

# Climate science

## Take The Plastic Pledge!



Children at Heswall Primary School learning about ocean life with Incredible Ocean's inflatable whale



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## Heswall Primary School's creative approach to the climate challenge.

**T**eaching about climate change should inspire children to make achievable, positive sustainable life choices – but how can we do this creatively in the classroom? Nicky Bolton describes #heswalloceanblue – 'Take the Plastic Pledge', - a creative environmental project that has taken place in her school, to raise awareness of the link between single-use plastics, and their negative impact on climate change.

### How it began...

During the annual Eco School audit, the Eco Council were horrified to discover 29 single-use plastic bottles in use each day in Year 6. Following considerable research into the effects of plastic pollution and its consequences for climate change, the children decided to write a whole school 'Plastic Pledge'. This was a commitment to reduce the use of single-use plastic in school by making alternative sustainable choices. Every child in the school signed the pledge and from that moment, they were on a mission to spot anyone carelessly using single-use plastic!



Raising awareness of the Plastic Pledge



Children are proud to wear their Take the Plastic Pledge T-shirts

But the project didn't stop there. Keen to make a wider impact, the staff and children started to think of myriad ways in which they could inspire others to take the plastic pledge: their parents, the wider community and even their twin school in Uganda!

### Creating a T-shirt campaign

One of the most successful ideas the children introduced was the #heswalloceanblue – 'Take the Plastic Pledge' T-shirt campaign. Since the beginning of the project, every child in the school has been given a T-shirt and every summer they are encouraged to wear it to inspire others to 'Take the Plastic Pledge'. We have since gathered photographs of the children spreading the message all over the world. We even have pictures of Dermot O'Leary and other celebrities wearing our T-shirts!

### The power of film

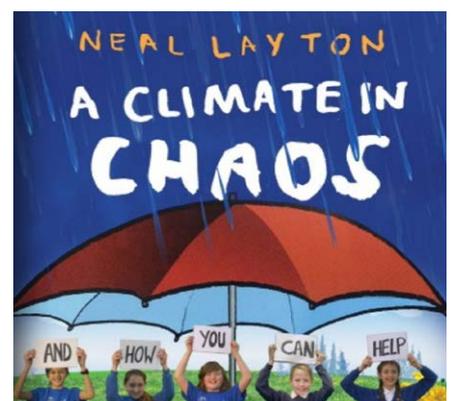
As a school community, we have also explored film-making as a powerful way to elevate the understanding of the effects of plastic waste and its impact on climate change. Working in collaboration with other local schools and the amazing Impossible Arts film company, we have now produced several films which include:

#### 'A Planet Full of Plastic'

(click link to view)

'A Climate in Chaos' (which premieres in July) inspired by the writer Neal Layton.

Working with film has given the children a brilliant opportunity to explore the issues of plastic waste and climate change through the media of acting, song and dance. We've even had a number of climate themed songs composed for us too.



Books and films offer powerful and creative ways to develop children's understanding of climate science issues



The school makes the most of themed days



**Raising awareness in the community – themed days**

There are many significant environmental days throughout the year, which remind children and the local community of ways in which they can help reduce their use of single-use plastics and protect their planet. Dressing up or having a theme on these days has helped our children to make the occasion especially memorable.

**Events in March**

Earth Hour encourages children to spend an hour without any power.

The Great British Spring Clean gives the whole school a purposeful opportunity to clean up the local environment.



Teams full of Wombles cleared the school's local area for the Great British Spring Clean!

**Events in June**

- World Environment Day
- World Oceans Day

These events both direct children to look at ways they can protect and improve the biodiversity on the planet.

**Raising awareness in the community – themed days**

A particularly successful venture for our project was our after-school 'Plastic Pledge community market'. This was an outdoor event which introduced parents to local groups, shops and organisations, who were keen to promote the reduction of single-use plastics. After the event, many of our parents started using the local milkman, and people were amazed by the wide range of sustainable shops and resources that were available right on their doorstep. This type of event is very simple and cost free to organise. Local organisations are only too happy to have the opportunity to network and share their services with families in the area.



The plastic pledge community market was very popular



The local dairy picked up many new customers at the market

**Environmental role models**

As a school, we have found using 'real life' environmental role models a powerful way to create real context for learning about environmental issues, plastic waste and climate change. During the launch of our #heswalloceanblue campaign, we spent time learning about microplastics with Russ Arnott from Incredible Oceans, explored plastic pollution with divers from the Blue Planet Aquarium, and examined evidence of the effects of plastics on marine life with Sarah Roberts, marine biologist and author of 'Someone Swallowed Stanley'. It is truly inspiring for children to listen to a passionate environmental expert; as a consequence many children will choose to make positive and sustainable changes to their own lifestyles.



*The environmentalist Sarah Robert's visit was an inspiration for the children*

**Seeking global partnerships to gain a deeper understanding of climate change**

School twinning programmes help children to understand how climate change is affecting the life of children in other parts of the world. As part of our project, we have worked collaboratively with schools in Uganda on environmental projects to highlight the effects of climate change and consider the impact of

deforestation in the local rainforest. This has included tree planting, and building water harvesting systems on the edge of the Bwindi Rainforest.



*Heswall has shared knowledge and worked collaboratively with their partner school in Uganda*

**The future of #heswalloceanblue**

Our 'Take the Plastic Pledge' journey has gone from strength to strength, leading us to form alliances with a wide range of schools, environmental organisations, community members and professionals, both locally and globally. We are constantly looking for new and exciting ways to engage our children with the issues of plastic pollution and climate change. It is a project that will continue indefinitely, a theme which we consistently revisit, and most importantly, an environmental pledge that we hope every child from our school will carry with them to help them become considerate and responsible custodians of the future of our planet.

**Some background information about plastic pollution and climate change**

There are many ways in which we can change our lifestyles to diminish the output of greenhouse gases. But reducing use of single-use plastic is a tangible goal for children and one that they can achieve in their everyday lives. Plastic is a major contributor to the increase in greenhouse gases. To manufacture plastic, billions of tonnes of

greenhouse gases are created. Recent figures show that we recycle just 43.8% of plastic packaging waste (WRAP, 2021). The remainder will be placed in landfill or incinerated, releasing more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Discarded plastic also litters our oceans. Recent research has shown that this is having a devastating effect on the plankton in our ocean. Plankton absorb carbon dioxide which helps to reduce the carbon in the atmosphere. However, as plastic degrades in the sea, microplastics (microscopic pieces of broken-down plastic) are absorbed by the plankton. This prevents them from being able to absorb carbon dioxide, leading to an increase in the level of the greenhouse gases which contribute to global warming (Ford et al, 2022).

**Useful organisations**

- **Eco Schools**
- **Impossible Arts (film makers)**
- **Incredible Oceans**

**References**

Ford, H., Jones, N, Davies, A., Godley, B., Jambeck, J., Napper, I., Suckling, C., Williams, G., Woodall, Koldewey, H. (2022) *The fundamental links between climate change and marine plastic pollution. Science of The Total Environment Volume 806 (1).*

WRAP (2021) *Recycling Tracker Report 2021: Behaviours, attitudes and awareness around recycling* <https://wrap.org.uk/resources/report/recycling-tracker-report-2021-behaviours-attitudes-and-awareness-around-recycling>.

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