

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Camden schools report



Capturing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Camden schools

This project

Camden Learning commissioned think and action-tank The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) to find out about and share the work underway in some Camden schools that use the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, to inspire others about their potential for transformational change.

We wanted to observe and hear about how schools were engaging with this initiative and what they had achieved.



The UN Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, all United Nations (UN) Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹, a plan of action to protect the planet, improve people's life experiences, and build peaceful societies. Underpinning this agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), covering economic, social and environmental themes.



Review of practice

A number of schools across the London Borough of Camden are currently engaging with the UN SDGs. For this review of practice, we gathered information from:

- **Torriano Primary School** - we conducted one focus group with two staff members and one with pupils.
- **Brecknock Primary School** – a member of staff attended the focus group discussion at Torriano and shared some examples of Brecknock’s work.
- **Christopher Hatton Primary School** – we visited and interviewed one staff member.
- **Parliament Hill School** (secondary) – we interviewed one staff member.
- **UCL Academy** (secondary) – we visited and spoke to two members of staff.

Information, images and comments gathered via this fieldwork are presented in this report.

We understand that the following schools are also engaging with SDG-related learning. Although they were approached, these schools were unable to participate in the research at this time:

- **Netley Primary School**
- **Edith Neville Primary School**
- **The Camden School for Girls** (secondary)

About the schools participating in this research

- Torriano, Brecknock and Christopher Hatton are primary community schools, Parliament Hill is a secondary community girls' school and UCL Academy is a sponsor-led academy.
- Torriano and Brecknock Primary Schools formed a federation in 2022. Each school has its own leaders, teachers, support staff and budget, but the Federation has a shared governing body.
- Torriano has a language resource base for 14 pupils who are identified as having developmental language delay.
- Torriano is the largest primary school, serving 451 pupils and Christopher Hatton is the smallest with 227 pupils. All of the primary schools have nursery classes. Both secondary schools serve over 1,000 pupils.
- Torriano and Christopher Hatton are rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, Brecknock and Parliament Hill are rated 'Good', and UCL Academy is rated 'Requires Improvement'.
- Brecknock has the highest proportion of primary pupils in receipt of free school meals or Pupil Premium funding at 57% and UCL Academy has the highest proportion at secondary level, at 41%.

Findings

Findings

In this section we explore examples of Camden schools' use of the UN SDGs, looking at some common activities as well as individual projects and initiatives.

It is possible to identify six distinct but overlapping ways in which schools can support SDG-related learning:

- within a subject-based curriculum (in particular the humanities, science and citizenship).
- beyond a subject-based curriculum, often through Project-Based Learning opportunities that link learning to real-world problems and are designed to give opportunities for pupil voice and youth leadership.
- through awareness campaigns that focus on specific SDGs or the global goals as a whole, some of which happen through events (from assemblies to youth-led conferences).
- through eco-initiatives.
- through volunteering and service-learning opportunities.
- through global exchange programmes and visits.

Schools in Camden are using most of these approaches, though volunteering was less common, and we did not learn of any exchange programmes through this research project.

The Camden School Climate Charter

All schools we spoke with have signed the Camden School Climate Charter², a local framework designed to empower schools to play their part in making Camden a zero-carbon borough by 2030. Signatories declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency and pledge to contribute to addressing it, through work in areas such as food, transport, energy, and biodiversity. They also commit to teaching environmental literacy to young people.

"We used [the Camden School Climate Charter] as a bit of a planning tool, and a bit of an audit actually, and students chose areas to prioritise ... [Students wrote] a letter asking the governors to sign up to the Camden Charter."

Parliament Hill staff member

The charter was launched at an event during the COP26 global summit on climate change. At the event, Parliament Hill, Torriano and UCL Academy spoke about successful climate action initiatives carried out at their schools, including banning plastics, promoting active travel to and from school, growing their own fruit and vegetables, and planting trees on site.

UN Sustainable Development Goals throughout school life

The schools aim to embed their work on the UN SDGs throughout the curriculum, including discussions in subjects such as science, technology, maths, geography, humanities, and PSHCE.

This process was generally felt to be easier from reception through to Key Stage 3, where there was less pressure to prepare for statutory assessments.

School staff felt that the SDGs helped to highlight cross-curricular connections between subjects, and ground pupils' learning in the real world. They also incorporate learning about the SDGs into assemblies, school trips, extracurricular activities and actionable projects within the local community.



Sustainable changes

Outside of their lessons, pupils across the schools have put their understanding of the UN SDGs into practice by making a variety of changes to their local environment. Torriano, Brecknock and Christopher Hatton pupils have instigated sustainable swaps in their schools, such as replacing single-use plastic bottles with reusable ones. At Torriano and Brecknock, pupils have also campaigned for a water fountain to be installed outside Kentish Town Station, introduced 'meat-free Mondays', and aimed to reduce food waste in the school canteen.

At Christopher Hatton, pupils have: introduced more meat-free food options and sustainably sourced fish; removed plastic wrappings from packed lunches; banned cling film and plastic straws in the school; replaced disposable milk cartons with glass milk bottles; and introduced food waste recycling.

Students at Parliament Hill have lobbied their catering provider to remove single-use plastics and are now working on introducing composting, cutting down meat consumption, and improving recycling.



"We all protested to get a water fountain in the town, which you can actually go down and see."

Torriano pupil

School groups and committees

Torriano and Brecknock have established 'eco-committees' while UCL Academy has an 'eco-schools' group engaged in rewilding the school's garden.

Parliament Hill has a climate action group of students and staff who choose which themes the school will prioritise working on at different times. This has been sufficiently popular to branch out into groups for different key stages. The student climate action groups also sparked a gardening group and parent action group, which work to improve biodiversity on the school site. This year, Parliament Hill has also allocated 'climate action governors' who liaise with the student groups on changes they want to make and how to achieve them.



