



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School



We are a small Catholic Primary School located in a former mining village in County Durham. St Joseph's Catholic Primary School was founded in 1899. We are located in the village of Murton, close to the coastal town of Seaham. Our school was opened on March 15th, 1899. We currently have 125 children in the school and they are split between 5 classrooms.

In 2007 we had a handful of children who found the classroom environment difficult and therefore struggled to behave and were spending more and more time disengaged with school life. A local allotment project had just started up in the village and after careful consideration and planning we embarked on what has been the biggest adventure for staff and children, this small school has undertaken. We first took part in a "Dragon's Den" activity, with a core group of children pushing our enterprise project, in order to win a £1000 grant for our allotment patch, tools and seeds to start us off. After a gruelling day the children were ecstatic to receive a cheque for the full amount and started to plan in the following meetings how to best spend the money!!



Work started with the core group at the allotment and it was a scary time with a lot of back breaking work!! With the guidance and help from Mr Jones (our head teacher Miss Jones' dad) we cleared the site and planned the beds. Every week Miss Jones and Mrs Cartwright set off with a different group of KS2 children to work all morning in the garden. The children worked together weeding, painting, planting, laying paths, digging, measuring and weighing to transform the garden into a profitable business.



We had a great gardening gang who loved working outside, they had calmed down in the classroom because of the opportunities that we had given them by putting what they were taught in the classroom into practise. They also knew that if they didn't behave during the week then they could not go to the allotment on a Friday!!



The children then set up a stall every Friday morning outside of our Parish Church to sell the produce that they had harvested that week. The parishioners loved this and demand was high to keep them stocked up with fresh vegetables for Sunday Dinner!! After our first season we were making a profit and the money was deposited into their own bank account giving them ownership of the spending. We decided that we had the vegetable market covered and with parents and the parish buying we needed to branch out to add to our stall.

Mr Jones our Gardening mentor had planted the seed about having livestock at the allotment. With the children so dedicated and the project enhancing the life of some of the children we were working with, Miss Jones finally allowed us to expand!!



The introduction of 'The Girls' worked well. The children not only have the occasional cuddle they learned the importance of looking after animals. They cleaned the sheds out, collected the eggs and dug over the hen runs. Egg sales went through the roof and 'our girls' struggled to keep up with demand. The 'Eco Group' decided that it was time to expand and we purchased our second allotment patch!! After more digging, clearing and planting we were up and running with more hens to help with demand.

Our Eco Team worked with Miss Jones on stage one of our school grounds makeover. They wanted to develop an area that would stimulate our EYFS children and allow them to work outside like they did at the allotment. Our school field began to change and after the hard landscaping finished our older children worked with the infants guiding and teaching them skills they had learned.



Working together we transformed an unused field into an outdoor classroom where children from the juniors could work alongside the younger children, sharing the skills and knowledge they had learned from working at the allotments.



Miss Jones our Head teacher is the driving force behind the work that is carried out. She believes that the children need to gain experiences by working outdoors and sometimes lessons are brought to life and understood more when the children are given practical problem solving work .

We often find her outdoors working with groups of children!!



Our next project was to bring some of the work and experiences that the children were doing from the allotment, which was based on another site, onto the field so that the whole school could come outside and use the knowledge that they had learned in the classroom. We decided to build raised beds giving each class ownership of a bed. The children worked together painting them and then deciding on the types of plants they wanted. As we were also starting to look at the environment as well as being an enterprise project we decided that the centre container would be planted full of lavender to encourage bees and other good pollinating insects into our garden!



Having fun, planting and watering – it's even better when the sun is shining!!

Expansion came again after the children decided that they wanted to use some of the profit they had made in buying a poly tunnel for the school. They wanted to grow tomatoes and other vegetables as well as starting a business in the summer, selling bedding plants and hanging baskets that they had grown from seed. These children loved work and could see how they could make more money from a little bit of hard work!

Exciting times as the frame is put into place



Mr Jones checking out the new Poly tunnel!

It didn't take us long to get the beds turned over and a path laid. We were ready for planting to begin.



The children worked hard, watering twice a day to keep the plants healthy. They used the poles to hang their baskets on to grow, ready to be sold.





Sales of hanging baskets went better than we had imagined and we were struggling to cope with the amount of interest in them. We were actually taking orders for them and the children along with Mrs Cartwright worked hard to make them each day.

Because of the demand the parents also placed orders for the following year to make sure that they got one when we started selling them!!

A strawberry patch was the next thing we built. The children measured and dug out the bed and planted the strawberry plants that a member of the parish had donated. We built a cage to protect the fruit from rabbits and birds that visit our site! With the help of the hot summer we had a bumper crop the first year and held a Strawberry Cream Tea for the parents and carers of the children.

