Project Green

Green School Initiative

PUBLISHED BY

Project Green
Avenue 77
Triq in-Negozju, Zona 3,
Central Business District,
Birkirkara, CBD 3010,
Malta

projectgreen.mt
info@projectgreen.mt

Publication date: March 2025

Table of Contents

Foreword by the CEO

At Project Green, our commitment to Malta's future runs deep. As an agency, we strive to transform urban and suburban areas into vibrant, accessible green spaces that offer tangible benefits for our communities. Whether it's creating new parks, regenerating valleys, or introducing nature-based projects in schools, our overarching goal is to enhance the quality of life for all citizens.

The Green School Initiative stands at the heart of this mission. By encouraging educators, students, and the wider community to collaborate in hands-on environmental projects, we empower the next generation to learn through experience - planting seeds, tending to gardens, and nurturing a sense of collective responsibility. These interactive, on-the-ground activities and values will continue to shape Malta's future well beyond the classroom, instilling a lifelong respect for nature and a commitment to sustainable living.

I invite you to explore this booklet to learn how your educational institution can partner with us in shaping a more sustainable future. By helping schools transform their grounds into vibrant, accessible green spaces, we bring nature closer to our communities and create opportunities for students, educators, and families to connect with the environment, and each other, right where they live. In doing so, we foster a new generation of engaged, environmentally conscious citizens committed to ensuring a healthier, more resilient Malta for all.

Joseph Cuschieri
CEO, Project Green

Foreword by the COO

At Project Green, we are driven by the belief that true transformation occurs when vision becomes tangible action. As Chief Operating Officer, I have the privilege of overseeing the rollout of the Green School Initiative across schools in Malta - an initiative dedicated to integrating nature into everyday learning spaces. Our collaborations with institutions like De La Salle College in Birgu and San Ġorġ Preca College in Ħamrun highlight how thoughtfully designed green spaces can blend seamlessly into school grounds, creating environments where students play, experiment, and learn in harmony with the environment.

From the initial planning to hands-on execution, we prioritize involving both educators and students at every stage. This collaborative approach ensures that each project mirrors the distinct character of its school community while fostering a lasting connection to the natural world. By empowering young minds to shape and care for these spaces, we bridge the gap between the classroom and the natural outdoors - ultimately bringing nature closer to home and strengthening our bond with the environment.

Beverley Costa
COO, Project Green

Introduction

In our rapidly evolving world, schools have the unique opportunity to serve as vibrant community hubs that nurture environmental stewardship and social well-being. By redefining what it means to be a "green school", as outlined by UNESCO, we embrace a holistic model that integrates sustainable practices with a strong focus on mental and physical health. Early on, these institutions can incorporate horticulture activities - hands-on gardening and plant care projects that connect students with nature - from school gardens to outdoor learning projects, fostering direct environmental care. This approach reinforces sustainable practices and strengthens community bonds, empowering the community to help build a healthier, more connected future at school and home.

Adopting a green school model yields transformative benefits that enrich education and empower communities. This holistic approach shifts learning from traditional academics to practical, real-life applications by integrating hands-on experiences and targeted upskilling in daily activities and community projects. This comprehensive approach sharpens practical skills for sustainable decision-making and instils a profound, collective responsibility toward environmental stewardship. In doing so, it sharpens practical skills, instils a collective responsibility for environmental stewardship, and builds community resilience - advancing a climate-resilient future.

The Green School Initiative reinforces that effective environmental education goes beyond traditional teaching methods. By grounding our efforts in High Standards, Trust, Creativity, Community, Sustainability, and Simplicity, this initiative enables educational institutions in Malta to become vibrant hubs where social engagement and eco-friendly practices are not merely taught but actively experienced. Students gain the skills, empathy, and inspiration needed to become forward-thinking leaders, fostering a collective responsibility for a greener, healthier future for all.

Project Green's **Education Strategy**

Project Green's overarching mission - fostering greener urban and peri-urban spaces - hinges on an education framework that empowers learners to appreciate and care for the environment. In line with the National Education Strategy 2024–2030, our approach prioritises well-being, inclusivity, and hands-on learning experiences that promote sustainable growth. By nurturing curiosity and responsibility from a young age, we aim to bridge emerging gaps in green skills, equipping students with the knowledge and confidence to make environmentally sound decisions.