School groups and committees

These school groups and committees provide young people with the chance to drive decision-making in their schools, enhancing their understanding and ownership of sustainability projects. A staff member at Parliament Hill noted that because of this work happening in Camden primaries, some pupils who join their school already have a strong understanding of the UN SDGs. They are enthusiastic about continuing what they have begun at primary level, which makes them powerful advocates and leaders of secondary school groups and within the wider school community.



COP 26

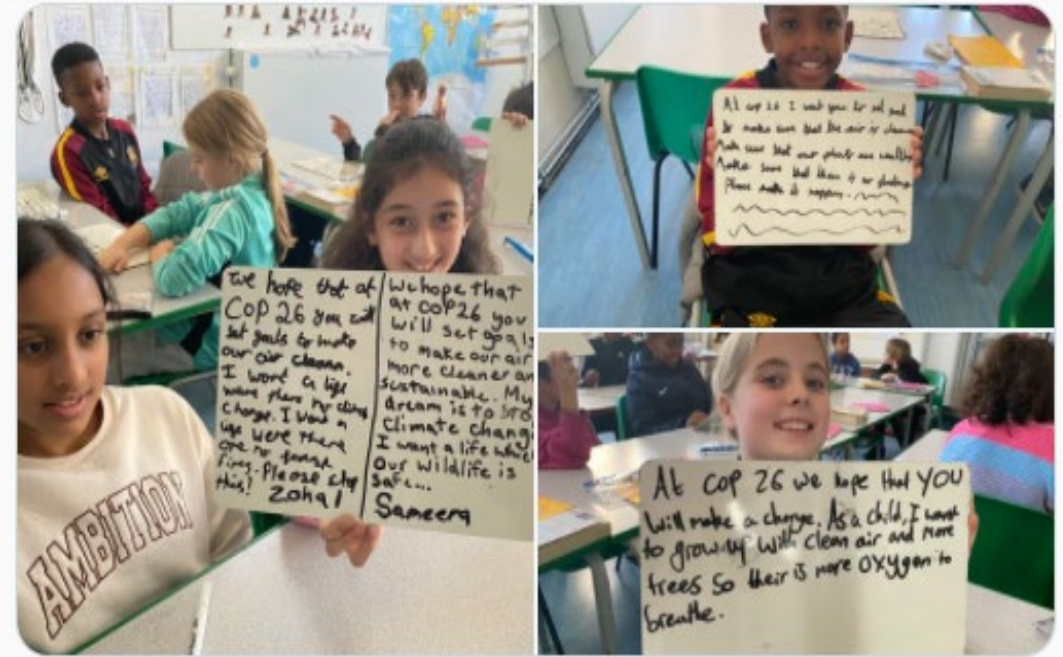
Camden schools were active during the COP 26 summit in 2021, highlighting their work on the UN SDGs and calling for further change.

Torriano pupils wrote to their local MP Sir Keir Starmer, calling on him to support their aims for cleaner air and action on climate change. One Parliament Hill pupil from Chad attended the conference in Glasgow as a youth delegate. She was interviewed by Sky News and also gave an assembly to her peers about the experience.



Torriano Primary @TorrianoJuniorS · 32m

6K want our wildlife to be preserved, biodiversity restored and and our air to be cleaner. Can you help us spread the message @Keir_Starmer ?



"When I wrote to Keir Starmer, I said to help other schools across the world. If he did that, then it would make a big change in the world."

Torriano pupil

1. Tweet your class message to your local MP



2. Eat more plant based



3. Waste free Wednesday
Youth Summit- Action to change the world



4 Outdoor classroom day



5 Turn off lights

Food waste Café Launch Year 5 and 6



The World's Largest Lesson

Camden schools have taken part in global activities framed around the UN SDGs. Torriano, Brecknock and Christopher Hatton pupils participate in The World's Largest Lesson³, a global online hub for resources and opportunities to teach pupils of all ages and nationalities about and through the SDGs. In partnership with UNICEF and UNESCO, it advocates for Education for Sustainable Development and encourages the widespread use of the goals through formal education systems. Campaigns and challenges are created throughout the year to keep learning engaging and relevant. A particular focus is 'Global Goals Week'; an annual week of action, awareness, and accountability, when organisations come together to cultivate ideas, identify solutions and build partnerships, with the aim of making progress towards the SDGs.



"We do the World's Largest Lesson ... I think children understand about children in other parts of the world, which is really important for them."

Torriano staff member

"There's loads of resources, but that can in itself be quite overwhelming. Things like The World's Largest Lesson and all of the materials on there are quite a good place to start. I'd say look at your curriculum and identify where the meaningful links are."