We devoured homemade scones with cream and strawberries, along with bowls of strawberries and cream. Because this afternoon was quickly planned and we hadn't advertised it, the parents who missed it requested another the following day. Our little patch raised over £150 and we had some very satisfied parents!



Enjoying the fruit of our hard work!!

With all of this going on, on our school site we needed to think about how we could water all of the plants without wasting water. We had already installed small water harvesting containers from the play shed in the EYFS outdoor area. We needed more with the amount of water needed to water the poly tunnel during the summer months. Miss Jones bought from the school budget as many as we could to fit around the school which has a sloping roof maximising the wet weather we get in the North!!

Each day the children fill buckets of water and carry it up the school field to the water bins we have outside of the poly tunnel. The children make sure these are full each day so that we can water all of the plants.



As our project grew we were asked to look at the requirements needed for the 'Green Flag Award', which is an international award programme, that guides schools on their sustainable journey, providing a framework to help embed these principles into the heart of school life.

Pupils are the driving force behind Eco-Schools – they form and lead an Eco-Committee and help to carry out an audit to assess the environmental performance of the school. In conjunction with the rest of the school and the wider community, it's the pupils that decide the environmental themes they want to address and how they're going to do it.

As we were already doing so much of the work we decided that this was going to be our goal, as there were only a small number of schools in the North East with this status.

An Eco Committee from the VEG Group worked alongside Mrs Cartwright looking at the nine topics that needed to be covered. After an Environmental Survey it was decided that we needed to concentrate on the Biodiversity topic and would transform a small unused section on the field into a nature area. With the help of a volunteer the children worked together in the area creating a pond, and other habitats for wildlife to live.

A rather large insect hotel was built from scrap material we had on site due to building work on a classroom extension. It was not uncommon to find Miss Jones and Mrs Cartwright checking out the contents of the builders skips to recycle in the garden!!

The Eco-committee has achieved the Gold Award for The Big Wildlife Garden in July 2011. This is a web based resource, organised by the Royal Horticultural Society and The Wildlife Trust.



Schools work towards gaining one of three internationally recognised awards from the Eco Schools Website – Bronze, Silver and the Green Flag award, which symbolises excellence in the field of environmental activity. Bronze and Silver are both self accredited through the website and Green Flag is externally assessed by Keep Britain Tidy volunteers.

With Bronze and Silver already achieved and all documentation filled in, we waited for our assessor.

On 29th February 2012 Mr Tony Adey came out to our school. The Eco Committee had the responsibility of leading the assessment. They answered questions and gave a very detailed tour of our grounds. After a 3 hour assessment all we could do was wait to hear if we had been successful.

Mr Adey reported to Eco Schools:

“This is an extremely good school, one of the best and most environmentally friendly I have seen, it has a good spirit and ethos, and is well supported with very committed and talented staff.”

The school received a letter on the 12th March confirming that it had been awarded Green Flag status. It also received the official ‘Green Flag’.



We enjoy our school grounds no matter what the weather is doing!!





Broom House Farm stall was well received



We were asked to take part in an initiative that was organised by the SOIL association, country wide. We worked closely with members on organising a Schools Farmers Market. This was aimed at giving local businesses an opportunity to sell their produce to members of the community. The school opened its doors and charged a fee for the use of the school hall. This was a great success with the local community. We had meat from a local farmer, a pie stall from one of our grandparents, a chilli company with oils and preserves, a beauty stall with hand made products, local farmers with fresh fruit and vegetables and our own stall with homemade cakes and pickled beetroot along with planters and hanging baskets the children had made.

Because our first market ran so well we have since had another.



Earthscent stall holders were thrilled with their sales.

Environment Award

The school was presented with a County Durham Environment Award on the 8th November, for its work in developing the EYFS play area and school field.

Mr Rich Hurst commented on the hard work and commitment of the school in achieving its second Environment award - a prestigious award which had stiff competition to fight off.

Mr Hurst was so impressed with the school grounds and the work being carried out in the school he requested that the school act as host to the Eco Forum planned for the 1st March.



After careful thought and consideration we decided that it would be easier for us to care for 'The Girls' if they were situated on the school site. It was becoming increasingly difficult to care for them daily in the winter months when roads were closed due to the heavy snowfall. On these days we had to walk to the allotments as this was the safest way to travel!

During the summer holidays 'The Girls' moved house. After David Cartwright designed and laid the foundations for the shed (supported by Mrs Cartwright, Miss Jones and her nephew) we needed to transport the shed from the allotments to the school grounds. This was a real team effort and we even enlisted the help from our Deputy Mr Scott!!



A neighbour from the allotments happened to have a flat-bed van and transported the shed onto site.

It was back breaking work and we worked all summer on the field digging out for posts for the runs, building and painting the sheds, wiring the runs and felting the roof. (All under the watchful eye of Mr Jones!!)

