



**Country Trust**

Where children learn and grow

## **Farm Visits Case Study**

**Evaluation Report to accompany videos**

**With thanks to the Sir John Cass Foundation**

Prepared by Hope-Stone Research

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## Introduction and Context

The Country Trust is a national education charity which has been quietly transforming the lives of disadvantaged children for 40 years. With the help of supporters and funders, we bring food, farming and the countryside alive for over 20,000 children each year who are least able to access it; children from disadvantaged areas, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, refugee children and their families, and young carers. We do this through three key programmes:

- Farm Discovery day visits to real working farms,
- Countryside Discovery residentials
- yearlong Food Discovery programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food.

We help to address poverty of opportunity, bringing rich experiences - vital for building language, literacy, self-confidence and self-esteem - to children who lead limited and often chaotic lives.

Farm Discovery day visits to real working farms and estates provide hands on experiences, where, with our farmer hosts, we are able to provide active learning, answer questions and give unique access to crops and livestock. Each visit, is by its very nature, unique, and our farm visit coordinators work with teachers and farmer hosts to ensure that appropriate links are made to the curriculum.

Previously, all evaluation has been from teachers at class level. With funding from the John Cass Foundation we have been able to do more in-depth evaluation, following the journeys of two pupils from three schools, as well as interviewing class teachers. Hope Stone Research conducted this evaluation on behalf of The Country Trust.

## Key findings

For most of the children going on these visits this is the first time they have visited a farm, and for many, the first time they have been to the countryside. This presents a unique experience for them and a unique opportunity for schools to help pupils better understand what the countryside is, what a farm does and to put into a real-life context curriculum learning about food, plants and the environment.

In all three cases the impact has been very strong, creating memorable shared experiences for the pupils; building their confidence in being in the countryside, helping them understand how food is produced, where it comes from and how to relate to and behave around animals.

Each farm brings its own unique offer and in these three cases studies they ranged from fruit growing only, through mixed farming and livestock only. What really added value to the visits was the way the farmer or guide interacted with the pupils and in cases where the farmer was very much at ease with doing this the experience was greatly enhanced.

As one teacher explained, you cannot recreate authenticity and what these visits bring are real life working farms where things are messy, scary, challenging, smelly even a little dangerous, but which ensure pupils are exposed to a genuine environment rather than a one created for visitors.

## Methodology

These cases study are based on a three-stage approach; before, on the day of, and after a visit to a farm. At each stage we talked to selected pupils in the form of a video interview. The selected pupils were interviewed together under the supervision of either their teacher or a TA. We also obtained feedback from the class teacher before and after the visit day, again via video interview. We also asked teachers to complete a feedback questionnaire online on the day of the visit but unfortunately only one was able to do so.

Full details of the questions asked are shown in Appendix 1 and 2 but in brief we covered with pupils:

- Pre-visit; awareness of the countryside and farms and expectations of their visit.
- Visit-day; what they enjoyed, what they learnt and what they didn't like.
- Post-visit, 1-2 weeks later; what they recalled doing, what they have done back in school, what they have learnt and what they have shared with friends and family.

With teachers:

- Pre-visit; the background of pupils in class and in particular those selected for the research, reasons for going on the visit, any preparations made for the trip and how she hoped the class would benefit.
- Visit-day; the highlights, perceived impact on the pupils, any suggested changes.
- Post-visit; any follow up work conducted in class, any comments or references from the pupils about the visit, overall learning and social value of the visit.

Pupils were chosen by the class teacher as being a mix of gender, articulate enough to take part in the research but having had little or no experience of the countryside or farms. They were also selected on the basis of having received permission to take part in the research.

As well as the interviews, the selected pupils were observed during their visit, where their activities were noted and how they responded to the stimulus around them.

## Background detail and overview

We worked with three mixed state primary schools based in the London Borough of Lewisham in South East London.

