St Mary's University Twickenham London

Developing whole-school approaches to sustainability in Catholic education

A Report for the Guardians of Creation Project

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Laudato Si' Research Institute

Diocese of Salford

Key findings

1

Principal barriers to sustainable development facing the Catholic schools participating in this report included short-term prioritisation, separation of sustainability from a school's remit, attainment pressures, ineffective communication networks, and perceived cost of change (see Section 2).

2

The Caring for Creation model maps the sustainability journey recounted by the Catholic schools participating in this report and supports schools in building a cyclical whole-school approach to the care of creation (see Section 3).

3

Incorporating care of creation into a school's development plan has the transformational potential to include all areas of school life in ecological action (see Section 3.3).

Guardians of Creation

This report is the second of two documents issued by the Guardians of Creation Project's education team by researchers at St Mary's University, Twickenham. The report produces a generalised toolkit for facilitating sustainable transformations in Catholic secondary schools, which is implementable at a school or diocesan level. There are accompanying resources for the model available alongside this formal report.

During the Guardians of Creation Project's lifetime, guidance will be issued relating to practical elements of sustainable change, like carbon accounting and environmental management within a diocese, as well as social and theological aspects of sustainability in the Catholic Church.

The Guardians of Creation Project has been developed collaboratively with the Diocese of Salford as a pilot study in England and Wales. The principal participating institutions in the Project are the Diocese of Salford, St Mary's University, Twickenham, and the Laudato Si' Research Institute at Campion Hall, University of Oxford.

Diocese of Salford

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1. Introduction

1.1. Executive summary

In his encyclical letter, Laudato Si', Pope Francis raises the importance of community actions in addressing the present ecological crisis.[1] Francis highlights the need for 'the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development' and that these community 'actions cultivate a shared identity' as stewards of God's creation.[2] This call for community action becomes especially pertinent for Catholic schools, which face an 'educational challenge' to support young people's growth 'in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care'.[3] However, finding ways to foster this shared identity of sustainable change and compassionate care in daily school life remains challenging for educational leaders. The complex tapestry of internal and external pressures in the education sector is often perceived as barriers to sustainable change, leading to partial or fragmented solutions rather than holistic, integral development.

This report proposes one model for cultivating whole-school approaches to sustainability in Catholic settings, the Caring for Creation model. It offers one pathway for developing a whole school response to the present ecological crisis that embeds Catholic Social Teaching within practical steps to implementing sustainable transformations in educational settings. For instance, it highlights the importance of including care of creation in school development plans as a vital step in instigating change for every member of the school's community. Grounded in existing models from wider scholarship, the Guardians of Creation Project's education team developed the Caring for Creation model based on insights from eight secondary schools in the Diocese of Salford. Supporting sustainable transformations in Catholic educational settings emphasises the importance of student leadership in conjunction with a Catholic mission and ethos to answer the urgent call to care for God's creation.

The Caring for Creation model is especially valuable for education systems in England following the Department for Education's (DfE) new strategy on sustainability and climate change. The DfE strategy lists 'a whole system approach' as one of its guiding principles, adopting a 'holistic view of education' to 'positively improve the environment'.[4] In partnership with the Church's call to answer this educational challenge in community structures, the Caring for Creation model seeks to support schools in meeting the increasingly urgent need to create whole-school sustainable developments within their Catholic ethos.

Consequently, this report draws on the accounts of eight Catholic secondary schools to explore the developmental process of school-wide changes in sustainability. It first examines the barriers school leaders and teachers face in implementing sustainable transformations. These barriers include short-term prioritisation, the separation of sustainability from a school's remit, attainment pressures, ineffective communication networks, and the perceived cost of change. The report then considers the Caring for Creation model in-depth as one way for educators to foster this whole-school approach to sustainability that cultivates a shared Catholic identity. To conclude, the report reflects on the role of dioceses in supporting whole-school transformations in sustainability.

1.2 Scope of the report

When investigating how the Catholic Church's teachings on the care of creation, as represented in Pope Francis' encyclical letter, impacted the approach to sustainability in Catholic schools, two research questions were posed: **What do teachers and policymakers perceive as the main barriers to implementing the principles and teachings of Laudato Si' in their schools?**, and **What do they need to overcome these challenges?** In exploring these questions, this report first narrates the experiences of school communities in facing and overcoming barriers to sustainable transformations (see Section 2). Informed by these understandings, the Caring for Creation model maps the delineated development of sustainability in Catholic schools to provide one framework for educators to develop whole-school approaches to addressing the ecological crisis (see Section 3). Through a consideration of these educational experiences within the broader context of regional Catholic dioceses, this report briefly asks how dioceses can support schools in this integral development (see Section 4).

1 Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis On Care For Our Common Home* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015).

2 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 13; 232.

3 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 202; 210.

4 Department for Education, 'Guiding principles', in *Sustainability and climate change: a strategy for the education and children's services systems* (2022) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainability-and-climate-change-strategy> [Accessed 25 August 2022].

In investigating these research questions, members of the Guardians of Creation Project's education team conducted 25 one-to-one interviews and 11 focus groups with voluntary participants in eight Catholic secondary schools piloting the Laudato Si' Champions toolkit across the Diocese of Salford. This qualitative data set incorporated multiple organisational levels within the Catholic education sector, including students, teachers, senior school leaders, diocesan leaders, national policymakers, and third-party ecological education specialists. In presenting the findings from this data, we, the Guardians of Creation Project's education team, acknowledge that these barriers vary in each school depending on their intricate, fluid, and localised circumstances, which are not universal. The analysis and examples presented here aim to reflect this diversity and complexity, offering an adaptable model as a resource capable of accommodating each school's educational context.

The breadth of experiences captured by this collection of interviews and focus groups is a great strength of this report's findings, providing a comprehensive overview of where *Laudato Si'* sits in Catholic secondary schools. However, the research data is specific to a secondary school context within the Catholic sector. While educators working with other age groups may find the insights of this report useful, further research is required to determine how the barriers and developmental model presented here would apply in primary, further, and higher education. Engagement with governing bodies and multi-academy trusts would also expand the understanding of ecological education in the Catholic sector presented here.

1.3 Rationale

Before considering the barriers to sustainable transformations and a development model, we ask why it is significant for Catholic educators to embed care of creation across their whole school. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasises the potential for 'community actions' to become 'spiritual experiences'.[5] Francis argues, 'these actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story […] that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us'.[6] In this statement, Francis foregrounds Catholic communities as the bedrock for fostering responsible stewardship, realised through collective action and shared identity. The Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) similarly advocates the importance of 'cultivating a healthy awareness of our own Christian identity' within the 'Catholic school model' to support 'dialogue with everyone'.[7] Cultivating a shared identity and community action is of unique importance to Catholic educators, fostering the ecological education and spirituality urgently needed to face the climate crisis with every member of a school's population.

However, the question of how schools can, in practice, create this shared Catholic identity that enacts responsible stewardship remains challenging. For this report, the concept of cultivation offers a useful interpretative lens for this process. As the Bishop of Salford and Bishops' Conference spokesperson for the environment, John Arnold expands:

> "The word "cultivate" takes us beyond simply learning information but to a way of living with that knowledge and having it affect us so that we cultivate a better future, a better way of living. I think that's probably what Pope Francis means when he uses that word. It's not just education, facts and figures, and good practice. It's living it and growing that sense of the importance of what we're talking about." [8]

Bishop Arnold's idea of living and growing in ecological awareness and practice offers an alternative vision of Catholic ecological education. Going beyond examination-focused knowledge retention, an ecological education grounded in Catholic teachings is about a way of living those ideas and growing in a shared sense of responsibility and action. Cultivating a shared identity requires a nurturing process of sustainable growth and development. It needs caretakers who are active and invested in that journey to help that small seed reach its full potential.

As such, the Caring for Creation model offers one framework for schools to map this cultivation process as they grow a community that enacts stewardship in daily school life. In a cyclical process, it encourages schools to begin by identifying their existing practices and progress towards the care of creation. In a flexible pathway, the model allows schools to map their next steps as they develop sustainable transformations before reflecting on future seeds of action within their educational community. In doing so, it promotes an inclusive approach, whereby every community member contributes to the school's collective efforts and seeks to frame these sustainable developments within a spiritual framework that reflects the Church's teachings on the care of creation.