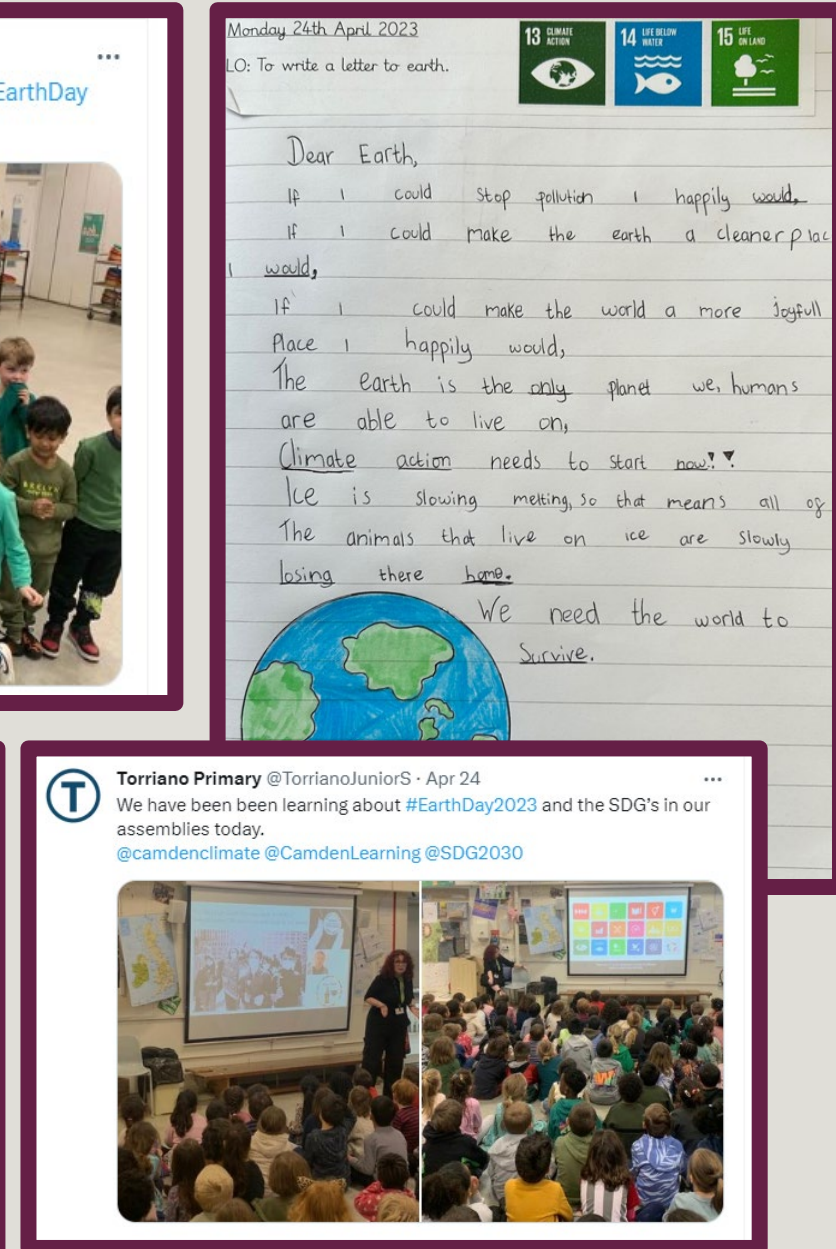
Christopher Hatton staff member

Torriano and Brecknock – Earth Day

Torriano and Brecknock schools celebrate Earth Day⁴, when pupils are encouraged to consider innovative ways to help combat climate change and develop their relationship with nature.

In 2023 Torriano and Brecknock pupils wrote letters to the Earth, describing the positive environmental changes they wanted to help drive forward.

⁴ For further information, please see: <https://www.earthday.org/about-us/>



Torriano and Brecknock – Clean Air Day

Torriano and Brecknock pupils have worked with the group 'Freedom to Breathe'⁵ to campaign for reductions in air pollution. They have taken part in workshops, conducted science experiments to test air quality, and contributed to petitions. The school participated in 'Clean Air Day'⁶, a World Health Organisation and UK Government initiative that provides tools and resources for schools to use to educate pupils about air pollution and support them to make positive changes to improve air quality in their local environment.



⁵ For further information, please see: <https://www.blueair.com/us/freedomtobreathe.html>

⁶ For further information, please see: <https://www.actionforcleanair.org.uk/campaigns/clean-air-day>

Torriano and Brecknock – Green Dragons’ Den

Torriano and Brecknock schools recently took part in a Green Dragons’ Den activity, in which pupils from both schools made pitches to a local business, seeking funding for sustainable development projects they had devised. They were questioned by a panel and had to justify the proposals they were putting forward and their benefits for the environment. After taking part they were awarded grants to build or repair greenhouses on the school sites.



Torriano Primary @TorrianoJuniorS · Apr 28

Inside the Green Dragon’s Den... our children used their oracy skills to deliver a superb pitch. Well done everyone! We are so proud of you.

[@ThinkDoCamden](#) [@CamdenLearning](#) [@camdenclimate](#) [@VeoliaUK](#)
[@TroupBywaters](#)



Torriano and Brecknock – STEAM projects

Each year Torriano and Brecknock schools carry out a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics) project that is linked to the UN SDGs.

In recent years, these projects have involved evaluating the potential for sustainable power generation and reimagining local roads. Pupils have worked with teachers, parents and the council to carry out research, such as testing air quality, and make positive environmental changes, such as widening the pavements and building wildlife friendly habitats.

STEAM 2021
DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

STEAM LEARNING JOURNEY
Greening the Grey

Health Apps

- Informative paragraphs about the benefits of exercise, mindfulness, healthy eating and being social.
- Videos showing workouts and activities to keep others feeling young.
- Interactive green space map.

Campaigning for Clean Air

- Affects of air pollution on young lungs.
- March for clean air in Camden – Greening the Grey party.
- Meeting with DEFRA about G7 summit.
- Anti-pollution plants.

STEAM Inspired Art

- Bright Ugochukwu Eke: Acid Rain Art – Rebecca Louise Law: Nature in the Air Art.
- Kasia Molga: Carbon Capes

The Ageing Process

How do we age?

- Stages of the ageing process.
- Changes that occur at each stages (physically, mentally and emotionally).
- Factors that affect ageing.
- How air pollution affects the lungs.

Architecture Workshops with Vazelia

- What safety measures do we need to keep in mind when designing a wellbeing space?
- Drawing 1:10 scale sketches of the space.
- Modelling furniture with well-being in mind.
- Using our knowledge to design a welfare facility and furniture for our green corridor.

