest outcomes of the project had been the relationships that developed through having the Year 10 students supporting the group. She explained one boy formed a particularly positive relationship with another girl and her friends, and now actively seeks them out during the school day. Her friendship group also make a point of greeting him and including him. Miss Abbas felt this was a significant development as the boy had since become more communicative and more willing to build relationships with other pupils.

> *“What I treasure is friendships. Getting to know each other more.” “I chose the ‘warmth’ card because we’ve made good friendships and relationships.”* (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)
>
> “*I’m happy because it helped me both inside and outside the club, and getting to know a lot of people, because a lot of people have joined, and we are trying to help our school become nicer.*” (St Peter’s Catholic College, 2025 focus group)
>
> “*We have started a garden with the intention of providing food for the food banks, but it’s become more than that for the kids and it’s about a safe space to go at lunchtime. About building confidence, they’ve made friends in other year groups, and I see them together outside this group.*” (Natasha Kipling, St John’s Catholic School)
>
> *“People have really engaged with what we're doing and been really interested in it, and when we started, we weren't sure actually whether other students would care, but they really have. So, we’re saving people money, they're pleased to get their clothes back and they can’t believe how well we’ve fixed them.”* (Ecclesfield, 2026 focus group)
>
> *“It brought everyone together. When we were in the gardens, we were always in little groups, separated, doing different jobs. Then we started standing round the table all together, all talking, and it brought everyone together. Some of us knew each other but we didn’t know everyone else. And some I knew well but I feel like we’ve become closer. Now we say hello to each other as well when we see each other outside of school too.”* (Redmoor Academy, 2026 focus group)

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY 1. Confidence and Expression.

The most noticeable difference identified by students and teachers being given more voice, was the increased confidence and agency they found by stepping more into the driving seat. Putting youth voice at the centre of the project was one of the most significant differences between Good Life Schools work, and other school activities according to teachers.

> *"Good Life School [is different because] it's a case of you go away and you have a think about what you want to do. It allowed learners a lot more thinking time, they've researched 'how can I make a difference in the local community? What would make a difference? What are issues?' It gets us thinking, because we didn't have a set idea of what we needed to do. So, learners could really pick what they wanted to focus on.* (Holly Owen, Redcar & Cleveland College)
>
> *"This is different because it gave students a choice of what they wanted to do. A lot of things in the forest school area it's trees, or money for safety things – overalls, boots, nothing that the students could make a choice with. But this is student led."* (Mel Gask, Beaumont Lays School)
>
> "*We completely left it up to the students what they wanted to do. I think it gave them a kind of a responsibility and a pride."* *(Nadine Baker, High Storrs School)*
>
> *"It was a bit daunting at first because I've never been to a club, where we get to choose things. It's always been very structured. Teachers say to us we are going to do this today and then this the week after. But this time it actually felt like we had a choice and a bit more freedom."* (Leicester, 2025 focus group)
>
> *"I feel like we're doing things that we can show our true selves and put our true selves into it, and it just makes more positivity."* (Redcar & Cleveland, 2025 focus group)

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY 2. Revealing Hidden Qualities.

Teachers noted the project revealed strengths and qualities in pupils that don't have the space to come through in other school situations, particularly for those with additional needs.

> "*Many of the pupils' EHCPs have communication as something to work on. The pupils wanted to pass on the message of how the school is being sustainable. They wanted to contact their local MP, contact local radio, made an Instagram video, and this is all their own idea. It's the confidence. They've been speaking and expressing their views. This allowed students to really*

> *think about their own views, their own position, and express it. We were all a bit blown away with how clear they were when we were talking about the project and what we were going to do. It was amazing.*" (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)
>
> "*The project has really suited individuals. They've had the freedom to choose what they want to do, what they want to get involved in and what their skill set is more suited to.*" (Ecclesfield, 2026 focus group)

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY 3. Leadership and Ownership.

Increased ownership also helped students become young leaders for the first time:

> "*I enjoyed working with younger kids and doing this allowed me to do that – to take leadership.*" (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)
>
> "*The year 12 and 13s were really keen to engage with the younger years. There was a kind of community cohesion between the different year groups. Just the idea that they could make a difference and really challenge their thought processes.* (Nadine Baker, High Storrs School)

YOUTH VOICE & AGENCY 3. Respectful disagreement and shared decision-making.

Pupils and staff specifically identified the ability to disagree respectfully as one of the most important outcomes of the project for some schools. Pupils reflected positively on having been able to disagree with one another without conflict or discomfort, and several pupils identified this as one of the most important things they had gained from the project

> " *We are proud of how we worked as a team and disagreement isn't always bad. We didn't all agree on our ideas but that's ok.*" (Outwood Academy Normanby, 2026 focus group)
>
> *"They [the eco club] asked us questions. They were curious about why chose make-up not food. We did have a few back and forth debates but at the end of it they agreed with us. That felt really good."* (Sir Jonathan North School, 2025 focus group)

ENVIRONMENT

ENVIRONMENT 1: Waste reduction and recycling in practice.