5 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 232.

6 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 232.

7 Congregation for Catholic Education, *The identity of the Catholic school for a culture of dialogue* (Vatican City: Holy See Press Office, 2022) para. 72 [emphasis original].

8 Bishop John Arnold, interviewed by Ruth-Anne Walbank about *Laudato Si'* in Catholic Education, 27 May 2022, 20:27.

1.4 Literature review

Existing academic literature similarly foregrounds the numerous barriers to implementing sustainable changes in schools. For instance, in an Australian case study by Neus Evans, Hilary Whitehouse, and Margaret Gooch, obstacles to implementing whole-school environmental education and practices included 'time and money', 'staff resistance', and 'limits to conceptual understanding'.[9] Similarly, research from the charity Global Action Plan cited how 'schools were sometimes seen as unsupportive' by young people in the UK, which 'stopped them from engaging in compassionate behaviour'.[10] As such, the barriers to implementing whole-school sustainable transformations are more than an internal logistic problem for educators; these barriers can prevent young people from engaging in activism and charitable work beyond school life.

In examining ways of enabling schools to address sustainability challenges, studies have shown how adopting a whole-school approach can support educators in developing holistic responses. For example, Arjen E. J. Wals and Aaron Benavot identify 'the "whole school" or "whole institution" approach' as 'the most promising' of current frameworks, allowing schools to 'make concurrent changes to curriculum, extracurricular activities, teacher training, human resources and infrastructure operations and processes'.[11] Furthermore, Elisabeth Barratt Hacking et al. argue that the benefits of 'being a sustainable school' include increased student engagement, improved behaviour, healthier lifestyles, advanced community cohesion, and a lowered environmental impact.[12] Overall, adopting a whole school approach to sustainability 'raises standards and enhances well-being', supporting the school's community in overcoming the challenges of sustainable transformations.[13]

There are various existing models for developing such comprehensive solutions to sustainability in education. For instance, the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Pathways model acts as a 'practical tool for planning a whole school approach' towards 'education for sustainable development (ESD)'.[14] It moves through six activities, including developing a shared understanding of ESD to including ESD in school policy and auditing existing learning activities, before finally developing 'an ESD Action Plan'.[15] Similarly, the National Governance Association (NGA) proposes a model for the 'whole school/trust approach to environmental sustainability', which uses 'the Four Cs' of curriculum, campus, community, and culture.[16] Furthermore, the former National College for School Leadership (NCSL) proposed a model for 'developing and embedding sustainability' in schools, in which 'a school can be categorised into four stages; beginner, performer, leader and pioneer' with three transitional steps in between.[17] The charity Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEEd) reflects that the existence of these multiple models is an acknowledgement that 'there is no one framework or model which suits all education settings'.[18] Instead, schools' dynamic and distinctive natures necessitate numerous models.

While these existing models act as valuable resources, they do not offer specific guidance for Catholic educators in developing whole-school sustainability practices within a UK context. Schools with Catholic characters are unique in their connection to the Church's traditions and intellectual history. With the care of creation forming a central principle of Catholic Social Teaching, reflected in the Catechism as the 'respect for the integrity of creation', schools need a development model that incorporates the Church's teachings into their ecological education and practices.[19] Drawing on existing models and our engagement with Catholic secondary schools, the Caring for Creation model proposes one pathway that intersects Catholic mission and ethos with sustainable transformations, informed by the challenges educators experience in the Catholic sector.

9 Neus Evans, Hilary Whitehouse, and Margaret Gooch, 'Barriers, Successes and Enabling Practices of Education for Sustainability in Far North Queensland Schools: A Case Study', *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 43:2 (2012) 121-138 (p. 128-129).

10 Global Action Plan, *United in Compassion: Bringing young people together to create a better world* (2021) <https://www.globalactionplan.org.uk/files/united_in_compassion_-_research_paper.pdf> [Accessed 11 August 2022] (p. 26-27).

11 Arjen E. J. Wals and Aaron Benavot, 'Can we meet the sustainability challenges? The role of education and lifelong learning' *Eur J Educ* 52:4 (2017) 404-413 (p. 409).

12 Elisabeth Barratt Hacking, William Scott and Elsa Lee, *Evidence of Impact of Sustainable Schools* (Nottingham: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010), p. 2.

13 Elisabeth Barratt Hacking et al., *Evidence of Impact of Sustainable Schools,* p. 2.

14 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) UK, *Pathways: to education for sustainable development* (2011) <http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/pathways_2011.pdf> [Accessed 13 September 2022], p. 1.

15 WWF UK, *Pathways*, p. 5.

16 National Governance Association (NGA), *Environmental sustainability: a whole school approach* (November 2021) <https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/42a15743-7a17-4dfb-b15a-804e5f26b5a2/nga-environmental-sustainability-20211104.pdf> [Accessed 22 November 2021], p. 5.

17 Anna Birney, Ben Kellard and Jane Reed, *The journey of sustainable schools: developing and embedding sustainability* (National College for School Leadership, 2011) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/339991/the-journey-of-sustainable-schools-developing-and-embedding-sustainability.pdf> [Accessed 11 August 2022], p. 3.

18 Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEEd), *Whole School/Institution Approaches to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) – A Backgrounder* (December 2016) <https://se-ed.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Whole-Institution-Approach-Backgrounder-update.pdf> [Accessed 11 August 2022], p. 2 (original emphasis).

19 Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd edn. (Huntingdon: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994; 1997), para. 2414.

2. Barriers to sustainable transformations

Before introducing the Caring for Creation model as one framework for Catholic schools to develop their approach to sustainability, this section first considers the research question: **What do teachers and policymakers perceive as the main barriers to implementing the principles and teachings of Laudato Si' in their schools?** The following subsections detail the core categories of barriers to sustainable transformations in Catholic settings recorded in this report's qualitative data gathering. The Guardians of Creation project's education team investigated this question through a series of 25 one-to-one interviews and 11 focus groups with eight Catholic secondary schools in the Diocese of Salford, encompassing perspectives from students, teachers, senior school leaders, diocesan staff, national policymakers, and third-party specialists in ecological education.[20] While the perceived barriers varied from school to school, short-term prioritisation, school separation of sustainability from a school's remit, attainment pressures, ineffective communication networks, and the perceived cost of change occurred in each of the eight participating schools in this report. As such, these barriers are not definitive but rather exemplify the common challenges school communities face in seeking to participate in the care of creation.

2.1 Short-term prioritisation

Students, teachers, senior school leaders, and diocesan staff frequently raised the barrier of prioritising sustainability in busy school life. As one teacher reflected, 'Environment is still seen as just one of many threads', illustrating how sustainability becomes one of several competing pressures within a school (Teacher T7.A, 18:15). Another senior leader identified how sustainability's prioritisation impacted their financial decision-making: 'We have to make decisions that I know are right for the short-term future in terms of their education, but no, probably aren't right for the long-term future of the planet' (Senior school leader H5.A, 09:07). As these accounts demonstrate, schools often have a conscious awareness of this prioritisation paradigm. Repeatedly, ecological education and sustainable changes became secondary priorities compared to other pressures, such as meeting the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspection criteria, the impact of student attainment on school league tables, and crisis management during situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers and students sometimes raised concerns that sustainability was not on their school's priority list at all.

Case Study 1: COVID catch-up and the cost-of-living crisis

'We've got COVID catch up and pupils behind', stated one teacher, 'which from a school point of view is more important than the sustainability aspects' (Teacher T2.B, 08:55). As for many others in 2022, pupil attainment post-pandemic was a top priority for this school. Consequently, sustainability became a secondary concern, perceived as less urgent than pandemic-related crisis management. However, the looming cost-of-living crisis was already worrying teachers, noting how 'all of a sudden, the electricity prices have rocketed', and cost-saving initiatives would take precedence for the 2022-2023 academic year. (Teacher T2.B, 23:10).

Upon reflection, teachers noted the limitations of these short-term, reactionary priorities for sustainability at their school. One teacher said, 'If I rewind back five years, I was saying the same over recycling even before COVID. […] Is it an excuse to say that's the reason now not to do it?' (Teacher T2.B, 14:07). 'It sounds like we don't prioritise the environment,' replied another teacher, 'But it's that long-term, short-term, and at the moment, because of COVID, we can only see the short term because it is an emergency almost' (Teacher T2.F, 13:46). In tackling these urgent and highly pressured crisis points, teaching staff felt they had no room left for sustainability.