Eco-Committee

- What eco projects are already ongoing at Torriano? What could be improved?
- Qualities of a committee member – job description.
- Shortlisting of candidates and chairing of first meeting.

TORRIANO ENERGY

STEAM

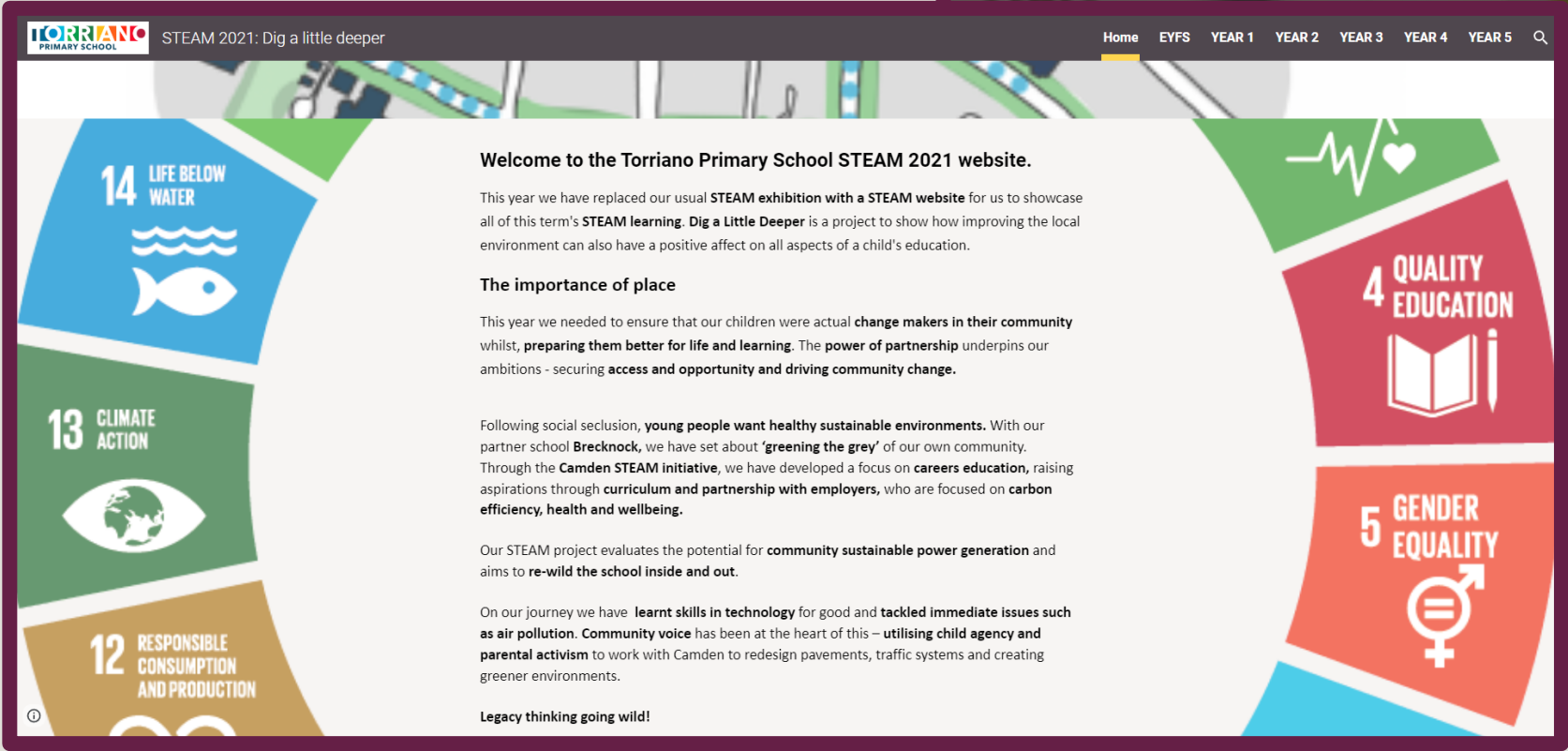
How does carbon dioxide affect our energy? in Camden

decide if speaking us and our footprint is we need to think this. our own footprint is getting worse. This will carry on for a while so be prepared.

Solar panel proposal

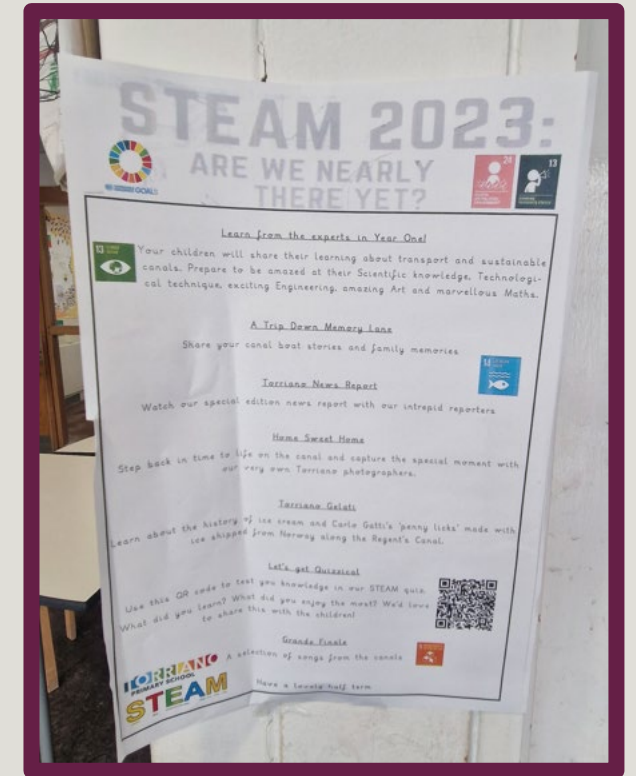
Build wind turbines. (Might be loud.)