Reducing waste was the single most frequent message young people talked about. Several projects delivered practical waste-reduction outcomes, converting their research into practical recycling or reuse activity. For example, at Ecclesfield, pupils decided to convert single-use plastic water bottles into 3D printing filament to make fidget toys, explicitly to reduce plastic pollution. They also kept usable clothing out of landfill by repairing school uniform items rather than replacing them. At Canolfan, pupils sorted plastic waste by recycling code with an artist and turned unusable plastic and fabric offcuts into artwork and t-shirt designs. Understanding the potential of waste and the need to reduce what we buy, reuse the materials we have, and choose recyclable materials was the most common environmental theme in focus groups with young people.

> "*Sometimes we don't need things, to have a good life.*" (Canolfan Yr Eithin Unit, 2026 focus group).
>
> "*British Beauty Council explains that 70% of make-up packaging is not recycled. There are a lot of little parts and components which are not being recycled.*" (Sir Jonathan North School, 2025 focus group)
>
> *"Fast fashion usually ends up in charity shops. If they don't get sold, they're going to landfill, so it just piles up and piles up."* (Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth, 2025 focus group)
>
> *"Our canteen is massive and some days you just walk around school and see empty plastic water bottles on the corridors. So, we thought we could make it into 3D filaments and make SEN toys and fidgets for The Hide, which is our support area."* (Ecclesfield School, 2026 focus group).
>
> *"Bronwyn [artist / community partner] was fantastic, she named the different types of plastics, they all have different code names. We learned about which we could use and which we couldn't, then we sorted them. The ones we couldn't use went into a black bin bag."* (Canolfan Yr Eithin Unit, 2026 focus group).
>
> *"There's definitely been a buzz around promoting sustainability and you know, pre loved, not having stigma about buying things second-hand, recycling, reusing… that has been really good for us."* (Victoria Colborne, Ysgol Coadcae)

ENVIRONMENT 2: Direct environmental and biodiversity impact.

The impact on nature and biodiversity was the second most commented on environmental impact students were keenly aware of and compelled by. In several schools, pupils found the impact of plastics on water pollution - and in turn on sea and river life – shocking. For other students, discovering the volumes of palm oil used in so many different consumables hit home, and they were appalled by the affect this has on environments and wildlife. Closer to home, pupils at Redmoor School found that by growing fresh food for the school kitchen and local community, newts and nesting birds started to appear.

> *"There were loads of microfibres, and when people wash clothes, that goes straight into the ocean."* (Ysgol Maes y Gwendraeth, 2025 focus group)
>
> *"One-use bottles get dropped on the school ground and eventually make their way to the sea."... "The sea life eat it or get trapped in it."* (Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, 2026 focus group)
>
> *"It was interesting seeing all the different types of food and drinks that had palm oil in it. We all had a shock that day."... "I was surprised by how many things had palm oil in and how people are cutting down trees. The forest."* (Canolfan Yr Eithin, 2026 focus group)
>
> *"We've attracted newts, I found one. I saw something moving when I was moving some weeds. So, we made a pond for it."... "We've got some birds behind the compost" ... "Wagtails nested there and hatched chicks."* (Redmoor, 2026 focus group)

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

We acknowledge the contributions of skilled and experienced teachers to enthuse and inspire the young people and take care of their access needs. Safe to say, we assume these ingredients are part of what teachers bring to these projects – as they would all their projects. The list of ingredients below then takes that assumption as a starting point and highlights the added value Good Life Schools projects bring specifically. Young people, teachers, community partners and stakeholders talked about the following consistent themes:

1. Include plenty of hands-on activity early on.

Research is an important element of the work, but balancing this with hands-on activity from the outset keeps young people interested, growing their buy-in and commitment as they start to learn more about the theory. This could be anything from a workshop with a community partner, to carrying out in-person research around school.

2. Put student voice at the heart of the project.

Pupils, teachers and strategic stakeholders all highlighted that what GLS does differently is put young people and their decision making at the heart of the work. This helped young people feel heard, valued, changed how they saw themselves and how other others saw them, and built their confidence and resilience. Start with their ideas, then refine according to what's feasible logistically and within the school calendar. Avoid starting from preconceived concepts – let young people lead to get the most out of the opportunity and provide something they're not accessing anywhere else.

3. Support young people to nominate their own leadership roles.

Young people surprised themselves, exceeding what they thought they were capable of, by taking on leadership roles in, for instance, documentation, research, communication etc. This gave them new opportunities, and they saw new potential in themselves. It also helped ensure projects were inclusive, by creating space for different kinds of young people with different skills, interests and needs. This was especially noticeable in students with neurodivergence or learning or sensory difficulties.

4. Help young people persist through challenging moments.

Young people spoke passionately about their determination to get past sticky moments like having to dig tons of soil, work out glitches with materials or machinery, or reach a consensus amidst group disagreements. They want to be given the time, support and opportunity to wrangle with something and overcome the barrier. That's what leads to their immense satisfaction, pride and resilience.

