Sustainability Policy

September 2026

Scoil Mhuire Effin

Sustainability Policy Statement

Scoil Mhuire, Effin

1. Introduction and Policy Context

Scoil Mhuire National School is committed to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and to supporting pupils to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to contribute to a more sustainable future. This Sustainability Policy Statement provides a whole-school framework for building on existing good practice and identifying priorities for further development.

The policy is informed by the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development - ESD to 2030 and reflects the understanding that sustainability has three equal and interconnected pillars: environmental, social and economic sustainability. The school also recognises the importance of whole-school action, pupil participation, community engagement and practical learning.

2. School Vision and Ethos

In keeping with the ethos of Scoil Mhuire, the school seeks to nurture care for one another, care for our community and responsible stewardship of the natural environment. Sustainability is understood as part of creating a healthy, inclusive and responsible school community in which pupils can learn, play and flourish.

Our vision is to embed sustainable thinking and action across teaching and learning, pupil leadership, school operations, use of resources and the development of the school grounds. We aim to give pupils meaningful opportunities to contribute ideas, take responsibility, work collaboratively and experience the positive impact of their actions.

3. Our Sustainability Journey

Scoil Mhuire has an established record of engagement with environmental sustainability. The school participates actively in the Green-Schools programme and has achieved five Green Flags to date: Litter & Waste, Water, Energy, Travel and Biodiversity. The school is currently working towards the Global Citizenship - Energy theme.

Existing sustainability practices include:

- recycling throughout the school;
- a compost bin in each classroom, with compostable material transferred to a larger outdoor composter;
- a school garden and polytunnel used each year to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables;
- a raised bed for each class, giving every class responsibility for planting and caring for its own growing area;
- classes taking turns during the year to help maintain different areas of the school grounds;
- multiple bug hotels, bee-friendly areas and wildflower planting to support biodiversity and pollinators;
- bird nesting boxes positioned around the school grounds to support local birdlife and biodiversity;
- an existing outdoor classroom which supports outdoor teaching and learning;
- a pupil Green-Schools Committee which meets regularly and has specific sustainability responsibilities.

These practices provide a strong foundation for further development and demonstrate that sustainability is already part of everyday school life rather than a stand-alone initiative.

4. Green-Schools, Pupil Voice and Leadership

Pupil participation is central to sustainability in Scoil Mhuire. The Green-Schools Committee meets regularly and helps to ensure that the school community continues to make responsible and sustainable choices.

Committee members are assigned individual jobs and responsibilities. These include supporting energy-saving behaviours, encouraging responsible use of lights and equipment, monitoring agreed practices and promoting awareness among their peers. Through these roles, pupils develop leadership, responsibility, communication skills and an understanding that sustainable development depends on everyday actions.

The school is also establishing a Student Council to further strengthen pupil voice and participation in school life. The Student Council will provide an additional forum through which pupils can share ideas, raise issues and contribute to decisions that affect them. Where relevant, the Student Council and Green-Schools Committee may work together on sustainability priorities and initiatives, helping to ensure that pupil perspectives inform whole-school planning and action.

The school will continue to seek pupil views when developing sustainability initiatives. Where appropriate, pupils will participate in surveys, audits, design activities, monitoring, planting, maintenance, peer-to-peer learning and evaluation of projects.

5. Environmental Sustainability

Scoil Mhuire will continue to promote environmental responsibility through the following areas:

5.1 Waste, Recycling and Composting

The school will continue to reduce unnecessary waste, recycle appropriately and maintain its classroom and outdoor composting systems. Pupils will be encouraged to understand why waste prevention, reuse, recycling and composting are important and to take responsibility for correct practices.

5.2 Biodiversity and School Grounds

The school will maintain and, where practical, enhance its wildflower areas, pollinator-friendly spaces, bug hotels and other biodiversity features. The school grounds will be used as a living resource through which pupils can observe seasonal change, habitats, plants, insects and the impact of caring for local biodiversity.

5.3 Garden, Polytunnel and Growing

A teacher currently oversees the school garden and polytunnel, with active involvement from the Green-Schools Committee and individual classes. Each class has its own raised bed and is responsible for planting and caring for it. Classes also take turns maintaining areas of the grounds throughout the year. These experiences allow pupils to participate directly in growing, food awareness, biodiversity and care of shared spaces.

5.4 Energy

Energy conservation is supported through the Green-Schools Committee and pupil responsibilities. Pupils help promote energy-conscious behaviour, including switching off lights and equipment when they are not required. Work towards the Global Citizenship - Energy Green Flag will provide further opportunities to investigate energy use and connect local actions with wider global sustainability.

5.5 Water

The school will encourage responsible use of water and will consider practical opportunities to reduce waste and use water efficiently. Water conservation may also be explored through curriculum work, gardening and future sustainability projects.

6. Social Sustainability, Inclusion and Wellbeing

Scoil Mhuire recognises that sustainable development also concerns quality of life, inclusion, wellbeing and the strength of the school community. Sustainability initiatives should therefore provide opportunities for participation, cooperation, positive relationships and shared responsibility.