Torriano and Brecknock – STEAM project websites



Torriano and Brecknock – STEAM projects

This year's STEAM project, 'Are we nearly there yet?' focused specifically on progress towards achieving the UN SDGs. School staff noted that one of the key challenges of this work was the target of change by 2030. They were aware of the need to ensure children still felt positive and empowered to drive change, in the face of potentially disappointing global progress towards achieving the goals. They explained that the schools aim to focus on celebrating achievements, both within the local community and beyond.



"[I feel] really proud and knowing that we are really doing something powerful and that could make a proper change."

Torriano pupil

Torriano and Brecknock – Sustainable food

Torriano Primary School's Eco Committee has delivered many sustainable projects at the school, including rewilding the playgrounds. They have opened a food waste cafe in the playground kitchen, with year groups sharing smoothies made from waste food and products grown on site. The group was the runner-up of the Camden Eco Champion Awards 2021 and pupils spoke out about their work on a local podcast⁷.

Brecknock Primary School pupils have worked on a school roof allotment and an allotment at Caledonian Park, including weeding; planting, growing and harvesting vegetables; and conducting science projects.



Torriano pupils' perspectives

Pupils at Torriano school spoke passionately about different aspects of the UN SDGs, including poverty, inequalities, health and wellbeing, and climate change.

They showed good understanding of complex issues, such as the causes of pollution and its impact on the environment and health. Pupils enthusiastically shared changes they had made to try to improve sustainability, such as avoiding products containing palm oil. They were also aware of government policy changes that aim to positively impact the environment, such as the ULEZ charge.

Pupils' awareness extended beyond their own lives. They were able to speak about global issues such as the war in Ukraine, and some had been involved in fundraising to support those affected. They described sharing what they had learned with family and friends from other schools, with the aim of positively influencing their behaviour.

Pupil 1: "Sustainability means that, for example, if you had a plastic bottle, you would recycle it or if it couldn't be recycled, you could upcycle it and make it into something new. Or you could not use plastic bottles at all. Or if you did get one, you could reuse them."

Pupil 2: "Because when you don't recycle stuff, the people, they throw all the plastic and stuff in the ocean and sea animals get harmed a lot. We need to recycle so those sea animals can live longer."

Pupil 3: "They don't just dump it, but more factories will produce the bottles ... they would produce more because you're throwing each one away, then you need more bottles, so you go buy some more ... Same thing with meat. If no one eats meat, then they'll stop running the company."

Torriano pupils

Christopher Hatton – summer term spotlight on the environment

At Christopher Hatton, alongside their work throughout the year the whole school spends the summer term focusing on sustainability. Learning themes all have a key focus on an environmental issue, such as river and air pollution, plastic in the ocean, climate change, deforestation and reforestation, endangered animals, and protecting local wildlife.

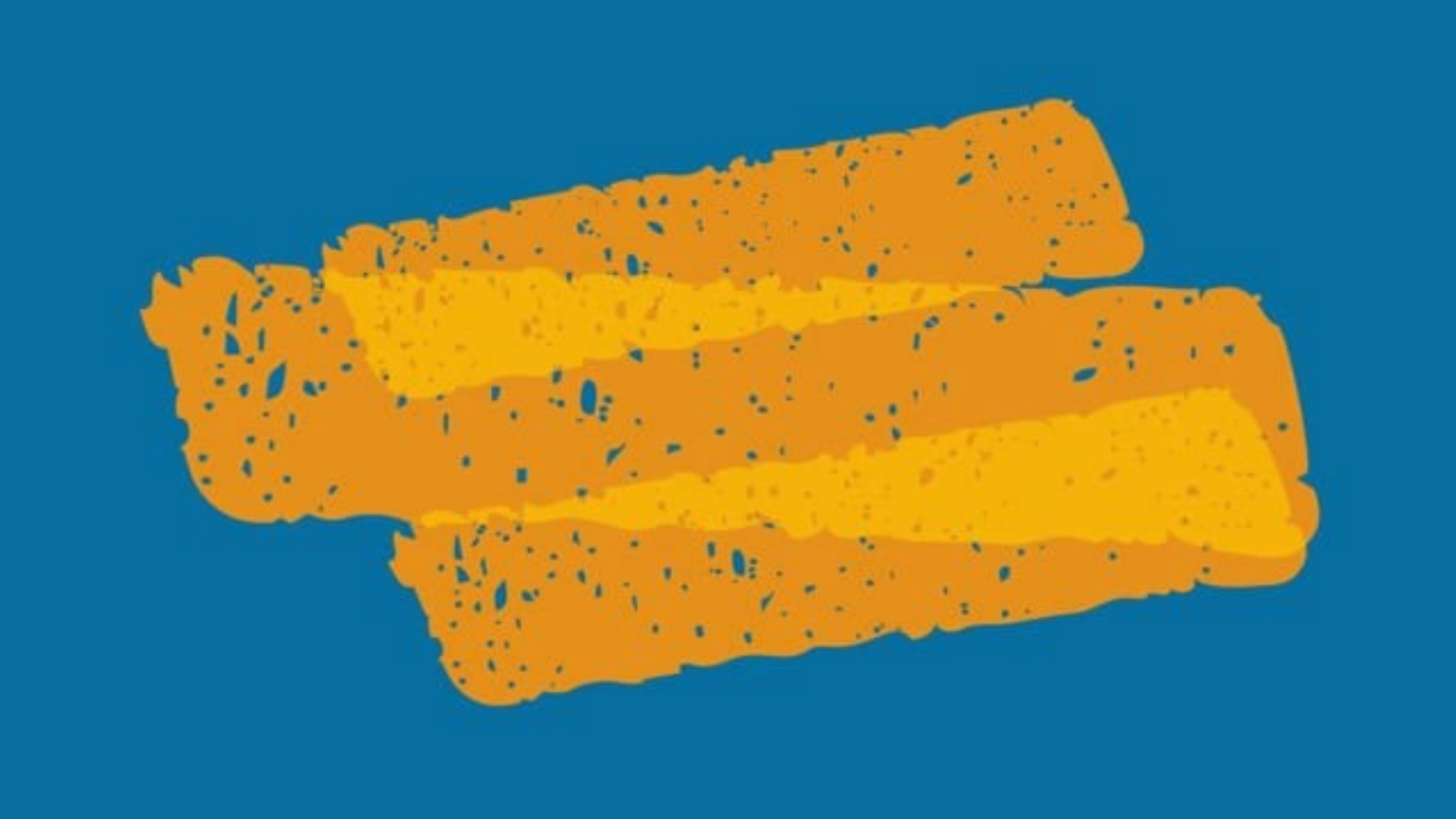
The outcome of the term's work is an Earth Summit, where pupils develop their oracy skills by sharing their work with a large audience from the local community through different media including speeches, poetry, music and art and storytelling.



