



**Growing Together:**  
**Gardening with Children and Young**  
**People with Special Educational Needs**

RHS SEN Schools Project 2009-2010



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**Gardening is a great enabler, providing opportunities for everyone to take part, to learn and to enjoy time together. In schools, gardening can strengthen relationships between teachers and pupils as they work together, sharing skills to improve their school grounds.**

Having worked on school outreach projects for the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) for the past five years, I have emphasised to my students (or my 'gardeners' as I call them) that they should not feel the need to rush to do a job. Working calmly and methodically at their own pace will bring about the best results.

For some students, horticulture can bring things back into balance. As a Year 9 Pupil that I worked with at Newick House School explained "Gardening is a useful thing as it calms me down, it's a relaxing thing to do. I hope to come back to work in the polytunnel in Year 10, it has been a good experience". His sentiments rang so true with how I too value gardening as an adult. When I am tired and juggling my work-life balance, I find an hour or so at the allotment calms me down and gives me a precious time and space to put things into perspective. After that even the ironing mountain does not seem quite so high!

It is the RHS Vision to give all young people the opportunity to garden as they develop – an opportunity open to young people of every ability and age. A legacy, left to the RHS in memory of Peter Rees, has enabled me to work for the past year with six Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools in East and West Sussex to develop RHS knowledge in this area. There were two key outcomes for the project. The first of these was

for pupils and teachers to gain new horticultural skills. The second was to show how the acquisition of these skills might benefit pupils in a much wider context in terms of their learning and personal progress. The resulting case studies and resources developed will be shared with schools across the UK through the website of the RHS Campaign for School Gardening.

This report provides an overview of the project and highlights many of the benefits that gardening can bring to both SEN pupils and their teachers. For me, the past year has been a career highlight, working with ninety five eager gardening pupils and their equally enthusiastic teachers, growing a wide range of edible and ornamental plants in a host of different ways and environments. I am extremely grateful to them all for their involvement and support over the past year and I hope many of them will continue to garden at both school and home for many years to come. "I will do gardening forever" enthused a Year 6 pupil from St Mary's School who has truly caught the gardening bug.



**Hayley Young,**  
RHS Special Educational Needs  
Schools Project Officer

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"Gardening is a useful thing as it calms me down, it's a relaxing thing to do. I hope to come back to work in the polytunnel in Year 10, it has been a good experience"

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**Year 9 Pupil, Newick House School**

## The benefits of gardening for children and young people

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“J has profound Autistic Spectrum Condition with movement difficulties. Gardening gives him the opportunity to show his capabilities in a practical context”

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**Teacher and Life Skills  
Coordinator, Downs Park School**

**The RHS believes that every child should be given the chance to garden to ensure that they grow up with a love of learning, a strong grasp of essential life skills and robust physical and emotional health.**

In 2009, the RHS commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to implement a research study looking at the impact of gardening in schools. The study surveyed 1300 teachers and conducted an in-depth study of 10 schools ranging from a large primary school in urban London to a small village school in Yorkshire.

The findings of this study, published in June 2010, showed that school gardens provide a dynamic platform from which to build better learning outcomes for young people. These outcomes fall into four key areas:

**Cognitive:** This is the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, the ability to think independently, to question and to apply concepts and principles in different contexts. Other outcomes include enhanced communication skills and use of vocabulary across the curriculum.

**Affective:** This is the development of young people's attitudes, values, beliefs and self-perceptions and covers the key attributes of resilience, responsibility and reflection. Gardening helps young people to feel better about themselves, to accept and respond to hurdles in life, to review and plan their personal progress and to become responsible citizens.

**Behavioural and Physical:**

These involve personal behaviours, physical wellbeing and physical skills. Findings from the study show that gardening provides a focus that enables young people to change established personal behaviour patterns. For example, growing food in the school garden supports positive behaviour change for young people in relation to healthy eating and physical exercise, both at school and at home. Physical skills, such as co-ordination and fine motor skills, are also improved.