- Sustainability activities will be planned to be as inclusive and accessible as practicable for pupils of different ages, needs and abilities.
- Pupils will be encouraged to work collaboratively and learn from one another.
- Pupil voice will inform relevant decisions about the school environment and sustainability priorities.
- Shared spaces will be developed and used in ways that promote respect, belonging, positive interaction and wellbeing.
- The school will value both active outdoor play and opportunities for quieter social interaction and calm play.

7. Economic Sustainability and Responsible Resource Use

The school will seek to use financial and material resources responsibly. Purchasing decisions will take account, where practical, of value for money, durability, long-term usefulness, repair and reuse, and the environmental impact of materials.

- reduce unnecessary printing and photocopying where appropriate;
- reuse and repurpose classroom and school resources where safe and practical;
- consider durable, recycled, recyclable or sustainably sourced materials when suitable;
- reduce reliance on unnecessary single-use materials;
- care for school equipment so that resources have a long useful life;
- consider opportunities for donated or reused materials where appropriate and safe.

8. Teaching and Learning

Education for Sustainable Development will be integrated across teaching and learning where appropriate. Relevant opportunities may arise through Science, Geography, SPHE, Mathematics, Language, Visual Arts, PE, Aistear and other areas of the curriculum.

The school will prioritise active and experiential learning where possible. The garden, polytunnel, outdoor classroom, biodiversity areas and wider school grounds provide authentic contexts for observation, investigation, measurement, growing, creative work, discussion and problem-solving.

Teachers will be encouraged to share relevant resources and good practice and to engage with suitable ESD professional learning opportunities as they arise.

9. Sustainable School Operations

Sustainability will be considered in day-to-day school operations as well as in classroom learning. This includes responsible energy and water use, waste management, purchasing, care of school resources and management of the school grounds.

Where appropriate, pupils will be involved in monitoring practices so that sustainable behaviour is visible, understood and shared across the school community.

10. Sustainable and Active Travel

As a rural school, Scoil Mhuire recognises that travel options differ for families and that walking or cycling may not be practical for all pupils. The school will nevertheless promote awareness of sustainable and active travel where feasible, alongside road safety and responsible travel choices.

11. Community Engagement

The school values the contribution of parents, the Board of Management and the wider local community. Sustainability projects may, where appropriate, involve local knowledge, volunteering, donated or reused materials, planting expertise or links with community groups and organisations.

Community involvement will support pupils in understanding that sustainable development extends beyond the school and depends on cooperation between individuals, families, schools and local communities.

12. Priority Action for 2026/27: Sustainable Outdoor Social, Play and Wellbeing Space

Building on the school's existing outdoor facilities, including the outdoor classroom, school garden and polytunnel, Scoil Mhuire has identified the planning and development of a dedicated outdoor social and seating area as a priority for 2026/27, subject to available funding and resources.

A corner of the school field has been identified as a potential location. The school intends to consult with pupils and explore how this area could be developed into an attractive, inclusive and sustainable outdoor environment where pupils can sit, socialise, engage in calm and cooperative play, spend time with peers and connect with nature. The extent and timeframe of the development will depend on available funding and resources. If developed, the space will be available during break times as well as for suitable organised activities during the school day.

The new space will broaden the range of outdoor experiences available to pupils and support the school's commitment to social wellbeing, inclusion, pupil voice and environmental sustainability.

Subject to consultation, suitability and available funding, elements may include:

- durable freestanding outdoor seating and/or picnic-style seating;
- natural or sustainably sourced seating elements where safe and appropriate;
- native, pollinator-friendly or sensory planting;
- planters or other features that help define and soften the space;
- simple resources for calm, cooperative or creative outdoor play;

- pupil-designed signage or artwork promoting inclusion, care and sustainability;
- appropriate storage for resources associated with the space.

Pupil voice will be incorporated into the planning of the space. Pupils may contribute through surveys, drawings, design suggestions, voting on appropriate ideas, planting, signage, agreed expectations for use and ongoing care. This will ensure that the project is educational and participatory as well as providing a valuable new school space.

13. Links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The school recognises that local action contributes to wider global goals. Sustainability work in Scoil Mhuire will make age-appropriate connections with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals where these links arise naturally in teaching, Green-Schools work and whole-school initiatives.

- SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being: supporting positive relationships, outdoor activity, wellbeing and inclusive social spaces.
- SDG 4 - Quality Education: providing meaningful, action-orientated Education for Sustainable Development across the curriculum.
- SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy: developing awareness of energy use through Green-Schools and the Global Citizenship - Energy theme.
- SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities: encouraging pupils to care for shared spaces and contribute positively to their school and local community.
- SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production: promoting waste reduction, recycling, composting, reuse and responsible purchasing.
- SDG 13 - Climate Action: building understanding of responsible choices and the relationship between local actions and wider environmental challenges.
- SDG 15 - Life on Land: supporting biodiversity through growing, wildflowers, pollinator-friendly areas, bug hotels and care of the school grounds.