Central to this strategy is integrating horticulture and outdoor learning into school life. Through gardening, tree planting, and other immersive activities, learners develop practical skills while forging stronger bonds with their communities. This approach resonates with the Strategy's emphasis on holistic well-being, encompassing cognitive, social, and emotional development, while also advancing Malta's broader Sustainable Development Goals. By partnering with educational institutions, Project Green seeks to embed environmental stewardship at every level, ensuring that the next generation inherits not just greener spaces, but the mindset and capabilities to protect and enhance them.

Fact Sheet

PURPOSE

Encourage green outdoor learning and gardening activities in educational institutions and create vibrant, sustainable green spaces that enhance student well-being and community engagement.

OBJECTIVES

- Green Learning
- Environmental Awareness
- Well-being
- Aesthetic Improvement

KEY FEATURES

- **Eligibility:** Open to state and church educational institutions.
- **Funding:** Financial support is provided in instalments based on progress reports.
- **Technical Support:** Includes training workshops, plant selection guidance, and garden design assistance.
- **Monitoring:** Regular site visits and evaluations to track progress.
- **Awards:** Recognition for outstanding achievements at the end of the academic year.

TIMELINE

Launch:
25th March 2025

Application Period:
25th March - 13th May 2025

Winner Announcement:
Winners will be announced in the next few months

KEY REQUIREMENTS

- **Dedicated Space:** Must allocate spaces for green learning.
- **Public Access:** Open space to the public for at least 4 hours daily (for proposals over €50,000 excl. VAT).
- **Staff Oversight:** Designated staff or club responsible for the green space.
- **Progress Reporting:** Regular, simple progress reports are required.

APPLICATION

Visit our website and fill in our form at
projectgreen.mt/gsi/

Case Studies

1. Advancing Green Roofs, Malta

The LifeMedGreenRoof Project, launched at the University of Malta, demonstrates how green roofs can enhance urban sustainability. Partially funded by LIFE+, the initiative explored suitable planting materials and resilient species for Malta's climate, addressing challenges like urban heat, air pollution, and energy efficiency.

Researchers focused on identifying suitable planting materials and resilient plant species for green roofs, leading to constructing a Demonstration Green Roof at the Faculty for the Built Environment. This space serves as a real-world example for architects, designers, students, and the public, illustrating how green roofs can cool buildings, enhance air quality, reduce water runoff, and provide much-needed urban greenery.

By integrating nature into the built environment, the project promotes sustainable urban development and encourages further adoption of green roofing solutions in Malta. Open to visitors, the Demonstration Green Roof continues to serve as an educational and practical model for the future of eco-friendly architecture.

2. Milton Primary School, UK

Milton Hall Primary School revitalised a neglected corner of its playground, turning it into a vibrant wildlife haven with wildflower containers, trellises, and hanging pots. This project provided pupils (many with limited access to nature) an opportunity to connect with nature and engage in hands-on learning.

The initiative began with Year 5 students using the Nature Park 5-step process to plan the space, assess existing wildlife, and select pollinator-friendly flowers. As the project grew, multiple student groups took on key responsibilities: growing seeds in a greenhouse, watering, and deadheading and collecting seeds. Younger pupils also visited the area as part of their science curriculum, learning about plant life cycles. This collaborative effort fostered ecological awareness and created a dynamic space for learning, exploration, and connection to the natural world.

3. Greening the classroom, UK

Introducing indoor greenery, such as potted plants, flowers, and green walls, enhances aesthetics and the overall learning experience across universities, secondary schools, and vocational institutions. These green-enriched environments boost attention, reduce stress, and create a more welcoming atmosphere, fostering student engagement and positive perceptions of their learning spaces.

Classrooms with greenery are consistently rated as more attractive and comfortable, improving focus, environmental satisfaction, and well-being. Among greenery options, potted plants stand out for their practicality and sustainability. Among the possibilities, potted plants stand out for their practicality and low maintenance, offering significant benefits with minimal effort. While green walls enhance visual appeal, they require more resources and provide less immediate cognitive impact.

By introducing simple and effective greenery solutions, educational institutions can transform classrooms into vibrant, supportive spaces promoting learning and well-being.

4. Co-op Academy Manchester, UK

The Sofia Municipality launched the SOfiaGreen program to promote urban greening and farming, aligning with global trends and grassroots calls for socio-economic and environmental benefits for Sofia's citizens.

