

## Criteria for Green Cool Schools

“Green Cool Schools” is a European network. Together we make schools greener and are committed to education for sustainable development. This is our contribution to shaping the future, curbing climate change, and advancing adaptation to it, and promoting biodiversity.

This document describes our idea of Green Cool Schools.










### Criteria

#### To join Green Cool Schools Network

1. The school has declared its membership of the Network and at the same time committed itself to the development goal of a Green Cool School.



#### Long-term development goal

2. The school has made a formal decision setting out its own goals for a Green Cool School. 
3. The school has set up a Green Team that coordinates the development process to become a Green Cool School and, if necessary, also supervises individual initiatives. 
4. The school has carried out an inventory of “green” issues - in particular the school grounds, their use as well as animal and plant species and biotopes. 
5. The school has implemented measures to maintain or expand greenery - in the outdoor area, on or in the school building. With it, the schools has 
  - a. included ideas, wishes and demands of students – also age- and gender-specific,
  - b. promoted nature and biodiversity,
  - c. applied relevant principles of sustainable procurement.
6. The school greenery is used for teaching purposes. With it, the school includes: 
  - a. technical and interdisciplinary perspectives,
  - b. sustainability aspects (SDGs etc.).
7. The school maintains networking and exchange with other schools on Green Cool Schools topics. 
8. The school carries out public relations work for its development into a Green Cool School. 
9. The school, the school authority, the education system or other supporters provide appropriate resources for the development of a Green Cool School. 
10. Long-term development with continuous improvement is ensured in a meaningful way. 

## Explanation of the Criteria

This chapter explains and justifies the criteria and, if necessary, gives schools and their stakeholders further information on how to become a green, cool school. Criterion No. 1 acts as a joining criterion for the Green Cool Schools Network; we see the other criteria as development goals.

### Criterion No. 1: Informal declaration of membership and recognition of the goal of a Green Cool School

Our network offers community, exchange and support for "Green Cool Schools" in Europe. All schools, teachers and actors who declare their membership and commit to the goal of a Green Cool School are warmly welcome. This is done informally during registration, see <https://greencoolschools.eu/initiatives/>.



This accession criterion is deliberately very simple, because we want to "take along" schools that are still at the very beginning of development.

### Criterion No. 2: Formal Green Cool Schools commitment (decision)

The transformation of a school into a Green Cool School is a long journey that touches many areas of school life - e.g. specialist lessons, working groups, design of school buildings and grounds, further training, use of budget funds, etc. This only works if the school is really willing to go this route. Therefore, a formal commitment / decision from the school is absolutely required. For example, it can be passed by the school management or the school conference. The commitment should be made known within the school and its surroundings.



"Green Cool school" is a guiding principle (the basic principles of which we describe with our set of criteria) and a network (in which schools that share this guiding principle can exchange ideas). The commitment should express that the school shares this guiding principle. No complex text is required for this; it is sufficient, for example, to refer to these criteria or to include them in the text of the commitment.

Many schools in Europe are already in the process of further developing their school quality. They already use more or less sophisticated management systems for this. They set up their own mission statements or educational or sustainability goals, analyze their current status, optimize processes or take on new projects - and much more. This can also provide the right framework for the development of a green, cool school - and is therefore also recognized in our network. Schools that have set up such a management system and thus pursue the goal of becoming a "green" school do not need to submit another commitment - the document in which the relevant objectives are described is sufficient.

The following management systems are recognized: qms.at, umweltzeichen.at, Eskola Jasangarriak (Basque Country), sustainability audit, EMAS, ISO 9.001, ISO 14.001. Additional management systems can be recognized after testing if information about the system is provided to us in one of the project languages.

### Criterion No. 3: Green Team

In a Green Cool School there are a variety of tasks that are not part of the "standard" tasks of the people who study or work here. Before a vegetable patch can be planted, for example, it is necessary to make arrangements (where is a suitable place, who can carry out the activity and when?) and to provide resources (e.g. garden tools, compost, seeds). During the activity, the participants must be instructed and supervised - and if you don't take photos now, you won't have any later. Once



the patch has been planted, it must be looked after - and vegetables do not take summer holidays either!

All of these tasks must be carefully thought through and coordinated. This requires a "Green Team" that should include teachers, caretakers and students, as well as parents and external partners if possible. This team mainly has a coordinating role; the implementation of the individual tasks should then be distributed among as many hands as possible.

A well-positioned team can also counteract the risk of a valuable initiative dying out if, for example, a dedicated teacher retires.