### **1. Myatt Garden: Brockley SE14**

Visited: Torry Hill Farm, Kent on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Class: Year 1

Myatt Garden's catchment is mixed socially and ethnically. The class that visited comprised around 20% BAME pupils, around 17% on pupil premium and 10% entitled to free school meals. Around 20% speak another language at home.

### **2. Elfrida School: Bellingham SE6**

Visit: Wilkins Farm, Essex on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Class: Year 2

Elfrida's catchment is primarily a large interwar low rise social housing estate near Catford. The class that visited comprised around 80% BAME, with 8 children on pupil premium and around a third entitle to free school meals.

**Baring School: Lee SE12**

Visited: Romshed Farm, Kent on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Class: Year 3

Baring School is based in an area with high levels of deprivation and in recent years has suffered from a high turnover of students as families are forced to move away due to rent problems. The class that visited comprised around 80% BAME pupil and a third of the pupils were on pupil premium, the same proportion entitled to free school meals.

All three schools could be seen to be typical of many inner-city London schools. From observation it is clear the teachers and staff put in a huge effort as is evidenced by the materials on display in the classrooms and other public places. However outdoor space is limited and primarily tarmac or concrete with little or no grass or other natural surfaces. Only Myatt Garden has a garden where fruit and vegetables grow, the other two schools need to travel to local parks for any kind of natural environment.

Pupil and teacher comments are in *blue italics*. Pupils' names have been removed for safeguarding reasons.

## Case Studies

### School 1: Myatt Garden

#### Before the visit

##### Why go?

The school try to take classes on school trips outside of London at least once a year, but trips tend to be within London given there's so much choice and transport is free. Previous local visits had been to Greenwich Ecology Park, Beckenham Park and most recently the Horniman Museum.

This farm visit tied in nicely with their current class topic, 'How does your garden grow?'. For the teacher, Alice, such visits create a greater connection with the topic by taking what they read about and turning it into a reality.

*As soon as the children go the concepts become real and learning is deeper...the connection is made.*

Additionally, while some children regularly go abroad or visit the countryside many of the pupils in the class had never been outside of London, so the trip provides a social as well as learning experience.

*Some children very much only have an experience of just the Borough of Lewisham....not really venturing much further.*

The teacher hoped that pupils would better understand how food is produced via a first-hand experience of being on a farm and talking to a farmer.

*A sense of being away from our urban environment, to feel the space of the rural setting. How the farm works and that it's an important part of the UK economy... I want them to understand about food growing and production.*

*Having that first-hand experience of talking to the farmer.*

#### Pupil knowledge of and expectations about the visit

The teacher felt pupil feelings were mixed prior to the visit; some were excited, others worried and nervous and not sure what would happen. There were feelings of embarrassment about animals licking their hands and joking about cows weeing and poeing as well as being scared of animals biting them. Meeting the farmer is something pupils appeared particularly interested in. For the teacher this was helpful as it fits in with the idea of teaching about possible jobs and aspirations. Compared with other trips the teacher thought pupils appeared less able to anticipate what it will be like.

The teacher only gave a very general briefing, mainly around the travel, protective clothing and hand washing. Some books have been read in class about urban and rural settings, but she hadn't shown them any photos.

*They know they're going to a real farm and going to meet a real farmer, and they're blown away by that idea...but we don't want to influence their expectations of the day, so I haven't said too much more than that... I want them to respond to the environment themselves.*

### **Case study pupils**

The two pupils chosen for the research were:

- **Pupil D** aged 6 - recently arrived in the UK from Nigeria, has not travelled outside of Lewisham since being in the UK, but has been to the countryside in Nigeria
- **Pupil P** aged 7 - Lewisham born and bred, has been outside of the area but mainly on school trips

### **Understanding of the countryside and farming**

Both pupils had limited ideas of what the countryside entails, Pupil D thought there were guards to protect things from thieves, Pupil P thought it was place to have picnics in.