**Interpersonal and Social:** These concern communication, the ability to relate to others and teamwork. Gardening provides all young people with a voice, irrespective of performance in the classroom. It gives them the ability to make a positive contribution that is recognised and valued by other team members. Gardening is task-orientated and naturally leads to a problem solving, team-based approach. The NFER study found that gardening activities also bridged different age cohorts and encouraged informal relationships to develop with peers and adults.





**School gardens  
provide a dynamic  
platform from which  
to build better  
learning outcomes  
for young people.**







# Introduction

## How gardening helps children and young people with Special Educational Needs

**Working closely with pupils and teachers on the project, the RHS has developed a greater understanding of the impact of gardening for children and young people with SEN. The key benefits that were evidenced from this work related to two areas; skills development and personal progress.**

### **Skills development**

Pupils who took part in the project showed improvements in their cognitive skills. These included the ability to use new horticultural terms in context, an understanding of cause and effect (governing crop successes and failures) and the skills to logically implement the processes required to grow plants effectively.

Practice with the more detailed horticultural tasks such as seed sowing had an impact on pupils' physical skills. Pupils showed improved patience and concentration as they became familiar with the tasks being set. Some adaptations of techniques were required to enable pupils to access certain activities. In general this resulted in pupils participating more fully and honing their skills by trial, error and repetition. Pupils also showed a willingness to taste new fruits and vegetables that they had grown.

In one school, a polytunnel enabled year round production and the development of enterprise skills. Another school has developed gardening as a spring board from which to launch pupils into their first taste of the working environment, through day visits to a local nursery.

### **Personal progress**

The breadth of skills acquired in gardening enabled some pupils to achieve targets set for their personal progress. After a period of familiarisation, many pupils developed a sense of ownership and responsibility for the garden, and consequently better ownership of their personal progress. Some pupils that had chosen initially to work alone developed an affinity for team working. Gains in confidence and self esteem made pupils more resilient and willing to persevere with challenging tasks.

A key observation was the improvement to Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). By enabling pupils to work shoulder to shoulder, individually or as a team each one had the ability to find their own space and pace at which to develop. Children who did not communicate with one another previously were seen to form new friendships by working outside.

### **Why Gardening is a vital tool in SEN schools**

The practical, hands-on and process-orientated nature of gardening was seen to be particularly appropriate to the visual and kinaesthetic learning styles of many SEN pupils.

The project also found that SEN schools are ideally placed to organise and benefit from gardening – with high teacher to pupil ratios, well developed staff teams, breadth and creativity within the curriculum and personal learning plans developed for pupils.

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“All the pupils were proud of being part of the gardening group. They were always asking when gardening would be happening, when Hayley would be visiting. They felt special to be part of a group”

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**Sylvia Murphy,**  
Pastoral Care Leader

### **Practical Skills that were taught in the RHS project:**

- How to use a range of hand tools, larger tools and other horticultural equipment correctly and safely.
- Soil preparation – digging, forking, raking, weeding.
- Seed sowing – indoors in pots and modules, making paper pots, direct outdoor seed sowing.
- Pricking out seedlings and potting on small plug plants.
- Hardwood cuttings of *Cornus* (dogwood) and *Salix* (willow)
- Bulb planting – flowers, onions, garlic.
- Planting – herbs, vegetable plug plants, soft fruit, fruit trees.
- Plant care and garden maintenance – watering, weeding, tidying garden areas, cleaning tools and pots.
- Harvesting crops. Storing crops (such as plaiting garlic). Tasting produce (fresh in the garden, taken home or used in the school kitchen / Food Technology lessons).
- Building – linked raised beds, netted fruit protection.
- Wildlife – making mini bug homes in plant pots, building a bug hotel.

## **Project Outline**

**Schools were visited by the RHS Project Officer regularly throughout the academic year to deliver practical sessions with teachers, support staff and small groups of pupils.**

Day long visits were usually split into four or five sessions with different groups, accompanied by at least one member of school staff. In schools with a mixed age range, primary and secondary groups worked in the garden at different times during the day. At one of the schools that offered boarding, the Project Officer also worked with a group of pupils after school to develop the garden at the front of their residential unit.