As with criterion no. 2, not everything has to be reinvented. If there is an overarching environmental, sustainability or school development team that has clear responsibilities for the Green Cool School, then this criterion is also considered to be met.

#### **Criterion No. 4: Green Cool School inventory**

Before starting new greening initiatives, it is sensible to first check the current situation - for several reasons: It could be that you already have ecological treasures on your school premises - perhaps songbirds, bats, hedgehogs or protected insects - and, for example, plants or biotopes that provide them with food or habitat. In addition, various usage requirements for the site must be taken into account, because space for children to move around, the fire department access, storage facilities for bicycles and possibly parking spaces for cars also have their justification (but all of this can be designed to be more or less "green"), and perhaps there are also cable or pipe routes that should be kept clear. The ownership structure is interesting - who owns the school premises or the school building? And if you want to green buildings, the statics and the condition of the surfaces also play a "fundamental" role.



That sounds like endless data collection. So: focus sensibly! For example, collect "general" data as far as it makes sense and is feasible – and only go into more depth, for example, if you want to change a specific area of the school grounds with an initiative. If necessary, also take part in higher-level campaigns such as the Geo Day of Biodiversity or the NABU Garden Bird Hour (both examples from Germany).

And make sure that data once collected is documented in a comprehensible and permanent manner!

#### **Criterion No. 5: Greening Initiatives**

A school with lots of plants – in the outdoor area, on or in the school building – is the core of our idea. But it's not about making everything new - preserving existing greenery is also part of it.



This criterion is specified in the following three sub-points:

##### **5.a - including the ideas, wishes and demands of students, also age- and gender-specific**

Even a green cool school is, first and foremost, a "living space" for the people who learn or work here. Normally, schools and other public buildings are planned by adults. It is important to us that the ideas, wishes and demands of the students are appropriately taken into account. Age- and gender-specific aspects should also be taken into account - perhaps younger students want more space for intensive play and older students want places for retreat and communication in smaller groups.

There are many ways to organize the participation of young people - such as idea competitions or „Zukunftswerkstätten“ / future labs (in which students, teachers and other responsible

persons can participate together). The adult responsible should seriously consider and support the students' contributions and also provide the students with timely feedback.

This approach goes far beyond greening: it strengthens personal responsibility and serves as a practical educational experience in sustainability and participation.

### 5.b - promoting nature and biodiversity

Extensive lawns are also green in summer - but that is not what the Green Cool Schools approach is about. Nor is it about superficially "beautifying" the school. Instead, a variety of plants, greenery elements and habitats should be created that meets the location and other usage requirements. These include, for example, native and site-appropriate plants, food plants for insects and songbirds, fruit trees or vegetable beds in the school garden. The buildings – their facades or roofs – can also be covered in greenery if the structural conditions allow it. Breeding or winter quarters for animals are set up. Areas with extensive maintenance are permitted. Mineral fertilizers and pesticides are avoided. Sealed areas are minimized - for example by designing parking areas for vehicles with grass paving stones or grass joint paving. Vegetable waste is composted on site as far as possible, and the resulting compost is used for greenery.

### 5.c - applying relevant principles of sustainable procurement

These include, for example, locally or regionally produced products, long-lasting materials, items made from recycled materials, non-toxic or low-solvent paints and the avoidance of tropical wood.

It is not required that the school itself extensively checks all purchased products and services for their sustainability. Rather, the use of relevant reference systems as a decision-making aid for procurement is recommended; These include, for example, the "Blue Angel" (Germany) or the Umweltzeichen.at (Austria).

However, these environmental labels only ever determine a "relative" sustainability within a product group - for example, for plant substrates or pesticides. The "question of meaning" is usually not asked - for example: what quality of soil do our plants need, do we even have to buy plant substrates or can we use existing soil substrate and improve it with homemade compost if necessary? Or: to what extent do we have to consider certain types of animals, plants or, for example, fungi on school premises as "harmful" and combat them? - In addition, the environmental labels are only awarded upon application; there are companies that manufacture sustainable products and do not apply for an environmental label. - In this respect, environmental labels can only be **an aid** in procurement.

In many European education systems, schools' options for action with regard to this criterion are very limited – for example, because teachers have other tasks than taking care of greenery (and are therefore more than fully occupied), because the school grounds belong to the municipality or the procurement is organized by the school authority. In these cases, the relevant higher-level institutions must be sensibly involved and then act in accordance with this criterion.