20 For further details on participants, see Appendix 1.

As Case Study 1 demonstrates, when sustainability becomes one of many priorities, it is subject to the changing pressures of individual schools and the wider education sector. It encompasses what educational researcher, Yi-Hwa Liou refers to as 'the dynamism of crisis situations' in education.[21] The unpredictability and complexity of crises in schools necessitate a restricted decision-making horizon to focus on those short-term pressures. In recognising the dominant prioritisation paradigm in schools, educators can consider alternative approaches that would enable teachers to address urgent crises without negating long-term sustainability goals. For instance, one diocesan leader articulated: 'We need to try and make the environment part of business as usual. If it's seen as integrated into all the work of the school, then it could link to some of their other curriculum or learning activities' (Diocesan leader D1, 47:01). In other words, school and diocesan leaders observed how perceiving sustainability as a method for approaching current priorities could help them integrate ecological education into every aspect of school life.

2.2 Separation from school remit

In some schools, teachers perceived the responsibility of enacting sustainable change as separate from their remit as educators. Some teachers noted that the climate crisis felt too distant or existential to include in their classroom, expressing how sustainable transformations went beyond their remit 'from teaching the theory to putting [it] in practice', arguing that the application of classroom-taught learning crossed 'that line' of responsibility (Teacher T4.B, 24:19). This argument illustrates how some teachers recognised their responsibility to teach students about climate change and related topics as part of the national curriculum but thought that role-modelling sustainable behaviour within school life was beyond their remit. However, this challenge is unique from the short-term prioritisation barrier, which examines the perceived timeframe of sustainability within a crisis management mindset. In contrast, this separation barrier addresses the differentiation between teaching sustainability in theory and enacting sustainability in practice. This viewpoint compounded the perception of sustainability as an extra burden to an already overwhelmed workload.

The characterisation of Catholic ethos within these interviews was emblematic of this separation. Teachers reflected on how their ethos emphasised more-overtly social aspects of Catholic Social Teaching rather than environmental ones. Some teachers expressed a lack of staff-level engagement with *Laudato Si'* and Catholic teachings on the care of creation in contrast to frequent initiatives aimed at helping the poor, such as food bank collections. One teacher articulated how their school's ethos focused on the "golden rule" of 'do to others what you would have them do to you' but did not think 'stewardship comes through' in their mission or ethos (Teacher T3.B, 08:16).[22] In some of the participating schools, sustainability was perceived as outside their remit, with this focus on specific aspects of Catholic Social Teaching over others resulting in student leadership initiatives such as student councils and ecology clubs existing in secular settings without spiritual grounding in Catholic teachings. Consequently, where schools perceived care of creation as separate from their distinctive Catholic character, sustainability sat outside the school's ethos and mission.

Case Study 2: Student perspectives on staff (in)action

When asking one ecology club what was preventing their school's sustainable changes, students cited their teachers' inaction. 'Teachers don't care about it,' said one student, 'They leave the lights on or don't turn their board off and leave computer screens on' (Student S7.B, Year 8, 23:44). Staff interviews reflected this mindset amongst teachers, observing 'a little bit of trepidation' in reducing technology in their classrooms: 'We do our best but within the confines of where we are' (Teacher T7.B, 17:26). However, students felt demotivated by this staff mindset. 'It's kind of like, what is the point?' noted one student, 'It's a bit defeating because what is the point in trying to change the school that doesn't want to change?' (Student S7.A, Year 8, 21:57).

However, the same students' named 'a few teachers that are really sustainable' and emphasised how their actions role-modelled sustainable behaviour for them (Student S7.A, Year 8, 05:12). One student said it gave them 'a visual motivation to see that people are actually caring about [the environment] as much as people in eco-club' and 'other teachers should learn from [them]' (Student S7.A, Year 8, 05:59).

21 Yi-Hwa Liou, 'School Crisis Management: A Model of Dynamic Responsiveness to Crisis Life Cycle', *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 51:2 (2015) 247–289 (p. 249).

22 Matthew 7:12, in *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (London: Biblica, 1973; repr. 2011).

Case Study 2 narrates how a staff-level separation of sustainability from their school's remit impacted students' mindset towards the care of creation. When staff translated their learning activities into sustainable changes, students similarly felt motivated to act. Conversely, where students perceive staff inaction, they interpret that disconnect between learning and acting to represent their whole school's attitude towards the care of creation. One potential solution suggested by teaching staff was that ecological education and sustainability should 'be part of teacher training' so they know 'what it actually means to be sustainable' in their daily practice (Teacher T4.B, 22:52; Teacher T4.C, 14:44.). They also expressed a need for 'mindset and peer-on-peer training for senior leadership' among existing educators (Teacher T7.A, 18:15). Third-party specialists in ecological education also advocated for 'empowering teachers' through training to 'enable and support' them in embedding sustainability in their teaching practice and including it as part of their remit (Third-party specialist O1, 14:52). In this sense, universities and colleges may have a significant role in supporting teacher's ecological awareness and empowerment towards sustainable changes.

2.3 Attainment pressures

Teachers and senior leaders emphasised the pressures on student attainment around examinations, resulting in less time for ecological education in school life. Teachers reflected that their 'time gets stolen by Years 11 and 13', and the pressure to meet their curriculum's statutory requirements resulted in a 'lack of headspace' to turn 'all these great ideas' on sustainability into action (Teacher T3.B, 13:03; Teacher T2.A, 09:18; Teacher T7.A, 37:52). One teacher recalled how their ecology club was popular with students, but 'when mocks turn up', they cancelled the club and never resumed (Teacher T3.B, 12:10). Even students as young as Year 7 protested they did not have 'much time' for 'fun interactive things' because they were 'getting ready for GCSEs' (Student S1.E, 23:14). When every member of a school's community feels these attainment pressures and allocates their time accordingly, examination results become the central component of that school's mission, leaving minimal time or space for fostering a Catholic ethos and mission rooted in an integral ecology.

Case Study 3: Examination pressures and Catholic ethos

For one school's senior leader, the value of GCSE results placed sustainability as a secondary priority. 'The success of the school is based on how children achieve', they stated, 'schools are held to account in terms of progress, results, and achievement' (Senior school leader H4.A, 25:20). In feeling that sustainability initiatives were 'not going to have an impact on an Ofsted inspection', they also expressed a reluctance towards initiatives like the new natural history GCSE until they could determine whether the qualification would 'lead to high attainment' (Senior school leader H4.A, 23:11). Some teachers in the school reflected this prioritisation of pupil attainment over sustainability. For instance, one teacher gave the example of photocopying worksheets to help them cover 'a large curriculum' where 'time is the biggest barrier' despite the ecological impact of those actions (Teacher T4.B, 06:19).

However, some members of the school's community felt that this attainment focus did not reflect sustainability's importance in connection to the school's Catholic identity. One student cited how they 'wanted to make a difference in school to make it more environmentally friendly', so they joined the ecology club (Student S4.C, 00:54). Another student agreed, stating, 'I feel like more could be done, more teaching about it' (Student S4.E, 31:08). One teacher echoed this sentiment: 'We teach the idea of stewardship; we listen to Pope Francis. But we're listening; we're not acting. And I don't think, as a Catholic school, that's enough. If we really want to follow the Catholic way, we need to act by the words that we're listening to' (Teacher T4.A, 33:25).

The sentiments expressed in Case Study 3 demonstrate how attainment pressures can diminish the urgency of sustainable transformations in schools. A further component of this barrier is that teachers are reluctant to make curriculum-based sustainable transformations unless there is an assured beneficial impact on the school's reputation and examination results. Teachers and senior leadership members repeatedly expressed a desire for ecological education to become 'more concrete' and explicit in their statutory requirements 'because that's when people will actually start taking notice' (Senior school leader H7.A, 29:46). While national inspectors like Ofsted are significant factors here, the Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI) is essential in providing this framework for Catholic schools. Such inspection frameworks offer measurable criteria for educators, enabling schools to prioritise sustainability across the curriculum and school life. Within the 2019 CSI framework, care for creation is mentioned twice under the provision and leadership of the 'Catholic Life and Mission' criteria. The framework judges the 'extent to which the whole school curriculum reflects a Catholic worldview' and lists 'school commitment to the environment' as a potential source of evidence.[23] Hence, there is scope for national leaders and policymakers to answer this call to provide schools with more definitive guidance on how holistically incorporating care of creation can meet the outstanding criteria for Catholic schools.

