



*St Thomas' SNS
Jobstown,
Dublin 24*

*Competition Entry
Enfo 2010*

'Blooming Amazing'

Our Community Garden

St Thomas community Garden, again almost two years ago in school here in Jobstown, Tallaght. For a number of years, we had been dreaming about creating a garden and in January 09, full enthusiasm, we finally sprung into action and our garden has finally become a reality. We gathered together a group of volunteer parents, community members, pupils, teachers and staff, to draw a wish list of what we wanted in our eco-friendly garden. Paddy Madden, in conjunction with the Heritage Council provided guidance, ideas and ongoing support. Our wish list is almost complete as we now have the following areas in our garden.

1. Herb wheel
2. Raised Vegetables bed (growing every type of vegetable imaginable)
3. Fruit trees
4. Wild life and composting areas
5. Sensory area
6. Cultural garden
7. Seating areas
8. Art and sculptural displays

As you can see from the enclosed DVD and photos, the results are blooming amazing.

- We now have an environment that is stimulating and attractive
- Our garden is a place of refuge and relaxation
- Our garden has taken learning outside the classroom.]
- We've learnt about food production, horticulture, bio-diversity, ecology, recycling and sustainability
- we our sowing the seeds fro possible future careers for some people
- Our garden is used for therapeutic purposes, helped to bring about improvement in social, mental and physical health
- The establishment of an afterschool gardening club, has given a group of young marginalised pupils a real sense of belonging and pride
- Our garden fosters inclusiveness; in our garden everybody is equal. In our garden no one is a failure, everyone is a success.
- Our garden celebrates the numerous cultural backgrounds of pupils and community here in Jobstown, through the creation of a cultural area, with plants from 18 different countries from around the world.

- All our gardening is done in an eco-friendly way. Without the use of chemical or pesticides.
- We have used a large variety of recycled materials wherever possible in the creation of our garden (the inside drums of washing machines, old tiles from mosaics, recycled paint for raised vegetable bed, recycled bricks for herb wheel etc)
- Our garden has promoted healthy eating in our garden

We hope that you can appreciate all the blood, sweat and no tears!! ,that is gone into the creation, development and maintenance of our community garden. It has been one of the most energetic, exciting and worthwhile projects our school can remember!

It continues to bring out the best of all involved. We have worked so so hard to create a garden, an oasis that we are extremely proud of. We have become gardeners, designers, artists, ecologists and conservationist all rolled into one. We have witnessed our most vulnerable marginalised children take such interest and pride in their garden. Their self-esteem has blossomed, but above all else we have lots and lots of fun and laughter. Words alone cannot capture what it has and what it continues to mean to all involved.

We are so so proud of our community garden, we not only love it, we are PASSIONATE about it! As the quotation on display in our garden says:

" There should be a garden attached where they (the students) may feast their eyes on trees and plants, where they always hope to hear and see something new"

Comenius (1632)

The Green School Programme

The Green school programme has been running in St. Thomas Senior School since 2006. As a result of being awarded the green flag in 2008 we were encouraged to continue our endeavours. We felt that a lot of our recycling schemes were running well and should be continued as the children responded very positively towards them.

Each classroom has two bins one for rubbish and one for recycling. Plastic bottles are recycled weekly. Composting was completed in most classrooms if the teacher choose to do so and this was used in our school garden.

To promote energy awareness throughout the school, we displayed posters in classrooms and corridors and in the staffroom. These posters contained reminders to switch off lights, computers, radiators and to close doors.

The "Click Team" members check classrooms at lunch time and going home time. This was very successful as it made both staff and pupils more energy aware.

Meetings are held once every half term either at lunch times or the last half hour of school time. Committee members remain the same since we began the project and new members write a letter of application if they would like to join. New ideas are discussed and each member has a new responsibility for each term. The pupils play a large role in promoting Green schools within the school in that they communicate progress to all classes during assembly or during class time.

As each of our members represent each of the class groups, younger children gain experience and knowledge and more senior children have become a lot more confident and pro active.

Our environmental review commenced in September '09 which was undertaken by our present committee members. Initially we identified any problems that existed with our current recycling project. It is continuing to be very successful and are proud to say that we are

continuing to use twice as many Green bins as Black bins since we started. However some teachers have complained about class disruption as members collect bins from classrooms. Currently we are very fortunate to have 2 Fás workers in the school who are available to collect bins discretely during class time. We also have some children involved in litter picking on the school grounds most Fridays.

