

Porthcawl Comprehensive School Case Study

Delivering The Workplace Recycling Regulations in Secondary Schools

Introduction

Ysgol Gyfun Porthcawl / Porthcawl Comprehensive School is a co-educational school with approximately 1200 pupils aged 11 – 18. Approximately 140 staff are employed at the school and there are 250 pupils in the Sixth Form. The school has embraced a consistent approach to implementing the Workplace Recycling Regulations, supported by senior leadership and a committed site team and operations manager. This case study summarises the approach adopted, lessons learnt and good practice examples.

Situation

Upon joining the school in August 2024, the newly appointed operations manager faced the challenge of rolling out Workplace Recycling within weeks. This involved introducing a new suite of 133 wheeled bins across the site and making changes to long-established waste management practices. A cultural shift was needed, with everyone committed to adapt to the new approach

Solution

The new approach to Workplace Recycling was introduced in September 2024, incorporating:

- The removal of bins in classrooms
- Rollout of a new, consistent coloured suite of bins - set up as standardised bin stations (indoors and outside)
- Use of clear liners throughout
- Daily litter picks by the site team and leadership by example

Impact

The result of the changes is a consistent recycling experience throughout, a clean and tidy site and commitment to do the right thing from top to bottom. Whilst the introduction of new bins represented a significant investment and clear liners are not cheap, monthly waste and recycling collection bills have reduced by approximately 33%. The year 1 outturn recycling rate was over 50%

Situation

The school is in the unusual situation of having complete autonomy over support functions. Cleaning and catering teams are employed directly through the school, streamlining communications and policy changes.

Being just 50m from the seafront, wind is a major issue. Bins need to be secured and litter kept under daily control. As with all schools, waste arisings vary over time, e.g. with end-of-term clear-outs. A proactive approach is needed to maintain cleanliness and avoid waste accumulations.

Challenges remain, most of which are operational in nature, including:

- Finding a cost-effective solution to clear liner purchase, particularly for the internal (140 litre) wheeled bins. Current liners do not fit well and are hard to secure in the bin
- Keeping on top of the collection service contractor and invoicing, ensuring missed collections and access issues are minimised
- Ensuring non-regular site users, including those hiring the sports and theatre facilities, recycle correctly.



Image: Internal example of the 3-bin system deployed across the site in 'non-food' areas

Solution - bins

A clear and consistent approach to all containers and signage is used across the whole site. This aids common understanding of what materials go where amongst staff, pupils and visitors alike. Recycling stations are well distributed, within lines of sight and driven by assessment of pupil movements.

Clear sacks are used as liners for all bins so that issues with incorrect placement of items can be spotted. All external bins are fixed to the wall to avoid windblown and unauthorised movement, with liners secured using bungie cords.

Cleaners move sacks from internal bins to the external waste compound(s) with help provided by the site operations team where needed. Caretakers empty the external bins, so there is a clear line of responsibility for internal vs external waste management.

Left to right, top to bottom:

- External bin system adopting a consistent labelling and colour scheme with clear liners used throughout
- Internal bin system with supporting mobile blue 'dolly' booked out by teachers to support classroom (paper and small WEEE) clear-outs, which caretakers will decant and sort
- External bin locations optimised according to pupil movements
- Weights have been bolted to external bin lids so they are not blown open in the wind
- Blue dollies also used to separately collect and move small WEEE on site
- Legacy (external) litter bins waiting to be repurposed / rebranded and used for events (temporary location, e.g. in support of sports days)