23 Catholic Schools Inspectorate (CSI), *Handbook 2: Inspection* (October 2022, v1.1) <https://catholicschoolsinspectorate.org.uk/inspection-materials> [Accessed 31 October 2022], pp. 25; 31.

2.4 Ineffective communication networks

The relationship between individual Catholic schools, their diocese, and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) holds immense potential for supporting sustainable transformations. Yet, students, teachers, senior school leaders, diocesan staff, and national policymakers raised ineffective communication channels as a barrier to implementing sustainable changes in schools. This barrier operated at multiple levels within schools and the Church's wider systems.

For instance, at a national level, one teacher commented that organisations such as the CBCEW and their related groups should 'help and guide' educators by setting goals for 'schools to aim towards during the next five years' (Teacher T7.B, 23:18). Yet, national policymakers felt that this would be 'overstepping' their role, impeding the autonomy of individual schools and the authority of individual dioceses (National education leader D4, 25:50). Meanwhile, at regional levels, some teachers and senior school leaders felt they lacked support and resources from their diocese. Yet, diocesan leaders simultaneously described their attempts to communicate ecological resources to schools as 'hit and miss' (Diocesan leader D7, 04:59). For example, one diocesan leader described the difficulties of 'directing information to the right people' given schools' busyness and frequent personnel changes (Diocesan leader D7, 10:34). 'We've tried different ways, it's very trial and error', they continued, 'we haven't found the right system yet' (Diocesan leader D7, 23:08). As these accounts reflect, the Church's complex ecosystem can make its hierarchical and lateral communication networks challenging to navigate, despite their interconnected potential for sustainable change.

Similar communication challenges persisted internally within schools, where the barrier of ineffective communication manifested at an internalised, local level and diminished the potential impact of their sustainable transformation.

Case Study 4: What solar panels?

'We're very keen on pupil leaders', states one senior leader, 'We do have some solar panels up on the roof, […] that came from Student Council' (Teacher T1.A, 12:56). However, in a focus group of seven students, no one knew that their school had solar panels. Instead, the students felt that while their 'school is trying to encourage [sustainability]', 'most people don't notice it and don't actually pay attention' (Student S1.C, 08:54; Student S1.B, 08:00). Other teachers in the school were also unaware of the solar panels, instead feeling as though senior leadership 'would argue that it's not their priority' to care for creation (Teacher T1.B, 31:13).

Despite this school implementing sustainable changes in tandem with student leaders, the absence of internal communication networks negated the transformative possibilities for the broader school community. For one student, this translated into a disconnect between their faith and the school's ethos, expressing 'when I look at my school, I'm very proud of it. But sometimes something is missing, something that makes it unique, that might also help the environment' (Student S1.E, 10:28). Another student noted the positive ripple-effect knowing about the solar panels could have for their school, saying, 'if they're visible for everyone, then they understand that, then they might want to have solar panels in their house' (Student S1.E, 12:30). Without communicating sustainable changes with the school community, only certain people participated in that care of creation, excluding other students and teachers from that transformative journey.

For the school in Case Study 4, participants reflected on how that absent communication with the wider student body minimised opportunities to cultivate further engagement in ecological action. However, other participants highlighted the benefits of effectively communicating care of creation across internal school networks and the regional diocesan, creating a culture of sustainable change that instigates community-wide changes and incentivises individual-level action. For example, one teacher said how 'seeing the gas and electric bills of a school' helped them see 'the bigger picture', motivating them 'to turn the heating off or turn the lights off' (Teacher T4.C, 09:18). Furthermore, one headteacher cited how they felt 'inspired by the bishop's vision for sustainability' in the Diocese of Salford to enact stewardship in their school (Senior school leader H5.A, 01:30). These examples from participants demonstrate the benefits of effectively communicating care of creation across schools and diocesan networks, creating a culture of sustainable change that instigates community-wide changes and incentivises individual-level action.

2.5 Perceived cost of change

Many teachers, senior leaders, and third-party specialists acknowledged the perceived initial cost of sustainable transformations, such as installing solar panels or heat pumps, as a significant hurdle to overcome. One third-party specialist emphasised the 'access to funding' alongside the 'lack of funding' as magnifying these perceptions of sustainability as too expensive (Third-party specialist O1, 17:21). The perceived cost of change affected schools by increasing their reluctance to implement sustainable transformations because of their financial impact.

One example of this perceived cost of change included the challenge of addressing waste culture. Students expressed wishes for 'a clean environment' in their school without 'loads of litter', and teachers reflected on the wasteful quantities of photocopying as 'a big problem' (Student S2.F, 21:09; Teacher T8.B, 11:17). One teacher even described how they took home their student's paper waste, as there were no recycling facilities at their school because senior leaders perceived the cost of a sustainable waste management provider as too expensive. Another senior school leader raised the challenges of 'procurement and acquisition' stating: 'As a school, we deal with probably hundreds of different companies on a day-to-day basis' (Senior school leader H6.A, 20:01). Sustainability challenges in procurement ranged from excessive packaging on stationery supplies to bins overflowing with single-use food containers, amongst other areas. From every level of school life, this single-use waste culture and excessive material consumption symbolised the limits to the care of creation within the current educational procurement model and the financial constraints within that system.

Case Study 5: The yearly school skip day

'We have a skip day at the end of the year, every year', says one teacher, 'It's literally empty everything that you can, and it gets filled within two, three days? And we need another skip because it's always full' (Teacher T8.D, 13:18). 'And that's the thing,' replies another teacher, 'how do we fill a skip every year?' (Teacher T8.C, 13:33). In contemplating this question, teachers in this focus group considered how they replace textbooks every few years, throw away left-behind workbooks and acquire a yearly stock of disposable stationery like whiteboard pens. It quickly becomes clear how the school fills a skip every year.

Yet, when asking teachers and students in the same school to imagine their ideal sustainable school, they listed changes such as 'more recycling bins', 'more plates and reusable stuff', 'more grown food, not much stuff that's been delivered', 'less waste', and 'reduced single use plastic' (Student S8.E, 37:22; Student S8.B, 37:34; Student S8.D, 38:03; Teacher T8.A, 29:08; Teacher T8.D, 29:14). The visible waste culture of litter, single-use items, and the yearly skip day became emblematic of the school's current approach to sustainable changes.

Senior leadership at the school acknowledged the problem, stating, 'I would really like to make our site a more sustainable site. But it's the cost of getting it to where you want it to be' (Senior school leader H8.A, 10:42). They cited the higher upfront costs of sustainable changes compared to cheaper, short-term solutions. For example, while acknowledging that disposable food containers in the canteen were ultimately more expensive for the school and the environment than reusable plates, the upfront cost of facilitating this change felt too large to justify.

Case Study 5 begins to uncover the complex and interconnected factors that impact material procurement, waste culture, and financial decisions in schools, demonstrating how this barrier is especially unique to each educational context. However, for participating schools that had already enacted sustainable transformations in procurement, teachers and senior leaders cited the long-term cost-saving benefits of such initiatives. For instance, one sustainability lead described how the school had saved 'about £8,000 through in-kind donations or actual money' in one year, such as reducing their energy bill through organising groundwater rebates (Teacher T7.A, 12:14). The same school's senior leadership team described the balance between their school's investment in sustainability and their long-term, cost-saving benefits: 'It's not cheap. We had to make a choice. So, either you've got to invest in terms of staffing, or you've just got to be realistic' (Senior school leader H7.A, 19:38). H7.A demonstrates the limiting factors of financial investment in sustainability, needing to set 'realistic' goals depending on available fiscal resources. As such, schools face a difficult balance between the short-term financial barriers of sustainable transformations and the long-term returns on investing in sustainability for their school community.

