

# LEADERSHIP for SUSTAINABILITY



SAVING THE PLANET  
ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME



DAVID DIXON



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The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations ... human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen. Pope Francis (2015, pp. 39, 43)

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I dedicate this book to my partner, Zaria Greenhill, for her unrelenting support. Also, to my children, Sequoia and Robb, who are a constant reminder that the planet needs to be future-proofed.

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# FOREWORD BY LORD KNIGHT OF WEYMOUTH

In my three years as minister of state for schools in England, it was a regular irritation that I was constantly fending off people who wanted to add yet another thing into the curriculum. It felt like the answer to every social problem was to teach about it in schools. But, occasionally, something comes along that needs time and space. For me, embedding sustainability into our school curriculum is a no-brainer.

International surveys of young people consistently tell us that they have little confidence that they can influence climate change (Schleicher, 2021). Research also shows growing levels of climate anxiety among children (Reuters, 2020); they feel ill-equipped to change what is otherwise a bleak future in a rapidly depleting environment.

When I talk to teachers and school leaders, they would like to be able to include more education for sustainability in the timetable. Some manage to use their curriculum freedoms, and other flexibilities, to go beyond the straitjacket of accountability and deliver on this aspiration. But they are exceptional leaders.

A few years ago, I was at an event in Leeds to discuss education change. I met Mark Moorhouse, the then head teacher at Matthew Moss High School in Rochdale. He talked about some of the innovations he had led in his school. Asked how he found the time and space given the constraints of league tables and inspections, he replied that he looked for where the rules did not apply. He realised that the rules only applied during the school day, and so added a sixth voluntary day for self-directed learning. Within the school day he used his other freedoms and flexibility to continue the innovation.

It takes unusual courage as school leaders to keep asking 'Where does it say I can't do that?' We can't wait for all leaders to be as imaginative as Mark. The need for

education for sustainability is urgent. It needs to be at scale and to touch every child. That is why I have been working on a top-down solution. In recent months I have been working with a range of education and environmental organisations to try to get sustainability and climate change education mandated in schools in England. I have introduced a private members bill into the UK parliament to try to achieve this by changing the law on the aims of the national curriculum. I also want to follow Italy's lead and transform citizenship into sustainable citizenship.

While I have been encouraged by cross-party support for this measure, I have been disappointed by the government's response. Education ministers do not support this curriculum change and argue that schools can do more if they want to build on the basics required by the national curriculum.

I will keep pressuring ministers with my colleagues in parliament and beyond. However, given that they are not persuaded at the very time when they are hosting COP26 in the UK, I do not see ministers giving way in a hurry. We therefore need other options to meet the demands of pupils, teachers and school leaders to better prepare them to live sustainable lives that afford the possibility of a successful future. Perhaps it is time for a bottom-up solution.

*Leadership for Sustainability* is the right book at the right time. What most head teachers and principals want is inspiration and practical advice regarding how to embed sustainability in their schools. David Dixon draws on his own experience as a school leader to show what is possible now.

This book challenges leaders to use their powers over the curriculum to change what and how young people learn. The author shows the potential to not only move the school estate to carbon zero but also to realise the learning from that shift. Finally, in the spirit of sustainability, he shows the critical role schools play in leading behaviour change across their communities.

The path David Dixon offers is exciting. It is not a narrow path; he sets out an approach that allows for the different context of each school in its diverse setting. My excitement is due to the fact that leaders now have a reference tool to help them build their own intrinsic motivation to do the right thing for their whole school communities. Rather than waiting to be told by ministers and parliamentarians, this book frees up schools to get on with it. I hope they read and act. We can't afford to wait.

**Lord Knight of Weymouth**





## FOREWORD BY PAUL VARE

There are two reasons why this book is both important and original, so I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to highlight them. One cliché that I won't trot out is the claim that the book is timely. For sure, its publication comes hot on the heels of the COP26 climate change conference held here in the UK and coincides with the Department for Education's launch of a new sustainability and climate change education strategy for England, but even the publishers would admit that such timing is fortuitous. This book will always be timely, not simply because the themes it addresses have been with us for decades and become more urgent with each passing year; but because there was never a time when they were not critical to our current and future well-being.