5. Build in project visibility.

Sharing the project's ideas and achievements has multiple benefits. As people across the school realise the work is happening, young people in the group start to get more recognition from people they didn't expect, who are not associated with the project, and sometimes from other students they've never spoken to before. That raises their confidence and keeps them inspired. It has a knock on effect on other students, with some becoming more interested in young leadership opportunities, some taking up the offer of the project (e.g. uniform repair or recycling) which brings more environmental benefits, and some being more respectful of the school areas the project has created (like outdoor spaces). It also inspires other staff members to ask about the project which then inspires them to join in or think about doing something similar. Importantly – this visibility can take any form. In some projects – just seeing the students getting on with their activities was powerful, and needed no extra work, pressure or time. Others created display boards, gave whole school assemblies, were filmed or interviewed by the media, and shared the work with VIPs and guests in local, regional and national communities.

6. Keep participation flexible.

Being able to drop in and out of the group as needed was important to many pupils. Other clubs, trips, commitments, exams, and their religious calendars all affect when young people can attend. For students joining voluntarily this openness matters and helps them stay engaged. While some will drop in and out, the flexibility encourages others to come regularly and start to form a core group who will keep the momentum going.

7. Keep a consistent timetable slot.

Linked to flexible attendance above. It's important students know when they can expect to find the activity, even if they can't come every time. This might mean 2 staff members need to be involved in the project, to keep things moving in a consistent way (it also helps share the load between staff, and bounce ideas around together).

8. Involve a community partner.

Working with new experts helped young people stay curious, build new skills, keep the energy of the group fresh, and provided meaningful new validation. External partners bring a different outlook and have no expectations of what anyone's capabilities are. Students often surprised staff by doing more than was expected when working with community partners.

9. Pro-actively plan with the community partner.

To do their best work, partners need to know about context – what has happened so far, who is in the group, what have they been doing, what teachers hope they'll bring to the project, and anything they need to know about access and inclusion factors. They also need to know about logistics – how long do they have to set up, how long is the session, how many are in the group, does anyone need to order materials. Having discussions in advance and keeping in touch with one another made for the most successful partnerships.

10. Get SLT and at least one other colleague onboard.

Projects with support from school leadership, and / or a second staff member involved, are more able to adapt and remain consistent when needed, for instance if the lead staff member is absent or called onto another priority. Leadership buy-in also means decisions can be made faster and project visibility can be increased.

11. Check internal timelines and budgets.

Find out as soon as possible how budgets are used, who needs to sign-off and how much lead-in time that takes. This is an important part of deciding when projects can realistically happen, and what they can achieve. This is even more vital if materials need to be ordered, planting and seasonal outdoor activity needs planning, and external partners need commissioning. Start planning projects at the start of the new school year – or even better, in the previous summer term.

12. Make the most of the specially created GLS resources.

Teachers said the GLS resources saved them research time, helped young people with their research, provided activities whilst waiting for materials to arrive or when bad weather stopped plans, and worked well because they can be adapted by teachers. They were also used to successfully facilitate conversations about group and leadership roles and encourage young people to develop their own ideas.

THE WIDER RIPPLE EFFECT AND LEGACY

1. SUMMARY OF WIDER RIPPLE EFFECT AND LEGACY

Good Life Schools projects generated a significant ripple effect beyond the young people involved, influencing teachers' professional development, wider school practice, families and local communities, community partners, and strategic policy at regional and national level.

New Knowledge and Partnerships for Teachers.

Almost all teachers interviewed described gaining new knowledge as a result of their involvement. The programme's resources gave teachers access to information about the environment and consumerism they would not otherwise have found, while ready-made materials meant they could adapt content without planning sessions from scratch. Teachers valued being connected to community partners and organisations they had not previously known about, with several intending to maintain these relationships beyond the project. For some, this led to new skills. More broadly, teachers reflected that the experience had changed their own attitudes towards sustainability and waste, both personally and professionally.

Changes in Teaching Practice.

Teachers described several ways the project shaped their broader practice. Many valued the shift towards more student-led decision making, allowing young people to think through their own views rather than being guided towards answers teachers already had in mind. Several felt the structured framework gave a sense of validation to approaches they previously delivered in a more ad hoc way, helping them feel more creative and effective. Others highlighted the benefits of working outdoors and in alternative spaces, both for pupils' wellbeing and their own teaching style, prompting one teacher to pursue further outdoor learning qualifications. Overall, teachers spoke positively about enjoying their roles in new ways and feeling inspired by those supporting the programme.

Whole School Changes to Waste and Recycling.

Reducing waste and encouraging reuse and recycling emerged as a common theme across many schools, in some cases extending well beyond the immediate project. At Ellesmere College, leading a pilot project had a significant effect on the school's Assistant Principal, who described a shift in her own thinking that then influenced decision making across the whole school, from how celebrations were resourced to broader purchasing habits, moving sustainability from a single weekly club into a wider ethos. In other schools, similar effects were seen, including business managers taking on pupils' recycling suggestions, and financial savings made by repairing uniform items rather than buying new ones, freeing up funding for other priorities. In some cases, wider staff teams became involved in the practical activity itself, such as watering gardens or growing produce.

Whole School Legacies.