3. The Caring for Creation model

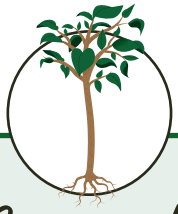
Informed by the interconnected barriers to sustainable transformations facing Catholic secondary schools, including short-term prioritisation, separation of sustainability from a school's remit, attainment pressures, ineffective communication networks, and perceived cost of change, we move to the question: **what do schools need to overcome these challenges?** The Caring for Creation model offers one framework to support schools in cultivating a whole school approach to sustainability (see Fig. 1). It visualises the steps schools may take in developing community-wide sustainable transformations as the growing of a tree, echoing the concluding prayer of Laudato Si', 'that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction'. A full guide for schools on using the Caring for Creation model is freely available via the Guardians of Creation Project's webpage. The model categorises a school's sustainability journey into four stages:

Stage 1: Planting Seeds

in which schools recognise the call to care for creation and identify existing sustainable practices.

Stage 2: Taking root

in which schools develop student and staff leaders as they embed care for creation into their school ethos.



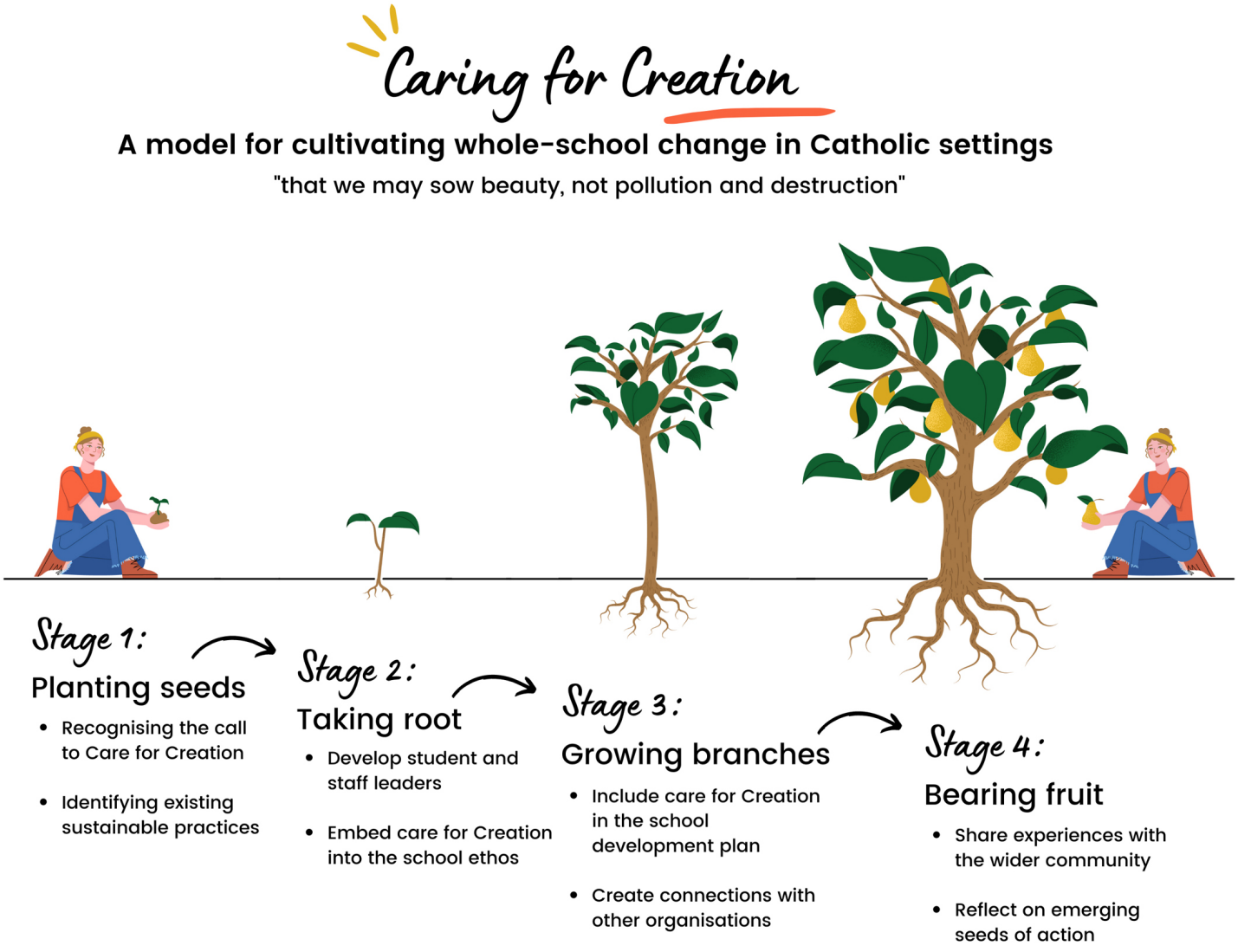
Stage 3: Growing branches

in which schools include care for creation in their development plan and create connections with other organisations.

Stage 4: Bearing fruit

in which schools share their experiences with the wider community and reflect on emerging seeds of action.

These stages of development are not static or universal but remain fluid and variable within the unique contexts of each school. The model is both descriptive and prescriptive, cataloguing the developmental journeys of the schools participating in this study into a cycle of change. Even within the eight participating schools, every community presented at a different stage and incorporated each stage in a way that was appropriate to their context. For instance, some schools started with their school development plan or by connecting with other organisations rather than waiting until what this model categorises as the third stage. Rather than offering an inflexible step-by-step guide, the Caring for Creation model acts as a reflective tool, helping schools identify potential next steps and assisting them as they map their journey towards the sustainable future they envision. While illustrated in a linear sequence, it is vital to consider this model as cyclical, representing a multifaceted, renewal-based approach. The Caring for Creation model aims not to grow a single tree but to cultivate an orchard; one transformation's fruits become the seeds for the next innovation and feed each student's ecological spirituality for life beyond school. The subsequent sub-sections consider each stage of the model, drawing on examples from the Guardians of Creation Project's interaction with its eight participating secondary schools to understand each developmental stage in-depth.



3.1 Planting seeds

The process for schools commencing sustainable development is comparable to planting a seed. Seeds represent growth potential, promising the beauty of creation from outwardly humble beginnings. Change only occurs when school leaders plant those seeds of action, articulating the intention for growth. Equally, planting seeds of change is a long-term investment; only after a substantive period of care and nourishment can a seed reach its full potential and bear fruit.

The school in Case Study 6 below illustrates this initial stage of cultivating whole-school change. It begins with the school's senior leaders hearing the call to care for creation and acknowledging that they can do more. The school community begins reflecting on the sustainability of their existing practices, identifying their strengths alongside areas for development. For some schools, this stage encompasses a formal 'sustainability audit' where a consultant calculates 'their carbon footprint, [to begin] their carbon accounting', but as one diocesan leader noted, this can 'depend on [schools'] financial situations' (Diocesan leader D7, 03:39; 13:35). In Case Study 6, senior leaders valued their students' existing passion in their self-started ecology as grounds for future developments, investing in 'co-leadership' to engage the whole school community and a mission statement refocused on stewardship. Their process is emblematic of this model's planting seeds stage, which hears the call to care for creation and reflects on potential growth areas to commence an action plan.

Case Study 6: Starting sustainable action

For one senior school leader, environmental action in school was in its early stages, stating: 'We need to do more […] because it's not enough' (Senior school leader H5.A, 27:45). While citing barriers of a 'finite budget' and pressured 'priorities', this senior leadership team focused on 'the little changes that make the big differences' (Senior school leader H5.A, 09:07). For instance, they began looking at 'the site more holistically' rather than 'putting quick fixes into place' (Senior school leader H5.A, 01:30).

As such, this school reflected on the sustainable practices they already had. Teachers identified changes such as considering 'what we use paper wise' to reduce photocopying, switching to 'recycled cutlery rather than the endless plastic throwaway stuff', and having 'trialled mixed recycling' before settling on 'having paper bins in classrooms' (Teacher T5.A, 00:54). While primarily financially motivated, staff realised the sustainable implications of these changes as starting points for further action. They also acknowledged underused resources, such as their garden space which 'never gets used for anything' but 'would be worth exploring with [students]' (Teacher T5.A, 19:49).

