

# The Eco-School Committee at St. Albert the Great College

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The work carried out by the committee during  
the scholastic year 2013-2014

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## **Abstract**

The eco-school committee at St. Albert the Great College Valletta consists of fourteen students and two link teachers. The committee meets once a month, after school hours, to discuss ideas on how to improve the environment of the school and that of the wider community.

In previous years the committee at St. Albert the Great College focused on: establishing a school recycling system, and helping the administration reduce paper, water and electricity consumption in the school. Through these efforts, the committee was awarded the Bronze Award and the Silver Award. This year's committee is trying to: reinforce the school recycling system, and set up green areas both inside and outside the school premises.

## **Setting up the Committee**

In the first week of October our eco-link teachers - Ms Tiziana Calleja and Ms Marika Pisani - spoke during morning assemblies regarding the eco-school committee and handed out applications to those interested in joining. The first meeting took place a week later, in the school Board Room. Students from Year 6 to Year 10 were present. Some of these students had already been part of the eco-school committee in previous years. During this meeting, the students identified the important roles that had to be established in the committee (such as president, vice-president, secretary, and PR representative etc) and elected the students that were to take on these roles for the entire year.

The members discussed the achievements of the committee during the previous years and any new issues that they wished to tackle. The students decided that during the scholastic year 2013-2014 the committee would focus on two main issues, namely: improving the school's recycling system and setting up green areas at school.

## **The Environmental Review**

After the aims of the committee had been established, the committee members started working on a questionnaire regarding these issues. Copies of this questionnaire were handed to eco-school members and other students (who were chosen randomly).

From the questionnaire, it emerged that the recycling bins present in each classroom (one for recycling plastic and the other one for recycling paper) were too big when compared to

the size of the classrooms. Also, the students thought that at school there was a need for more fresh air and green areas.

The members agreed that this issue had to be discussed with the school administration so that a cost-effective and practical alternative to the current recycling bins could be found. Some committee members also commented that some students were not separating the waste appropriately. With regards to the second issue, some members proposed that the small room on the roof (which is currently not being used) may be converted into a small greenhouse. We were also interested in the idea of planting trees in Valletta.

## **Sharing the Action Plan and Eco-Code with the entire School**

Once the environmental review had been completed, the eco-school president, Miguel Cauchi, wrote the action plan. Here the aims of the committee, the dates by which these aims were to be reached and the individuals responsible for reaching these aims were specified. Other members of the committee produced an eco-code (a drawing that illustrates the main aims of the action plan).

We decided that the action plan and eco-code would be placed on the eco-school notice board (which was already being used to put notices regarding the dates of the after school meetings, dates of eco-school outings, competitions, etc) and the school facebook page. Several eco-school members helped maintain the notice board. For example, some students attached posters regarding Maltese indigenous trees that were donated by the school Science Department. Also, Jeremy Brey (an eco-school member) created a tree design using recycled cardboard which was used to decorate the notice board.

## **The Monitoring System**

Monitoring sheets were prepared for each classroom, and during every eco-school meeting members of the committee would go round the classrooms to see how the waste was being separated, whether the lights and fans were switched off or not, and whether the classrooms were clean or not. All this information was recorded on the monitoring sheets. Eventually, the monitoring process started being carried out during the Unplugged Sessions. These are 50 minute sessions that are organised once a week, and that allow students to participate in extra-curricular activities. In this way, the monitoring of the classrooms could be carried out once a week rather than once a month.

Towards the beginning of the year, there were several classes that were not taking the recycling system seriously. Indeed, several complaints were being made by the care takers on this regard. We approached the school administration in order to find a solution for this problem. The teachers were informed of this issue and students were reprimanded during morning assemblies. Eventually, we started seeing an improvement in the use of the recycling bins.

## Visits

During the first few eco-school meetings, committee members expressed the wish to visit the Malta National Aquarium at Bugibba. We felt that this visit would be a great opportunity to learn about biodiversity. The visit took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> November. Personally, we think that this visit was a very enriching experience because we saw different kinds of fish, and the tour leader explained how the fish live in their natural habitat and what they eat.

## The Peacock Garden Project

In December, we met with our headmaster, Mr. Mario Mallia, to discuss the possibility of having green areas in the school. The headmaster promised us that we would have the school administration's full support in this regard. We also discussed the idea of have potted plants in the classrooms and choosing particular students to be in charge of these plants.

The committee moved on to idea of setting up green areas outside the school. On the suggestion of our link teachers, we contacted the Valletta Local Council, Ms Cynthia Caruana (eco-school coordinator) and Mr Johann Gatt (LEAF national coordinator) for their assistance. The Local Council gave us the opportunity to plant indigenous trees in Peacock Garden, a playground located a few streets away from our school that is being completely rebuilt.

Our next step was to organize a number of fund raising activities so that we would be able to purchase any shrubs, trees and resources we would need in order to complete this project. The first fund raising activity was a cake sale.

## Arbour Day

While we working on the Peacock Garden project, we decided to participate in 'Arbour day', an activity that was being organized by the LEAF program. The activity was held on the 15<sup>th</sup> January and it involved the planting of indigenous trees at Xrobb I-Għagin Park and Sustainable Development Centre.<sup>1</sup> In order to participate in the activity, the committee sponsored four trees.

Arbour Day was a fantastic experience. We were given the opportunity to plant a number of trees ourselves, and learn about Maltese ecosystems and pest control.

## Our Progress So Far

Following 'Arbour Day' we continued working on the Peacock Garden project. Our committee president made a presentation during the teaching staff Professional Development Day and the Prize Day Ceremony to raise more awareness among the school regarding this project.

In March, a second fund raising activity, the pen cake day, was organized to raise more funds for the project.

## Our Goals

In April, we shall be planting the trees at Peacock Garden. We shall then move on to setting up green areas at the school itself and changing the recycling bins.

These projects are making us more aware of the importance of taking care of our natural environment and the community we live in. We hope that these projects will be a success so that we may attempt similar projects in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ekoskola.org.mt/uploads/2014/03/LEAF-Malta-Newsletter-Issue-2.pdf>