Beyond changes in attitudes and practice, several schools created lasting physical legacies. These included new outdoor learning spaces, such as seating areas, outdoor classrooms, sensory gardens and allotments, some involving the reuse of existing materials such as old filing cabinets repurposed as planters. Several schools also gained new equipment, including machinery to melt plastic bottles into filament for 3D printing, and smoothie bikes combining food waste reduction with exercise, which staff noted had become a highly visible way of raising the project's profile across the school. Other schools invested in equipment to support ongoing uniform repair services. These developments were generally described as legacies that would continue to benefit pupils and staff beyond the life of the funded project.

Impact on the Community.

The projects also extended wellbeing benefits into local communities. In some cases, this involved pupils making sustainable gifts and cards for residents in a local care home, felt to reduce loneliness among older residents while giving pupils a strong sense of purpose and connection to their community. In other schools, produce grown by pupils was shared with the community, with plans to distribute food more widely once growing spaces were established. Uniform repair services were also highlighted as providing practical financial support to families in areas of deprivation, reducing pressure on parents and guardians to buy new items.

Impact on Local Partners and Practitioners.

Community partners and practitioners also reported benefits. Several valued the opportunity to test new ways of working and noting that the time and budget allocated allowed for more substantial sessions than they typically deliver elsewhere. Some used the experience to develop new workshop formats or explore working with older age groups for the first time, while others said it had given them valuable insight into young people's views on the climate crisis and eco-anxiety. For several partners, the project also marked the start of new relationships with schools, with both sides interested in continuing to work together.

Adding Value at Policy Level

Good Life Schools was recognised for its contribution to strategic priorities at regional and national policy level. In Carmarthenshire, one school's involvement was embedded into local authority practice, with a teacher seconded to help develop a county wide model now being rolled out to other schools, supported by council waste and education services and existing community partners, at no additional cost to schools. Representatives from other local authorities noted how the programme aligned with wider priorities, including climate action planning, school food guidance, curriculum reform and wellbeing agendas. Several also noted that its combination of youth voice, wellbeing and a consumer-focused approach to environmental issues was distinctive, filling a gap not addressed by other climate programmes, particularly at secondary level. The programme's visibility was also raised through media coverage and presentations at national conferences.

Good Life Schools projects had a ripple effect on teachers' professional development, wider school resources and approaches, on families and those living close by, on the community partners and practitioners involved, and added value to strategic initiatives and regional approaches.

RIPPLE EFFECT 1: New knowledge and partnerships for teachers.

Almost all teachers interviewed described new knowledge gained because of their involvement in Good Life Schools. The resources helped teachers access **information about the environment and consumerism** that were new to them which they felt they wouldn't have found for themselves. This, combined with a **better understanding of community partners** who can help them, also led to some **new skills**.

> "*It's nice to have little video clips and things like that which really start getting pupils talking and think about other areas I might not have known about before.*" (Jemma Richards, Cyfarthfa High School)
>
> *"There were a lot of resources which if I'd been planning a session myself, I wouldn't have come across that information."* (Nadine Baker, High Storrs School)
>
> *"All the research was done, I could just adapt what I needed for my students"* (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)
>
> *"I'd never heard of OASES prior to this and they're quite local. They offer so much stuff, so I'll definitely be keeping in touch with them.*" (Natasha Kipling, St John's Catholic School)
>
> *"Connecting us with the organisations is the thing that's different. I wouldn't have that, because I wouldn't know who to contact, I had never heard of them before.*" (Tomas Zahorsky, Millgate School)
>
> "*Our trips have been mostly related to the environment. We visited North York Wildlife Park, and we went to The Deep. For learners to look at the animals, the sea creatures, and understand the importance of all the work we're doing. We'd look to continue that, even if we don't have the Good Life Schools. We've built that knowledge and understanding that we can certainly carry that on.*" (Holly Owen, Redcar and Cleveland College)
>
> "*Helen [Good Life Schools team] had loads of connections of outside providers and things, that was fantastic, it's a really good way of getting a project underway.*" *Victoria Colborn (Ysgol Coedcae)*
>
> *"When she [community partner] came in and showed us how to do hand sewing, I joined in with the sessions, and she even taught me to do a few things. An incentive was that if I can pick it up, I can ensure next year's year 7s joining junior leadership can do the uniform repair shop next year.* (Matt Breeze, Outwood Academy Redcar).
>
> *"It's changed how I do things. I'm thinking a lot more about not wasting things. I'm really determined not to buy tatt. We're going to reuse boxes, everything is going to be something that's sustainable"* (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)

RIPPLE EFFECT 2: Changes in teaching practice.

Teachers explained how the project had an impact on their teaching practice. They saw the **benefits of enabling more student led decision making**; they **felt validated** by the programme giving structure to what they had previously seen as ad hoc or creative approaches. That gave them **more confidence in their approaches**, they saw **new benefits to working outdoors and in alternative spaces** and **enjoyed their roles in new ways**.