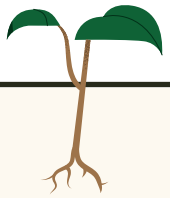
Alongside these site management changes, senior leaders and teachers cited emerging student leaders as the driving force for 'talking about stewardship within our school' (Senior school leader H5.A, 17:32). One senior leader recounted how 'a group of young people passionate about making a difference to the environment' had approached them, asking to start an ecology club, stating: 'We need to talk about co-leadership here because it's not my leadership that will change this. Young people will not look at me, […] they're going to look at each other' (Senior school leader H5.A, 24:26). In acknowledging the importance of students acting as 'role models' for each other, the staff decided to 'make more of our own mission statement' and focus on building 'the right habits' to 'change behaviours for a far more sustainable world' (Teacher T5.A, 20:35; Senior school leader H5.A, 01:30). In this school's emerging action plan, student leadership and behaviours became the seeds of sustainable change.

Planting seeds begins with small activities in ecological action rather than a system-wide imposition and is often contained within a few areas of school life. Facilitators of this stage invite reflections on why care of creation is meaningful for the school community, inspiring personal investment in enacting stewardship from the individual actors. This process can be proactive in prioritising certain areas of development or reflexive towards existing practices with sustainable implications.

3.2 Taking root

Having sown the seeds for sustainable change, taking root focuses on establishing concrete foundations for school-wide change. When planting seeds, they often seem inactive, but they grow a network of roots below ground to gather nutrients for the plant. Similarly, this second stage focuses on nurturing student and staff leaders, equipping them with the knowledge and skillsets needed to make sustainable changes. Through this process, care of creation becomes integral to the Catholic school's ethos, possibly emerging in its mission statement so that answering the cries of the earth and the poor becomes embedded in the school community's hearts and minds.

In Case Study 7, the school focused on building established practices to continue its sustainable development journey in multiple areas of school life. Using the Laudato Si' Champions toolkit produced by the Guardians of Creation Project's education team, the school began incorporating these sustainability student leaders into the wider community, making them integral in the school's sustainable development. As such, Case Study 7 illustrates one way to establish strong roots for substantive whole-school change, empowering its members to value care of creation through its Catholic ethos.



Case Study 7: Making plans with student leaders

For this school, there was 'a lot going on' around sustainability (Teacher T8.D, 16:37). One senior school leader described how they 'had the geography department holding the baton for environmental issues' but wanted to take sustainability further (Senior school leader H8.A, 01:39). Students expressed excitement at these new initiatives, especially around their school 'building a greenhouse' so they could grow 'fruit and veg' (Student S8.B, 03:25). At the same time, teachers observed their senior leadership team 'joining some of those dots across the school' between different pockets of environmental action (Teacher T8.D, 16:37).

However, the school viewed their developments as starting points for further change. A school leader described the existing approach as 'a foundation', intending to write the care of creation into their school development plan, giving 'it the impetus to push forward' across a 'two-year cycle' (Senior school leader H8.A, 21:50; 22:27). Teachers highlighted a need for 'education of staff and maybe site staff' to support this movement at a school-wide level (Teacher T8.D, 11:42). They also emphasised the importance of getting 'the kids involved from the start', making them 'a part of the planning process' and 'letting them take responsibility' (Teacher T8.A, 21:09).

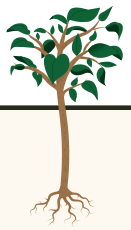
The school had recently used the Laudato Si' Champions toolkit with 12 students to support them in developing sustainable changes through independent projects. One senior leader aimed to support these students in 'championing this faith into action' across the school's extracurricular opportunities (Senior school leader H8.A, 18:26). The school also visited the Diocese of Salford's Laudato Si' Centre with the Champions, their chaplaincy team, and the school council's equalities group to 'bring in the social elements' with the ecological (Senior school leader H8.A, 19:06). Together, student leaders and teachers designed a new garden space and prayer garden, generating a clear plan 'about how it's going to go forward' (Senior school leader H8.A, 19:06).

Taking root is a practice development process in which the pockets of ecological action begin to spread through school life, supported by the engagement of invested pupils and teachers as they inspire others to contribute. Facilitating this stage can involve a time-based investment in utilising educational resources or financial investment via third-party specialists to enable staff and student training in their roles as sustainability leaders. Through this process, care of creation takes root in the school's ethos and mission to build a vision for the school's sustainable future.

3.3 Growing branches

This third stage of growing branches signifies transitioning from those foundational structures to tangible changes within schools, with active student and staff participation that extends into the wider community. Depending on the school's mission, these branches of action manifest in unique ways, ranging from behavioural changes around single-use waste to the development of outdoor learning spaces, amongst other areas. These actions find strength in the school's well-equipped student and staff leaders from stage two so that the whole community grows together. This stage also emphasises the importance of networks with regional dioceses and third parties like charities.

A distinctive characteristic of schools that felt they had made substantive sustainable transformations was including care of creation in their school development plan. For the school in Case Study 8, integrating care of creation into their school development plan was essential for prioritising sustainability at a whole-school level. It resulted in having a dedicated sustainability leader, investing time and money into answering 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor', and facilitating spaces for students to enact their ideas.[24] Having sown the seeds of becoming 'carbon neutral' with the support of student leaders, this school was making considerable progress in enacting the sustainable transformations they imagined.



Case Study 8: Sustainability in the school development plan

The inclusion of sustainability in this school's development plan was 'integral' in setting a goal for 'the whole school' to become carbon neutral 'by 2028' (Senior school leader H6.A, 11:25; 05:14). A senior school leader described how they received the role of sustainability lead after their governing body raised care of creation as a priority. They narrated how this change occurred since Laudato Si's publication, as it 'gave us more impetus and more of a focus. […] And as a Catholic school, it permeates through our school' (Senior school leader H6.A, 12:07).

Alongside site management changes such as switching to 'all wind powered' electricity and 'challenging [the school's suppliers] about what their commitment is to going green', this school sought to develop 'outstanding practice for student councils' (Senior school leader H6.A, 07:25; 20:01; 14:30). Working in partnership with the school's ecology club, a focus for the school council became 'specifically environment', meaning the school prioritised these student leaders attending 'two conferences/summits' on sustainability (Senior school leader H6.A, 14:30; 03:24).

'It's not about a tick box with us', the school's sustainability leader said, 'We know the journey is going to be a long one. But we're up for it big time' (Senior school leader H6.A, 07:25). They continued: 'The plan that we put forward for the first year was to be called an emerging school. […] We've put strategies in place this year, and we're going to fulfil them' (Senior school leader H6.A, 05:14). 'And then after that, we've got a plan to be a leading school, to become a carbon neutral school […] and working more in partnership with other schools' (Senior school leader H6.A, 05:14).

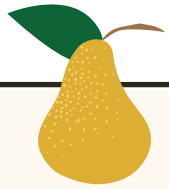
The growing branches stage operates as the turning point in this model, where the foundations of ecological action move towards substantive sustainable transformations that engage everybody within the community in a whole-school approach. Crucially, the school's development plan acts as a locus for integrating sustainable practice across curriculum, policy, and procedures. As these arms of action form, this stage also invites facilitators to branch out of the localised school community to connect with groups like charities, parishes, or dioceses to mutually benefit one another's sustainable development.

24 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 49.

3.4 Bearing fruit

In stage four, the endeavours of a school's sustainable transformations start to bear fruit. There are visible changes to the school's mission, encompassing whole-school ethos and the mindsets of everyone in the school's community towards daily actions. Schools in this stage celebrate their journey with gratitude and praise, sharing their experiences to foster a collaborative exchange of best practices.

The school in Case Study 9 exemplifies the positive outcomes of a long-term investment in undertaking a sustainability journey. Senior leaders and teachers identified substantial changes to their school's sustainability culture, encompassing their curriculum and site management. This development operated in tandem with student leaders through open dialogue with their senior leaders. In turn, the school celebrated their awards and accolades that recognised its successful sustainability transformations. However, this stage did not mark the end of the school's journey, as they highlighted staff training and community engagement as the successive focus areas. Accordingly, this stage acts as a reflection point for future development, where schools begin to identify emerging strands of action that form the next phase in their development plan.



Case Study 9: Where next for sustainability?