The schools selected the pupils to be involved in the project. These included the whole range of ages from 4 to 16. 95 pupils took part, with a diverse range of Special Educational Needs, covering Aspergers Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC), Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD), Cystic Fibrosis, Downs Syndrome, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Elective Mutism, Gross Development Delay, Hearing Impairment, Profound Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and Speech and Language Development Difficulties.

“For many children, it was important to give them time out from the classroom” explained Amanda Fletcher, Pastoral Care Leader at Newick House School “and for some of the pupils I worked with, their absence also gave the rest of class some time out too”.

The emphasis of all sessions was to give the pupils practical, hands-on gardening experience and for their teachers to learn skills alongside them so they could deliver similar

sessions between visits and in future years. Whenever possible work was outside. Only on a couple of occasions did rain result in having to run indoor sessions. Following a practical demonstration, pupils were encouraged to have a go themselves with the Project Officer and member of staff offering support if necessary. As outlined in the case studies on the following pages, a wide range of horticultural tasks were tackled over the course of eleven months.

Working alongside the pupils, the Project Officer was able to record her observations as to how effectively tasks could be tackled and how some could be adapted to suit the needs to particular pupils. The research element of this project has led to the development of a range of practical resources for teachers that will now be shared more widely through the RHS Campaign for School Gardening website.

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**“I think for a lot of our pupils they learn much more when they are doing practical things, I think by doing gardening you can learn about other subjects at the same time such as Maths, English, and Science. Lots of our pupils learn by doing, hands-on, that’s where gardening is really, really important in our school”**

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**Teacher, Newick House School**



# The Project Schools



Top: (left) St. Mary's School, Horam  
(right) Newick House School, Burgess Hill.  
Middle: St. Anthony's School, Chichester.  
Bottom: (left to right): Hamilton Lodge  
School for Deaf Children, Brighton,  
Manor Green Primary School, Crawley,  
Downs Park School, Portslade.



## Teacher Training



“It has been a brilliant day. Very inspiring and has given me lots of ideas to take back to school”

**Teacher, Downs Park School**

**In a TeacherVoice survey conducted by the NFER on behalf of the RHS in 2009, teachers said that lack of horticultural knowledge and skills were preventing them from using the school garden as a tool for teaching and learning.**

The RHS believes that the training of teachers and school staff is fundamental to delivering a step change in the way that school grounds are used to inspire pupils and engage them in a dynamic learning experience. Giving teachers better access to horticultural skills is therefore a vital component of all RHS education programmes.

During the SEN project, practical group training sessions were delivered by the RHS Project Officer within in each school so that skills could be developed across the wider school workforce. This was an important feature of the project, encouraging and enabling schools to continue their growing activities in future years.

Across the six schools, more than 30 members of staff participated in twilight training sessions held in the spring and autumn terms. Autumn training focused on soils and soil preparation and gave staff the chance to get their hands dirty with soil texture testing. At the beginning of the growing season, the spring sessions covered propagation techniques; including seed sowing methods, hardwood cuttings and soft fruit propagation.

In the summer term the RHS hosted a day training session at the Clore Learning Centre at RHS Garden Wisley. This was an opportunity for all six schools to come together to improve their practical skills and to share their own school gardening experiences and aspirations with one another. 15 teachers participated in sessions facilitated by the Project Officer and other RHS professionals. Informative and creative sessions included Pests and Diseases, Taking Cuttings, Exotics in the Classroom, Identifying Weeds, Ideas for Less and Making a Herbarium. Tours were given of the Glasshouse and Fruit Nursery to show specific RHS techniques. An important aspect of the day was when participants gave a short presentation, celebrating the gardening achievements in their school.

Details of the national RHS Continuing Professional Development Programme for Teachers are to be found on page 27 of this report.