Supporting more student-led decision making:

> "*Often in lessons we prescribe what the topic is, where the focus is. We lead, we ask open questions but really, we know what answer we want them to give. Whereas this allows students to really think about their own views, their own position, and express it. We were all a bit blown away with how clear they were when we were talking about the project and what we were going to do.*" (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)
>
> "*The initial Good Life Schools introduction to the learners is good - it's a case of you go away and have a think about what you want to do. [Otherwise], we might be led by what we [teachers] wanted.*" (Holly Owen, Redcar and Cleveland College)
>
> *"I've been on school council for a long time. Pupils always bring up sustainability, or recycling. When I've done things in the past, it's a bit ad hoc, but this is more guided, more focused and brought together different things."* (Jemma Richards, Cyfartha High School).

More validated and confident in creative and new approaches:

> "*Having that structure meant in some ways, I was more creative, I feel like it just worked better. We have an eco-celebration next Thursday and I'm looking at the presentation for this year compared to last year, and it's just really clear, there's a really clear message."* (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)
>
> "*I was apprehensive at first because we're doing a lot of different eco projects, we're so busy with it. We went for this one because it's really well planned. It's a really good project, you can deliver it in so many ways"* (Tomas Zahorsky, Millgate School)

New practice of outdoor working.

> *"It ties into forest school but it's also classroom based so it's a different experience for me, to see that crossover from both sides. It was nice. And we normally work with the SEMH students in Forest School, so it was nice to work with different students and see different kinds of responses*" (Charlotte Willcox and Mel Gask, Beaumont Leys School)
>
> "*I think being outside is so important for your mental health. And to teach in a way that uses outside space, as opposed to a lesson just taking place outside for the sake of it, makes you think how you're teaching a bit differently too.*" (Nadine Baker, High Storrs School)

Enjoyment of working in new ways.

> "*The experience with Good Life Schools has been absolutely amazing. And it's encouraged me as well, so I'm now looking to do a forest school qualification, it's been super positive, they couldn't be more helpful.*" (Natasha Kipling, St John's Catholic School)
>
> "*Knowing how many people are keen to help young people generate these normal life skills but huge life skills that are going to help them so much in future, it's been quite inspiring.*" (Matt Breeze, Outwood Academy Redcar)
>
> *"We've enjoyed doing it. We've had a great time."* (Charlotte Willcox and Mel Gask, Beaumont Leys School)
>
> "*It's been brilliant, it's lovely how it's turned my thinking around.*" (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)

RIPPLE EFFECT 3: Whole school changes to waste and recycling.

Reducing waste and encouraging more re-use, reduction, and recycling was a common theme in many of the schools.

> **Ellesmere College Case Study:**
>
> Sally Gough was the lead of a pilot version of Good Life Schools for special schools. The experience inspired by the students affected her, and through her – rippled out across the whole school thanks to her senior leadership role, enabling her to influence more holistic practice and planning across the whole school.
>
> "*It's educated me. It's been brilliant, it's lovely how it's turned my thinking around. I'm Assistant Principal and I've got responsibility for lots of things. I've started thinking a lot more about sustainability, about not wasting, and I'm thinking about that across all of my hats. So, in school, let's not automatically buy plastic tat. What can we make? What can we use? What's really sustainable? And by doing that, others are starting to do the same thing. For Chinese New Year last year, we bought loads. This year we made everything from paper and wooden things. We were able to apply that sustainability and not wasting to everything we did. So, it was no longer eco-club for one hour on a Monday. It was all of us, we're seeing eco as it's something that should be this golden thread. It's become a whole way of thinking, and that is wonderful. And it's inspiring other teachers to do it as well. It's certainly had an impact beyond the weekly sessions as the ethos is something that can impact positively on all aspects of school life.*" (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College)

And in other schools...

> *“The group had a very diverse set of ideas. They spoke to the business manager; he explained what the school already does. So, they came to their choice. And now the business manager is talking to them about some of the other ideas they came up with, like recycling bottles and having a recycling station.”* (Charlotte Willcox and Mel Gask, Beaumont Leys)
>
> *"Rather than having to spend £1000 on new ties we can repair £500 worth of ties and put that funding into something else."* (Matt Breeze, Outwood Academy Redcar)
>
> *“It's getting the wider school involved. Staff in the science department have been coming down and joining in the workshops and offered to water the garden and asked if they can grow things, and the head has asked if there's anything we can grow in the school's arbor."* (Natasha Kipling, St John's Catholic School)

RIPPLE EFFECT 4: Whole school legacies.

Schools also created other material legacies for students and teachers going forward including **new spaces, machinery and equipment**.

New outdoor spaces for learning, food, wellbeing and the environment.

> “*They have installed four benches. Each seats eight people, so there is enough space for a whole class. In terms of the whole school, just having that space that we can use... to see something that is there, that they've been part of, that everyone can use, it's been lovely. And there are plans to develop the outside classroom space. With trees arriving in November shade will be provided... there will be seed planting as well.”* (Nadine Baker, High Storrs School)
>
> *"We measured up for the compost base so we're going to build that. The willow weaving is in situ and the peas are growing. We've recycled old filing cabinets and use them as planters. I have a 5 year plan including a poly tunnel to put in the space."* (Natasha Kipling, St John’s Catholic School).
>
> “*The sensory garden will be there for students to come and see in the future. It will be part of the school ground. We have the raised beds; we want to get the gazebo there and other things*." (Tomas Zahorsky, Millgate School)
>
> *“We turned this unused space into an allotment for food. Currently it has several raised beds, a compost corner, a wheel barrow is in one corner. We've got new planters and water butts. As a surprise for us, The Pierce Perspective, the charity that are helping us, had that planter and fence structure made and donated for us. There'll be a big shelter and a sensory garden. They're doing logs that go up in steps to make an enclosed station... with a water feature, and planting for birds, and a sensory area. I thought it would be a few plants, some new planters, but that's all completely new.”* *(Redmoor 2026 Focus Group)*

New machinery and equipment.

