

CASE STUDY

MICHAEL DRAYTON JUNIOR SCHOOL GET GOING WITH SUCCESSFUL GROWING!



Michael Drayton Junior School is a large school of 500 pupils with a diverse catchment. As part of their Food for Life work, they have embraced growing to the full with great success, both in terms of the impact on the children and the growing of produce itself. Kate MacRae coordinates the growing as she is responsible for outdoor learning. The school understand that being outdoors is very important for the children's mental and physical health. Growing in the school grounds has given them a great learning context for that time outdoors, enabling them to experience risk in a safe setting, get their hands dirty and even wear wellies – a new thing for some! It also provides a real opportunity for team-working and peer mentoring as the older pupils support the younger ones in developing their skills.

Deciding on where to locate their growing beds was critical to this success. Kate recognised the need for beds to be in a high profile position for parents to see and also to be near the classrooms so that groups of children could go out easily, without the need for additional adults. Also, the spaces created needed to be big enough to grow a variety of vegetables without being too big to manage. Their beds vary in size, but are approximately 1m wide and 2-3m long. All of these aspects came together when they decided to redevelop the old tired-looking shrubbery areas outside the classrooms, as this is the area where the parents gather when they drop off and pick up their children. Dense, prickly shrubs were removed and a lot of work went into creating raised beds using sleepers.



So how was this work funded? A grant of about £1,000 was awarded to the school from Lottery Awards for developing the outside space. The support of the site manager, John, was invaluable, as he did all the necessary woodworking and building of beds with support from parents and grandparents. The result was a fine set of vegetable beds...but no soil! A delivery from the local household waste recycling depot of (very rich!) compost made from household waste soon solved the problem. It was given for free as a grandparent kindly picked it up in their lorry. The children wheel-barrowed it in which took a while but was worth the effort!

Experimenting with what to grow has been fun! The school are now in their third growing season but for the first season, Kate was unsure what would grow well in their soil. So they began with a variety of seeds – tomatoes, potatoes and runner beans, which they have learnt tend to always do well. Now they grow salad leaves, strawberries, carrots, broad beans, runner beans, French beans, cherry tomatoes and beetroot. Beetroot was a huge success story, especially a golden variety that grew particularly well, which the children loved! They pick and wash salad leaves, tiny carrots and cherry tomatoes in the summer term for their lunchtime Salad Bar. Equally, rainbow chard and spinach have done well – which had the added benefit of feeding the rabbits over the winter as it didn't die off!

As part of Kate's wage is paid for by Pupil Premium (two days per week), part of her focus to date has been on harnessing the input of these children, some with challenging behaviours. Children are taken out of class and set tasks related to growing that run alongside the curriculum. Naturally, it fits most

directly with the science curriculum but the growing space is used to enhance learning right across the curriculum. A whole section has been dedicated to a 'Dig for Victory' project and a lot of root veg were grown to enhance an Anglo Saxon history topic where the pupils made a broth and simple bread. The growing area provides a fantastic, practical context for a lot of maths learning – measuring, areas, perimeters and weighing. Growing has also fed into literacy through descriptive and instructional text (e.g. broth recipe). A free, easy-to-use app called PicCollage has enabled the children to take photos of their growing area as it develops and add text. From this a scrap book of before and after shots, and time lapse photos of the site's development have been created. In addition, the teacher who leads on cooking is aware of what is happening in the growing area and incorporates produce into recipes that the children cook. Alongside this and the lunchtime Salad Bar, any gluts are frozen and used for future cooking projects.



Kate's advice for any school thinking about starting to grow fruit and vegetables is to start small, with just one raised bed perhaps or pots. Most importantly, never be afraid of failure as more will be learnt from your failures than your successes! By getting the children involved right from the outset, as watering and weeding monitors for example, it is a learning experience where the responsibility is shared. Also, growing small things that the children can pick, wash and eat easily works well, such as different colours of cherry tomato. At Michael Drayton, even pupils who said they didn't like tomatoes enjoyed the sweet flavour – a real success!



This year, Kate wants to enhance the curriculum through growing for all children– a challenge with 500 pupils at the school but by the end of the year, every pupil will have had the opportunity to garden. This improves on the original plan as, when beds were allocated to year groups during the first two growing seasons, it was a challenge to encourage ownership. Some Teachers and Teaching Assistants were very keen and others less so! Kate will now dedicate more of her time to taking small groups out to garden, and for those days that she isn't on-site, Year 6 pupils act as Gardening Gurus and ensure jobs get done and that younger children are supported in undertaking these tasks.

TOP TIPS

- Start with just one raised bed or some pots - something that is easily manageable and will give maximum success, and put them in a high profile area. Hide it away and it will soon be neglected!
- Involve older children as monitors to watch, weed and water areas regularly
- Don't be afraid to experiment! It is great fun trying out different species and encouraging pupils to try things they would never normally try