

CITY SCHOOL BRINGS FARMING TO THE HEART OF THE CURRICULUM

An inner-city school miles away from the countryside has brought food and farming to the heart of its curriculum and pupils are now reaping the benefits.

Sacred Heart RC Primary School in Gorton, Manchester, has worked with educational and farming charity The Country Trust to deliver a Food Discovery programme to every year group across the school enabling each child to grow and cook their own food and learn about where their food comes from with the help of farmers.

Children are now not only understanding food production, learning about healthy eating and trying new fresh foods but the programme has become so embedded within the curriculum that the scheme is improving their science, literacy, maths and DT attainment.

The Country Trust works with schools educating the most disadvantaged children in Britain giving them access to the countryside through visits to real working farms, delivering year-long Food Discovery Programmes and offering residential visits.

Headteacher Suzanne Walker said: "The impact this has had on our children has been enormous.

"I sat down with Country Trust Food Discovery Manager Vicki Leng and together we developed the idea that rather than the Country Trust deliver the programme for us, the charity would train and support us to deliver it ourselves.

"We saw straight away that the key to making the programme work was to embed it within our curriculum. Fortunately our Year One teacher Charlotte Robinson was keen to take a lead."

The Food Discovery programme enables children to explore where their food comes from with farm visits at the heart of their learning. Pupils grow their own food in school and are taught to prepare and cook healthy meals using the produce they've grown. They also host a playground farmers' market and harvest festival and are taught about costing and budgeting.

Suzanne said: "In terms of the children, they have a level of understanding of food from what's involved in growing and selling their own produce to cooking, preparing and eating it. We've completed the circle for them."

Charlotte Robinson Year 1 teacher, school science co-ordinator and Food and Farming Co-ordinator said: "We have to be very structured to make it work and think about the simple things like who is doing the shopping for a cooking session. In the end we moved to ordering online and having the food delivered. We then built this into our classwork and had the older children helping us and looking at budgeting and personal finance. The standard of their learning, engagement and writing has increased because it's not shoehorned into the curriculum, it's woven into it.

"Science is a big part of the new curriculum and every class has a plants and living things topic so the programme fits really well. We use it across all subjects though such as literacy.

"My class have also been reading *The Enormous Turnip* and it definitely helps their writing because they actually planted turnips and they can use adjectives from their real experience. In our cooking and tasting sessions we actively encourage children to explore language and adjectives using the things that they're handling such as "The heavy, prickly, spiky pineapple".

One of Charlotte's pupils is Max Choudhury, 5. He said: "In my group we grew lettuce. It was good and interesting. We had to dig to the blacker soil so the lettuce can grow. I saw the worms and I put one on my hand. The worms make holes so the water can get to the lettuce and make it grow nice and big and tasty."

Zara Moran, Mum to Max said. "If I'm honest Max isn't a big vegetable eater. But because they're growing vegetables themselves he's much more prepared to try new things."

"Max is a very outdoors child and responds much better to doing anything if it's in an outside environment. It's made a big impact on his learning as he's actually physically doing it and he can transfer that knowledge back to the classroom."

The whole programme is supported by class visits to farms where pupils are able to meet farmers who explain the journey of British food to their table.

Charlotte said: "The programme really encourages them to ask questions about what they're experiencing. When one class went to a dairy farm, most had never even seen a cow before let alone experienced the whole process of milk production. It's not just a cooking programme. It's the full story of where food comes from and even we as adults didn't realise how our food gets to our table."

The programme has proven so successful that The Country Trust is now using it as a model to roll out to other schools across the country.

To find out more about The Country Trust and its work with schools, visit www.countrytrust.org.uk

Ends...

Editors' notes

For more information, please contact Phil Hesmondhalgh at phesmondhalgh@countrytrust.org.uk Tel: 01245 608363 or Jill Attenborough at jattenborough@countrytrust.org.uk

About The Country Trust

- Founded in 1978, The Country Trust is the leading national educational charity that brings the working countryside alive for those children least able to access it, whether through disadvantage or disability. Every year we support hundreds of volunteer farmers and landowners to welcome thousands of disadvantaged children from all backgrounds and faiths onto their farms.
- The Country Trust has 3 main strands of activities:
 1. Farm Discovery - day visits to real working farms
 2. Countryside Discovery - residential visits to the countryside
 3. Food Discovery - yearlong programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food
- The Country Trust focuses on working with the following:
 - Primary age children from schools with an above average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals
 - Schools catering for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
 - Looked After Children and Pupil Referral Units
- In 2015 The Country Trust enabled
 - 18,079 children to go on a farm or estate visit
 - 6,650 children took part in farm led assemblies and food and farming workshops
 - 1,113 children took part in Food Discovery Programmes
 - 918 children went on 29 Residential visits
 - 361 children with Special Educational Needs took part in Countryside Adventure days in Hampshire.
- The Country Trust currently works with schools in and around London, Essex, East Anglia, Hampshire, Birmingham and the East and West Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West, North Wales and Northumberland.

What we do

- We make it easy and safe for children to visit farms and for farmers to share their knowledge and passion.
- We bring urban and rural communities together, increasing communication, respect and understanding of the countryside as a place of possibilities but also a place on which livelihoods depend.
- We facilitate children's cultural understanding about the life and work of the British countryside through visits and talking with those who live and work there.
- We enable children to experience the wonder of the countryside:- open space, breathing space, the people who live and work there, habitats, farm animals and wildlife.
- We enable children to understand the possibilities of food, what a variety there is, why and how it grows, who grows it and where, what it tastes like, why all this matters.
- We introduce adult role models who nurture and take responsibility for crops and animals. People who often work in strong family units.
- We bring two interdependent but disconnected communities together for a stronger future. Our school community includes many urban children and a significant number of children from ethnic minorities.
- We can help schools to meet the new Ofsted common inspection framework which now includes a judgement on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare'. Ofsted states that the first-hand experiences of learning outside the classroom can help to make subjects more vivid and interesting for pupils and enhance their understanding. It can also contribute significantly to pupils' personal, social and emotional development.

Chief Executive: Jill Attenborough

Head Office: Moulsham Mill, Parkway, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 7PX

E: info@countrytrust.org.uk

W: countrytrust.org.uk