With regard to energy awareness, we decided to conduct an Energy Audit and a Questionnaire for each class. The questionnaire consisted of various questions in relation to what teachers and children were aware of and what they proposed as a possible action plan. We as a committee analysed these questionnaires so as to gain insight into the knowledge or lack of knowledge within the school community. Emphasis has been placed on educating children about the uses of energy and energy conservation. Even though the reviews are completed once a year there is an ongoing review process for both energy and recycling.

Decisions regarding the action plan were negotiated and discussed during the committee meetings which began in September 2009. We realised from our questionnaire that both teachers and students knew very little about energy conservation within our school environment. We noticed that computers were not being switched off at night. The photocopier was never switched off and also lights were being left on during lunchtime. The hall lights were always left on even when not needed. We were concerned that staff and pupils were being careless so we decided that as a school we needed to inform them about energy and energy conservation. We decided to put up posters in each classroom as reminders to turn off lights, close doors and turn off computers when not in use.

We e-mailed Sustainable Energy Ireland as to how we could inform our school of the importance of reducing our energy use. They were very generous and sent us lots of posters about Guzzler and gave us an energy pack for each class on "The Story of Energy".

We informed teachers of our "Switch It Off" campaign and we decided to record our electricity meter on a daily basis. We also decided to switch from our current electricity supplier to Airtricity or Bórd Gais as they recognise the crucial role for using renewable energy sources. We noticed that our electricity bills had not reduced so we had to further investigate how we could reduce our energy output. This may have been a result of the numerous interactive white boards that have been installed into each classroom. However this further highlighted how we

could save more energy. We had not considered all the electrical appliances that were being used in the staff kitchen. We talked to our tea lady Jenny and the water boiler is being switched off everyday at 2 o'clock and all 3 fridges are being defrosted and turned off for every holiday. The cleaners who come to the school work only switch the lights on for each room they are working on and turn off the lights when they are finished. The water immersion was also turned on at 6am and this is now turned on at 8pm.

Targets

A lot of our targets have been reached. The committee closely monitors the progress of our scheme. Recycling is continuing to develop and children in every class are aware of its importance. We have also started to work in conjunction with WEE Ireland and we are recycling batteries and ink cartridges.

New targets have evolved due to our concern of the introduction of 16 new interactive whiteboards. These include

- Morning cleaners turning on the lights only as required and turning them off once their work is completed unlike previously where they left lights on until teachers arrived to school. The vice principal commented how the school would look like a floodlit football grounds early in the morning.
- Our tea lady is switching off the water boiler at 2pm each evening unlike previously it was never turned off
- Our Caretaker switches the immersion on at 8 am unlike previously it was turned on at 6am. The heat is also switched on at a later time and switched off earlier weather depending.
- Hall and corridor lights are switched off during class teaching times.
- We decided to ring in our exact electricity meter reading at particular times so as not to receive underestimated bills.

As far as possible all pupils are involved in curriculum work related to being a Green School. They are informed by school memo or assembly.

- Every class received an Energy Pack from Sustainable Energy Ireland which includes relevant activities
- Promotion of a "Green Christmas" where tree decorations and Santas made from recycled material toilet rolls and plastic bottles etc
- All children are involved in the upkeep of our School Garden by composting in each classroom

- Children were involved in the creation of sculpture for school garden with the help Bob Frasier(artist), and a scarecrow competition using recycled clothes
- Cooking classes were held using fruit and vegetables that the children grew in school garden
- Planting of Hyacinth and crocus bulbs in the classroom using recycled washing machine drums. Children also made bird feeding tubes from recycled bottles.
- Science Week Activities
- A group of children attended SEI workshop on Energy in Clondalkin Library
- Lessons in various classes on Energy using ESB website and information on energy efficiency in the home
- Visit to Airfield house and gardens learning about "Caring for our environment".
- Low Energy Day which was held in February 18th 2010-We reduced our meter reading from the average of 550 kw to 320kw in one day.
- WOW day was a huge success in which 70 extra children walked to school
- SEI Workshop on Energy in Clondalkin Library March 2010
- Taste of Jobstown June 2010 open garden day
- National Spring Clean Day and National Recycling Week September 2010
- Presentation about composting from South Dublin County Council (Claire Hinch Environmental Officer)

Information about the progress of our Green School Programme is printed in our school newsletter to parents once a term. The Green School Notice board and Art Exhibition offer an opportunity for the parents to see the ongoing work of the pupils and their endeavours towards a second Green Flag. We continue to make contact with the Jack and Jill Foundation and collect mobile phones for the charity. We continue to recycle batteries and have recently received the new WEEE Ireland recycling boxes. We have entered the esbie.ie Green Energy project where we hope to be linked with a local industry in the next few weeks. This will involve a visit to the local industry to observe how they can improve their energy awareness and the children will show a power point of what we have done to decrease our energy use.