An action plan was developed to secure funding for integrating natural elements like tree planting and urban farming into schools, kindergartens, and nurseries. Five kindergartens installed vertical mini gardens, creating educational and recreational opportunities while introducing urban agriculture to children and their families. Principals, teachers, and older kindergarten children actively contributed to designing, installing, and maintaining the gardens. Parents also participated through volunteer activities, enhancing school grounds and fostering stronger community ties. The vertical gardens have created meaningful educational and social impacts. Children have learned to grow and care for plants, promoting sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Collaborative planting and maintenance activities have united children, parents, and teachers, fostering stronger community bonds. The teachers also report increased curiosity among children about food production and ecology, with the gardens serving as practical tools for hands-on learning and addressing real-world environmental challenges.

5. School in Solana de los Barros, Spain

Solana de los Barros Primary School in Extremadura, Spain, implemented Nature-based Solutions (NbS) through the EU-funded myBUILDINGisGREEN LIFE initiative to tackle rising temperatures, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss. Facing a projected 4°C temperature increase by the century's end, the school sought to enhance climate resilience and promote environmental education.

To achieve these goals, several NbS were introduced. Green roofs with native plants reduced surface temperatures by 5.4°C while improving rainwater filtration—green facades with climbing plants and hydroponic irrigation stabilised humidity levels and cooled indoor spaces. A natural ventilation system with automated windows improved airflow, lowered CO^2 levels, and regulated classroom temperatures. In the playground, vegetated pergolas, porous paving, and wooden canopies were installed to provide shade, water infiltration, and biodiversity benefits.

These interventions successfully reduced indoor temperatures to below 27°C, cut water runoff from 13% to 3% and introduced 77 animal and 16 plant species into the ecosystem. The project has inspired replication agreements with eight municipalities and contributed to discussions on integrating NbS into Spain's Technical Building Code. Despite high costs and slow plant growth, the school's success highlights how educational institutions can lead climate adaptation efforts, creating greener, more resilient learning spaces.

6. Poznań's Green Schoolyards, Poland

Poznań is transforming urban schoolyards into climate-resilient green spaces by replacing concrete surfaces with natural playgrounds and green spaces. By integrating NbS, this initiative enhances educational spaces' climate adaptability while fostering student well-being and environmental education.

Many schools are dominated by impervious concrete surfaces, contributing to heat retention and limiting water infiltration and flood risks. Rising temperatures and limited green spaces further reduce children's exposure to nature and benefit from outdoor learning.

To address these consequences, Poznań's initiative redesigns schoolyards with permeable, natural materials such as grass, sand, and wood. Play areas now feature willow huts, tunnels, and logs for sensory activities. Drought-resistant native plants enhance biodiversity, improve water retention, and provide much-needed shade. At the same time, outdoor learning spaces create opportunities for hands-on environmental education and strengthen students' connection to nature. These green schoolyards function as living classrooms, sparking curiosity and ecological awareness. The proximity to nature improves children's physical and mental well-being, while vegetation helps cool surrounding areas during heatwaves.

7. Rialto Green School Initiative, US

The Rialto Unified School District in California has reimagined its schoolyards by creating gardens and enclosed "Heritage Citrus Groves." These green, sustainable environments offer hands-on learning opportunities, access to fresh fruit, and cooling shade, addressing the community's environmental and educational needs.

The initiative includes citrus groves and raised garden beds at all 19 elementary schools, with fenced spaces providing defined outdoor classrooms. High schools feature wellness gardens that promote health and well-being, while groves of native trees are planted to capture carbon and reduce emissions. These schoolyards double as living laboratories, integrating environmental and sustainability education into the curriculum. Students participate in projects such as GIS mapping of trees, monitoring tree health, and calculating carbon sequestration, with lessons aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards.

Students gain hands-on skills in agriculture, water conservation, and ecosystem monitoring while integrating green spaces, which enhances physical and mental well-being. Access to shade and fresh fruit helps protect students from extreme heat and improves nutrition, with over 14,000 pounds of fruit harvested in 2022 supplementing school meals. Sustainability efforts like turf removal save more than 6 million gallons of water annually.