The school does not intend to address every SDG through every initiative. Relevant goals will be selected to help pupils understand how practical actions in school connect with sustainable development locally and globally.

14. Sustainability Action Plan 2026/27

Priority	Key actions	Lead / participants	Timeframe	Evidence of progress
Policy	Consult on, adopt and publish the Sustainability Policy Statement.	Principal, staff, Board	2026/27	Policy adopted and published; review date set.
Green-Schools	Continue Green-Schools work and progress Global Citizenship - Energy.	Green-Schools Committee, staff, pupils	Ongoing	Committee records, actions and Green-Schools progress.
Pupil leadership	Maintain regular committee meetings and	Green-Schools Committee	Ongoing	Participation, jobs completed, pupil feedback.

	individual pupil sustainability jobs.			
Waste & compost	Maintain recycling and classroom-to-outdoor composting systems.	Whole school	Ongoing	Routine checks and pupil participation.
Growing & biodiversity	Maintain raised beds, garden, polytunnel, wildflowers, bee-friendly areas and bug hotels.	Teacher lead, classes, Green-Schools Committee	Seasonal / ongoing	Planting records, photographs, observations.
Energy	Promote energy-conscious behaviour and pupil monitoring.	Green-Schools Committee, whole school	Ongoing	Energy actions and awareness activities.
Outdoor social space	Consult pupils and develop a sustainable outdoor social, play and wellbeing space in the school field.	Pupils, staff, management; community where appropriate	2026/27	Pupil consultation, photographs, use of space, feedback.
Community	Invite appropriate community support for sustainability initiatives where beneficial.	School community	As appropriate	Record of participation / collaboration.
Annual planning	Review progress and identify sustainability priorities for the following school year.	Principal, staff, Green-Schools Committee and pupils	End of school year / start of next year	Updated annual Sustainability Action Plan.

15. Monitoring and Evaluation

The school will use practical evidence to monitor progress. Depending on the initiative, this may include pupil and staff feedback, Green-Schools records, photographs, participation levels, evidence of planting and growing, biodiversity observations, recycling and composting practices, energy-related actions and use of the outdoor social space.

For the proposed outdoor social, play and wellbeing space, baseline pupil views may be gathered before development and compared with feedback after the space is established. The school may also observe patterns of use during break times and consider whether the space is meeting its intended aims of inclusion, positive social interaction and wellbeing.

16. Communication, Awareness and Celebration

Scoil Mhuire will seek to make sustainability visible across the school community so that pupils understand current priorities, recognise progress and can share responsibility for agreed actions.

Communication methods may include Green-Schools displays or noticeboards, assemblies, pupil announcements, classroom discussion, signage, the school website or newsletter, photographs of projects and communication with parents. The methods used will depend on the initiative and the needs of the school.

Pupil achievements and progress in sustainability will be acknowledged and celebrated. Sharing successful actions will help reinforce positive habits and encourage participation across the whole school.

17. Roles and Responsibilities

- The Board of Management will support the implementation and review of the policy within available resources.
- The designated Sustainability/ESD Coordinator, where appointed, will coordinate the annual action plan, liaise with the Green-Schools Committee and share progress with the Principal.
- The Principal will support whole-school implementation and ensure sustainability remains part of school planning.
- Teachers will integrate ESD into learning where appropriate and support agreed whole-school initiatives.
- The teacher overseeing the garden/polytunnel will coordinate this area with support from pupils and colleagues.
- The Green-Schools Committee will provide pupil leadership, carry out agreed sustainability jobs and promote good practice.
- All pupils will be encouraged to participate in sustainable practices and care for shared spaces.
- Parents and the wider community may be invited to support appropriate initiatives and volunteering opportunities.

18. Implementation, Publication and Review

The Sustainability Policy Statement provides the long-term framework for the school's approach to ESD. To keep the policy practical and responsive, the school will identify appropriate sustainability priorities for each school year through an annual Sustainability Action Plan.

The annual action plan will take account of Green-Schools priorities, pupil voice, curriculum opportunities, the needs of the school grounds and available resources. Progress on the annual Sustainability Action Plan will be reviewed towards the end of each school year, normally in June, and will inform priorities for the following year.

Following consultation, this Sustainability Policy Statement will be presented to the Board of Management for consideration and adoption. Once adopted, the school intends to publish the statement through its normal communication channels and on the school website.

The Sustainability Policy Statement will receive its first formal review in October 2027 and will be reviewed periodically thereafter, or sooner if required. The annual Sustainability Action Plan will be reviewed separately each school year to reflect progress, changing school needs, Green-Schools priorities and developments in Education for Sustainable Development.

Date adopted by Board of Management:	15/10/2026
Chairperson:	Mary Power
Principal:	Anne-Maria Murphy
Date published:	16/10/2026
Review date:	October 2027