

News story: Schools challenged to go single-use plastic free by 2022

The Education Secretary has today (Thursday 27 December) urged all schools to eliminate their use of single use plastics by 2022.

Damian Hinds has called on senior leaders in schools to stop using items such as plastic bags, straws, bottles and food packaging in favour of sustainable alternatives, and invited them to start a conversation with pupils about the effects discarded plastics have on the environment and wildlife.

The UK is committed to being a global leader in tackling the issue of plastic pollution and Mr Hinds is urging schools across the country to follow the lead of Georgeham Primary School in Devon who are the first school in the UK to achieve single use plastic free status.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

On my first school visit as Education Secretary almost a year ago, the very first question I was asked by a pupil was what we can do to limit the damage of plastic on the environment. Reducing our use of plastic clearly is an important and timely issue which has captured the interest and the imagination of everyone in society.

Plastic can harm our precious environment and be lethal to wildlife. The leadership shown by schools like Georgeham Primary in going single use plastic free is an impressive example for us all – and I want to work to support every school in the country following their lead by 2022.

It's not always easy but we all have a role to play in driving out avoidable plastic waste, and with more schools joining others and leading by example, we can help to leave our planet in a better state than we found it.

Georgeham Primary was awarded the accolade by Surfers against Sewage, a marine conservation charity, who recognised that the school had met five crucial targets including an initial plastic audit of the school and removing at least 3 items of single-use plastic items throughout the school. The key changes that enabled the school to go plastic free was by getting rid of plastic from the school's supply chain and replacing single use plastic with plastic that can be easily recycled.

One of the most common uses of single use plastic are the straws and packaging from the cartons of milk provided to reception pupils in schools. After agreeing a deal with their suppliers, Georgeham School now have their milk delivered in recyclable containers and the children drink out of washable beakers.

Whilst the Government has a 25 year Environment plan looking at the reduction of plastic use in general, the Education Secretary has asked the Department for Education to increase communication with the school supply chain regarding the plastic packaging of milk cartons and other day to day supplies for schools. Mr Hinds has the long-term ambition that all schools will work with suppliers to make these small changes with a view to make a big difference in single use plastic consumption.

Julian Thomas, Headteacher at Georgeham Primary School said;

We are thrilled to hear the Education Secretary is calling on all schools to become single use plastic free by 2022. All of our pupils enthusiastically played their part in helping the school reduce excessive single use plastic consumption. I am confident children across the rest of the country would also welcome the challenge!

By making relatively minor changes, such as replacing cling film for foil in the canteen we were able to significantly reduce our plastic use in the school. We're a small school but we think big and I'm very proud of everyone at Georgeham for what we've achieved.

The Government's 25-year Environment Plan launched in January pledges the elimination of avoidable plastic waste by 2042 and promises to consider steps to discourage plastic items that prove difficult to recycle and ideas to reduce demand for commonly littered items, including takeaway coffee cups and takeaway boxes.

There are also plans to introduce a world-leading new tax on plastic packaging which doesn't meet a minimum threshold of at least 30% recycled content from April 2022, subject to consultation, to encourage greater use of recycled plastic to tackle the problem of plastic waste and protect our environment.

A YouGov survey commissioned by BRITA UK and Keep Britain Tidy in April found that young people are more committed than other generations to mitigating the effects of single-use plastic, with 68% of 18 to 24 year olds currently owning a reusable water bottle, above the national average of 55%.

See [here](#) for more information on what the government is doing to reduce single use plastics.