# Teacher Training Day /

## RHS Garden Wisley





# Case Study /

## Downs Park School

“I like my friends being nice to me when we are working together in the garden”

**Pupil, Downs Park School**

## New gardens and new experiences... How gardening fostered responsibility and team work



*Pupils were taught how to clean and care for their tools.*

**Working with a group of just four pupils and a member of school staff was crucial to providing the necessary support and encouragement to develop gardening skills at Downs Park.**

Year 8 pupils from Downs Park were very mixed in their educational needs and abilities; some tiring after ten minutes, others able to dig all day if given a chance. The opportunity to work outside with just a few of their classmates meant that a sense of camaraderie developed alongside the flourishing garden. As one pupil explained “I like my friends being nice to me when we are working together in the garden”.

By undertaking a broad range of practical tasks throughout the year, pupils were able to work to their individual strengths and talents. Pupils soon realised that team work would bring about results. Building a system of linked raised beds was a good example of this. Construction of the beds proved more difficult for pupils with poor motor skills, although pupils with behavioural difficulties relished the physical nature of the challenge and the responsibility that came with it. Once the beds were slotted together the whole group worked as a team to lift them into position. At the end of the exercise, all were proud of their team effort.

“I have liked using all the equipment especially the big ones (spades, rakes and long handled hand tools), I haven’t used them before”

**Pupil, Downs Park School**

A gardener’s wheelbarrow full of tools was a big draw for pupils. “Can we use them?” they keenly asked. For many pupils this was their first opportunity to use tools. Having talked through the safety aspects, they clearly enjoyed the responsibility of using and maintaining them. Trialling different tools was an important aspect of the project and meant that every pupil could find a tool that suited their individual needs. As one pupil reflected on the project “I have liked using all the equipment especially the big ones (spades, rakes and long handled hand tools), I haven’t used them before”.





“My favourite, favourite, favourite bit was digging”.



**School Profile:**

Downs Park School, Portslade, East Sussex

**LEA:** Brighton & Hove

**Age Range:** 4-16

**Special Needs:**

Moderate to complex learning difficulties, including pupils with Autistic Spectrum Condition.

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 87

**Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**

Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) – 13 pupils  
(5 girls, 8 boys)

**Type of Garden:**

Raised beds & wild flower meadow.

# Case Study / Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children

“One of my pupils is very capable out in the garden as he gets lots of opportunity to practise at home”

**SEN Co-ordinator,**  
Hamilton Lodge School

## **School Profile:**

Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children, Brighton, East Sussex

**LEA:** Non-maintained school with residential facilities. Three quarters of pupils are boarders.

**Age Range:** 5-17

**Special Needs:** Severe / profound hearing impairment, and a number of pupils have additional learning needs. British Sign Language (BSL) is the pupils' first language.

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 70

## **Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**

Primary Unit – 9 pupils

Secondary with additional SEN – 3 pupils

Residential – 5 pupils

**Type of Garden:** Raised fruit and vegetable beds, cut flower border at residential unit.

## Feeling ‘at home’... How gardening provided links between home and school life

The catchment of Hamilton Lodge School covers the whole of the South East of England with pupils travelling on a Monday morning from as far away as Essex, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. The school offers boarding for most of its pupils who all have severe or profound hearing impairment.

Gardening had been firmly established at Hamilton Lodge as a Primary School activity for a number of years. More recently Stephanie Sheppard, a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and keen allotmenteer, had started growing with her group of secondary pupils with additional Special Educational Needs. By getting involved with the RHS project, the school saw gardening as a means to link home and school life for all pupils. The school also wanted to involve staff from their residential units more actively.

“Gardening is a great activity for sharing between home and school” said Fiona Aitken, Primary Teacher “Such a practical activity can be enjoyed by the pupils and both signing and non-signing members of their families. It provides great links to healthy eating and healthy lifestyles”. As one pupil signed “I really love gardening and my mum loves gardening too”.

Elements of home life were brought into school by developing garden

areas around the residential units.

