

Not just world, kids want schools to turn green too

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Young people across the UK have caused controversy with school walkouts to demand action on the climate crisis — but they're also forcing change inside the classroom. Children as young as five are presenting business pitches to schools on how to be greener, while pupils are begging their parents to stop engines running outside the school gates and calling on teachers to make school trips closer to home.

The number of eco-conscious students across the country has grown as a result of the movement led by teenage activist Greta Thunberg in recent months and the 'Attenborough effect' — awareness caused by TV programmes like David Attenborough's Blue Planet II that showed the damage that plastic was causing to coastal areas, teachers say.

Plastic bottles, straws and Christmas crackers are a thing of the past at some schools after student-led campaigns for the environment. And pupils are increasingly demanding for school trips to be scaled back and for meat dishes to be replaced to reduce their carbon footprint.

Pipers Corner School, a private girls' school in Buckinghamshire, has employed an "environmentalist in residence", believed to be the first of its kind, to address the rising interest among students. Phil Williams is helping teachers at the school embed lessons on climate issues across the curriculum, including in maths and psychology, and he is urging pupils to look at the school as a business.

A group of five- and six-year-olds wanted a gutter on a shed in the playground to collect rainwater to help the environment, so the headteacher asked them to present the idea to senior authorities at the school. Helen Ness-Gifford, headteacher of Pipers Corner School, said: "There are ecogroups and teams of students as young as five-years-old who see it as absolutely vital."

The school had already decided to get rid of plastic bottles and straws. Meanwhile, at Sheffield High School, pupils are leading a campaign against air pollution. They created posters warning parents against car idling outside the school which were displayed on roads nearby. Nina Gunson, head of the girls' school, said more kids are sharing their "dissatisfaction" with policies through eco-committees and they are calling on their families "to be mindful of their world".

Children as young as seven at Sheffield High School recently made a business pitch to remove single-use plastics from the canteen. And they are questioning the school's plans for trips and long-haul flights. Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "There is certainly an increasing appetite among kids for more action on environmental issues."

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