> *“We ordered a load of like equipment to be able to do more uniform repairs in our school ourselves. The staff and the kids are all dead excited to just keep going and keep making a massive difference in our academy.”* (Matt Breeze, Outwood Academy Redcar)
>
> *"We’ve explored in more detail the impact of food waste and the benefits of exercise, so we have the smoothie bikes thanks to your funding, and we are encouraging students and staff to use these and experiment with different ingredients. Primary students are given free fruit on a Monday but if there is unused fruit we can then put it to good use in the smoothie bikes. The bikes initiative has been incredibly effective at raising the profile of the Good Life project across school. They’re really visible and great conversation starters.”* (Sally Gough, Ellesmere College).
>
> *“We've got this machine that melts plastic so we can turn the school's plastic water bottles into 3D printing filament. So, we can make SEN toys and fidgets for The Hide, our support area.”* (Ecclesfield, 2026 focus group)

RIPPLE EFFECT 5: Impact on the community.

Good Life Schools projects helped pupils develop the good life among their local communities too, growing the wellbeing around them. For some this took the form of emotional investments to **help with loneliness for older people in residential care**, for others it was about **food sharing,** while others supported the **financial resilience** of local families through uniform, shoe and bike repairs.

> **Redcar & Cleveland College Case Study.**
>
> *"Just before Christmas, we made gifts for the elderly, just little tree decorations, baubles and stuff like that, but out of sustainable products. And we made Christmas cards, again, out of old card etc, and took those to the elderly care home around the corner. What we've decided is we use old jam jars to create little gifts for the elderly care home because this project needs to be, yes, good for the environment... but also what makes a difference to our community, and what makes a difference to mental health. We know we're helping these elderly people, because some might suffer with social isolation. They might get a visit once every few weeks from the family. They were overjoyed just to have young people going in. Not only does it have such a positive mental effect on the elderly people in the home, but also on the students, because they're giving back. The students felt like they were doing something really good for the community.”* (Holly Owen, Redcar & Cleveland College)

And in other schools…

> *“We’ve picked apples for the kitchen.” … “And we’ve had some of the tomatoes” … I took some home and cooked with them, and some bay leaves and rhubarb.” … “The plan going forward is to get the food out to the community, so things aren’t wasted. It’s going to take a full year before that’s ready because it has to have time to get the allotments ready and then time for things to grow.*” (Redmoor Academy Focus Group, 2026)
>
> "*We do have a big uniform problem; Redcar is quite a deprived area so giving people access to uniform repair is vital. They now know they can bring it to the Repair Shop, and they don't need to worry the parents or guardians about buying new stuff.*" (Matt Breeze, Outwood Academy Normanby).

RIPPLE EFFECT 6: Impact on local partners, practitioners and professionals.

Several community partners also benefitted from Good Life Schools projects. For some it gave them chance to test out **new ways of working**, some projects kick-started **new relationships schools intend to continue** so bringing more potential income and / or impact for partners,

New ways of working.

> *“In terms of time and budget, and the organisational overview, I think it was very much more aligned with what we would like to deliver. Often gardening sessions we've done in the past only lasted an hour in schools, and there's not much continuity. In this project there was more time, we had the opportunities to deliver at least two workshops of a reasonable length. It felt much better, more substantial. It was realistic. I really appreciated the fact that the budget for the materials had been considered and that our time was considered separately – it made it easy to see how it was all going to fit together. The framework provided by Good Life Schools provides so much more scope. I’d be interested in doing something like this again – of course! I’d prioritise it over other smaller things.”* (Fran Halsall)
>
> *“"I had to think about doing things differently and use those learning points and do it in a different way. I would definitely be interested in doing something like this again.*" *(Amy Everitt)*
>
> *“I hadn’t tried doing a workshop with the big sculptural pieces before. I had to think about how many kids would want to do that and how many could at the same time. I have learnt a lot – I know what will work now for next time. I would definitely offer this particular workshop again and I know more about how the logistics need to work”* (Daisy Buckles)
>
> "*It's all experience you can add on your CV. My work had mostly been in primary schools, and I'd wanting to pivot, branching out into secondary schools, so it was really nice to have that as well to put on my CV and share the sort of work I’d done.*" (Louise Goult)

> "*A lot of our youth engagement is done with younger kids, primary school ages. This was a lot older. It's really opened up an avenue for us to explore further where else we can take it.*" (Kieran Price)
>
> *"It's had a huge impact on me in terms of understanding where young people are within the whole climate crisis and eco-anxiety. What their views are, what they think about things, some of them are really switched on."* (Bronwen Gwillim)

The start of new relationships.

