St. Albert’s Primary School – growing space and outdoor learning project

This project was supported by the CSGN Community Projects Fund 2013-14. The Fund is focused on projects undertaken for the benefit of, and/or involving children and young people under 16 years of age and is intended to support small-scale, community led projects that deliver green network improvements on the ground; increase community use of the green network and/or increase community involvement in the maintenance and enhancement of the green network locally.

Where: St. Albert’s Primary School, Pollockshields, Glasgow
What: St. Albert’s Primary School was awarded £3,000 to further develop their growing space to support learning, create produce for cooking and promote healthy eating. The grant was used to purchase materials for three raised beds, compost bays an herb spiral and lectern mounts displaying research by the pupils.
Why: St. Albert’s have had an ongoing commitment to the eco school agenda for many years, but despite the school having amazing grounds with wild space and mature trees the new Head Teacher found that the children were generally playing on the concrete. The project has been used to re-invigorate the growing space and linking it with all areas of the curriculum. Grounds for Learning have helped the school develop play in the grounds in parallel to the growing space project.
Who: The project involves staff, pupils and parents from St. Albert’s Primary School, local charities Urban Roots and Hidden Gardens, New Victoria Gardens allotments and Grounds for Learning

1. What are you most proud of?

We are proud of the way we have managed to link the growing space and the activities to the whole of the curriculum and into many aspects of our school life. We feel it is embedded in all that we do.

There are so many opportunities for learning in the space – the raised beds have been used in maths for measuring and shapes work and in environmental art. The compost bays have been used for composting left over school dinners and the pupils have analysed what is not eaten and why, which has lead to discussions regarding healthy eating and negotiations of the school dinner menu. The research for the lectern mounts and tree trail has been used in science, literacy and development of language, the latter is particularly important as 85% of the pupils have English as an additional language.

2. What was hard?

Initially it was hard to get the parents engaged in the project. They were largely supportive in principle, but maybe not ready to come in and get their hands dirty. Many of the parents work long hours and find it hard to find time to volunteer. Gardening is not a big thing in the community where most families live in flats. The parents are also very ambitious on behalf of their children and had less focus on the value of play – now they see the value of the opportunities for playing outside, taking risks and learning that the growing space provides.
3. **What happened that you didn’t anticipate?**

We were surprised by the potential of the project and how all our teachers have been able to make use of the growing space and activities in their class work. It was encouraging to see how much we could achieve with relatively limited funds.

Delivery of huge compost sacks direct to the garden area turned out to be difficult because of the walls around the grounds. So we consulted with Glasgow City Council on creating a new double access gate to allow delivery trucks better access to our garden area in future and this proposal has now been approved.

We decided not to buy a poly-tunnel and instead spent the funding buying signage for a school nature trail. This takes the form of 10 lectern mounts with Perspex covers which are used to enclose the pupil’s own work to interpret the various points on the nature trail. The pupils are researching and writing about the trees, plants, birds, herbs and other wildlife in the school grounds including environmental problems they face and the medicinal qualities and some of the folklore connected with them.

4. **What would you do differently?**

We have to get better at making use of the food produced in the garden. The summer months when the school is closed were a challenge. Next growing season we will be better at forward planning what, when and how to use the produce.

We also want to take more photos and document the journey from seed to table!

5. **What advice would you give others?**

We would say to others to think about how sustainable their project will be and how it will enhance learning for years to come. We would advise them to try get the whole community involved and especially to give the pupils a sense of ownership of their project so they will take an on-going interest in it.

We would encourage anyone to do a similar project to ours, as it develops new knowledge and skills in both adults and children who don’t have access to natural spaces or gardens of their own, as well as a sense of purpose and increased confidence in their own abilities. It is great team building work and further develops social skills in a relaxed outdoor setting. It also infuses children with joy and creates in them a sense of wonder and respect for the natural world.

We used our website, twitter the Urdu audio newsletter to keep parents informed and engaged.

6. **What next**

Next, we want to strengthen the links to the healthy eating agenda at the school and make better use of the garden produce in the school kitchen. Local Charity the Hidden Gardens is going to help us and each class will have their own raised bed in the next growing season.
This case study was prepared by greenspace scotland in conversation with St. Alberts Primary School for the Central Scotland Green Network Trust