### Criterion No. 6: Use in teaching

Schools are first and foremost places of learning for the younger generation! Every school initiative - including Green Cool Schools - should therefore also be able to answer how it contributes to the school's educational goals. In addition, as a teacher, you are primarily paid for your educational work - so the better you combine Green Cool Schools activities with your lessons, the lower the risk that this commitment will eat up your free time. And finally, it is fantastic for your students when lessons are not just held with books and worksheets, but are connected to real life.



Use in teaching includes not only subject lessons, but also project days or weeks, elective courses, study groups or a green classroom. The network offers exchange and support for this purpose.

This criterion is specified by the following two sub-points:

### **6.a - including subject-specific and interdisciplinary perspectives**

The core of educational work in schools is subject-specific teaching. Many subjects can help to understand phenomena that are relevant to school greening. Planning, craft or creative work or the communication of activities can also be linked to subject-specific teaching. Through practical activities, students can acquire skills that are required in the subject curricula. In addition, complex everyday tasks such as setting up a Green Cool School are also ideal applications for interdisciplinary teaching.

On the website [www.greencoolschools.eu](http://www.greencoolschools.eu) we publish teaching materials that offer suggestions and support for this.

### **6.b - including sustainability aspects (SDGs etc.)**

Sustainability still often seems like an politically abstract construct. But the idea of sustainability must be implemented in all areas of life, or better: it can enrich all areas of life enormously! The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations offer starting points for this, especially since they have been specified with many sub-goals and since they are now also applied at national and regional level. So you will find many points of reference if you look for them.

The greening of school grounds is a good practical example of this. Which of the 17 SDGs can you make links to?

## **Criterion No. 7: Networking and exchange with other schools**

We strongly advise you not to remain alone with your ideas, questions, good deeds, successes or problems! Seek exchange with suitable partners in order to advance your Green Cool Schools together. This can involve individual tips, but also, for example, information about speakers or training courses, the exchange of teaching concepts, teaching materials or plants, mutual visits or joint activities.



Our network offers an opportunity for this - and you are very welcome! For example, use our webinars!

You may find further opportunities in the context of school partnerships, the Local Agenda 21, regional networks for education for sustainable development or other Erasmus projects. You can also connect with each other, e.g. by inviting your partner school to also become a member of the Green Cool Schools network.

## **Criterion No. 8: Public relations for Green Cool Schools**

Public relations also have several functions at the same time. You can use concrete examples to spread "green" topics - this is good for the necessary social transformation towards more sustainability (and thus also for the future of your students). Your school will be perceived positively - and ideally also new options for support. And finally, it can also have an enormously positive effect within the school if a well-written newspaper article about the latest greening initiative makes the rounds among the staff.





There are now a wide range of means and media available for public relations - e.g. a website, social media, newspaper articles, inviting interested people (e.g. "Open Garden Day") or even taking part in competitions (e.g. in Germany: "Jugend forscht"). This can be confusing - but on the positive side, it offers a good chance that you and your team will find channels that suit you, your preferences and skills and also your resources.

### **Criterion No. 9: Appropriate provision of resources**

Even if you are creative and have a talent for working with simple means - or if you are just starting out small: you will need additional resources such as money or materials on your way to becoming a Green Cool School! Even for small initiatives, you may need gardening tools, plants, planters or material for trellises. Make realistic plans and proactively request the necessary resources. The school management, the school authority or even higher-level bodies in the education system should value your work and reliably support it. It should not be your job - or that of your Green Team - to also acquire all the resources you need yourself.



But you can try to gain additional support. Sponsors can provide not only money, but also material resources or labor. And there are also foundations and funding programs for initiatives like yours outside the education system.

In a well-established education system, regular work performance should also be recognized, e.g. by particularly active teachers having to teach one hour less. However, this often does not happen, in which case the close connection with one's own teaching obligations (see criterion 6) becomes all the more important.

### **Criterion No. 10: Long-term development with continuous improvement**

Even if we try to describe a (long-term) development goal with these criteria, development is always ongoing - for example because you have new goals and ideas, because new actors enter (teachers, students, partners), because things break or plants die or because framework conditions change.



Organizations that are successful in long-term development processes do not let themselves be driven by these things, but actively manage their development process. For example, they regularly question their values and goals, their activities and results, their structures and resources - and plan their next development stage based on this.

In our opinion, this should also take place in an appropriate way in Green Cool Schools.

The "7 steps" from project lead B-NK can provide assistance with this. Or this can also be ensured within the framework of a comprehensive quality development system (examples under criterion 2).

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