In one school, the care of creation had existed in the school's mission statement and development plan for 'at least ten years' across two headteachers (Senior school leader H7.A, 04:30). Senior leaders and teachers described how sustainability had 'support from all levels', and how it was 'in job descriptions' and 'in school policies' so that an ecological awareness persisted in every area (Senior school leader H7.A, 19:38; Teacher T7.A, 21:51). One senior leader described how their efforts to 'interweave sustainability within the curriculum' had 'really worked', especially in the 'PSHE curriculum, and the citizenship curriculum' (Senior school leader H7.A, 08:31). As a result, teachers reflected that these sustainable practices lead to 'a lot of quality awards' for the school, including healthy eating, diversity, and ethical procurement awards (Teacher T7.A, 00:09). These accolades raised the school's prestige and helped 'provide evidence for inspections' (Teacher T7.A, 00:17). Student leadership was central to this school's sustainability initiatives, seeking to 'empower them and give them agency to make significant real changes in their schools' (Teacher T7.A, 00:26). One senior leader fondly recounted how 'the young people, once they're energised, you can't stop them […] they want to change the world' (Senior school leader H7.A, 01:32).

With a long and successful history of sustainable development, this school community reflected on what was next. The school's sustainability lead wanted to focus on developing networks with other schools in their diocese, creating space for exchanging best practices to 'lead from the front', and adding provisions for staff training (Teacher T7.A, 52:08). While celebrating its success, this school acknowledged its sustainability journey was a continuous improvement practice. 'It's a long-haul game', reflected one senior leader, 'it's a process rather than the endpoint' (Senior school leader H7.A, 35:12).

Bearing fruit is a celebratory and reflective stage of the model's process, which acknowledges the positive difference sustainable development has offered for the school's community and aims to share this journey with others. Facilitators may solicit reflection on the strategic value care of creation has brought to the school, considering the implications of sustainable development on areas such as curriculum, ethos, and building management. In this reflection process and as schools identify those emerging seeds of future action, the whole school begins systematically working together to build the sustainable future it envisioned in the earlier stages.

4. The role of dioceses in supporting schools' sustainability

Following Section 3's in-depth consideration of sustainable transformations at a whole-school level, we briefly consider the role of dioceses in supporting ecological education within Catholic settings. Through our data gathering, staff at the Diocese of Salford contributed to our understanding of the barriers facing schools, discerning how dioceses can support educators in developing their care of creation. The Diocese of Salford is unique in the Catholic Church's ecological context of England and Wales, as Bishop John Arnold is the lead on the Environment for the CBCEW.[25] As such, sustainability was a current focus within the diocese when we conducted these interviews, with an established organisational approach to ecological issues. The following subsections narrate diocesan developments that staff felt worked effectively and areas for growth, including cross-departmental communication, the Laudato Si' Centre, and school-parish-home connections.

4.1 Cross-departmental communication

Diocesan leaders raised how increased cross-departmental communication proliferated ecological action throughout the diocese's organisational structures. Staff members described how their teams worked 'less in silos, and more interdependently with each other' (Diocesan leader D5, 00:47). The result was that sustainability was 'not just seen as the environment team's work' but became part of 'all teams' from 'Human Resources' to 'Property' and 'Finance' (Diocesan leader D1, 03:45). One diocesan leader expanded:

> "Once upon a time, that would have been the environment department- nothing to do with me. But now, it links into curriculum intent and implementation. It clearly links with Religious Education in a Catholic school, but it also links with geography, with science, with maths. And the idea is that with an environment team […] there will be dialogue with my team about how best to do something from a school perspective."
>
> ***Diocesan leader D5, 04:17***

This diocesan staff member's account connotes the collaborative influence of cross-departmental communication, connecting care of creation with Catholic schools across multiple disciplines and curricula. In this case, joint-up working patterns at a diocesan level where sustainability is a priority across the resources and support available to schools within this diocesan partnership was a strength of the Diocese of Salford's existing approach.

4.2 School-parish-home link

Fostering active connections between schools, parishes and families was a key concern for diocesan staff. One diocesan leader reflected how 'a lot of people don't connect the people and the environment bits', stating 'there's still a real disconnect' between the two aspects of Catholic life (Diocesan leader D1, 12:53). Similarly, while some diocesan staff highlighted the positive impact of getting 'the young people within a parish to lead on [sustainability]', others noted that 'the parish and the school don't really link on anything other than the sacraments, and that is done in quite a formal way' (Diocesan leader D3,15:46; Diocesan leader D2, 15:29.). Another diocesan leader continued: 'I would really love to have a parish school link, but the parishes and the schools just don't work like that. And it's such a missed opportunity because this is about families. It's about the future of our children' (Diocesan leader D2, 15:29). Interestingly, no school-level participants, including senior school leaders, teachers, and students, raised the school-parish-home connectivity as a concern. The recorded responses imply that only regional and national level organisations within the Church perceive this area as a challenge for sustainable transformations, suggesting that more work is required from dioceses and the CBCEW to foster this connectivity and convey the benefits of the school-parish-home link for sustainability.

25 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 'Environmental Advisory Group (EAG)', (11 March 2021) <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/environment/environmental-advisory-group/> [Accessed 14 September 2022].

The importance of strong relationships between the parish, school, and home is a long-standing concern for the Catholic Church at a national level in a UK context. How the parish 'will affect all our educational work' was a central concern as far back as the *Signposts and Homecomings* report for CBCEW.[26] In recent years, Pope Francis conveyed the importance of this relationship for sustainability, identifying how 'ecological education can take place in a variety of settings: at school, in families, […] in catechesis and elsewhere'.[27] Therefore, we highlight the importance of the school-parish-home link as an essential and under-acknowledged factor in enacting ecological education, offering a rich area for further study.

4.3 Impact of the Laudato Si' Centre

Diocesan staff, senior school leaders, and teachers highlighted the Diocese of Salford's Laudato Si' Centre as a focal point for sustainable development and ecological education. The CBCEW describes the Laudato Si' Centre as 'a flagship for effective action on climate change', encompassing a walled garden with vegetable patches, greenhouses, beehives, a memorial woodland, and outdoor learning spaces.[28]

Among our participating schools, the Laudato Si' Centre connected them to the diocese and helped develop their sustainable transformations. A senior school leader recounted how their visits to the Centre were 'really useful' for enabling 'young people to be more involved, […] to be inspired and bring something back' to their school (Senior school leader H3.A, 31:52; 30:37). Other teachers expressed interest in visiting the Centre with their students, such as one teacher who wanted 'to make sure that's in my new curriculum […] to take kids over there' each year (Teacher T3.B, 19:50). While the space is still in development, one diocesan leader described how the Laudato Si' Centre is 'about that interconnectivity […] focused on wellbeing, spirituality and learning', embedding the vision of an integral ecology into its activities (Diocesan leader D1, 01:44). Another diocesan leader reflected:

> "When I look back now and think that that walled garden was just simply a lawn three years ago, and there's just so much going on there now. We get visits from a lot of schools and some parishes; it's also quite a focal point for volunteers. […] It seems to be quite a centre of interest, so that's working well."
>
> ***Diocesan leader D6,13:35***

This diocesan leader narrates how the Centre connected different areas of the diocese, involving individuals, schools, and parishes to enhance sustainable transformations across the diocese. The accounts to date suggest that this Laudato Si' Centre model offers a potential strategy for creating an interconnected sustainability network across a regional faith community. Further research may consider how the Laudato Si' Centre model can serve as a prototype for other dioceses to adapt within their contexts.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this report has introduced the Caring for Creation model as one framework for cultivating a whole school approach to sustainability within Catholic schools based on the actions and practices observed in schools at every level of ecological awareness and development. Drawing on the insights and narratives of eight school communities in the Diocese of Salford, this report has explored a collection of barriers educators face in effectively implementing sustainable transformations, alongside the role of dioceses in supporting this process. Subsequently, the model presented in this report moves through a cyclical journey from identifying a school's existing progress towards the care of creation to developing a school's next steps in a flexible framework and reflecting on the future seeds of action within the educational community. In doing so, the Caring for Creation model emphasises the importance of investing in student and staff leaders, including care of creation in a Catholic school's development plan, and fostering connections with the wider educational community. The unique nature of every school means that the four stages represented in this model are not fixed or linear, so not every educator's journey will follow the stages in sequence. However, as a reflexive resource for cultivating a shared identity that values the beauty of creation and actively works towards a sense of responsible stewardship, the Caring for Creation model offers one tool to support educators in cultivating whole-school approaches to sustainability in Catholic settings.