Solution – food waste

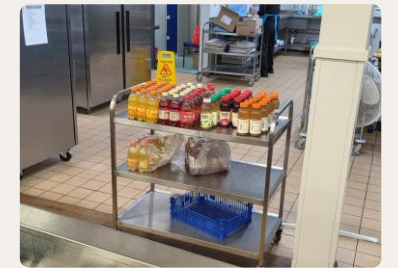
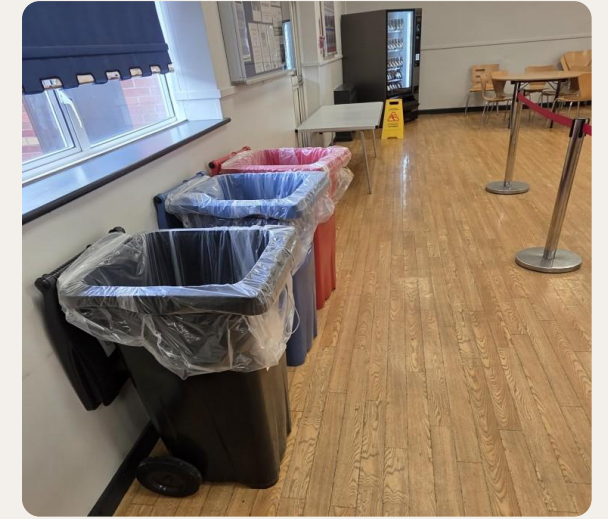
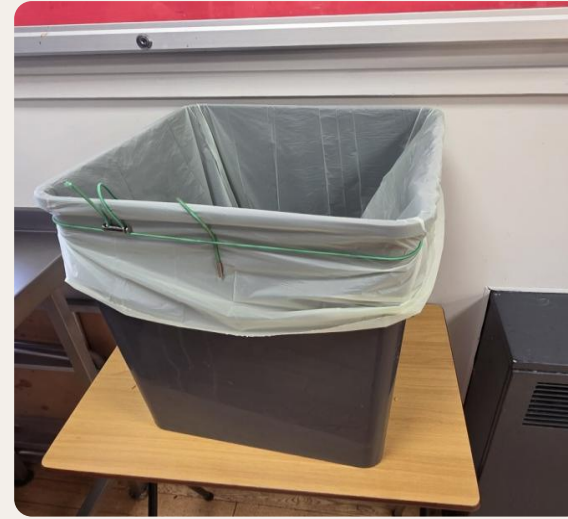
The management of food waste and its containment is well thought-out, with flexible arrangements applied to different settings in the school.

In the main canteen, which is monitored during breaks, bins and caddies are left open to aid 'hands free' disposal. In the main food preparation area bins have been retrofitted to be pedal opening, again for improved hygiene management. In food preparation classrooms, flexible mini-bins are in place, again adopting the standardised colour scheme.

Because the school manages its own catering, including supplies, decisions can be taken directly on refreshments that are made available for sale, with ease of packaging recycling factored in.

Left to right, top to bottom:

- Prominently located food caddy in canteen for pupil use
- Internal bins in canteen with open lids to aid use by pupils
- Selection of drinks available to purchase in the canteen: single material packaging, easy to recognise as recyclable
- Bins adjacent to canteen food preparation area have push pedal operation – to maintain hygiene
- Refillable water stations are located throughout the school, encouraging reusable bottle use
- Example food waste caddy in food preparation classroom



Solution – culture and leadership

A culture of taking ownership for waste management, litter and recycling has been embedded from the top-down. Where teachers request bins in their rooms, granted by exception, they become responsible for managing and emptying them, including the headteacher.

The site operations team undertake daily litter picks at 11:20am after the morning break. The headteacher is commonly seen picking up litter and the leadership team are visible through daily rota'd site patrols.

A staggered shift pattern applying to the 3-strong site operations team means monitoring is ongoing. Issues are resolved quickly and site CCTV is used to capture evidence and inform follow-up action.

Lines of responsibility and expectations are clear. Two dedicated 'recycling changes' letters were sent to parents / carers in April and September 2024, along with an assembly presentation in September 2024 coinciding with the change of system.

Image: School coat of arms



Impact - results

External waste compounds now have more recycling than general waste bins and the school sends zero waste to landfill



Monthly recycling rate consistently achieved

40-45%

Year 1 outturn recycling rate*

54.25%

Saving in monthly £ waste bills (pre versus post-Workplace Recycling Regs)

c.30%

Number of external (1100l) euro bins for general waste reduced from

7 to 3

* A big boost to recycling levels is seen in July due to classroom (paper) clear-outs

Impact - testimonial

As a large school site, with approximately twenty different buildings, there was a lot of logistical planning and communication required. The importance of recycling was clearly and consistently communicated to all year groups through engaging assemblies, ensuring that every learner understood not only how the systems work, but why they matter. Staff were equally involved, with the processes shared, discussed, and refined collaboratively with a view to create a unified, environmentally conscious culture.

There was regular communication to home to ensure a shared understanding. Recycling is a continued and regular focus at the school and with a total of 1350 pupils and staff on site each day we are proud of the shared responsibility and a collective action we have taken to support sustainability.



At Porthcawl Comprehensive School, we are very proud of our commitment to environmental responsibility through the development and delivery of a comprehensive recycling system. It has been a whole school approach: every member of the community - pupils, staff, leaders, governors - has played a part in embedding sustainable habits into daily practice.”

Mike Stephens
Headteacher

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