In the autumn term, outside the girl's house, a group of pupils dug over an overgrown bed and planted early summer flowering bulbs such as *Ixia*, *Sparaxis* and *Gladiolus nanus*. The bulbs were carefully selected to ensure they were not poisonous or a potential irritant for pupils. Another small bed was sown in the spring term with annual flowers such as *Centaurea cyanus* (cornflowers) and *Statice sinuatum* (strawflowers). These provided colour to the front of the property and cut flowers for the girls to pick to celebrate each other's birthdays.

Communication with home is important. Pupil's gardening achievements are often celebrated in the school's weekly newsletter that is sent out to parents and carers. This encourages a number of pupils to share their skills at home. As Mrs Sheppard explained “One of my pupils is very capable out in the garden as he gets lots of opportunity to practise at home”.



Left: A pupil learns how to make paper pots at school.



**A secondary pupil from Hamilton Lodge School using the gardening skills he has learnt at school at home in the family garden.**





# Case Study /

## Manor Green Primary School



Pupils using an adapted planting technique for spring bulbs.

### **School Profile:**

Manor Green Primary School, Crawley, West Sussex

LEA: West Sussex

Age Range: 2-11

**Special Needs:** Generic special needs school, accepting pupils with complete range of additional needs.

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 135

### **Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**

Juniper Class – 7 pupils ages 9-11

Oak Class – 4 pupils ages 7-9

Cherry Class – 2 pupils with profound multiple learning difficulties.

**Type of Garden:** Raised beds for edibles and flowers, greenhouse, wildlife garden and shared sensory garden with college.

## Drainpipes and Dropping... How adapting horticultural techniques supported Personalised Learning Plans

**Learning outside the classroom is part of everyday school life for the pupils at Manor Green Primary. The school makes the most of its outside areas with raised beds, a large wildlife garden and a sensory garden that they share with the adjoining SEN college.**

Manor Green has invested both time and funds in developing the outside environment and has benefited from volunteers from Business in the Community projects helping with large scale building and maintenance work.

“At Manor Green, every child has an education plan with three targets for them to achieve. These targets are about life skills and are set twice during the school year, in autumn and spring, in consultation with their parents and carers” explained Louise Bunce, Assistant Head Teacher. “Although the activities of the children may be within the context of gardening, the focus is about developing skills. Skills like working together, improving physical strength, improving concentration and following instructions rather than the specific skills of gardening techniques.”

Autumn bulb planting provided an unexpected opportunity for a pupil with Severe and Multiple Learning Difficulties (SMLD) to meet one of his personalised learning targets. The learning target in question – one of dropping balls precisely into a bin rather than throwing them at random – was achieved by the pupil using an adapted technique of dropping bulbs into a pot, to the great satisfaction of both the pupil and his teacher. Other pupils used drainpipes to roll the bulbs precisely into the pots. In spring, the group’s efforts were further rewarded with a successive display of *Crocus*, *Muscari* (grape hyacinths) and *Alliums*.





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 "The chance to work shoulder  
 to shoulder rather than having  
 direct eye contact gives pupils  
 opportunity to gain confidence  
 and express themselves"  
 .....

**Teacher,** Manor Green Primary



“Pupils in our school benefit greatly from learning through practical experiences. Having the opportunity to garden gives them a skill for life that they would possibly be able to use for employment”

**Gillian Perry**, Head Teacher,  
Newick House School



**School Profile:** Newick House School,  
Burgess Hill, West Sussex

**LEA:** West Sussex

**Age Range:** 4-16

**Special Needs:** Moderate learning difficulties, although an increasing number of complex needs. Many pupils are on the autistic spectrum and have a wide range of communication difficulties.

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 160

**Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**  
Secondary – 12 pupils, including 4 from the Increased Social and Independent Skills class (ISIS)  
Primary – 6 pupils

**Type of Garden:**  
New polytunnel and vegetable beds.

## Case Study / Newick House School

### Enterprising endeavours... How gardening in a polytunnel turned process-based learning into profit

A brand new polytunnel, set in the school grounds, provided the impetus for Newick House School to get involved with the RHS project. Keen to make it a productive facility and to give pupils the chance to be involved in an enterprise venture, the aim was to be able to grow a range of different plants for sale to staff, visitors and at school fairs.