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26 Constant, D., *Signposts and Homecomings: The Educative Task of the Catholic Community,* Report to the Catholic Bishops' of England and Wales (Slough: St Paul Publications, 1981), p. 141.

27 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, para. 213.

28 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 'Response to the Ecological Crisis', (14 August 2020) <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/environment/ecological-crisis-response/> [Accessed 14 September 2022].

Appendix 1: Data collection and analysis methods

Members of the Guardians of Creation project's education team collected the data presented in this report from the eight secondary schools that voluntarily participated in the Laudato Si' Champions toolkit pilot study in the Diocese of Salford. Collating a total of 83 participants across 36 interviews and focus groups, collating this data aimed to develop an informed understanding of Laudato Si' in England's secondary Catholic education.

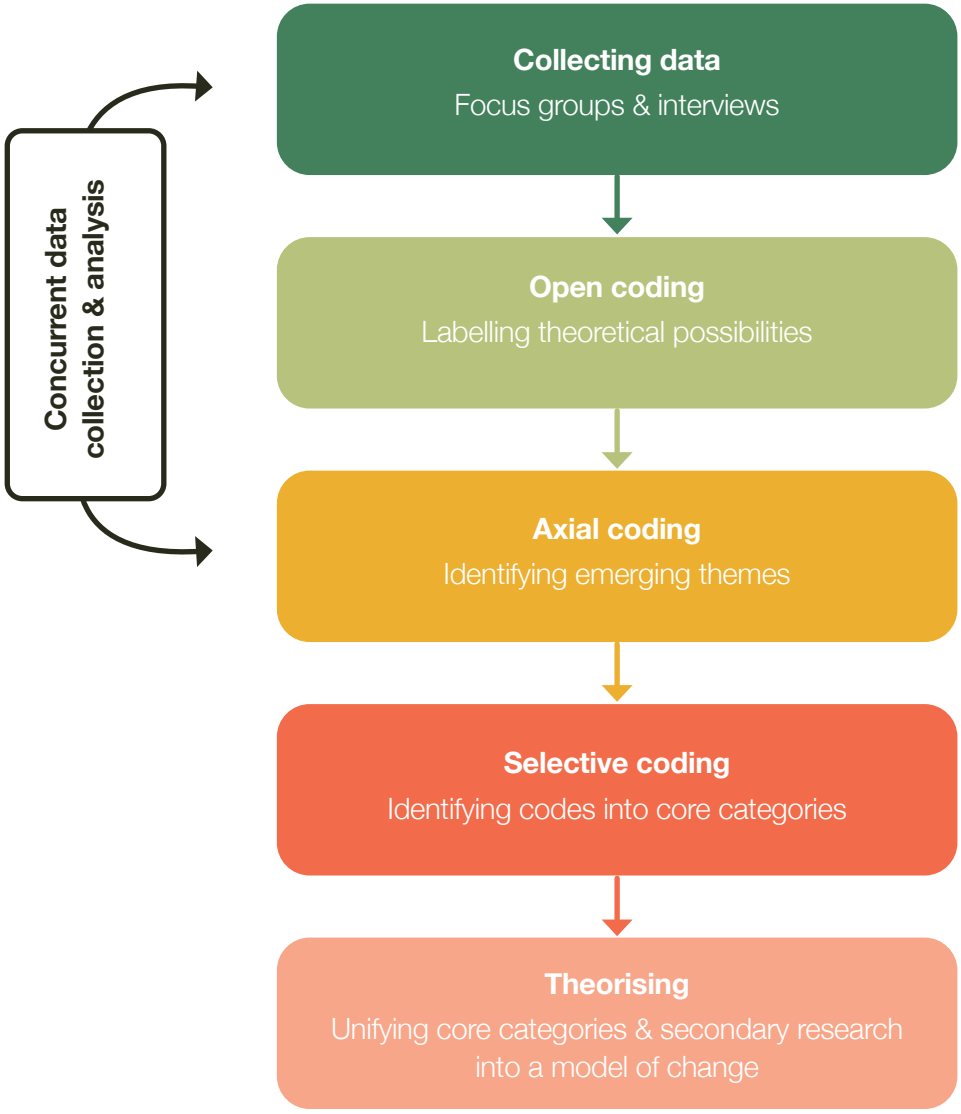
Group of participants	Data collection method	Number of interviews/ focus groups	Total number of participants
KS3 students in pilot schools	Focus groups	8	44
Teachers in pilot schools	Interviews	6	6
	Focus groups	3	14
Senior Leadership Team (SLT) representatives in pilot schools	Interviews	7	7
Staff at the Diocese of Salford	Interviews	6	6
National policy officers from the Catholic Church in England and Wales	Interviews	2	2
Third-party ecological education specialists	Interviews	4	4
	Total	**36**	**83**

Having transcribed the audio recordings from each interview and focus group, we used evolved grounded theory to construct our analysis in three stages of open, axial, and selective coding (see Fig. 2). The basis of the grounded theory approach arises from Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research*, David Silverman's *Qualitative Research*, and Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman's *Qualitative Data Analysis*.[29] Much of the data collection and initial open coding occurred concurrently, enabling constant comparative analysis. In doing so, we emphasise what Gina Grandy terms the position of the 'researcher as co-constructor', acknowledging the 'subjectivity of the researcher' as an instrument of interpretation and analysis in presenting the 'opinions, values, stories, and reflections' this study has collated through its primary data collection.[30]

29 Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 1998);
Silverman, D. ed., *Qualitative Research,* 5th edn (London: Sage, 2021);
Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd edn (London: Sage, 1994).

30 Gina Grandy, 'An introduction to constructionism for qualitative researchers in business and management', in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods,* ed. by Catherine Cassell, Ann Cunlife, and Gina Grandy (London: SAGE, 2018) pp. 173–184 (p. 178).

Fig. 2. Qualitative data grounded theory methodology



Ethical considerations

The study was approved by St Mary's University Ethics Sub-committee. Full and informed consent was given from each pilot school's headteacher, alongside all pupils participating in the project's sessions and their parents or guardians. The consent forms included notice that participants' data would be stored securely and lawfully according to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All data items were anonymised before interpretation and analysis using a letter-number substitution system to protect participants' privacy. References to individual interviews or focus groups and their transcript's timestamp are given in parentheses after quotations, such as (T3.A, 24:53).

Appendix 2: Glossary of terms

Care of creation. A theme of Catholic Social Teaching, drawing on the seventh commandment to respect the integrity of God's creation. It encompasses a sense of responsible stewardship, caring for the earth and the people living on our shared planet. This report uses "care of creation" and "care for creation" interchangeably unless otherwise stated.[31]

Ecological crisis. A condition of human-induced ecological disorder that may destroy the earth's ecosystems and significantly damage human life for multiple generations. It encompasses global warming, loss of biodiversity, and social factors such as loss of human life.[32]

Ecological education. The process of developing an ecological understanding or literacy. More expansive than climate literacy, ecological education involves understanding core ecological principles with ecological practices informed by human-environment interactions. This study distinguishes ecological education from environmental education to include human and natural ecosystems.[33]

Ecological spirituality. The intersection of ecological actions with religious and spiritual beliefs. In a Catholic context, ecological spirituality refers to ways of acting, thinking, and feeling about creation that draws on the Gospel's teachings to create moral practices of protecting our common home.[34]

Ecology. The interrelationship between all living and non-living things encompassing humans, society, plants, animals, environments, and more. Ecology recognises that everything is connected and interdependent. This report uses "integral ecology" and "ecology" interchangeably unless otherwise stated.[35]

Encyclical. A papal letter that is circulated to all bishops in the Roman Catholic Church.[36]

Ethos. In the context of Catholic education, the character and way of life at a school reflect the Catholic Church's moral teachings. A school's ethos is represented in the lives of pupils, teachers, and facilities within its community.[37]

Mission. The sharing of a faith's beliefs and practices within their community. Schools often express their mission in a statement or code of conduct, emphasising the values and aims of their educational vocation.[38]

Sustainability. The maintenance of balance with the earth's ecosystems by communities, in solidarity with the needs of future generations.[39]

Sustainable transformation. A change in policy, practices, or governance to make a community more sustainable and establish a balance between the health of nature and human life. This report uses sustainable transformations and sustainable changes interchangeably unless otherwise stated.[40]

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