> *"The teacher said 'this is great, and we see this as foundational steps, what do we do to keep this going forward? And I said, 'you know where I am, we'll keep this conversation going, we'll find a way of doing more'. For us as an organisation, to be able to carry on that relationship in whatever way that happens, that would be a real win."* (Fran Halsall)
>
> *"There is obviously an appetite for us to continue to come and work with them because the teacher, who is my contact at the college, is keen for us to do some more, and talking about all the different things that we could do together."* (Kieran Price)

RIPPLE EFFECT 7: Adding value at policy level.

Good Life Schools was praised by regional authorities for its **success in supporting strategic initiatives at national and regional policy level.** Simultaneously, its **unique combination of a genuinely youth-led approach, wellbeing, and consumer focussed environmental perspective** meant schools and young people were supported in new ways. This mix was felt to be absolutely timely and unmatched by other programmes. Projects also generated **high profile interest** enabling the messages to reach and influence others.

Adding value at national policy level.

> **Carmarthenshire County Council Case Study**
>
> **Good Life Schools has had a substantial impact on the education infrastructure and practice across Carmarthenshire.** The experiences of the project in one school became embedded into the Education & Children's Services Department, who then invested resources into adapting the work to fit the local context, and cascade a local version out to all schools in the area. Associate Educational Support Advisor Louise Morgan explains:
>
> *"One of the teachers from Maes Y Gwendraeth school came to us for a secondment, bringing her experience of GLS and worked with us to put together a programme, which is now part of their new academic year in the school. She brought her experience of GLS, and we ensured the support needed from the waste department, and my knowledge and understanding of what the portfolio looks like for schools. She developed a model where the school run three workshops each academic year for a cohort of pupils, all linked to elements of the GLS programme, elements of our sustainability resource portfolio, and our climate action group.*

It's embedded across that school for three terms and run in-house, not from any extra funding. The first term they looked at waste, the second term at fast fashion, and the third term, at consumerism and mobile phones. Next, they want to roll it out as a transition project for pupils coming up from year six who visit in summer term. They'll look at mobile phone usage and consumerism linked to the GLS programme in readiness for when they start in the September and have to hand their phones in, because the school has a no-phones policy. This creates that culture and provides a deeper and a better understanding of why we are doing this.

Maes Y Gwendraeth are reviewing with us how this model can be taken forward by all secondary schools in Carmarthenshire. That was always the plan. My role is helping cascade it to other schools. The offer will be shared at the next good practice meeting. We have an annual conference when things are delivered across the board to primary and secondary schools, and we have a SharePoint resource for all schools to access. My role is about facilitating it across the 110 secondary and primary schools in Carmarthenshire. The school improvement team I work with also work with certain schools in a different capacity. They can go into those schools and ask, 'have you considered doing this, using that resource?' so it's a wrap-around approach.

The offer is a suite of digital resources the teacher has prepared which each school can download from the SharePoint and roll out themselves. If they want peer mentoring, that's available from Maes Y Gwendraeth. So, we know what's worked, what didn't, and that it's not going to cost the school anything. We have a 'repair, repurpose and reuse village' as part of our waste department landfill site which has an education officer. He is able to support with the waste and repair workshops in the autumn term. Fast fashion can be delivered in-house by the textiles teacher. For the third term the health and well-being perspective is supported by teachers in that department to support with the mobile phone usage and link with the primaries.

It's got to be free so schools can sustain it. This is why we work with the education officer in the council's waste department who delivers workshops to schools. So that becomes the community partner strand. They go into whatever school decides to roll out the programme. And we have a repair and reuse cafe in the town. They'll go in and support schools for a really small cost contribution. So, there's a there's a model of what we call 'schools as learning organisations' SLOs. That's the model that we have cultivated from guidance and Welsh Government.

It's place-based, that's a key word. Our Curriculum for Wales is all about 'Cynefin' which means a sense of belonging, a sense of place. So ideally a school creates a curriculum which best suits its location and supports that wider learning with the local area. This fits with all of that."

Supporting other national policies and initiatives:

> "*It fits with Curriculum for Wales and pupil wellbeing. Those are strategic priorities and I can also see how it fits with behaviour and reducing exclusions from a strategic perspective.*" *(Sarah Humphires, Bridgend County Council)*
>
> "*Wales has something called the Future Generations Wellbeing Act. It's very much about making a commitment for society, for Wales to future proof for those young people and the GLS programme very much supports that and our approach to our citizenship model.*" *(Louise Morgan, Carmarthenshire County Council)*
>
> "*The expectation from the DfE [Department for Education] is that schools have a climate action plan, so this programme directly adds relevance to that. Also, big changes to school food guidance and school food waste are coming - that could really shake things up and this programme could be very relevant to that.*" *(Richard Hurst, Durham County Council)*
>
> "*We were in a meeting with Public Health Wales talking about the use of social media and climate anxiety, so it [Good Life Schools] is an interesting model as this impacts young people. That's at the forefront of all their funding so it ties in very well with that in a way other climate works isn't doing.*" *(Louise Morgan, Carmarthenshire County Council)*
>
> "*The Director of Education felt Good Life Schools would be good for Merthyr and sit side by side with what Community Focused Schools, a new Welsh initiative, is aiming to do.*" *(Leanne* Drew, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council)

Adding value to regional and local policy, campaigns and initiatives.