*It's a bit like another country but it's the countryside but with a lot of flies and insects.*

Both had some idea that a farm is about animals and food. They also believed fruit came from farms too.

*A farm is where the farmer lives and takes care of the animals and makes all the vegetables and eggs for people.*

*He helps animals.*

### **Expectations of the visit**

Both believed they would have interactions with the farm animals, either feeding them or in Pupil D's case, riding a horse.

*I think I'm going to feed animals.*

*If we are good we're going to have a special treat riding the horses.*

They were somewhat nervous about the animals licking them, about a bull being in the field or goats that hit trees (both possibly from reading stories).

### **Visit Day**

The visit day was warm and sunny. Immediately after disembarking the coach the children were faced with a flock of sheep in the farmyard ready for shearing. Both Pupils D and P joined the rest of the class in going up to the fence and seeing if they could stroke them. The farmer then took them to a meadow where Phoebe became totally immersed in trying to catch butterflies. At the same time D found a feather from a dead crow that he held onto as a souvenir for the remainder of the visit. The farmer took them into a field with cows and P appeared quite anxious about approaching them, holding the teacher's hand.

However, she did build up sufficient confidence to let go and seemed to enjoy looking at cow poo and the creatures that live in it.

After lunch the class watched the sheep shearing and both pupils appeared transfixed by the process, if a little alarmed when the sheep were released right where they were standing. They then looked into a bee hive and had time to feed and stroke a horse. Finally, they were encouraged to run across a large field to reach the cherry orchards where they were given punnets to fill before returning to the coach.

### **What they did and enjoyed**

When asked at the end of the day what their strongest memories were, they tended to be what they'd most recently done; stroking the horses, running down a hill to the cherry orchard and picking cherries, looking inside the bee hive. Feeding the horses and stroking them appears to have been the thing they enjoyed most. After some thought they also recalled the butterflies, the cows and the spikey plants (thistles) that scratched them in the meadow.

### **What they learnt**

They felt they had learnt how to behave around horses and that you can make clothes out of sheep wool.

*Look after animals and try and make them into things you can eat.*

*They shaved the hair off the sheeps (sic)...because it gets too hot.*

The teacher's immediate feedback reflected the observations and comments from Pupils D and P, noticing the mix of excitement and anxiety but generally responding very well to what was going on around them.

*I hadn't anticipated level of excitement at seeing sheep, cows and the farm horse. Some children were overwhelmed by space/experience. Some were frightened... especially walking through long grass in meadow where there were thistles and lots of bugs.*

*They were both full of joy and very adventurous...I thought they might've been more wary of some of the activities (looking in beehive, stroking horse). I loved watching one of the children trying to catch butterflies in the meadow.*

She felt they had learnt about food production as well as picking up new vocabulary through a very hands-on experience that touched on all the senses; sight, smell, touch. In terms of skills, an increase in confidence in a new environment was the clearest outcome in her opinion.

*One of the children knew that farms also produce meat (he knew that cows give meat - most children thought milk). Their vocabulary was also broadened in a meaningful way - so they really understand what a meadow is now having run through one, they've seen a wheat and corn field, they've examined a cow pat! All their senses were engaged which made the experience so memorable and meaningful.... definitely increased confidence having experienced a whole new environment (relatively) independently.*

More generally she believed the class had learnt via a shared experience, increasing their confidence, speaking and listening skills as well as knowledge of the difference between the countryside and the city.

## After the visit

We caught up with Pupils D and P two weeks after the visit. They were able to recall many aspects of their visit, most of which they liked:

- Looking inside the beehive
- Petting and feeding the horse
- Sheep being shorn - and taking some of the wool back to school with them
- Running down the hill
- Picking cherries

*I got a full box and got to eat them.*

- Finding the dead crow
- Walking up close to the cows

The only thing recalled and disliked was from Pupil D, which was hearing the dogs barking in the van.

In terms of association with other activities the visit had made Pupil D think about a previous visit to the Horniman Museum where he had also seen farm animals.