Getting back to those two points; firstly, this work is important because it distils years of research and experience. Those of us who have been working in this field for decades will recognise the concerns raised so eloquently and may be familiar with many of David's sources of inspiration. But, here, they are brought together in a way that makes them accessible to the next generation of professionals with whom we now entrust our young people. Naturally, teachers and education leaders will want to make their own discoveries – and mistakes – but there is a depth and richness to this Noah's ark of material that provides the perfect resource bank to inform future voyages of discovery.

The second point I would highlight is the book's originality. The great contribution that it makes is the author's perspective itself. As a head teacher who has put these ideas into action over many years, David speaks with an authority that few authors on this topic possess. This is not simply a repository of useful tools; it is also a manual offering practical ways of working with these ideas, with real pupils in real schools.

Ultimately, this book is about leadership; that is, it illuminates a way forward through what might seem an impenetrable web of complex overlapping issues.

Despite years of treaties and conventions, the carbon load of our atmosphere still rises, inequalities between peoples grow, species loss continues apace and irreplaceable habitats are lost. It may feel like it is all too late; for business as usual, it certainly is. That makes it all the more critical that our unsustainable system of human development changes now. The radical transformation that is required cannot be an overnight phenomenon, and neither will it take a single recognisable form. The system will change because all of us – who, after all, constitute the system – are changing ourselves in myriad unforeseen ways. To prepare our young people for this transformation, rather than for a world that cannot be sustained, education must change too. This is the message conveyed in the book's subtitle. The change may be radical but it will happen one school at a time, and this book suggests how.

In his introduction, David describes his own shame in taxing the Earth with his past lifestyle, but that is as far as the guilt-trip goes. While this work reflects years of learning, it is forward-looking and positive in its outlook. The author may no longer be leading a school, but be in no doubt – in the following pages he continues to lead the way.

**Paul Vare**



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Finally, I am eternally grateful to Geoff Bowen, a lecturer at Ilkley College, for showing my student self the vital importance of environmental education locally and globally and how it ensures 'learning for life' on many levels.





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# GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACEs	adverse childhood experiences
CO <sub>2</sub> e	carbon dioxide equivalent
CPD	continuing professional development
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfID	Department for International Development
ECEfS	early childhood education for sustainability
ESD	education for sustainable development
ELSA	English Learning and Sustainability Alliance
EYFS	early years foundation stage
G7	Group of Seven
GCDA	Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency
GDP	gross domestic product
GENE	Global Education Network Europe
GLP	Global Learning Programme
INSET	in-service training
kWh	kilowatt hour
LEEF	London Environmental Educators Forum
NAEE	National Association for Environmental Education

NGO	non-governmental organisation
PSHE	personal, social, health and economic (education)
PTA	parent–teacher association
RSE	relationships and sex education
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAL	social and emotional aspects of learning
SEEd	Sustainability and Environmental Education
SELCE	South East London Community Energy
SMSC	spiritual, moral, social and cultural
SNAG	school nutrition action group
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WEIRD	Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic
WRAP	Waste Resources Action Programme
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature



# INTRODUCTION

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Today catastrophe is well on its way, it is losing no time at all, but education seems still unable to get started, has indeed not even readjusted itself to start. The race may, after all, prove a walk-over for disaster.

**H. G. Wells (1942, p. 63)**

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When I relinquished primary school headship after leading two schools (three if you count an amalgamation) over 20 years, it was tempting to think that I deserved to sit back, potter in the garden and do some part-time school improvement consultancy to pay for extended out-of-season holidays. I am, after all, a middle-class baby boomer (those born between 1946 and 1964) who, like some of my peers, had it all in terms of homeownership, relatively high disposable income and an index-linked pension. Wasn't I therefore 'entitled' to an easier life after a stressful time in schools in very challenging circumstances?

