

Circular Schools: Zero Waste Champions Programme

Programme Overview



The Circular Schools Programme aims to empower young people to become environmental changemakers by introducing the principles of the circular economy and reducing waste in schools.

Through a series of practical, engaging workshops delivered throughout the academic year, pupils learn how everyday resources such as food, textiles and electrical items can be kept in use for longer through reducing, reusing and repairing. The programme supports schools to take meaningful action on sustainability by equipping pupils with the knowledge and practical skills to make the most of the resources we already have.

Developed in collaboration with Northern Ireland Resources Network members, who are leaders in reuse, repair and circular economy practices across Northern Ireland, the programme provides pupils with the knowledge and practical skills to help build a more circular future.

"I liked learning how to give old things a new life instead of putting them in the bin." - Year 7 pupil



Our Aims



- To embed Circular Economy education in schools across Northern Ireland and inspire the next generation of sustainability champions.
- To build stronger circular communities by connecting schools with local authorities and organisations that support reuse, repair and sharing.
- To give pupils and teachers the knowledge, confidence and practical skills to understand the Circular Economy and its role in addressing climate change.
- To encourage lasting behaviour change, helping circular thinking become a natural part of everyday life at school, at home and in the wider community.

Programme Structure

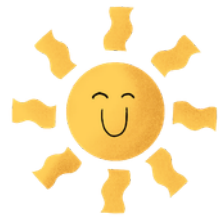
Since launching, the Circular Schools Programme has engaged over 1,000 pupils across 30 schools in six council areas, delivering over 80 interactive workshops on the circular economy, food waste, textile waste and electrical waste.

Coming in 2026/27

We are now entering the third year of the programme and aim to work with 20+ **primary, secondary and SEN schools** across eight council areas.

Participating schools will receive a series of engaging, curriculum-linked workshops delivered throughout the academic year. Pupils will develop practical skills, think creatively about real-world environmental challenges, and explore innovative ways to keep valuable resources in use for longer. Workshops include:

- **Introduction to the Circular Economy** – Exploring how everyday choices can reduce waste and protect our environment.
- **Food Waste** – Understanding the impacts of food waste and practical ways to prevent it.
- **Textile Waste** – Discovering the environmental impact of fashion while promoting repair, reuse and sustainable choices.
- **Electrical Waste** – Learning how to extend the life of electronics through repair and reuse.



Throughout the programme, pupils will explore the Waste Hierarchy: **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover and Dispose** and learn how these principles can be applied at school, at home and in their local communities.

Annual NIRN Reuse and Repair Week

As part of NIRN's annual **Reuse and Repair Week**, celebrated each year at the **end of May/beginning of June**, participating schools are invited to take part in our **Reuse and Repair Competition**.

Pupils and staff are encouraged to work together to develop creative reuse and repair projects within their classroom, across the whole school, or in the wider community, showcasing how valuable resources can be given a new life.

The competition celebrates creativity, teamwork and innovative thinking, recognising a range of inspiring projects that promote reuse, repair and resourcefulness. Competition categories and judging criteria are reviewed annually and will be shared with participating schools in advance of Reuse and Repair Week.

The winning school will receive a whole-school prize in recognition of their outstanding achievement.

Interested in Taking Part?

Please contact our **Environmental Education Officer, Órlaith Quinn**, to find out more about the Circular Schools Programme or to register your school's interest.

Email: orlaith@ni-rn.org

Tel: 07933 199771



"The workshops were fun, interactive and informative. The children learned so much and thoroughly enjoyed every session."

– Teacher feedback