Their teacher said the pupils had also talked about 'Farmer John' and picking cherries.

## Learning

Both pupils recalled that cows are used for both meat (brown cows) and milk (black and white dairy cows) and that cherries grow on trees.

The teacher felt the trip had helped pupils build confidence both around animals and being in a large open space (i.e. the meadow)

*They found that expanse of space quite intimidating.*

She felt they learnt to look beyond the thistles to see the wildlife among them, how to feed the horse and how to behave around the sheep. For some just travelling so far without their parents had a positive impact on their social skills.

For Pupil D in particular it helped broaden his understanding of a world beyond South East London and both he and Pupil P enjoyed the element of 'danger' near the bees, in the pen with the sheep and creeping up to the cows - a sense of jeopardy and excitement. Overall, their teacher felt that allowing the children to roam free it gave them an opportunity to experience things in their own way.

*We loved it when we ran across the meadow, able to explore at their own pace.*



### Sharing

Pupils D and P said they had told their parents about feeding the horse and seeing the sheep, as well as picking the cherries (which they took home with them).

### Class follow up

Classroom follow up was extensive; they created a collage of their journey to the farm illustrating the changing landscape from city to countryside. They had an open day for parents where they set out toy animals to describe their visit. They have started a topic on fruit by voting for their favourite fruit (mango), read Farmer Duck in class and used another book to understand where and how much farmland there is in the UK.

They also had opportunities to talk about the visit, looking at video and photos of the trip. Their teacher noted some new vocabulary used; meadow, thistle and calf.

### Summary of the visit

The teacher hadn't taken such young children on a trip like this before but was happy to follow the lead set by the farmer, John, and the Country Trust coordinator, Poppy. John's confidence helped the teacher feel at ease, as well as being able to fully engage the pupils too.

*John, a great communicator, quickly built the children's confidence, they liked him, they wanted to hear his stories...he challenged them and pushed them.*

The teacher was extremely positive about the visit that provided positive learning and social outcomes as well as supporting her classroom work. It provided an authentic insight into country life and food production, bringing school topics to life as well as providing a shared experience for the whole class.

*If you want a true real experience of the countryside... taking children to a farm like Torry Hills is the only way to do it.*

*What better way to learn about food production, our landscape, the difference between the city and the countryside...than to be in it, to look round, use your senses, we know that's how children learn. It was relaxed it was fun it was exciting; classroom learning can support that and if you do carefully planned follow up classroom learning can enrich it.*

### Supporting resources

The teacher had a few ideas for possible supporting resources that included; a bank of images available of the farm, the farmer, the animals, a summary video, a map of the area, a way of sharing what other schools have done to help teachers enrich their follow up plans. It would have also been nice to have written thank you letters but for real with a chance for a reply.

### Improving the visit

The only suggested change for future trips would be to have pupils prepare questions for the farmer in advance.

## School 2: Elfrida

### Before the visit

#### Why go?

The primary driver for the visit came from the head teacher and the school has an existing relationship with The Country Trust. For the teacher, Sophie, while not planned to coincide with what they are learning in class, the visit did link into their current topic of the plants lifecycle and the link between food and plants. This meant the visit would provide an opportunity for pupils to better understand what they had been learning by seeing real life examples.

She also hoped the children would enjoy it as well as learning something new.

*Kids love it, it's the most exciting time of their school.*

As most trips tend to be local, for example to the park or Greenwich Ecology Park a visit like this is a once a year opportunity.

*We do try to do something they haven't done before rather than just going to the park.*

Additionally, some children (see below) have never left the estate that surrounds the school before and many know little or nothing about the countryside.

#### Pupil knowledge of and expectations about the visit

The teacher has told the class they would be fruit picking, something most hadn't done before. When she told the class, the pupils seemed happy with the idea and asked questions about how far it, what it will be like, what they'll do. None showed any signs of being anxious.