The reason why I chose to sweat over a hot laptop to produce this book can be found in the realisation that I'm entitled to nothing. Why? Because my life to date has likely taken much more out of planet Earth's biosphere than has been replenished. This is starkly illustrated by Earth Overshoot Day.<sup>1</sup> This 'marks the date when humanity's demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year'.<sup>2</sup>

I think of my numerous foreign holidays by plane and the hundreds of thousands of miles I've driven. This is compounded by my consumption of processed food with high carbon and water footprints, living in energy-thirsty houses and lazily using cheap products procured from ethically dubious sources. I also wince about

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1 To determine the date of Earth Overshoot Day, Global Footprint Network combines environmental data from many sources to assess humanity's resource situation. See <https://www.footprintnetwork.org>.

2 See <https://www.overshootday.org>.

the amount of single-use plastic I've consumed and how many cheap electronic devices and articles of clothing I've discarded without thought for how they were manufactured or disposed of. All this is nothing compared to bringing up two children in one of the most prosperous areas of the world: children themselves requiring vast planetary resources.<sup>3</sup> I've also benefitted from countless outdoor pursuits and aesthetic pleasures derived from the natural world, with some like skiing causing much damage.<sup>4</sup>

I'm as guilty of obliviousness, self-justification, obfuscation and denial of my personal responsibilities towards our planet as the next person.<sup>5</sup> Like many, I've also put my environmental concerns into a box marked 'to be dealt with later' while carrying on regardless. I'm one of the people benefitting from a WEIRD society – Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (Henrich, 2021) – that instigated Enlightenment thinking, selfish individualism and associated superiority complexes.<sup>6</sup> Like many others in 'developed' nations, I've felt a misplaced sense of entitlement to my spoils, as if this was the natural way of things.

Having had a background in environmental education, I was aware earlier than most of today's headline environmental problems. This led me to put sustainability increasingly at the heart of my work, while endeavouring to pursue a low-impact lifestyle. But, as you can see from my past accumulation of overconsumption, I'm not preaching from an ivory tower of smug virtue. I sometimes did my best, but hindsight has shown me that it wasn't good enough. Suddenly, the distant deadlines for action of my youth have come uncomfortably close, along with a sinking feeling that some have passed. So, it's all too apparent that the social and

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3 On average, in developed nations, having a child creates 58.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) per year and meat eating 800 kg of CO<sub>2</sub>e per year. See Wynes and Nicholas (2017) for other things we do which cause high emissions.

4 For the detrimental impact of skiing, see Beaudry (2019).

5 Denial is a fascinating area of psychology. To illustrate this in relation to this subject matter, see the account of a community whose glacier was rapidly melting, but didn't want to address climate change in Kari Marie Norgaard's (2011) book *Living in Denial*.

6 The Enlightenment (sometimes referred to as the Age of Reason) emerged in Europe in the late 17th century and was the basis for the rapid developments in science, technology, economics and industry that have delivered the many material benefits we see today. The 'rational' thinking and belief in 'objective facts' behind it also increased the questioning of long-held religious and other traditional cultural beliefs, including regarding how societies should be run. New artistic forms also emerged during this time and later – both because of the Enlightenment (for example, realistic paintings depicting anatomical accuracy, science themes and everyday life) and as a reaction against it (such as Romanticism in the late 18th and early 19th century; the Arts and Crafts movement in the later part of the 19th and the early 20th century; and, in the early 20th century, Dadaism). Its modernist philosophy promoted the notion of continual linear progress and this greatly accelerated unsustainable human existence by magnifying our exploitative tendencies and the rift between ourselves and nature. It made people forget that we are part of a finite and precious world.

economic activities which are depleting planetary resources at an alarming rate need to change course as we enter the uncertainties of the geological Anthropocene epoch. National Geographic says: 'the current epoch is called the Holocene, which began 11,700 years ago after the last major ice age'.<sup>7</sup> This is being rapidly superseded by the Anthropocene Epoch, triggered by profound changes to the planet's biosphere caused by human activity. This shows that, like asteroid strikes and volcanic eruptions, humans are radically and detrimentally changing the biochemical make-up of the planet. It should be noted that not all humans are culpable as there are many billions who live well within planetary limits (unfortunately, in abject poverty due to exploitation and/or neglect by the people who live well beyond those limits).