The school growing year started in the autumn with oriental and overwintering salad leaves, sown from seed in one lesson, pricked out after a few weeks and then potted on into grow bags to crop and sell. All of the pupils absorbed the hands-on, methodical, process-based experience. Teachers were shown how to set out selected equipment and work in an organised way alongside the pupils. “It is clear that such preparation techniques make the gardening lessons much more successful” said one teacher. Each stage of the process was documented photographically so that pupils could attempt to order tasks visually into their natural sequence – a tool that helps to both review and reinforce the learning that has taken place.

The same skills were repeated throughout the year, with flowers and a range of vegetables. Not everything was a success. The fluctuating temperatures at the beginning of the year made it impossible to germinate any half hardy annuals and the overhead sprinkler irrigation system turned the clay soil under the mypex ground cover into a bog. These apparent failures gave pupils an important understanding of the realities of gardening and offered

opportunities for staff and pupils to develop their problem-solving skills. Plug plants proved to be the solution to the germination problems, giving the pupils much larger plants to pot on and then plant up into hanging baskets for the summer fair. The irrigation system was used only at weekends, with watering cans being used by pupils the rest of the time to achieve greater precision.

The polytunnel had many high points. The first ripe strawberry harvested on 5th May brought much excitement and the potting of beautiful hanging baskets and containers with the pupil’s own choices instilled a sense of pride. There was the added bonus of £134.20 profit from plant sales at the school summer fair, giving the gardening group plenty of funds for next year’s seeds, plants and compost and the installation of a drip irrigation system.

The retention of information by the pupils and development of their practical skills were impressive. “Guess what?” said one Year 10 pupil on the final visit, “If you dry a strawberry out you can save all the little seeds on the outside and plant them, then they will germinate”.





# Case Study /

## St. Anthony's School

"Working with the RHS has helped to turn gardening opportunities into reality"

**David Birch**, School Site Officer



*Plaiting garlic for winter storage.*

### **School Profile:**

St. Anthony's School, Chichester

**LEA:** West Sussex

**Age Range:** 4-16

**Special Needs:** The majority of pupils have complex needs, 30 per cent with Autistic Spectrum Diagnosis and over 80 per cent with speech, language and communication difficulties. Other needs include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Down's Syndrome, Dyspraxia and medical needs.

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 202

**Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**  
Year 8 (Key Stage 3) – 19 pupils

### **Type of Garden:**

Raised beds, sensory beds and wildlife garden.

## New faces, new places... How gardening helped to build new adult-child relationships

**When St. Anthony's school applied for the RHS project, they were just reaping their first harvest from new raised beds installed in early 2009. The school wanted the help of the RHS to establish gardening as an all year round activity for more of its pupils.**

St. Anthony's school appreciated that gardening could offer many benefits for their pupils, not only in terms of learning skills but also for social and emotional well being.

Year 8 pupils were chosen to lead the work in the garden. At first they were generally a quiet group and somewhat uncertain as to what to expect. In addition to practical skills, it was hoped that pupils' social skills would blossom by working with different adults. As Deputy Head, Steve Whale explained "Social interaction is very important as most students do not mix socially outside school. They come from a very wide catchment area."

Gardening in groups of four with an enthusiastic member of staff and the RHS Project Officer put pupils at their ease. Soon the group was actively involved in growing herbs, flowers and grasses as well as fruit and vegetables. Whenever possible, the groups would be joined by the school Site Officer, David Birch, who is a

keen gardener. As the year passed, the pupils gained the confidence to trust and to communicate with adults with whom they did not regularly work, as well as having confidence to tackle a range of tasks.

Following the SEN schools' training day at RHS Wisley and inspired by the other schools' plans, Mr Birch was keen to share with the Headteacher his ideas as to how he, as a member of the wider school workforce, might support an increased level of gardening activity at the school. His enthusiasm has resulted in two afternoons a week being timetabled for different groups of pupils to work in the garden for the new school year. "We are also planning more raised beds and extending a shed to create an outside classroom", explained a delighted Mr Birch, who has been empowered to lead the project. "Working with the RHS", he concluded "has helped to turn gardening opportunities into reality".