#### Case study pupils

Five pupils<sup>1</sup> were chosen for the case study:

- **Pupil S** aged 6 has not to the teacher's knowledge, ever left Bellingham but is academically bright but occasionally anxious.
- **Pupil L** aged 6 has been to the countryside once before and other UK holidays.
- **Pupil K** aged 6 quite shy and again with little experience of visits outside of Lewisham
- **Pupil D** aged 6 lively and chatty, hadn't visited the countryside before
- **Pupil C** aged 6 (only interviewed on the visit-day and post-visit) very close friends with Pupil L, very articulate with some experience of visiting the countryside

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<sup>1</sup> Only these 5 had permission for filming. After the 1<sup>st</sup> paired interview (Pupils S and L) we were concerned they might be too shy to say much so we decided to include two more, Pupil K and Pupil D. On the visit day the 5<sup>th</sup> pupil with permission, Pupil C, was inseparable from Pupil L so we included her as well, in part because she was able to encourage the others to talk more.

### **Understanding of the countryside and farming**

Neither Pupil L nor Pupil S understood the term ‘countryside’ and didn’t have much idea what it might be like. Pupil L thought she’d been there in the past to pick strawberries. Pupil S said he hadn’t been before, the only thing he thought it might contain was a river. Pupils K and D suggested that the countryside has farms and fences.

*... because some countryside is on cliffs and people might fall off them.*

They did have some ideas about what a farm might be; Pupil D thought that it would contain animals including horses, pigs, sheep, dogs, goats and llamas while Pupils L and S believed it was where strawberries and other fruit and veg is grown, harvested then sent to shops.

### **Expectations of the visit**

Pupils L and S thought they might plant and pick fruit and might see vegetables such as tomatoes. Pupil D understood he was going to pick fruit, plant some plants and try some of the fruit.

*There might be some kinds of fruit growing on trees like apples.*

All said they were either excited or happy to be going as they had had a good experience on their last trip in Year 1. Only Pupil D mentioned a slight worry about a goat headbutting him (possibly a concern derived from reading a book).

## **Visit Day**

The visit day was warm and sunny. Most of the first half the visit was spent touring the farm on a tractor trailer. All pupils were given a spotter sheet with various plants and animals on it. At various points the tractor would stop and the guide talk about the fruit growing nearby. They disembarked to go inside a ‘greenhouse’ where strawberries were growing but otherwise the guide gave a commentary while they were moving around. This meant that it was hard to hear what he was saying at the back of the trailer and many of the children were quite quiet during this time.

After lunch the class visited the covered cherry trees and strawberry plants where they were allowed to pick and eat ‘one or two’ fruits. The final activity was trying to find letters to make up the word Loganberry by entering a maze. They spent a considerable amount of time here and along with the fruit picking, appeared to enjoy this element the most. On departure they were each given a bag with a leaflet about sustainable farming and a small pot of jam.

### **What they did and enjoyed**

The five children said they most enjoyed eating the cherries and strawberries because in their own words they tasted nice, delicious and sweet. They also enjoyed going in the maze to find hidden letters to make up a name of a fruit. They also mentioned using the spotter sheets to find animals and plants. When asked about what made them go wow, again it was the maze and fruit picking along with going on a tractor trailer.

### What they learnt

These five children picked up a key message that humans are like plants in that they need sunlight, air and water.

### After the visit

We returned to Elfrida School just over a week after the visit. The teacher hadn't found time to complete the visit-day questionnaire, so we covered those questions in the post-visit interview instead.

### Recall

The pupils recalled all the different elements of the visit day:

- Going in the maze to find the letters to spell loganberry
- Picking strawberries and cherries
- Using the spotter sheet
- Going on the tractor trailer
- Receiving the pot of jam

*At the end we got jam and ate strawberries and cherries and found the letters to spell loganberry in the maze.*

The best things were thought to be eating the fruit (2 said they'd never done this before) and going in the maze (some had never been in one before). Pupil L also recalled the joy of being outside...