Another strong motivation for writing this book is raw fear, enhanced by having a young daughter, who is 6 years old at the time of writing and might well be alive at the end of the century. Way before this, by the time she's an adult, environmental tipping points may well have been reached (some say that they already have) and I literally fear for her life and her generation, let alone those coming later. She may inherit some material advantage from my estate, but this will literally be worth nothing if civilisation crumbles due to the biosphere being unable to bear the burdens human beings place upon it.

Despite mending many of my damaging ways, I still owe the planet a substantial debt. So, if you see this book as a guilt trip, I suppose it is. At least I'm not in denial!

## SIMPLE ARITHMETIC

Saving the planet one school at a time might seem an extravagant claim. But imagine if every school *really was* a sustainable school in the widest sense, as I will outline in Chapter 1. The difference this would make to education and wider society would be inestimable – although let's try. My calculation goes as follows: one sustainable head teacher with a school roll of, say, 500 pupils, with 50 staff, would not only have the potential to influence those 550 individuals, but also their families, extended families and friends, which could take the figure up to several thousand. If the school had a high profile in this field, with the way social media works, it could reach many more, perhaps tens of thousands. If all the schools in

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/anthropocene>.

England did the same, through six degrees of separation, we're talking about a reach of millions across the country and beyond.

But who are the planet savers needed to lead sustainable schools? In Chapter 2, I characterise leaders for sustainability as guardians of the long-term future who can inspire others to join them by providing opportunities for co-creating new solutions. They model types of thinking and behaviour which encourage everyone in the school to unleash their minds to avoid blind acceptance of what is 'normal' (much of the present normal being a planet wrecker). These leaders are upbeat and solution-focused through holistic means, offering a bright future for everyone. They have a strong moral compass – being values-led – and display high levels of empathy and courage. Above all, they are authentic rather than mass-produced cardboard cut-outs. These leaders think outside of the box, while recognising that the box, in the form of the present education sector, can't be ignored. They break away from unnecessary conformity and subtly game the system for the benefit of all. It's all about wanting everyone to thrive and flourish (Critchley, 2019) rather than just survive.<sup>8</sup> I emphasise that education leaders don't need to be trapped by the accountability imposed by a national education service and that, rather than being a peripheral issue, having a sustainability ethos is really the only sensible option on many levels. A sustainability mindset can throw off the chains of compliance laid down by others for reasons of power and/or outdated processes and traditions.

## AGE OF STUPID?

Most baby boomers and many in succeeding generations have been living in cloud cuckoo land by perpetuating a myth that we should expect indefinite economic growth on a finite planet. Consequently, graphs illustrating the rise of greenhouse gases and species extinction show exponential trends. When cells in the body grow like this we call it cancer! And it's not as if greening the present economy or waiting for various techno-fixes or large-scale geoengineering will necessarily be our ultimate salvation (although aspects of these will be needed).<sup>9</sup> Just as

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8 In Valerie Hannon's (2017) thought-provoking book *Thrive* she argues that in order for more of us to really thrive, we need more disruptor leaders – especially in education – who challenge dominant damaging paradigms in schools and society generally.

9 See <https://www.geoengineeringwatch.org>.



importantly, we need a change of priorities within a change in our very culture. Schools should be at the vanguard of this change. Films such as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* and its sequel spell out in graphic detail the factual overview of our plight.<sup>10</sup> For me though, the 2009 film *The Age of Stupid* has more of an emotional impact. It's set in the environmentally ravaged year 2055 and centres on an old man who looks through archive film of our time and wonders why not enough was done to alleviate climate change. Thought-provoking and scary!