The support from the wider community has really developed in the past two years, and we are particularly proud of the development of our school

garden and the awards we have received a FíS award for "The best use of the environment".

We hope that it is evident from this entry the hard work and enjoyment we are taking from being a Green School. We look forward to receiving our second Green School Flag in 2011.



National Spring Clean Week 2009



Energy Workshop Clondalkin Library 2010



Our First Green School Flag Awarded 2008



Current Green School Committee October 2010

Future plans for our garden

1. Plant Nature Trees from saplings in the wildlife area of our school/community garden as well as some fruit trees for mammals and birds.
2. Make a log pile in our wildlife area to benefit fungi, birds, mammals and insects.
3. Create a butterfly patch in our school garden and include pollen rich plants for bees, butterflies and other flower visiting insects.
4. Plant scented flowers to encourage bees and moths.
5. Establish a wormery to make beneficial use of leftover food and use the end product on our vegetable beds and to feed plants in our garden.
6. Gather nettles in our local environment to make a green fertiliser and nettle tea and soup for tasting for the more adventurous among us!!
7. Continue to have specialists (such as Paddy Madden, local bee keeper Paul Doody etc.) visit our school to help support work we are already doing; give us new ideas and deepen our knowledge and understanding of biodiversity, as well as invite new specialists e.g. Birdwatch Ireland to further develop our awareness and education on Biodiversity.

8. Continue our monthly efforts at indoor gardening by implementing some relevant suggestions/projects demonstrated in each month's 'In touch' magazine in the article written by Paddy Madden e.g. making birdfeeders from recycled materials, planting bulbs etc.
9. Make feathered friends! Make birdfeeders and birdbaths (from recycled materials) and feed them the sunflower seeds we saved from our fantastic sunflowers last summer. Provide birds with food and water. The birds should benefit from the insects and worms in our garden. Undertake a project on "Our Garden Birds." Invite Birdwatch Ireland /local birdwatchers to visit our school.
10. Turn a section of our lawn into a Wildflower meadow.
11. Continue to Garden Organically in our school garden, we do not use any chemical or pesticides. We do not use peat based composts as far as possible. We make and use our own compost from leftover fruit, teabags, leaves, etc. on a daily basis - however due to the large volumes we need to make a larger composter to facilitate quicker turnover.
12. Erect a small polytunnel to add to the large variety of vegetables and plants we already grow.
13. Make a leaf composter.
14. Try introducing ladybirds to our garden. Make ladybird houses.
15. Strengthen our efforts to make our School Environment Litter Free - perhaps have termly clean up days to build on the 'National Spring Clean' week we currently get involved in each year. Don't litter, recycle and reuse whatever and whenever we can.
16. We are currently working towards achieving our Second Green Flag (see attached file)
17. Encourage more pupils and staff to participate in our WOW days i.e. Walk on Wednesdays - thus reducing the CO₂ in our local environment as well of course as increasing our fitness/health levels.

18. Organise a "Biodiversity Awareness" week in our school.
19. Organise a "BioBuzz Day" - a race to find as many different species of plant, animals and insects as possible in our environment.
20. Organise more frequent trips to places of importance in helping raise our understanding and awareness of Biodiversity in our wider environment and in turn bring our learning back to our local environment, here in Jobstown. (e.g. Trips to Airfield Garden, Phoenix Park, Zoo. etc.)
21. Develop a "Biodiversity Trail" around our school garden
22. Erect proper long lasting signage around our Garden to highlight the various areas in our school garden and its links to Biodiversity.
23. Devise a "Biodiversity" folder for each class packed with information, resources, activities etc. based on our local school environment.
24. Continue to share our ideas, good practice and success to date with other schools and groups in our area and hopefully inspire them to become more "Biodiversity Aware."
25. Use more vegetables, fruit and herbs from our school garden in our cookery classes.