*Laid on the floor and just looked at the sky and clouds.*

Pupils L and C both said they'd like to return, particularly to eat more fruit.

*Go back and eat fruit until I get fat.*

When asked if anything near home reminded them of their trip Pupil L said the plastic shelter in the playground reminded her of the strawberry greenhouses. She also mentioned that some similar birds to those on the spotter sheets can be seen in their neighbourhood.

### Learning

The case study pupils said they had learnt that fruit was grown under plastic to provide the right temperature, that the temperature and water supply was important, and that fruit is used to make jam.

Their teacher pointed out that quite a few children had never had cherries before and learnt that the darker the fruit the better the flavour. They also learnt where cherries come from and how to pick fruit properly.

In terms of new vocabulary, the teacher said children started saying crops rather than plants.

She also heard that some pupils had tried new fruit and vegetables and had asked their mums to try something new too. Specifically, Pupil D said he had started to eat more fruit and vegetables since the visit.

### Sharing

Pupil S said he'd told his family that they visited Tiptree farm and ate cherries and strawberries. while Pupils L and C told their parents they had picked fruit. No other sharing stories were mentioned.

### Class follow up

After the visit each pupil had to produce a written re-count of their visit (something mentioned by Pupil L only).

### Summary of the visit

The teacher felt that the authenticity of the real farm is something of immense value and made the visit stand out compared with urban or visitor orientated venues.

*Really good to go to a working farm rather than where you just go round and feed the animals.*

Being able to tie it in with the current class topic was an added bonus as it helped pupils make the connection between classwork and the real world.

*A really good consolidation of the topic...we're doing plants.*

*Because it links its actually had a bigger impact...then it means something to the children.*

Asked to summarise it in a sentence she said the visit was...

*Very informative, children love it, try something new, relaxed, fun and engaging.*

She continued by pointing out that this was a school without access to the countryside and without the funding for the journey they wouldn't be able to go.

### Improving the visit

The teacher pointed out that it was hard to hear the guide on the tractor and the language he used was far too technical for the age group. This meant she had to 'translate' what he was saying into child friendly terminology.

*It wasn't as child friendly in the vocabulary as it could be... interesting but could be given in a different way.*

She also felt that having more walking time would have been better than spending so much time on the trailer.

She finally added that some kind of pre-visit resources or more spotter sheets during their visit would have been helpful.

## **School 3: Baring**

### **Before the visit**

The visit had been arranged by the head teacher and the class teacher hadn't had any contact with The Country Trust.

#### **Why go?**

The class teacher, Natalie, explained that most children in the class haven't been further than Catford or Lewisham let alone on holiday or day trips outside of London and many don't even visit London museums. Consequently, the farm provided a really different environment for the children to experience.

She hoped that the visit would help address some pupils' fear of animals (most don't have gardens and have only seen wildlife and the countryside on screens) and help them feel more comfortable in a different place to their own neighbourhood.

The school does have an outdoor learning programme and each year they visit a wild area (that does feel a little like the countryside) in the local park.

The current class topic is plants and looking at soil and they had recently done a local trip to look at soil. They recently conducted an experiment on how plants grow so the visit should demonstrate some of the things they have been learning about but on a much larger scale.

#### **Pupil knowledge of and expectations about the visit**

Other than covering the plant growing topic, at the time of interview Natalie had not briefed the class on the visit but would run through behaviour, safety and logistics the afternoon before going. Otherwise she didn't plan to say much, just to let them experience it in their own way.

#### **Case study pupils<sup>2</sup>**

- **Pupil K** aged 8 is of African heritage described by Natalie as the life and soul of the party. A passionate learner and very social with adults and children. But has to be quite independent at home (he makes his own packed lunch for example) and is having to be grown up at a very early age.
- **Pupil I** aged 8 is quieter, of Bangladeshi heritage, has ridden on an elephant so has some concept of the countryside, albeit in another country.

Both like football and both feel family is important but neither have had much experience outside their neighbourhood.

