

Mill Strand Integrated School and Nursery

Number of pupils: 245
Age range:
Location: Portrush

Joined Eco-Schools: 2007
Number of Green Flags: 6

There has been a long-established practice of outdoor learning and the use of the local Mill Strand Beach as an additional classroom for the school. Outdoor Classroom sessions are carried out weekly for all classes in the local environment. There are also frequent visits by all year groups to the beach to help look after their own nearby unique marine environment. Within the school there are raised beds and a Polytunnel where children can explore 'seed to plate' activities, growing and nurturing a wide variety of plants. There is also a Sensory Garden which was designed and developed to plant vegetables and encourage wildlife to create habitats. Rainwater is collected to provide for plants in the garden.

For another year running, the school has won awards for their continued work in the environment including awards for their 'Scaremaid' and 'Maid of straw' creations in the IEF recycled Scarecrow competition. They have won the Translink Travel Challenge for two years running.

They contribute annually to the Ulster Wildlife Marine Debris Art Exhibition, winning it twice and participate in the annual RSPB birdwatch.

With the support of Brian Poots and NIFSA Mill Strand is now officially a 'Forest School.' Their ECO Coordinator is a qualified Forest School teacher and one of their classes has already been awarded 'Nature Rangers' certificates.

Mill Strand are involved in numerous projects such as the Live Here Love Here Big Spring Clean; SAS Beach Clean. They have adopted part of their local beach as part of the 'Adopt a Spot' Programme, carrying out regular litter picks to protect it. They hold annual 'Green Fingers Days' last year this was funded through the Curtis Community fund allowing the whole school community to replant and rejuvenate areas around school, creating spaces and habitats for wildlife.

Topic actions:

To promote environmental and healthy travel the school partakes in initiatives such as the Translink Travel Challenge, Beep Beep Day and 'Walk to School Wednesday'. They have also recently achieved their Sustrans bronze award.

The ECO Committee have discussed with kitchen staff about food waste and have together agreed both to eliminate the two choices at dinner time – reducing food waste by over 50% and together have been able to cease the use of polystyrene for ice cream and instead use cones.

Sharing Good Practice actions:

Partaking in the Green-Schools' Marine Environment Conference in Galway, Mill Strand's Eco team spoke to visiting schools and provided them with a snapshot of their marine work whilst also participating in a variety of sessions on the threatening effects that pollution is having on biodiversity.

Pupils are very involved and use their knowledge and skills to help others through the buddy system in school.

Mill Strand are the first school in Northern Ireland to purchase a [2 Minute Beach Clean](#) board for their local community. This 2 minute beach clean

The topic of water is embraced in the school from collecting rainfall to water plants, to partaking in the RNLI Water Safety Programme. The Eco Committee also regularly check that the water butts are being used appropriately.

Healthy Living is a topic embraced by the whole school: Nursery to Y2 are provided with a healthy Break and the ECO Committee check Year 3 to Year 7 pupils bring a healthy snack to school. The dinner menu is revisited half termly to look at balance & nutrition. The After-School Club also provides a varied active programme including hockey, surfing, running and dance.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Regular litters pick are carried out at the West Strand and the amount and types of litter are monitored.

Regular beach cleans are organised to educate the pupils while protecting the environment for future generations.

The Sustrans travel challenge as well as other initiatives within school provide opportunities to self -evaluate and monitor progress with pupils at the core.

ECO club weekly carry out a before & after simple assessment on their environment. They also carry out regular experiments to encourage awareness of the importance of water

board in Mill Strand is linked to litter programmes such as the SAS Campaign Litter Pick and the Big Spring Clean Litter Pick. Pupils care deeply about protecting their environment and are keen litter collectors.

A ban has been recently implemented in the school on plastic straws. A target was set to reduce the 700 straws used a week in the school to 0. The school no longer uses plastic straws. This ban was implemented after a pupil highlighted his concerns by rejecting a straw for his morning milk. He had seen the video of the sea turtle having a plastic straw removed from its nose and was deeply concerned about the negative effect of single use plastic on marine life. Mill Strand want to share this message and educate other schools about 'The Last Straw' initiative as well as reducing single use plastics in schools.

Mentoring School:

Mill Strand encourage other schools to come and visit both the school environment and the unique marine environment at West Strand.

The school uses their Facebook page and twitter account to promote more environmentally friendly initiatives and events to family and friends of pupils but also to other schools.

They have a link with Zomba, Malawi and have recently become involved with the Global Learning Programme. Mill Strand are leading a cluster of schools in applying for the 'Connecting Classrooms' project. The school hopes to organise reciprocal visits to South Africa for teachers while linking classrooms and raising global awareness.

Mill Strand also share their initiatives with other schools in the area: working with pupils and training teachers, most recently St Malachy's Primary school, Coleraine. They also provide outdoor learning opportunities annually for PGCE students from university of Ulster, Coleraine.



Above: Mill Strand receiving their Ambassador Eco-School award at the annual Eco-Schools' Conference 2017



Above: Mill Strand pupils launch their 2 Minute Beach Clean board at Portrush West Strand.



Above: Nursery and Preschool eating lettuce sandwiches from the lettuce grown on site (facebook)



Above: Mill Strand pupils participating in the Green-Schools' Marine Environment Conference in Galway, January 2019



Outdoor Learning for all pupils

Left: Year 1 and Year 7 exploring and making fairy-tale castles down at the beach

Right: Year 3 Outdoor Classroom activities

