A framework for whole-school approaches to education for sustainability (EfS)

Facilitator guide

The purposes of the framework

There are three main purposes for the framework:

1. **clarifying what is meant by the term "whole-school approaches" to EfS**—it provides a series of aspects thought to be important in whole-school approaches to EfS, and a set of scaled indicators on a continuum from absent to well developed, that allows schools to understand the breadth and depth of EfS in schools

2. **helping a school to identify what might be involved if it were to initiate a whole-school approach to EfS**—it provides a leverage for school staff to begin to formatively assess how they feel their school is positioned currently in terms of the Aspects of a whole-school approach, and what and how they can work to improve their whole-school approach in a way that is appropriate for their school.

3. **providing a means by which a school that considers it currently has a whole-school approach to EfS can discuss its approach and possibly develop it further**—it provides an opportunity for a stocktake as to how the school is progressing towards a whole-school approach to EfS, and is a useful review tool. It is **not** intended to be used as a summative tool, to give a score for the school, or to be used to compare one school against another.

The 25 aspects of the framework

The framework identifies 25 aspects within whole-school approaches to education for sustainability (EfS) in schools. These aspects have been explored through research in several New Zealand primary and secondary schools.

Evidence has been found that each aspect is a factor in developing whole-school approaches to EfS that align with *The New Zealand Curriculum* and international conceptions of EfS. The research also showed that the framework promotes fruitful and meaningful discussion about EfS in schools. However, should you (the facilitator) become aware that teachers are in need of further explanation, we provide here a short explanation for each aspect to assist you in using the framework. Each explanation attempts to provide some background to the aspect

and what is meant by it, and attempts to strike a balance between being prescriptive and allowing for local interpretation at each school.

The framework divides the aspects into four **sections:** people (ten aspects), programmes (six), practices (six) and place (three). Each aspect has **indicators** which fall under a set of five headings, namely, "absent", "preparatory", "emerging", "developing", and "well developed". The indicators are seen to build upon one another from left to right, so for example, although awareness is only explicitly mentioned under the preparatory heading, it is required for the emerging, developing and well developed categories. The framework therefore has a total of 125 indicators. This means that the question "are you taking a whole-school approach to EfS?" does not set up a simple "yes"/ "no" situation. Rather, every school will have its unique pattern of responses to that question.

We suggest that you use this guide as a reference **only** if your teachers need clarification about an aspect or if they appear to you to be basing their discussion on an unintended interpretation for one of the aspects. It is not generally intended that this guide be provided to teachers to allow them to self-facilitate, although this practice may be appropriate for teachers knowledgeable in EfS.

People

1. **Working collaboratively across all groups involved in the school**—whole-school approaches require effective working relationships in which all groups involved in the school are able to contribute. Collaboration is taken to mean working together in such a way that encourages participation and sharing of ideas/resources. "Groups involved in the school" is taken to mean students, staff, boards of trustees, parents and the wider community involved in the school. This collaboration may not involve all groups all the time, but successful working collaborations provide opportunities for all to be involved and to contribute.

2. **Reflecting the cultural diversity of the school and its community**—whole-school approaches recognise that cultural identity, and recognition and acceptance of diversity are important. Culture is interpreted here in a broad sense akin to "the way we do things", and may incorporate ethnic, religious, social, academic, sporting, artistic, –and so on—ideals which are important to the school and its community (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 9).

3. **Acknowledging New Zealand's bicultural foundations**—whole-school approaches recognise that the bicultural foundations of New Zealand are crucially important in social and cultural identity. Acknowledging these foundations recognises the role of the Treaty of Waitangi and promotes knowledge of te reo Māori and me ōna tikanga (Māori languages and culture) alongside European languages and culture (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 9).

4. **Having community relationships for learning**—whole-school approaches see schools as a complete functional part of their community (encompassing school staff, students and their families, as well as the local community in which the school is located). The learning relationships can have many different forms (i.e., student presentations to parents, community experts talking to a class, partnerships in action projects, and so on). This aspect recognises that the school has much learning to offer

the community; equally, the community has much learning to offer the school (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 9).

5. **Engaging in participatory key decision making**—whole-school approaches require a democratic process of inclusive decision making that creates a sense of commitment to decisions that are made. However, it is recognised that not all parties can, or even should, be involved in all decision making. Key decision making is seen to encompass decisions that affect the quality of the educational experience for staff, students and the community through the school.

6. **Being involved in action for sustainability**—sound EfS involves participants taking actions that foster sustainability. This includes direct actions such as developing systems for sustainable waste management, installing solar panels, or planting a native garden, or indirect actions such as promoting sustainable behaviour through the community or lobbying for environmental improvement in the local area (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 8).

7. **Having support from school leaders for EfS in the school**—sound EfS in schools has been shown through research to be more effective with support from school leaders (senior management, departmental heads, syndicate leaders, board of trustees). Those who are responsible for *curriculum* leadership are especially crucial in this relationship. Whilst this is true for all school endeavours, as EfS is non-mandatory in schools, it requires school leadership support to gain space in the curriculum and active staff engagement.

8. **Involving staff in professional development in EfS**—sound EfS requires staff who are well informed about the aims, and skilled in the delivery, of EfS. As EfS is a relatively new and evolving area in the curriculum, many staff may require professional development to gain this information and skills. Additionally, as pre-service education in New Zealand offers few opportunities for all teacher trainees to gain understanding and skills in EfS, this makes inservice professional development especially important.

9. **Recognising the school as part of a local, national and global community in EfS**—sound EfS requires students to understand their place in the world and the interconnectedness between local, national and global dimensions of community. This recognition leads to thinking about the reciprocal interplay between local, national and global issues and is embodied in the phrase "think global, act local" (*The New Zealand Curriculum,*, p. 8).

10. **Celebrating whole-school of achievements in EfS**—sound EfS promotes change towards more sustainable behaviour. This may require significant effort, and positive reinforcement will support this and be an outward demonstration of the school's commitment to sustainability. Achievements in EfS should be celebrated just as achievements in school sports and cultural activities are.

Programmes

11. **Having a whole-school plan for EfS**—sound EfS requires co-ordinated and forward-thinking planning. Sustainability is very much about planning for the future, and the

whole school and its community should have the opportunity to develop a plan for EfS in the school. This plan is especially important as EfS is not mandatory in schools.

12. **Developing coherence between learning areas and EfS**—sound EfS is holistic and requires teachers and learners to understand connections within and between learning areas. This provides for coherent transitions, and opens up pathways for further learning (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 9). While a school may choose to deliver EfS either in one learning area, in multiple or all learning areas, or as a stand-alone EfS area, it is important that teachers ensure that learners see how environmental, social, cultural, political and economic factors are all involved in EfS.

13. **Using effective pedagogies in EfS to develop students' action competence**—sound EfS recognises that development of students' action competence is a key outcome for sustainability and lifelong learning. This requires the use of effective pedagogies that encourage creative and independent thinking, decision-making ability, and intentional and informed action taking for the learner (*The New Zealand Curriculum*, p. 34). It is recognised that using a range of pedagogies is most effective.

14. **Facilitating learning experiences in EfS within and outside the classroom in a variety of settings**—sound EfS recognises that learning can happen anywhere and that a range of experiences coupled with reflection can be very powerful for learning. Education **in** the environment (e.g., school grounds, local parks/beaches/bush) can promote understanding of, and attitudes and values towards, the environment that lead to a sense of commitment and connection with the environment for the learner.

15. **Fostering co-curricular EfS opportunities**—sound EfS may provide opportunities for staff and students to engage in sustainability-linked activities outside normal class time. This may take the form of clubs, envirogroups, community activities such as plantings (e.g., Arbor Day) or litter collection (e.g., beach clean-ups), or even outdoor education camps with some focus on learning about sustaining the environment.

16. **Carrying out assessment that recognises student development of action competence in sustainability**—sound EfS requires successful student learning outcomes. These can be determined through development of a student's action competence in sustainability. Assessment of this development is then desirable. It is recognised that general understanding of how to assess this development in EfS is still evolving but the framework for developing action competence in EfS can help.

Practices

17. **Utilising budgeting and purchasing procedures based on sustainability principles**—sound EfS requires decisions on budgeting and purchasing in schools to be made on ethical and sustainable grounds. This includes appropriate allocation of funds to promote sustainable operations in the school, considerations of sustainable use of any materials and resources purchased for the school (including options for recycling of used goods), and considering the sustainable and ethical positions of potential suppliers, including supporting local suppliers if feasible.

18. Having organisational support structures available for EfS—sound EfS requires that schools have support structures that enable sound engagement with EfS. These structures include effective communication and planning, such as appropriate meeting times and spaces (e.g., planning meetings, school assemblies), and EfS-sensitive school timetabling.

19. Practising sustainable resource management—sound EfS should entail the sustainable operation of resource management in the school. This reinforces the education messages delivered in the school, promotes efficient and sustainable resource use and may well have economic benefits for the school. It is recognised that there may be external constraints on resource management which the school may not be able to control, such as availability of recycling options, Ministry of Education guidelines on school operations, and so on.

20. Ensuring that the school's practices reinforce the EfS whole-school programme—sound EfS requires consistent messages to be delivered to all participants. In this aspect, the school's practices refers to what the school actually does (i.e., its culture and environment), which may in some cases conflict with what the school says it does in its EfS programmes and promotes in its EfS goals. In other words, does the school's rhetoric on EfS match the reality?

21. Orientating new staff and students to sustainability in the school – sound EfS requires all community members to commit to the school's EfS programme. For new members of the community, this suggests the need for an orientation on arrival so that they can participate fully in the EfS programme.

22. Monitoring, evaluating and reflecting—sound EfS requires critical reflection and feedback to ensure good practice. This suggests a need for regular but not over-bearing monitoring of EfS systems, evaluation of outcomes and reflection on direction, and the use of information gained to inform future actions and the development of the EfS programme.

Place

23. Using a variety of natural environments in the school grounds for formal and informal learning—sound EfS recognises that learning can happen both within and outside the classroom, as is noted in WS14, and that the school grounds can contain messages about the school's commitment to sustainability that should match its EfS goals, as noted in WS 20. This aspect brings these ideas together.

24. Having a variety of natural environments in the school grounds that sustain and people and ecosystems—sound EfS recognises the connectedness of people with each other, with other organisms and the environment. This interdependence should be modelled in the school through natural spaces (i.e,. gardens, play areas) that feature environmental, cultural, social or spiritual characteristics which enhance feelings of comfort and identity in the school, and support local biodiversity.

25. Developing new and existing school buildings that benefit the environment and student learning in EfS—sound EfS recognises that sustainable schools strive to incorporate thoughtful design and, where possible, sustainable features in buildings.

Such an approach provides learning opportunities for the school and its community. It also recognises the relationship of the built environment with our emotional and psychological well-being, and with the biophysical environment. This suggests a need for consideration of good learning spaces that nourish a community of learners.