Our current stupid Western societal approach is also bound up with neoliberalism, which although in most forms advocates governance with rigid structures of laws, rules and regulations (unlike neoconservatism) promotes the idea that other issues (including climate change etc.) should be sorted out by market forces which harness the power of individual choice and technical innovation. Perhaps it could be our saviour if we had more time to play with!<sup>11</sup>

Most schools have tinges of green, but they're not really sustainable in the same way that wider society isn't. Schools with sustainability at their core can overcome this by becoming part of the zero-waste circular economy. This helps to bring consumption down to within the planet's ability to replenish and avoid overshoot. This is in contrast to the 'take-make-use-dump' linear model, escalated by the Industrial Revolution and based on the consumption of fossil fuels. A circular economy works in harmony with the biosphere, and if happiness isn't dependent on the consumption of ever more stuff, why should schools subscribe to the old unsustainable narrative? The practical ways of working towards this circularity feature in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. In particular, Chapter 4 shows how school buildings and grounds (officially referred to as 'the school estate'), when linked to the curriculum, can deliver fantastic learning opportunities through adding to biodiversity and showing in microcosm how a circular economy can work in reality.

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10 The scientific facts presented by Gore are largely irrefutable and should have scared us into change. Why haven't they? Once again, complex psychology is at large.

11 See George Monbiot's (2016) account of neoliberalism, and also David Harvey's (2005) book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Both are quite a revelation and shocking in their way.

## PERFECT HARMONY

Look out for the subject of harmony as it's a strand which runs throughout the book. Harmonious ecosystems work to their optimum, as do harmonious schools.<sup>12</sup> This is a challenge to achieve, but more than worth it.

Unfortunately, we are beset by a variety of linearities, many of which contribute to unsustainability. In Chapter 2, I highlight the problems with WEIRD linear/rational thinking in contrast to more rewarding ecological systems approaches. The novelist Hilary Mantel said, 'I don't dwell on time's arrow so much. I'm looking for what's cyclical' (The Guardian, 2020). Perhaps we should all do this a bit more.

In this light, Chapter 3 discusses decarbonising the curriculum by going through the similar and linked process of decolonising the curriculum. Both these elements can be seen as a reaction against the exploitative culture and structures of power that have dominated our society from time immemorial, through the mercenary exploitation of the biosphere and human resources for the advantage of the few at the expense of the many. This is very obvious when looking at the dark satanic mills of the 19th century and the dirty industry equivalents today, but due to complex and hidden supply chains, is not so obvious unless blatant examples are flagged up by the media. Most people who are comfortably above the breadline are happy with, or at least tolerate, our present economic system because it's assumed that it's the natural way of things. You don't have to look too far down the social stratification from me and you to see that this is crooked thinking, and it gets ever more crooked when applied to so-called 'developing' countries who suffer from our present and historic excesses (back to WEIRD psychology again!). This is why it's so important for schools to encourage young people to become critical thinkers, rather than just accept received wisdom.

It's significant that questioning the status quo regarding our use of the biosphere and lithosphere is becoming more mainstream, giving us cause for hope. Crimes against humanity in the form of genocide are being extended to ecocide (Higgins, 2015) as litigation has begun across the world to prosecute individuals and corporations for damaging the natural world on which we all depend. The rights of the planet are at last coming to the fore. Leaders for sustainability are part of this paradigm change.

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<sup>12</sup> Seek out The Prince of Wales, Tony Juniper and Ian Skelly's (2010) beautifully illustrated book, *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at the World*. The photographs alone are worth it.

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

To address our planetary challenges, there's a clamour for change from learners of all ages. For example, economics students at universities are rejecting classical and neoclassical economics in favour of sustainability-based 'new economics'. At the other end of the education spectrum, primary school children and their parents lobby for more local climate change action. Too often the response, if any, from education providers can be dismissive, too tokenistic or not joined up. Nonetheless, education leaders at all levels should be galvanised by the following three bodies of research from which I've taken excerpts (the full reports are well worth reading):

- 1 42% of young people aged 10–18 say they have learnt a little or hardly anything or nothing about the environment at school; 68% want to learn more about the environment and climate change; 49% would like to be more involved in projects or activities that help the environment; and 86% thought all schools and colleges should help pupils to do things to help the environment (Green Schools Project and NUS, 2019, p. 3–4).
- 2 70% of teachers think that the education system needs radical change for the times we live in; 69% think there should be more teaching about climate change in UK schools; and 75% feel they haven't received adequate training to educate students about climate change.<sup>13</sup>
- 3 77% of the general public said that learning about climate change should be part of the school curriculum.<sup>14</sup>

