

# Putting the environment at the heart of the curriculum

Phoebe Doyle

Teacher Ian Warder has helped to renew the Eco Schools Green Flag status at St Christopher's School. Photograph: Ian Warder



Speaking to Ian Warder it's no surprise he once taught at [Summerhill](#) in Suffolk, perhaps

the UK's most famous 'alternative' independent school. Indeed his eldest children went there and it was when they left that he left for [St Christopher School](#); this was 2003. There he took up as a regular maths teacher, but quickly expressed an interest to become involved in the environmental work which was already thriving under teacher [Betsy Reid](#), who became something of a green hero to him.

Since taking over, and renewing the school's [Eco Schools Green Flag](#) accreditation (Ian is now an assessor for the Eco [Schools](#) Award) he's not had time to stand still. From creating a school wormery, which he says composts much of the school's waste, to leading campaigns with titles ranging from the simple Ban the Bag to the intriguing Biscuits for Batteries Ian's only complaint is that he just wishes there was more time.

A [Quaker](#) who practises mindfulness and teaches meditation and [tai chi](#) in his spare time, believes: "Learning about the effect we have on the rest of the world as a result of the way we live, and how we can choose to change this, is the most important lesson we can possibly teach."

Father of a new young family (he has three girls all under the age of four) Ian says: "Empowering children to be self-aware and confident, to try and create a fairer, more just and sustainable world is what I hope to do, as I try and do the same myself. [Teaching](#) children to be kind and respectful to each other is a fantastically important opportunity that is continually challenging, refreshing and rewarding. What we teach is important, but so is how we do it."

So, Ian Warder is no ordinary teacher. But then [St Christopher School](#) in Hertfordshire is

no ordinary independent school. This school is a 100% vegetarian and teachers here are Linda and Jeremy – not a sir or miss within ear shot. Here the school is committed to creating mindful citizens, active members of the community, critical thinkers. And the lessons learnt here by the privileged pupils are having a real impact.

For starters, the school has interactive assemblies, dedicated solely to environmental topics, and it's serious stuff. "We cover issues like hazards of incineration, economy and the environment and reduction of carbon footprint," Ian says.

It's not all discussions though. "It's not all doom and gloom. It needs to be fun for the young people to get engaged and enthused." And Ian feels this essentially means getting them to discover for themselves.

Last summer, for instance, the school had No Power Hour when all the electricity went off. He said: "Through such activities they're learning why they need to be responsible, about how green issues will affect them if they don't take action."

Science is learnt through testing and experimenting around observations and questions that have been raised organically. One such example is the student's uncertainty around whether paper towels or hand-driers would be more environmentally friendly. This became their topic... real science for a real problem.

(The fast-drying dryers won the environmental debate, by the way.)

Being political, finding confidence to question about environmental issues, is a clear objective of Ian's. "A group of students organised a petition that collected more than 300 signatures in 2011, which was sent to our local MP, asking him to question the government's stance on the effects of pesticides on bee populations."

In March 2011, the school hosted the first [UK Plant for the Planet](#) conference and climate ambassador training. Around 80 young people from 15 local schools attended and as a result, and Plant for the Planet now has children representing it in 98 countries. Its message has two themes: global warming and climate justice. Climate justice is the idea that it is only fair and just that each of us in the world should have an equal amount of allowable CO2 emissions.

"The conference is a day of information, but also practical training in public speaking, planning and taking action. It's empowering for young people and inspiring for adults to see," says Ian. "An essential action that emerged is the need to plant more trees to increase the carbon 'sink' on the planet. The school has done fundraisers, talked to other students about it and planted some trees at school. The five presenters have gone on to do a second conference for six schools in Edinburgh, with more conference presentations planned for next year."

Ian is under no illusions about the fortune bestowed on the students here. "Of course we're lucky. We know that. We've got fantastic grounds – even an orchard which the children harvest, making apple juice to sell.

"We are anything but complacent though. We like to talk to other schools about our work and theirs." He firmly believes that the curriculum grows from the students and their wishes to improve not only their world but the world around them too.

**We would love to hear about environmental initiatives going on at your school. If you would like to see your school profiled on our green pages, email [Emma](#)**

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