**"Social interaction is very important as most students do not mix socially outside school"**

**Steve Whale**, Deputy Head





*School site officer David Birch  
works with a pupil in the garden.*

# Case Study /

## St. Mary's School

“Conflicts in the classroom seem to disappear when out in the garden”

**Teacher, St. Mary's School**

## My garden, my choices... How the freedom to choose activities led to a better team culture



**School Profile:** St. Mary's School,  
Horam, near Heathfield, East Sussex

**LEA:** East Sussex

**Age Range:** 10-16 (Boys only).  
Includes week day residential provision.

**Special Needs:** Behavioural, emotional  
and social difficulties (BESD).

**Number of Pupils on Roll:** 48

**Pupils who worked with RHS Project:**

Year 6 – 3 pupils (ages 10-11)  
Year 7 – 5 pupils (ages 11-12)  
Year 8 – 4 pupils (ages 12-13)  
Year 10 – 4 pupils (ages 14-15)

**Type of Garden:**

Large productive garden – fruit and  
vegetables with wildlife area.

For many pupils at St. Mary's School, the formative school years had brought significant challenges in terms of social, emotional and behavioural needs that could not easily be met in a mainstream school setting.

The focus at St. Mary's is therefore very much on supportive measures to help the boys aged 10 to 16 with their social and emotional development. The school provides educational and residential opportunities to give basic skills to take them into the workplace and beyond into life. School staff work to support pupils in feeling safe, secure and respected whilst helping them to achieve individual targets through a restructured curriculum. At Key Stage 4, both skills and subject streams are timetabled to work in parallel with one another.

Throughout the year, gardening sessions were held for most year groups to support life and work skills development. A 'Garden Jobs List' presented at the start of each gardening session allowed pupils to select a task that appealed to them. Having the opportunity to work independently gave the pupils confidence to develop their skills and, with four pupils in each session, support could be given to individuals where needed by the RHS Project Officer and school staff. Although the pupils worked alone at the start of sessions, they naturally progressed to helping their classmates out with jobs. For example one pupil started building bean wigwams and was joined by two others who helped with poles and then with planting and watering.

“Gardening offers the pupils a rich context in which to learn not just about the land and the environment but also develops the skills of teamwork and co-operation that so many of them lack”

**Alan Roderick, Senior  
Teacher – Assessment,  
Recording and Reporting**

Not only did the fruit trees blossom but the pupils grew in confidence and clearly took great pride in their achievements. “Katie is the best (apple) tree, she has grown really well, I take good care of her” proclaimed a Year 10 pupil showing his nurturing side for a tree that he had planted on a bleak, sleety day in February.

“Gardening offers the pupils a rich context in which to learn not just about the land and the environment but also develops the skills of teamwork and co-operation that so many of them lack”, enthused Alan Roderick, (Senior Teacher – Assessment, Recording and Reporting). “As such”, he commented, “gardening is a fabulous way for our boys to progress”.









## Building on RHS work with Special Educational Needs Schools

The RHS is keen to build on the 2009-10 SEN schools' project to work more widely with young people with Special Educational Needs and to support schools nationally.

The Peter Rees legacy will enable the RHS to complete two further projects:

### Accreditation of skills

A key finding of the pilot project was the need for individual students to show progression and to leave school with accredited skills that increase their chances of work experience and employment.

In a three year pilot (2010-2013), RHS Project Officer Hayley Young will work in East and West Sussex with Year 10 and 11 pupils and their teachers to explore options for formal skills accreditation. The learning from the pilot will be evaluated with a view to recommending existing RHS qualifications to SEN schools nationally or to developing further RHS qualifications to meet the needs of SEN students. More information

regarding the RHS qualifications can be obtained by emailing [qualifications@rhs.org.uk](mailto:qualifications@rhs.org.uk)

### