



ISEB
Independent Schools
Examinations Board

CASE STUDY

iPQ AT COTTESMORE SCHOOL: CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY

"It is incredibly rewarding to see pupils pursuing something they are individually motivated by under the umbrella of sustainability. If schools haven't explored the iPQ, they really should."

Ross Borthwick, iPQ Lead and Head of Sustainability and History, Cottesmore School.

WHAT IS THE iPQ?

The iPQ is a research-based project qualification that is carefully constructed to teach and assess essential independent learning skills for Years 5-8. It is divided into five sections: **Define, Research and Review, Discuss and Develop, Reflect and Present.**

HOW IS THE iPQ USED AT COTTESMORE SCHOOL?

ISEB's iPQ was first adopted at Cottesmore School as a leavers' project for a small group of Year 8 pupils in 2019. After its initial success, Ross Borthwick took on the role of iPQ Lead in the summer of 2020 and the qualification is now completed by all of Year 7 and 8. Ross is Cottesmore's Head of Sustainability, designing the subject's scheme of work in the summer of 2021. He founded the school's farm, which was built by children and parents, and keeps ducks and chickens rescued from battery farms, with the chickens housed in a run made from an old swing set. He also runs a breeding programme for Saddleback pigs (a rare breed).

Sustainability has become a timetabled subject at Cottesmore, with one hour a week for Years 6 and 7. In 2021, Ross decided that this should become the focus of the iPQ. Most Sustainability lessons are spent outdoors foraging, growing crops or creating bug hotels (the list goes on). However, when the British weather strikes, this lesson time is spent working on the iPQ. All research questions follow the theme of sustainability, such as examining aspects of school life and how these can become more sustainable or researching a personal passion through a sustainable lens, be that international sport or space exploration.



WHY CHOOSE THE iPQ?

Ross observes that the relevancy of projects such as “How have trains developed over time?” is boosted when linked to what is now one of the most prevalent global issues. The marriage of the iPQ to Sustainability has bolstered an already existing drive for sustainable living or created one for many pupils. One pupil, who previously had little knowledge or interest in sustainability, decided to combine this with his love for football when choosing his research question, electing “How sustainable is international sport?”. The research and outcome of the project were enlightening, causing the pupil to question something that previously he had accepted without question. Ross notes that “these learning opportunities that would not have existed without the iPQ are particularly important and rich”.

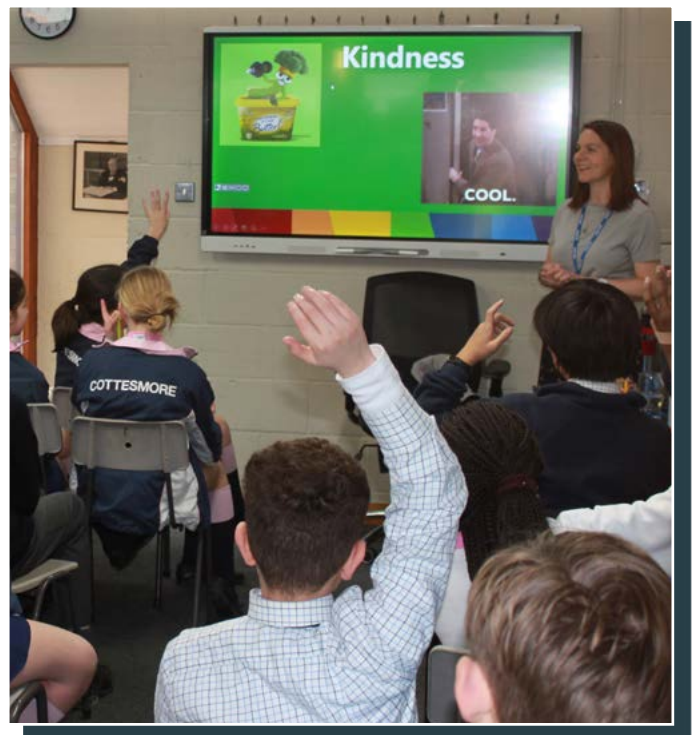


Cottesmore’s sustainability projects have tackled issues much closer to home. One particularly special project saw a pupil explore “Is the school’s catering sustainable?”

The student delved deep into the topic by questioning current standards, such as the number of food deliveries to the school each week. Feeling particularly strongly about the subject, the pupil then interviewed many involved parties and went on to email companies involved in the supply chain. This allowed her to generate the data on what proportion of the food on an average plate at Cottesmore had been sourced locally, nationally or internationally. Helen Sundaram, founder and director of The Kindness Bank – a lobby group dedicated to adding sustainability to the national curriculum in primary schools – visited Cottesmore for the iPQ presentations and was amazed by the quality of the work done by the children, but particularly impressed by this project. This has led to Cottesmore launching a sustainability podcast, based on their impressive iPQ projects.

The iPQ engages pupils’ strengths in a way that the core curriculum often does not. Students who have practical strengths thrive, given the opportunity of the iPQ. At Cottesmore, this has been perfectly supported by their sustainable theme, as pupils are heavily invested in the school farm. One pupil’s project focused on using the school’s food waste by creating a scrap collection bucket, which was then used to feed the chickens.

Ross recognises the importance of developing soft skills that are not encouraged in traditional exam preparation, but are essential to a child’s growth. The iPQ is an obvious opportunity for teamwork as it allows group projects whilst awarding individual marks; it promotes research skills and public speaking, none of which are covered in the core curriculum for Common Entrance. “The iPQ injects a new and exciting element into the existing framework.” Such is the success of the iPQ at Cottesmore, some pupils have decided to undertake another sustainability-based project after completing their timetabled iPQ.



For information on how to get started, visit:

www.iseb.co.uk/iPQ

For the Cottesmore School website, visit:

www.cottesmoreschool.com

To read about the success of the iPQ at The Banda School, Kenya visit: [iPQ Banda](#)