

Make Haste Reduce Waste

St. Augustine College Secondary Sector is an educational community of 375 learners and around 70 educators and members of the Senior Leadership Team. The EkoSkola committee was set up three years ago and its members meet twice weekly. From the start, litter was one of its main concerns and one of the action plans for the first year of activity. The work carried out resulted in an improvement in reducing the amount of litter and improving recycling in the school.

This year the committee members realised that learners were once again not sorting litter properly. Regular checks and collection of recycling bins showed the need to reduce the amount of waste generated and to improve the sorting of waste into the appropriate bins, namely general waste (Black bags) recycling (White bags) and organic bins provided in the class. The committee also wanted to reduce the overall amount of waste being generated. It was noted that this was mostly coming from packaging of food and drinks. In our school there is currently no tuckshop but snacks and drinks can be bought from two vending machines. During one specific week we monitored what learners were buying and found that bottles of water, juices and packets of nuts and snacks were the most popular. All these items have a lot of packaging, mainly plastic. Moreover, learners buy food and drinks from shops outside the school before entering and after leaving school. This also generates a lot of litter. Since the school is very near the sea, any litter left lying around outside can easily end up in the sea by being blown by the wind or carried off by rain water. Waste is also produced by school lunches prepared at home and brought to school in single-use packaging (mainly plastic and foil) and by using paper from just one side and then discarding it.

The committee decided to work on these issues in a number of ways:

(i) Proper recycling:

The committee continued to monitor and collect recycling from classes, collecting around one and a half bags weekly. It was noted that waste had not been reduced but most litter in the recycling bags had to be discarded with the general waste in the black bag as waste was not sorted properly. When the amount collected fell to about half a

bag in one week, the committee decided to take further actions. A short presentation on the proper recycling of litter and its importance was delivered to each year group during class assembly time. During staff briefing the teachers were told about the problems we were facing. Many teachers helped by reminding learners on proper sorting of litter. Others, such as the Science and English teachers, included litter in their lesson activities. We also started a staggered recycling system: during the first week, learners were asked to only recycle clean paper used from both sides, and clean and empty plastic bottles were added the week after. The amount of recycling collected rose to two full bags and then to two and a half bags.

(ii) Waste reduction:

The committee saw the need to reopen the tuckshop. An online questionnaire was distributed to all learners using Google Forms. This showed that nearly half the learners use the vending machines every day or sometimes, while more than half of the learners buy food from outside the school. The frequency varies; while some only buy sometimes, there are those who buy on a daily basis. The questionnaire also asked what food we should serve in the tuckshop. We will use the tuckshop to promote waste reduction and healthy eating. The committee is now working with the Senior Leadership Team and the Financial and Employability Skills teachers on the refurbishment of the tuckshop area.

(iii) Other work:

We are also promoting the use of lunch boxes and reusable bottles instead of single-use packaging, the use of paper banks in classes for sheets of paper used only on one side, and the collection of used batteries, plastic caps, and used clothes. As a college, we are also collecting used books and uniforms that are in good condition.

Over the next weeks we hope to finish the refurbishment of the tuckshop area. We will also introduce a system of Eco-points for classes. These will be based on the efforts of each class to reduce waste generated (such as through spot checks to check the proper use of paper banks and reusable lunch boxes and bottles) and proper sorting of waste in the class. The Year 7 learners will also participate in activities organised at school

by a local NGO about the United Nations Organisation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this way we will continue with our work to reduce waste and to promote proper sorting of waste so as to contribute to making our school a more sustainable and eco-friendly community.



Photo 1 – Monitoring of waste sorting and collection of recyclable litter from classes



Photo 2 – Information sessions to each year group about the importance of proper waste separation



Photo 3 – Working to reopen the tuckshop as a way of reducing litter.