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<sup>2</sup> Two boys were chosen as the teacher said there were many more boys in the class than girls, however from observation of the visiting class there appeared to be as many girls as boys.

### Understanding of the countryside and farming

It was the teacher's understanding that while some of the children in class love and have a good knowledge of animals most do not. Additionally, even some pupils have been out of London to the countryside very few have actually been to a working farm.

Pupil I had some idea about what the countryside was, describing it as somewhere...

*without internet...it's a village, with farms nearby. Farms are surrounded by wheat, vegetables, fruit, animals, jungle*

It also transpired that Pupil I's mother had kept chickens at their home in London but were recently killed by a fox.

Pupil K said he has never been to the countryside before but was able to explain what a farm does.

*Produces food and sells it at market or elsewhere. Sells produced from animals (from cows and chickens).*

Both were able to explain where strawberries come from; from farms or that some people grow them, and Pupil I said he grows strawberries, pumpkin and blackberries at home.

### Expectations of the visit

The boys said they were expecting a long coach trip and to learn about farms. Pupil I said he was excited as going somewhere far away as that could lead to a good experience. Pupil K said he was excited and happy because he liked to learn about the world but was nervous as it was a new experience.

### Visit Day

The weather was warm and sunny. The class were met at the end of the farm drive and on the walk to the farmyard pupils were encouraged by the farmer to collect different types of flowers and seeds. After an introductory talk in the barn and a chance to get to know the farm dogs they entered a field of cows and were able to stand within a few feet of them. Some were able to stroke one particularly tame cow. They next visited the pigs and were encouraged to stroke them while they were feeding. Some of the children enjoyed the small shocks from the electric fence while others kept their distance from the animals.

After lunch they were given a sheep dog demonstration and a chance to ask the Shepherd questions. Finally, they visited the hens and were able to both stroke a hen and enter the enclosure to see if any eggs had been laid, some of which were still warm.

Both case study boys were accompanied by family members; Pupil K with his grandmother, Pupil I with his mother, which appeared to have had an impact on their behaviour as they spent a lot of time very close to them rather than with their classmates. They appeared quite reticent near the cows and very wary of the pigs. In Pupil I's case he explained that as a Muslim going near them was haram. However, both were very interested in the chickens (in Pupil I's case possibly because he had had them at home before). Overall both

were noticeably more inhibited than most of the class, many of whom enthusiastically played with the farm dogs and eagerly engaged with the livestock where possible.

### **What they did and enjoyed**

Pupil K was surprised that there were so many different types of animals while for Pupil I the wow moment was watching the chickens lay eggs.

*I saw one lay an egg and it was still warm.*

Both enjoyed watching the sheep dog round up the sheep.

*Watching the sheep dog Sam round the sheep up seeing how obedient he was. The first sheep dog I've met or will meet.*

While they appeared wary at the time both said they actually enjoyed being really close to the cows. What they didn't like were the pigs, either because of their smell or due to religious reasons that they are not seen as clean.<sup>3</sup>

*The pigs were very smell although nice to see them but very dirty.*

*I'm not really supposed to go near the pigs because I'm Muslim and I don't eat pork.*

Overall, they were very positive about their experience.

*That I got to do lots of stuff and had a really nice time.*

*I would give this ten stars, nine out of ten - there's poo all over the place.*

### **What they learnt**

The boys were able to explain that the farm provides eggs, bacon and wool as well as selling animals such as old chickens and sheep. They also learnt that horse dung is good for growing vegetables, how to round up sheep and about chickens.

*Learnt lots about animals and what they do.*

### **After the visit**

The class teacher, Natalie, was not able to go on the visit so we interviewed the assistant teacher, Ms Brand, who did. She was very enthusiastic about the visit describing it as a unique experience for pupils to be able to engage so closely with large farm animals, the rural environment, to find out where meat comes from and to discuss animal welfare and ethical issues around food production.

