

The introduction of waste food recycling at St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Wesham

Overview

St Joseph's is a small primary school with 107 pupils on roll and 19 members of staff (6 teachers, 7 support assistants, 3 welfare/lunchtime assistants, 1 cook (LCC), 1 bursar, 1 site supervisor, 1 cleaner). On a typical day, approximately 60 children have a school meal with the majority paid for by the UIFSM grant and the rest of the children have a packed lunch brought in from home. The school meals are prepared on site in our small kitchen and all pupils eat together in the main hall utilising folding dining table units for seating. The cook and an assistant serve the food, the welfare assistants oversee meal consumption and the children are responsible for clearing away when they have finished eating which now includes segregating and disposing of uneaten food.

The journey

Step 1

Having attended a Chair's forum where waste management was discussed I decided to look at what went on in school and towards the end of the summer term in 2022 carried out a waste audit. It became apparent that only cardboard was being segregated and put into a separate container with everything else being directed to the general waste bin.



Step 2

I discussed the issue with the Headteacher who agreed that we needed to do something to improve things (not just because of our personal social responsibility for the environment but also as a Catholic school we have the "Laudato Si" encyclical from the Pope that we should "care for our common home" pricking our consciences. I checked the LCC Schools Portal "Waste and Recycling" pages for guidance but could not find any relevant information so I contacted some of the schools locally to ask what they were doing. In addition, as my daughter is a Deputy HT in a Special School in Lancaster, I decided to find out what they do and the query was then forwarded by her HT asking 12 of her associates. Without exception, the response was the same – all waste from food preparation and from meals was being directed to general waste.

Step 3

During the summer term, I researched what was being done across the UK in the hope of finding a Local Authority somewhere that had started to put something in place. Unfortunately, I didn't find what I was looking for but did discover that the requirement to undertake food waste recycling is governed by Law in Scotland and is a legislation proposal for the UK Government in 2023. I then looked for companies that were involved specifically in waste food recycling and found two who operate in the north west of England: - Biffa Waste Services Ltd and ReFood Ltd. I arranged meetings with representatives from both of the companies to understand the services they each provide and the associated cost.

- **Biffa** – integrated waste management service provider. Biffa collect all types of waste, which is segregated by the customer, and direct what they collect to either recycling centres or landfill. Food waste is collected but cannot be contaminated as they don't have the capability to “clean” the waste before it is sent to an anaerobic digestion plant. The rep was keen to put a contract in place for servicing all of the school's waste streams for which a discount could be offered and the cost for food waste would then be approximately £8 for each 240-litre bin collected.
- **ReFood** – dedicated food waste recycler utilising the company's anaerobic digestion plant. ReFood only collect food waste and accept small amounts of contamination. Anaerobic digestion creates methane gas which is then processed and finally used to drive generators that produce electricity for the national grid. Waste from the production of the biogas is transformed into bio-fertiliser for use on farm land. The cost for the collection of each 240-litre bin was quoted as £8.70.

I reported my findings to the Full Governing Body at the summer term meeting and it was agreed that we should implement waste food recycling even if the costs had a negative impact on the school's budget

Step 4

At the start of the autumn term, I held a discussion with the HT and the Learning Mentor who also has responsibility for directing the school's Eco Group which was set up a couple of years ago. We agreed that we would move forward utilising the service offered by ReFood Ltd; the justifications for selecting ReFood were that we could continue to use FBC for general waste and ReFood accept “packaging contamination” in the food waste having the capability to cleanse the waste prior to anaerobic digestion. To proceed with implementation, we adopted the following approach:

- Discussion held with the members of the Eco Group to introduce them to the problem of food waste in school and suggest that our food waste could be recycled using anaerobic digestion. The group were very enthusiastic and quickly established a sub-team to lead the project, giving themselves the name of “Earth Angels”. The team met to decide how to communicate the waste food recycling message to the whole school and created a small presentation based on

the ReFood Education Pack (located at <https://refood.co.uk/sectors/education/>). The team then set about raising money to purchase recycling bins for various locations across the school and used the profits from the sale of fair-trade confectionery to pay for them.

- Fylde Borough Council were contacted to ask them if the school could use the kerb side collection service to recycle glass, plastics, aluminium/foil containers, cardboard and paper. The Council agreed to the request and supplied 3 blue and 3 brown wheelie bins
- A contract with Green Oak Recycling (cardboard only collection service) was cancelled with the cancellation effective from the 01/01/2023. The cost for this service was £16 per calendar month and the saving due to the cancellation of the contract will be used to offset the cost of the waste food recycling or the purchase of any sundries required to support the scheme.
- The contract with Fylde Borough Council was amended so that collections of general waste would take place fortnightly rather than weekly i.e. there will be 20 collections during the academic year rather than 40. By reducing the number of collections, the cost reduced from £24 per month to £12 per month and the saving will be used to offset the cost of the waste food recycling or the purchase of any sundries required to support the scheme.
- The introduction of food waste recycling was discussed with the cook and her assistant and both agreed to implement appropriate changes so that the waste from food preparation and leftovers from meals would be directed to the ReFood recycling container.
- A contract was agreed with ReFood for the supply and collection of one 240 litre wheelie bin of food waste to be collected weekly at a cost of £8.70. Contract start date 01/01/2023. The monthly cost is £34.80 but we have “saved” £28.00 by making changes to recycling contracts which means that the budget will take a hit of £272 annually (£6.80 x 40). We believe that this is justified by the need to protect the environment and we will look for ways to reduce the amount of food waste we produce e.g. smaller portions, tighter control of the number of meals being made, educating parents about the content of packed lunches.
- At the start of the new term in January ReFood delivered the wheelie bin, the Earth Angels gave their presentation to the whole school and food waste recycling commenced

It is only a couple of weeks since we fully implemented the changes and have hit a few problems e.g. the lunchtime welfare staff don't think it is their responsibility to “police” the disposal of leftovers, the site supervisor thinks that segregating the waste has added more to her workload and the teaching staff/teaching assistants don't think that there is enough space in the staffroom kitchen area for the various bins. However, the Earth Angels are monitoring what is happening across the school by carrying out regular audits of the bins. Where problems are found they report them to the Learning Mentor

who either addresses the problem personally or provides the children with direction so that they can address the problem themselves.