I feel it's rather shaming that many school leaders sit back and watch children and students taking the lead. Are they too compliant, risk-averse, cowed by The System or just too happy with the status quo? Ofsted, the school inspection body in England, is equally obtuse. For example, the English Learning and Sustainability Alliance (ELSA) lobbied Ofsted with the following suggestions and requests. That inspectors:

- 
- encourage reporting and look for evidence of learning for sustainability and suggest whole school approaches to it;

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<sup>13</sup> See [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/i6swtiz9ta/YG-Archive-02012020-OxfamClimateCrisis.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/i6swtiz9ta/YG-Archive-02012020-OxfamClimateCrisis.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/survey-results/daily/2020/01/22/d1cab/1>.

- look for integrated approaches to curriculum, behaviour and attitudes and personal development;
  - use the interview time with students to see how their education matches with their concerns about the future and the world.
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Furthermore, that Ofsted:

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- suggests CPD for whole school approaches’;
  - ‘quality of education’ judgements include educating for a socially responsible and sustainable world and link with Defra’s 25 Year Environment Plan (and Bill) and DfID’s Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning and, so that SDG4 is reported on in a holistic way. Scott (2019)
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To date, Ofsted has taken no notice of these recommendations.

The desire to live sustainably is also much more apparent across the general population. For example, the Climate Assembly UK, which is a branch of the Citizenship Assembly, came up with 25 recommendations in order of priority. Number one was: ‘Informing and educating everyone (the public, industry, individuals and government).’ Within the top 10 was the desire for ‘A joined-up approach across the system and all levels of society’ and ‘Local community engagement’ (Climate Assembly UK, 2020, p. 12). Members of this assembly were recruited at random from across different demographics, and this gives yet another mandate for a leader for sustainability in a school.

## FISH, FORFEITURE AND FROGS

Chapter 5 shows how leaders for sustainability have an in-depth knowledge of their catchment areas and the wider world, past and present. This provides added insight into the causes of many of our unsustainable tendencies, allowing an escape from the following syndromes. Although they can be viewed as clichés, I’ve found them to be useful points of reference.

'Shifting baseline syndrome' is a phrase first coined by Pauly (1995). He was an ecologist looking at fisheries and came to the conclusion that his peers tended to judge the health of fish stocks by comparing them with how they were at the start of their careers, rather than investigating further back through historical records. As a result, their findings didn't fully take account of the decline over time because the baseline was set too recently. McClenachan (2009) showed this by studying photographs of trophy fish caught off the coast of Florida. In the 1950s they were longer than a tall man. By the 2000s their average length was less than 30 cm. This concept has been used in many other ecological studies and also by writers such as Robert Macfarlane, when highlighting how children and adults today tend to know much less about the natural world and so value it less. They don't realise that it has diminished over time because they have no points of comparison (see also Soga and Gaston, 2018).



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It's good to see that an increasing number of younger people are overcoming shifting baseline syndrome in light of the climate emergency. They *do* realise what they're losing and wish to do something about it – often to the shame of their elders – as exemplified by Greta Thunberg's campaigns.

'Corporate memory loss' is a related concept. Gardener and Bainbridge (2006) found examples of this when experienced personnel left a company without fully passing on their knowledge to those remaining or new people coming in. This sometimes led to drops in health and safety standards and the malfunctioning of certain administrative systems. They said that there was nothing new in this; it had always occurred, particularly in periods of rapid change. To illustrate this, they quoted Santayana (1905): 'Progress, far from consisting in change, depends upon

retentiveness. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (Gardener and Bainbridge, 2006, p. 1). Change can also be mistaken for progress if we always think that bigger is better and that upgrades are beneficial. In the context of sustainability, this book argues that education should be part of a process of cultural change, enrichment and adaptation, rather than just promoting a narrow definition of 'progress'. This includes developing the wisdom to know what to retain, what to resist and what to adopt, otherwise our ability to cope is always in catch-up mode due to the 'rapidification' caused by technological advances.<sup>15</sup>

