



Case study: Community and Conservation

The link between learning outside the classroom or school ground and reserve spaces

It's not just what we learn, but where we learn it and how we learn it!

(School Ethos – James Dixon Primary)

The School

James Dixon Primary in London has around 400 pupils. It is one of the only school in the South East of England that has been awarded the gold award from the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (UK) for their regular outdoor learning practice. With a diverse student population, 28 different languages are spoken. Although the site adjoins a large playing field with some mature trees, the buildings are surrounded predominantly by tarmac.



Key focus Conservation

Who was involved?

The Assistant Headteacher who is creative curriculum and Learning Outside the Classroom Leader, community, staff, students and school volunteers.



Image – before and after images of outdoor learning space built by the school community

Project overview

The schools large playing fields were divided into two sites and fenced off to stop grass mowing and left for nature to re-colonise. The only addition has been log piles and insect hotels. The most important element of this project is the division of the site into two discrete learning/conservation spaces.

Stewardship (maintaining and management)

Pupils and staff are all involved with the stewardship of the site (maintenance and management). Teachers organise regular working parties when children and parents can work together. This is also part of outdoor lessons with older classes.

Surveying

The staff and children have found that over time the second area has become more species diverse. Involving the children in monitoring the space prior to the improvements has provided a baseline data set for biodiversity. This activity can be done each year for every season and incorporates math, science and critical thinking skills.



Image – FRED BANKS Forest School areas left for nature to thrive

Key messages

- Involving students in development and maintenance increases ownership.
- Pupils benefit from planned regular and progressive outdoor learning.
- Nature takes over in any space given the chance. It is less about having lots of money and more about use and developing an appreciation of the natural world.
- Small changes over time can have huge impacts on outdoor learning opportunities.

Lessons Learnt

1. The most valuable resource is the community. Talking and building relationships will give access to a range of skills and materials from tree surgeons for natural resources to builders and surveyors for larger projects.
2. Trust in your students. No matter what year group the children are amazing at taking ownership and learning what needs to be done to maintain and sustain areas around our school. This could be weeding and filling ponds, weeding vegetable plots or picking up litter, the pride and responsibility that comes with the ownership is incredible.

3. Patience. Sometimes things have to just be left and as much as you might want to use a site or want 'big' trees, you just have to wait it out. Nature can't be rushed.

Reflection

- What resources do you have to support the maintenance of the changes you make for wildlife?
- What skills and equipment might a school need?
- Who might need to be involved in changing a maintenance plan?
- How could you work with students to get them engaged in the maintenance of wildlife habitats?