

Northfleet Technology College have been rewarded for their climate change activities, winning the Zayed Sustainability Prize for Europe and Central Asia and having their teacher, Michael Jones, selected as a winner for the Climate Change Challenge. Both accolades were presented to the school at COP28 in Dubai.

Northfleet Technology College have placed themselves at the forefront of sustainability thinking, making them serious contenders when it comes to thinking about the future of climate and what we, not corporates or governments or NGOs, but we as individuals can do to arrest the damage caused and maybe, just maybe, reverse the damage and build a world that will not again inflict so much damage.

So, why should teachers become involved in sustainability teaching? Here are a few pointers for us to consider.

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping the minds of future generations. That's really stating the obvious! Integrating sustainability into the curriculum, we can instill values and practices that promote environmental consciousness, social responsibility, and economic awareness among students. Notice that this is devoid of subject context.

Sustainability is a faceted concept which includes environmental, social, and economic aspects. We, schools, have an ability to design and deliver holistic educational experiences, helping students understand the interconnectedness of these dimensions and develop a well-rounded perspective on sustainability.

Sustainability principles are a cross-disciplinary theme. Integration allows students to see the relevance of sustainability in different contexts, fostering a comprehensive understanding of its importance in diverse fields.

Increasingly, the scales are falling from the eyes of many. Getting out of the classroom and doing, more often physical, can have a profound effect on how we connect to the flora and fauna that surrounds us. Enabling experiential learning opportunities allows students to engage directly with sustainability issues. Whether through field trips, hands-on projects, or community initiatives, we provide real-world experiences that deepen students' understanding of sustainable practices.

One of the barriers faced is the question 'why?' 'What benefit to me/my students' progress? It's a valid question. Curriculum pressures are ever present. Ignoring subject specialisms, teaching sustainability involves encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills. No one can argue against that, can they? Teachers are experts at creating learning environments that challenge students to analyse complex issues, consider multiple perspectives, and develop creative solutions to real-world sustainability challenges.

It goes without saying, we have a significant influence on students' behaviour and attitudes. By incorporating sustainability education, we inspire environmentally conscious habits and lifestyles. This can lead to a ripple effect as students carry these values into their homes and communities. Consider, a little over 2 years ago NTC had a team of Eco leaders numbering around 6-8 students. Today that number stands around 50.

Education is a long-term investment in creating a sustainable society. We contribute to building a culture of sustainability by fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship among students. This is a core element of our moral contract. We are not just knowledge banks. Far greater influence and impact is what we do in respect of the building of attitudes we foster as students grow into adults, allowing them to apply sustainable principles in their personal and professional lives.

Sustainability education must involve a global perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness of the world. Teachers can help students develop a sense of global citizenship by understanding their role in a broader, interconnected world and appreciating the global implications of their actions.

Perhaps the number 1 skill we have is our skill at adapting teaching methods to the needs and interests of our students. This adaptability allows us to craft sustainability education to the unique characteristics of our classrooms and communities, making the learning experience more relevant and engaging.

So, are teachers best placed for teaching sustainability? If not teachers, then who? Our role is that of shaping young minds, using our ability to integrate sustainability across disciplines, influencing behaviour and attitudes, ultimately contributing to the long-term goal of creating a more sustainable and responsible society. We are not alone, the bigger job is to get governments, multi-nationals, NGOs and a host of others to agree and align. That is the bigger challenge. The simple part is knowing that we are in great danger - the science is screaming that hitting 1.5 degrees is a turning point. Going beyond 2 and 3 degrees rise in global temperatures will create a future and planet much different from now.