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Nurturing ecological thinking in our Catholic Schools

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The influence which school ethos can have on pupils' attitudes and values towards the environment and sustainability was the theme of my final year Capstone.



The school where I undertook my research was St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor, Co. Down. As I soon discovered, the attitudes and values of staff are highly significant in forming the ethos of care and responsibility towards the world around us. From the early years pupils learn to give thanks to God for their beautiful new school and its stunning setting, nestled as it is between the backdrop of the Mourne Mountains, Kilbroney Forest and Carlingford Lough.

The interdependence between humanity and creation is embedded in the ethos of St Bronagh's, where pupils learn to value the gifts of creation. They are encouraged to see themselves as part of that creation and to contribute to the greater good of humanity by living more sustainably. As Pope Francis reminds all Catholic educators in *Laudato Si'* (2015): 'the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development'. (para 13.)

My research brought me to a deeper understanding of what working together as a school family really means. I learnt



that as Catholics we are called to care for everything around us, be it plant, animal, person and the world itself. The staff and students in St Bronagh's approach their eco-mission as a faith-focused family, working collectively, caring for and about each other and making informed decisions about how to use the gifts of creation. Taking inspiration from Pope Francis' insistence that things can change for the better and that we can help this

happen, the pupils are championing sustainable thinking and living nurtured by school staff and supported and encouraged by the local community. The school's hard work and dedication has led to its being recognised as an Ambassador Eco-school for the next three years. We all need to commit to environmental ethics and the contributions we can make to the greater good of the human family by thinking and living sustainably.