

MEEN was invited to work with the school council at Heald Place Primary school with the express purpose of helping to reduce lunchtime food waste. Consequently, our first activity was to run a lunchtime waste audit and set up a system to record the amount waste so that we could track the impacts of running a campaign.

With the systems in place we explored the amount of energy and resources needed to bring food to the table. We discussed what energy inputs food needs to grow and then, using a world map, we tracked all the ingredients needed for a can of baked beans including the can. We also discussed the climate impacts of rotting food.

Once the pupils understood some of the reasons for reducing food waste, we set about tackling the problem. After some deliberations it was decided that pupils who ate their food and behaved well in the dining room should be rewarded through the school's dojo points system.

But how could the school council make the rewards fairly? To help them consider the possible issues that might arise we ran a roleplay session. Whilst acting out a typical lunchtime scenario the pupils were given, in turn, the school council role with the responsibility of deciding who to award whilst the remainder were given secret roles to play. Other roles included being the school councillor's friend who would try to persuade them to give them a reward; another pupil was instructed to behave well and eat all their food whilst another made a big show of eating their food whilst putting their leftovers on someone else's plate. This activity was a lot of fun and helped prepare the pupils for their new lunchtime responsibilities.

The team then collectively wrote a presentation explaining why the school needed to reduce food waste and how the reward system would work. Each member of the school council was then asked to deliver the presentation to their class.



They also did some research asking their peers about the foods they liked and the foods they did not and it was clear from the responses, and from examining the bags of food waste, that boiled potatoes were not at all popular and, in response, they were removed from the menu. The team also

created two displays which were put up near the dining room queues which communicated the issues and helped everyone understand the problems food waste causes.

At a feedback session one of the pupils commented how much they liked creating the displays adding, 'And I think they made a difference as people read them in the lunch queue and thought about eating up their lunch'.

Within a very short period of time the levels of food waste showed a marked reduction and, even though hanging around the bins with a set of scales was not the pupils' favourite activity, it was obvious to everyone that the intervention was making a difference.

The pupils were asked by MEEN to draft up an article for MEEN's newsletter, Beehive, about the project asking them to share the design of the campaign and to share what a difference they had made to their school's food waste. Once edited together it went on the front page of our Spring edition. This article explains the process very clearly:



**BEEHIVE**  
Spring 2022

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[coordinator@meen.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@meen.org.uk)

**Don't forget:**

MEEN runs on project funding but we continue to deliver our

newsletter, maintain our website and run free network events for educationalists interested in Education for Sustainability.

If you would like to support MEEN's work please consider becoming a member: <https://www.meen.org.uk/join/membership>

or make a donation at: <https://www.meen.org.uk/donations>

MEEN would like to thank all our funders including People's Postcode Lottery and Suez/Recycle for Greater Manchester.

**Less waste, more taste, say pupils at Heald Place**

We are the school councillors at Heald Place Primary and we are trying to stop school lunch food waste. Food waste is unacceptable for several reasons: food has often travelled all round the world to get to your plate, when food is wasted it emits greenhouse gases which adds to climate change and some poor people do not get much food so we are lucky to have food to eat. Sadly, the UK has more food waste than any other country in Europe.



We think this can be changed but we must act fast because the clock is ticking! We want to stop food waste so we can protect our planet.

We decided that to encourage everyone to eat their food we would give out dojo points (the schools rewards system) to two children from each class who have eaten all their lunch.

But first we did a presentation to each class. Our presentation contained lots of facts about food waste such as:

FACT: One third of all the food grown in the world is not eaten but thrown away.

FACT: The UK throws away over 9 million tonnes of food every year -

that would fill 23 million 40 tonne trucks which would be enough trucks to circle the earth seven times.

FACT: On one day this school threw away 90 kg of food waste.

We know this because the school council has been checking the amount of food waste. We found mostly boiled potatoes were thrown away, lots of broccoli, and on one day lots of chicken. But we know our plan is working because over two months our food waste has substantially decreased. The school has made as much as 90kgs of food waste on one day, but last time we weighed the food waste bags it was only 35kg.

We collected the weight of all the food waste generated each Friday. This was averaged out before the campaign (67kgs) and then after the campaign (35.7kgs). This indicated that there was a saving of 313kgs over 10 weeks just on Fridays. If the campaign made a difference on Fridays, it is likely to have impacted on food waste every lunchtime so the potential savings are likely to be even greater. To keep the focus on food waste we also ran a science experiment to see how much greenhouse gas we could collect from rotting food waste. Using bottles, water, waste tomatoes and peas along with two reclaimed balloons we set up a system to collect the gases.



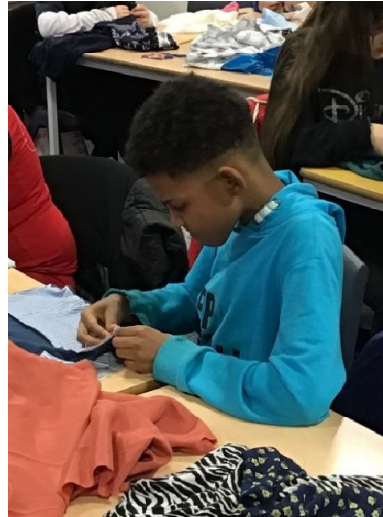
One of the team members feedback that, 'I liked doing the experiment, setting it up and checking it. But the results were a bit poor. We collected some gas but not much'. The verdict was that there was probably a slow continuous gas leak.

When the offer arose to plant native trees in the school grounds to help mitigate climate change the group were keen to participate and a new row of trees were soon planted.



Meanwhile, Year 6 classes were tasked with finding items of clothing which needed repairing, patching up or making them more appealing to wear in the future. The classes were then visited by Stitched Up who talked to the pupils about the huge impact of the fashion industry on climate change. The pupils then got to sew and get creative with needle and thread.





These sessions were not just good for stopping clothing from going to landfill, they taught new skills and also brought about a wonderful calm as the pupils engaged, enjoyed and achieved.

As the school council spent time weighing food waste at the bins we also noticed that paper was not being recycled properly, an issue faced by many schools since Covid 19 had changed practices. Consequence, we decided to visit the classrooms to discover what was going on. On our journey from room to room we made several discoveries and took various actions. Firstly, we noticed there were a lot of off-cuts being binned as teachers prepared pupil worksheets. As these off-cuts were regular in size it was easy to take a stapler and refashion them into small notebooks which the pupils made and took home. We also discovered much of the paper in the bins was only used on one side and this led to a decision to collect reusable paper for an early years group to draw on. We also discovered that one of the teachers was collecting office quality paper to recycle and during Covid had been taking it home to make sure it was!

Using the findings, the team decided to take action. As one pupil stated in the feedback session: 'We got all the paper recycled! We asked the teachers to make sure it was done. And we got the trays sorted in the classes to use both sides'. In fact, the team decided to approach key members of staff in the key stage to ask them if they would mind having responsibility to make sure the paper was put in the right bins and properly recycled.

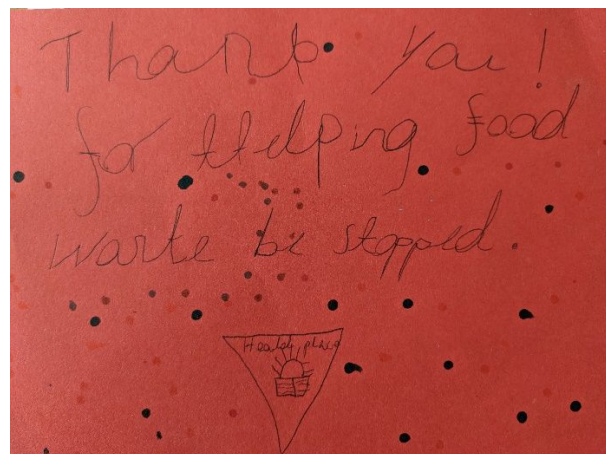
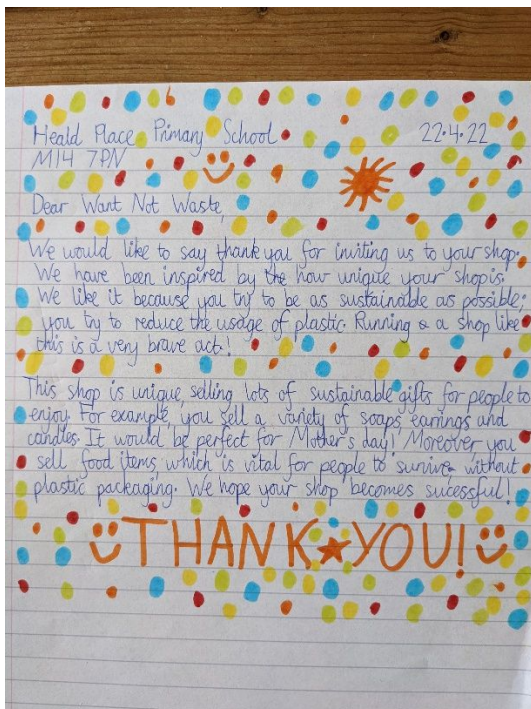
Further reductions in paper use were also introduced by school leadership with teachers receiving an allocated amount of paper each term per class whilst, instead of printing worksheets to stick into exercise books, the pupils were being encouraged to write directly into their books, which as one pupil observed, 'Ah! We're not using as much that way!'