"I think the children are really engaged by it and really passionate, I do think it definitely speaks to the children. Children are caring on the whole and they want to feel they can make a difference ... the careful thing is about showing them there are possibilities. It's not all doom and gloom, so you have to have that balance ... We want them to understand what's happening but also recognize that they are part of the solution."

Christopher Hatton staff member

Christopher Hatton – Year 1 Earth Summit presentation



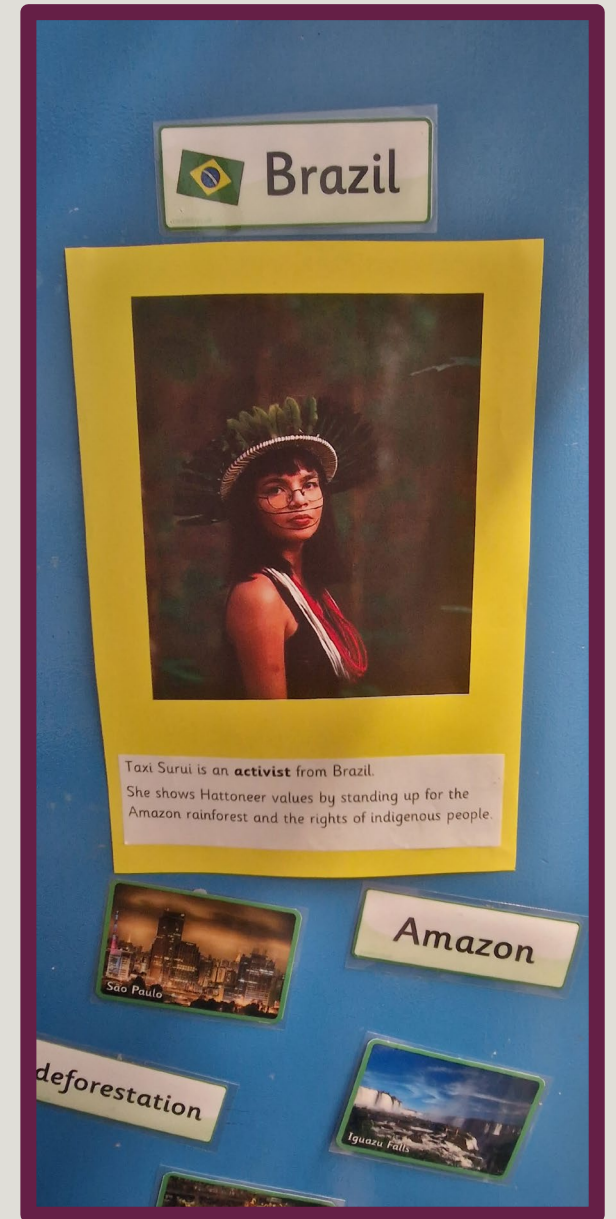
Christopher Hatton – Young Activists

Christopher Hatton pupils are encouraged to see themselves as environmental activists and campaigners. This year, each class in the school chose an activist from around the world to follow for inspiration. Their work is discussed in class and pupils have their own mantra that is repeated at the beginning of lessons:

"We're Hattoneers. We're activists. We're environmental activists. This is an activist we've been learning about."

"My assembly last week was about a young Ugandan woman who has become a really big activist in terms of saving the Congo rainforest ... She was the first person to go to university in her family and she travelled to COP and gave speeches."