8. Ethnobotanical Garden at Dar Taliba, Morocco

The ethnobotanical garden at Dar Taliba girls' boarding house in the High Atlas supports biodiversity conservation while empowering students from underserved Amazigh communities. It addresses the loss of ancestral plant knowledge, providing over 180 girls annually with opportunities to reconnect with tradition and nature. It bridges cultural heritage and modern learning, providing over 180 girls annually with opportunities to reconnect with their traditions and nature.

Through seed saving, organic farming, medicinal plant cultivation, and sustainable harvesting, students gain hands-on experience that fosters sustainability and self-reliance. These activities strengthen their identity and community ties, encouraging them to become environmental stewards.

Beyond cultural preservation, the garden is an educational hub, integrating agroecology, biodiversity, and food security into the curriculum. Workshops provide practical training in sustainable agriculture and food systems, deepening students' understanding of conservation. By blending heritage, sustainability, and education, the Dar Taliba Garden demonstrates how schools can preserve traditional knowledge while promoting ecological awareness, offering a model for sustainable learning worldwide.

9. Natural Spaces for Positive Youth Development Outcomes, US

Renovating schoolyards in low-income urban neighbourhoods into green spaces significantly benefited students by promoting physical, social, and emotional development. By integrating gardens, grassy areas, and play equipment, these transformed spaces provided safe, engaging environments that encouraged more physical activity, particularly among younger students, promoting healthier daily routines.

The renovated green spaces also fostered more positive social interactions among students. Observations revealed that most interactions, such as cooperative play and supportive gestures, were prosocial, with very few negative behaviours. The schoolyards created a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, enhancing student relationships.

Teachers and caregivers also reported improved safety, fewer injuries, reduced bullying, and a decline in gang-related activity compared to pre-renovation periods. These long-term changes demonstrate how green schoolyards can provide lasting physical, social, and emotional benefits for children in underserved communities.

Conclusion

Project Green's Green School Initiative is a call to action for all educational institutions to transform their indoor and outdoor spaces into thriving, sustainable environments that inspire social interaction, community engagement, and collaborative learning. Inspired by the National Educational Strategy 2024-2030, this initiative incorporates horticulture activities and green outdoor learning, fostering sustainable living and environmental conservation.

By increasing students' access to green spaces, the initiative boosts environmental awareness while enhancing students' physical and mental well-being through direct sensory experiences. These immersive interactions with nature foster inclusivity and a sense of belonging, ensuring each student feels valued and connected. Ultimately, the initiative cultivates a culture of well-being, sustainability, and collaboration. Furthermore, the Green School Initiative emphasises upskilling by equipping students with essential green skills that prepare them for their daily lives and careers. By nurturing these competencies, schools become hubs for community growth and resilience. Ultimately, this initiative enriches individuals and the broader community, fostering a well-being, collaboration, and sustainability culture.

Bibliography

Introduction

https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future/schools

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390028

Case studies

1. Advancing Green Roofs, Malta

https://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/news/2016/05/officialopeningofthelifemedgreenroofdemonstrationgarden

2. Milton Primary School, UK

https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/involving-every-young-person-miltonhall-primary-school

3. Greening the classroom, UK

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338744311_Greening_the_Classroom_Three_Field_Experiments_on_the_Effects_of_Indoor_Nature_on_Students'_Attention_Well-being_and_Perceived_Environmental_Quality

4. Co-op Academy Manchester, UK

https://projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/cityzen/news/news-article/15902/sofiagreen-action-for-urban-farming-in-kindergartens/

https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/creating-green-wall-co-op-academy

5. School in Solana de los Barros, Spain

https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/nature-basedsolutions-in-schools-a-green-way-to-adapt-buildings-to-climate-change-in-solana-de-los-barros-extremadura-spain

6. Poznań's Green Schoolyards, Poland
https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/mission/solutions/mission-stories/naturalplaygrounds-and-schoolyards-story17#improving-the-quality-of-playgroundsand-schoolyard

7. Rialto Green School Initiative, US
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57682b81725e25259d8396e3/t/64b9760ecfd5dc3bc4a59c9c/1718828387165/23_07_20+Rialto+Schoolyard+Forest+Case+Study.pdf

8. Ethnobotanical Garden at Dar Taliba, Morocco
https://www.childrenandnature.org/resources/morocco-global-diversity-foundation/

9. Natural Spaces for Positive Youth Development Outcomes, US
https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00805/full


Project
Green