MEEN also organised a trip for the school council to visit a student run shop called Want Not Waste. A group of students from the University of Manchester set up the shop to model waste free shopping. The shop is run by student volunteers and they also coordinate a Terracycle Hub, so we walked from school to the shop carrying lots of rubbish which could be recycled including items like the pens we collected during the bin audit.

The students were really helpful and ran a session for the pupils talking about waste and the problems we have created throughout purchasing chains. They also showed the pupils how to run a waste free shop: whilst one group of pupils organised the waste in the Terracycle Hub another group examined what was in stock, weighed and measured the goods being purchased and were shown how to accept payment and record the transactions.



Some of the pupils wrote thank you letters to the shop for letting them visit and learn. When the letters were delivered the students were very pleased to be given such positive feedback.



When pupils were asked to comment on the highlights of the project one of the pupils instantly focused in on the trip saying that:

- 'At Want Not Waste we found lots of things.'
- 'Yeah, but what was special about it?'
- 'There were things made of old recycled plastic bags.'
- 'But what were they trying to do?'
- 'Sell stuff without packaging.'

The visit clearly made a difference to the pupils understanding of how we could do things differently.

The team continued to weigh and record food waste but when watering the trees we realised how much litter was blowing under the fence into the school grounds so we decided to organise litter picks. In one session alone the team collected 2kgs of plastic waste including a mobile phone and a

broken green food waste caddy. As one pupil commented: 'I liked when we did the litter pick and we found the old green bin and we used that to collect all the other rubbish and the old phone'.



During feedback another pupil enjoyed the litter picking so much she announced that, 'Now I do it at lunchtime with two friends. And we like doing it because it makes the school cleaner and we've found lots of rubbish'.

When measuring the food waste one day we also discovered a treasure trove of 7kg of WEEE waste in one of the black bins which we gathered up and MEEN took to be recycled.



Another discovery was the huge number of batteries that had been collected by the school which the pupils sorted and weighed prior to recycling.



MEEN had been contacted by the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and invited to have a stall at their community Sustainability Festival. MEEN agreed to participate and asked if young people could make a contribution to the event. We agreed the pupils could run the stall by hosting different activities and that they would be able to make a presentation to the festival participants on the work they were doing in school.

The Heald Place team decided to engage with the attendees on the issue of food and, working with a set of food cards, asked adults to learn about the carbon footprint of the foods we eat. They also attended the key note lecture given by Jonathon Porritt on climate change and were given their own spot to field questions.

The pupils' experience was positive with pupils commenting that:

'I liked when we went to the university on the visit. There were lots of stalls to look at.'

'And it was fun'.

'And we learned about sustainability'.



Pupils work with Councillor Ali looking at food footprints and listen to Jonathon Porritt on climate change.

Although the pupils enjoyed learning from other people they also enjoyed being able to make their own contribution to the festival with one pupil stating: 'I enjoyed doing the presentations at the conference and when we talked to that Councillor about the food footprints'.

The pupils had chosen to deliver their presentation without a script with each pupil standing up and telling the audience about a specific aspect of the project. They also adeptly answered all the questions they were asked.

To summarise the work of the school council the pupils had not only helped to successfully reduce the school's food waste and paper waste, amongst other items, but they had also taken the message home and into their lives. During the feedback session pupils discussed reusing cardboard to make festive decorations at home; not wasting food at home; re-using the plastic bottle they were given with their packed lunch and taking personal responsibility for litter picking around the school.

MEEN is looking forward to working with some of the pupils in the next academic year so they can share their achievements with other schools.