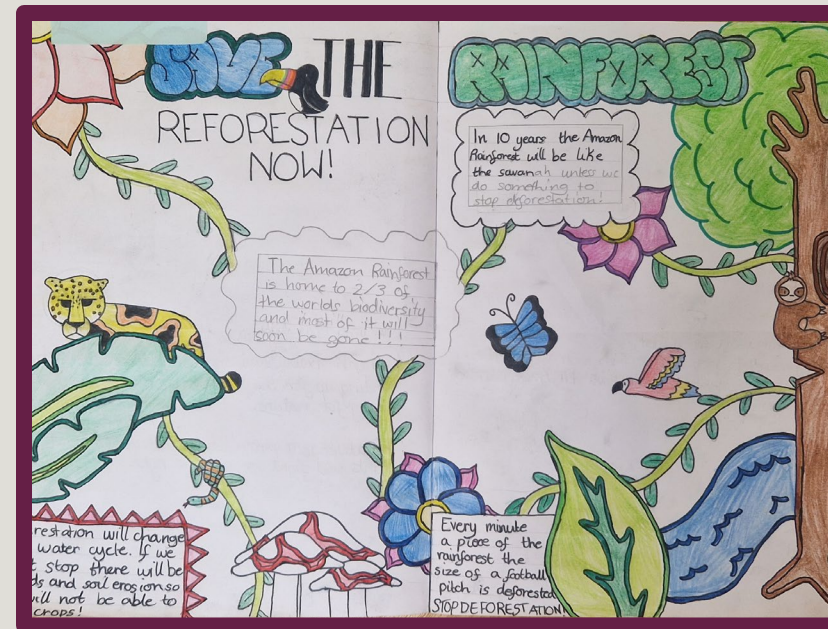
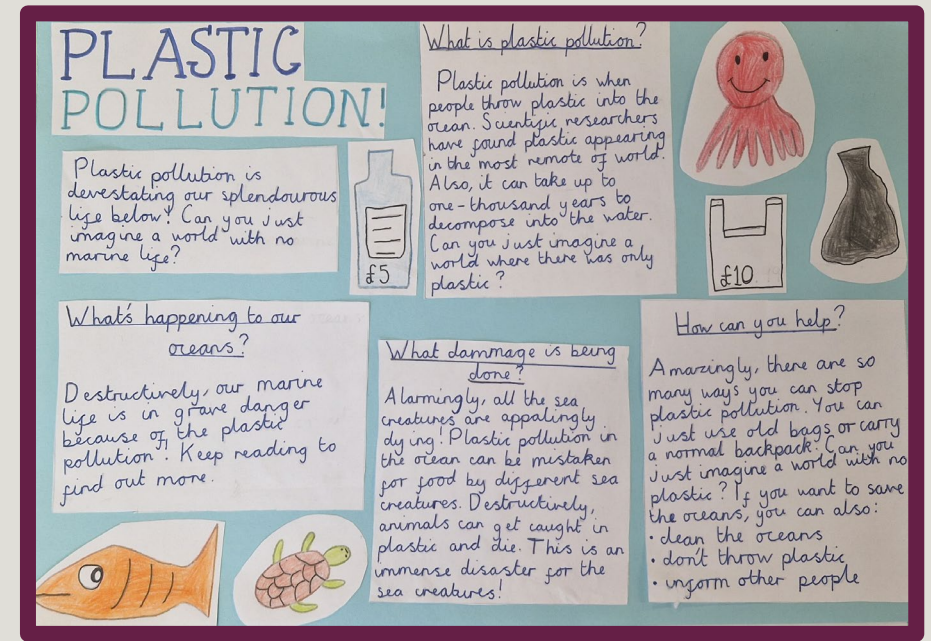
Christopher Hatton staff member



Christopher Hatton – Young Activists

Pupil activism at Christopher Hatton has involved activities including taking part in a Climate March and becoming involved in the development of a new housing estate opposite the school. Pupils were able to have a say in the design and architecture of the estate, questioning sustainability aspects of the building work such as whether green roofs or solar heating would be included.

Pupils have also developed a 'pocket park' just outside of the school, planting a small area of ground to make it more habitable for wildlife.



Christopher Hatton projects

Displays of pupils' project work on polar regions, and the impact of climate change

CHRISTOPHER HATTON
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Year 4 Topic: Pole to Pole

Geography: Human and Physical Geography
Science: Living things and their habitats

What I have already learned:

- About the seasons and weather in the UK
- Know the seven continents of the world
- Know the five oceans of the world
- Some things that are the same and different about London and another place in the world
- Some ways that humans hurt the planet and how we can protect it

What I will learn:

- Where the polar regions are and what they are like
- Where the Equator, North and South Poles are
- Know about the physical features and climate of the polar regions
- Know about explorers who went to the North and South pole, how they survived and why they are famous
- What the Climate Crisis is and how it is hurting the polar regions
- Know what an activist is and how I can help protect the planet and make a change
- Group living things in different ways – including using classification keys
- Know about animals who live in polar environments
- Know how changing environments can pose dangers to living things
- How to construct and interpret food chains

Animals that live in the polar regions:

Famous polar explorers:

Ernest Shackleton, Ingrid Christensen and Matthew Henson

Key vocabulary

explore	If you explore a place, you travel there in order to find out what it is like.
Equator	The Equator is an imaginary line around the Earth at an equal distance from the North Pole and the South Pole
physical feature	A Physical feature is a natural feature of a place such as mountains, rivers or seas.
climate	Climate is the usual weather of a large place, over a long time
crisis	A crisis is a very serious problem.
activist	An activist is someone who works to bring about political or social change.
dependent	Dependent means need something or someone in order to survive.
classify	To classify things means to sort into groups so that things with similar characteristics are in the same group.
environment	A plant, animal or human's environment consists of the natural surroundings in which they live or exist

Food chain icons:

- producer
- consumer
- predator
- prey

Year 4 -Polar Landscapes

Year 4 were exploring polar landscapes and painting, inspired by the work of artist *Emma Stibbon*.

They used their sketchbooks to practice colour mixing, creating texture, observational drawing, and developing ideas for their final compositions. They also explored a range of different water colour techniques such as wet on wet and making colour washes.

They used pencil, ink and watercolour to make their final paintings using all of the skills that they had explored.



UCL Academy – Grand Challenges

At UCL Academy, work on the UN SDGs is tied to UCL's Grand Challenges⁸. Established in 2008, the Grand Challenges form an initiative to stimulate and support cross-disciplinary research. Themes include cultural understanding, global health, human wellbeing, justice and equality, sustainable cities, and transformative technology.

The Grand Challenges provide a fundamental link between UCL Academy and their university sponsor and underpin both the academic and pastoral curriculum, with the aim of supporting students to become global citizens who contribute to a sustainable future.

One example is a series of lessons called 'Connect and Reflect', which are taught to year seven and eight students. Through this work, they explore one of the Grand Challenge themes in a half-term and make links to the UN SDGs. Most recently, the focus has been on how to build a sustainable city. Every Tuesday, students also take part in whole school reading of current affairs articles which are linked to the Grand Challenges and UN SDGs.

Staff at the school feel that students' work on the Grand Challenges and UN SDGs is influencing their choices about the future, with more young people opting to go on to study subjects with direct relevance to themes they learn about, such as international relations, engineering, sociology, and law.

UCL Academy – Grand Challenges

UCL Academy incorporates opportunities for pupils to learn about the Grand Challenges and the UN SDGs up to Key Stage 5, with pupils revisiting topics in greater depth to build on their learning. One example for sociology students included a visit to the Royal Courts of Justice, to support their understanding of crime and deviance, which they study as part of the GCSE and A-level specification. This was connected to the themes of justice and inequality.

Staff at the school felt that this work was particularly beneficial for the transition from primary to secondary school. They explained that many students experience thematic learning at primary level, which contrasts with subject-based learning at secondary. Threading the Grand Challenge and UN SDG themes throughout the secondary curriculum helps students to continue making connections between different subject areas. This approach also helps to prepare pupils who choose to take the Extended Project Qualification at Key Stage 5, which involves project-based, thematic study.

“So the social justice piece, by the time you get to A-level and you're doing sociology, you're thinking about it at that level, but you're also looking at it from when you hit foundation year seven and you're studying it in humanities and looking at justice and equality at that level ... it's a sort of tangible golden thread.”

UCL Academy staff member



Parliament Hill – Digital Leaders

At Parliament Hill, staff have been working on the development of a Digital Leaders Group with students. They have focused on the sustainability benefits of being less paper-based and balancing these changes with the energy impact of using more devices. Students have sought to influence the habits and behaviours of staff and peers across the school, with one climate action group running a poster campaign that included reminders of the importance of turning off lights and equipment when they are not needed. They are also working on installing solar panels.

Students observed that post-COVID-19, people had gotten out of positive habits, and they wanted to ensure these were revitalised across the school community. They have worked with teachers to introduce 'shout outs' in staff bulletins, highlighting the work of staff who have adopted a more sustainable approach.



Parliament Hill – Connecting with nature

During the pandemic, Parliament Hill responded to health and safety guidance by turning its attention to work on the UN SDGs that could be completed outside. Pupils, parents and staff have created an orchard at the school and a wildflower meadow. Products created from these environments are now sold at school summer fairs, such as bath salts made using herbs.

As an inner-city school, staff feel that the students miss out on connections to some of the UN SDGs, such as 'life below water'. Many of their young people have never visited the British coast. The school would like to explore options to build partnerships with rural schools or schools in other countries to enable students to learn more about these issues.



" We have this amazing wildflower bloom at the front of school at the moment, and so many members of staff have said just how happy they are walking past that every day as a greeting as they come into school ... it's really uplifting and inspiring to see the benefits that this is bringing."

Parliament Hill staff member

Next steps

Recommendations for schools

Research participants offered some suggestions for how other schools can get involved in work on the UN SDGs:

- Engage with other schools that are involved and 'buddy up' – visit and see what they are doing if you can.
- Don't feel you have to start from scratch – speak to other educators about how they have incorporated the UN SDGs into their curriculum and see what you can replicate in your school.
- Link to current affairs and global or national developments where you can – young people may already be aware of them and enthusiastic about getting involved.
- Nominate a member of staff to lead on the work – but don't expect them to do it all single-handedly. Make sure they have SLT support and get others, including parents and local volunteers, involved.
- Connect with local organisations focused on sustainability that can support your work.



Recommendations for Camden Learning

Research participants offered some suggestions for how Camden Learning could support further work on the UN SDGs in schools:

- Support schools to lobby contractors (such as catering firms) to make positive sustainable changes to their practice, or signpost to contractors already using sustainable approaches.
- Support schools to connect the UN SDGs to careers guidance and work experience opportunities for secondary school students, for example by making links with local sustainable businesses.
- Identify relevant speakers or organisations to visit schools and deliver presentations or workshops on the UN SDG themes.
- Introduce the UN SDGs as topics for Camden Conversations or subject network discussions, to encourage sharing of best practice.
- Explore opportunities for Camden schools to partner with other schools using the UN SDGs, across the UK and beyond.

Further information

The Goals

- <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

The Schools

- Torriano Primary School: <https://torriano.camden.sch.uk/>
- Brecknock Primary School: <https://www.brecknock.camden.sch.uk/>
- Christopher Hatton Primary School: <https://www.chrishatton.camden.sch.uk/>
- Parliament Hill School: <https://www.parliamenthill.camden.sch.uk/>
- UCL Academy: <https://uclacademy.co.uk/>

Research partner – The Centre for Education and Youth

The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) creates connections, insights and actions that improve young people's childhoods and life chances.

Our vision is of a society that ensures all children and young people receive the support they need to have a fulfilling childhood and transition to adulthood.

We partner with a diverse range of organisations and people, bridging gaps between sectors, practitioners, policymakers and researchers, to help make wise, bold decisions about how best to support young people.

We collaborate as learning, investigation, action or communication partners, carrying out timely, accessible and rigorous projects that get under the skin of key issues.

We shape debate, inform policy and change practices, helping to create systems where all young people, but especially those most at risk of poor outcomes and marginalisation, can thrive.

We are positive about the future and, as a team of teachers and youth workers, believe in the power of brilliant practitioners to realise the potential of all young people.

Contact the team at: hello@cfey.org