> "*Our Built for Change programme, funded by Public Health's Reserves Fund, supports Sheffield schools to reduce carbon emissions and take climate action, to adapt to the changing climate. We've used the newsletter for that to celebrate and promote GLS and it's been helpful for us to learn from GLS experiences when developing and delivering our own programme in terms of recruitment and attendance at events.*" *(Victoria Penman, Sheffield City Council).*
>
> "*Good Life Schools has been really good for building a network around, bringing NGOs and charities like ReGather and Green Estate. Getting everyone to see it's all connected, and showing pupils that these are also business, employers.*" (Lee Jowett, Sheffield Hallam University)
>
> *"We have Build for Change here locally. That supports schools to adapt to the changing climate in terms of the physical building and infrastructure, and we're also using it as way to get them to develop their climate action plans and mitigate. Good Life Schools is complementary, being focused on young people and helping them think of different lifestyles."* (Marc Tench, Leicester City Council)
>
> "*The biggest local authority programme we have here is ECO2 Smart Schools which focuses on energy and water. It was delivered to about 220 schools this year, delivered between the local authority, local charity OASES doing in-school support, billing and energy procurement,*

> *metering, and helping schools reduce energy spend and carbon footprint. It's about whole school infrastructure and focus on energy and water and climate implications. We also have a multi organisation task force supporting schools and other organisations re rethinking plastic use, campaigns around littering. For other partners with DfE education / climate strategy – we make sure we connect their activity with National Education Nature Park, Let's Go Zero, and climate ambassadors. Good Life Schools can complement any of those." (Richard Hurst, Durham County Council)*

Providing a unique offer.

> "*How it's unique from the local authority perspective was the sustainability and how that could be transferred to support young people with mental health. That was surprising, that it links that with education. It could be a small group could do it in a nurture provision, or a larger group each school could make it as big or small as they wanted to.*" (Sarah Humphries, Bridgend County Council)
>
> "*Being Secondary focused that's a real strength. Nearly everything else is primary, or if it's available in secondary schools it's usually as an add on, but not purpose designed, not this level of quality. It's not just green, not just eco kids and sustainability. Schools and contacts and networks are having that same conversations over and over. But the starting point of consumerism is a different way of going into schools.* (Lee Jowett, Sheffield Hallam University)
>
> "*It has a different focus to a lot of what we do, some of our regular projects and schools. We have a food growing competition, a litter picking project, our celebration event, we support eco schools programmes - water, energy, waste, but none of that really addresses the advertising and consumer side so it seemed fairly unique.*" (Marc Tench, Leicester City Council).
>
> "*Good Life Schools is different because it's about consumers so it's unique and its offering a different need, and the wellbeing side of it, and considering what the circular economy looks like from a personal perspective. That's a new road and especially so at a secondary level.*" (Louise Morgan, Carmarthenshire County Council)

Raising profile and sharing practice.

> "*There have been two items on Welsh TV which highlighted the work which is brilliant.*" (Louise Morgan, Carmarthenshire County Council)
>
> "*We have run workshops at national conferences with the Good Life Schools team, at the Science Association and at the Geography Association conference. That was really useful to link it back to curriculum for subject teachers.*" (Lee Jowett, Sheffield Hallam University)

CONCLUSION

Good Life Schools is delivering meaningful impact. For young people, the programme has built confidence, pride and emotional wellbeing, given them genuine voice and agency often absent from their usual school experience, and developed a practical, first-hand understanding of environmental issues that translates into tangible action. This impact has been especially significant for pupils with additional needs, for whom projects have provided a rare space to grow in confidence and be seen differently by staff and peers alike.

Beyond the young people, teachers gained new knowledge, skills and community connections, and carried a more student-led, creative approach into their wider practice. Schools have seen tangible legacies, from new outdoor spaces and equipment to lasting shifts in attitudes towards waste and sustainability that have, in some cases, reshaped whole-school culture. Local communities benefitted from reduced loneliness among older residents, food shared more widely, and practical financial relief for families through repair services. Community partners valued the chance to work in new ways and build lasting relationships with schools, while local authorities and strategic partners have recognised the programme's distinctive contribution to policy priorities around climate, curriculum and wellbeing.

Underpinning all this is a consistent set of ingredients: genuine ownership handed to young people, hands-on activity balanced with research, meaningful partnership with community experts, and the flexibility to work around the realities of school life. Where these ingredients have come together, the impact of Good Life Schools has extended well beyond the original project group.

Good Life Schools is achieving what it set out to do. It is helping young people build the confidence, values and practical skills to live more sustainably, while creating ripple effects that strengthen schools, support families and communities, and contribute meaningfully to the wider strategic response to consumerism and the climate crisis. The consistency of these findings across very different schools, settings and regions suggests a genuinely replicable model, and one with clear potential for further, wider reach.

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