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<sup>3</sup> Although Pupil I's mother was present she didn't appear to dissuade him from approaching the pigs



*The children loved every minute of it and got experiences they'd never ever get...they enjoyed the space and tranquillity of the place.*

She was impressed with how well the farmer asked and answered questions from the children.

*Her questioning skills were very good for the children.*

Case Study Pupils K and I recalled seeing the pigs, dogs (Sam and Mungo), the chickens (saw a freshly laid egg - still warm), cows and Sam rounding up the sheep. The boys said that since the visit they had thought about what the dogs might be doing now and if the eggs have hatched.

### **Learning**

Ms Brand believed the pupils learnt how to interact with the natural world, how to behave around animals; not to scream, run or confront livestock and was good for developing empathy and self-control around animals without scaring them. Being in the countryside helped with spatial awareness and sense of geography. Looking at the seeds and flowers was also beneficial as this tied in with their current classroom topic.

*Which runs throughout the curriculum and they got a chance to see that in action...not just one or two specimens...finding the plants themselves.*

### **Sharing**

Because the class teacher didn't accompany the visit there was a post-visit discussion between her and the children back in class. Ms Brand also noted general excitement among the class, she heard some saying it was their best ever visit, talking about playing with the dogs and about having and caring for a dog. They also talked about the connection between meat and animals and some mentioned wanting to be a farmer.

*A lot of them came back saying they wanted to be farmers when they grow up.*

She said that the parents who came on the trip also loved it, one wanted to volunteer at the farm, others found it uplifting and spiritually engaging.

*I know myself I've started looking for organic eggs and I wouldn't be surprised if a few of them wouldn't be doing that after the discussion.*

Pupils K and I said they had told their respective families but gave no detail (keeping in mind that they were both accompanied by family members).

### **Class follow up**

The visit was in the penultimate week of term and there was no formal follow up from the trip, indeed at the time of our visit the class was moving rooms and all work done was in boxes rather than on display. Ms Brand did say they had been reading Babe the Sheep Dog in class, so it was perfect that they got to see the sheep dog in action at the farm.

Pupil K said that since their visit he had eaten more vegetables and less meat because this led to fewer animals being slaughtered.

*When the summer holiday starts I'm going to be start being a pescatarian...I don't want to eat meat anymore because we're eating all of those animals.*

### **Summary of the visit**

For the children the teacher saw it as a valuable shared collective memory that brought the countryside and science to life via a practical experience rather than just seeing everything via a book or video.

*You need to have those real experiences.*

It was also a unique experience for the adults too (both teachers and parents); providing additional confidence to be near livestock and to allow the children to be a bit freer.

*A lot of those experiences were completely new for me.*

*Gives you the confidence to let them run and bit and be out in the open*

*When children are engaged and inspired with what they are doing...that absolutely does that...there isn't anything that compares with this...incomparable.*

Authenticity was also critical; the teacher believed that talking to a real farmer about problem solving and budgeting is much more valuable than a visitor attraction.

*I've been to Godstone Farm and it hasn't got a patch on real working farm.*

She summarised by saying that the children simply wouldn't have had this opportunity without the funding and the trip.

## **Recommendations: Overall**

- More communication between schools and Country Trust about possible topics being covered in class that could be referenced to or connected with at the farm. E.g. for the Baring School visit the farmer only got to hear about the class studying seed growth the morning of the visit and was able to add something of relevance at the last minute. Knowing such topics in advance would help ensure the visit could tie in with classwork better.
- Online resources such as photos and videos of the farm
- Online forum for schools to share their farm visit experiences
- Template thank you letter and contact details for pupils to write to

## **Recommendations: Tiptree farm only**

- Less time spent on the tractor trailer where pupils could not hear what the guide was saying
- Less technical language used by the guide; teachers had to rephrase his explanations in a more age appropriate way
- More opportunities to ask the guide questions
- If time, a chance to see jam being made

## **Acknowledgements**

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