'Boiled frog syndrome' describes how if a frog is thrown into boiling water, it'll jump out immediately. If, however, it's placed into tepid water and the heat is gradually turned up, it'll be less likely to notice and will end up being compliantly boiled. This is a metaphor for any situation that is unacceptable, but which if introduced incrementally and surreptitiously will become the accepted norm. In my opinion, this is what has happened to many education leaders in England. They've been 'boiled', by being assimilated into a system which, although they might periodically grumble about it, generally assures compliance with its demands. This has led to a narrowing of the curriculum and the plummeting mental health of pupils and staff. Despite prevailing challenges, education should aim to help achieve the greater good for everyone in terms of physical safety, mental well-being and social justice. These can't exist on a sick planet and, conversely, a healthy planet needs well people in all senses. Well-being is also linked to school improvement (Rees, 2017), which is why it features prominently throughout this book.

I was depressed to hear a principal of a sixth-form college bemoaning the loss of exams due to the COVID-19 crisis. I paraphrase him here: 'These students have been in full-time education since the age of 4 and at the age of 18, at the *culmination of their schooling*, have been robbed of the chance of a university place and successful career.' He was displaying the classic signs of boiled frog syndrome. Is it really the case that a young person's time in school is all about the build-up to the exams they take between the ages of 16 and 18? Is the end product above the process? Shouldn't education be as much about 'drawing out' a child's originality (to return to the original etymological meaning) as 'putting in' and examining the way they retain this? Shouldn't education be a process of synthesis between

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15 In his second encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis (2015, p. 15) refers to an acceleration in the pace of life and work ('rapidification'), which causes anxiety to individuals, places strain on communities, and harms the environment.

educators and learners which produces a new and better culture? At the moment, it appears that we spend far too much time weighing the pig rather than feeding it!

## TALK IS CHEAP

There are myriad writers on education leadership, ranging from eminent academics to cultish gurus. I reference some of these, although I keep returning to the practical things we did in my own schools to embed sustainability and the effects these had. I not only aim to show the art of the possible, but also how we as leaders have a rich potential to deviate from the norm without jeopardising our positions or those of our colleagues. We can enhance what can be done on the ground to embed sustainability in the widest sense. It's difficult to provide hard and fast templates for this because each school is unique, but I suggest ways of operating which can be tailored to any situation. To provide context, I offer the five Cs of sustainability:

- **Captaincy.** Through an in-depth study of leaders in a wide variety of primary schools that achieved Eco-Schools Green Flag status, I distil what a leader for sustainability really looks like, how they operate and why their traits deserve a distinct and special leadership category more in keeping with facing up to current challenges. I give examples of whole-school approaches through systems thinking and planning frameworks for those who wish to embed sustainability, rather than see it as a bolt-on. Captains of sustainability lead from the front where necessary, but more often use distributive and servant methods of leadership to empower everyone for the greater good.
- **Curriculum.** Education for sustainable development (ESD) is explored and I give lots of practical examples of how it can enhance teaching and learning through cross-curricular approaches, while also enabling schools to tick the 'standards agenda' boxes. The value of learning via head, heart and hands is central to this process and exemplified in forest school practices. The thorny problem of sustainability bias is tackled. How can we enable children to deal with issues impartially, while also wishing them to live more sustainably?<sup>16</sup>

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16 See Tilbury (1997) for examples of using a head, heart, hands approach to help learn about environmental problems.

## A STIRRING AND INFORMATIVE GREENPRINT TO HELP SCHOOL LEADERS PLAY THEIR PART IN MAKING THEIR SCHOOLS MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AND BETTER PLACES TO LEARN FOR ALL.

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**Dr Paul S. Ganderton, Principal Consultant, Paul Ganderton Consulting, educator and environmental scientist**



**Dr David Dixon** was a full-time primary teacher for 15 years before becoming a head teacher for the following two decades. In that time, he promoted the twin causes of environmental education and sustainability, which formed the central ethos of his schools. David is now a freelance education consultant, specialising in curriculum and leadership and helping individual schools to link sustainability with school improvement more generally.

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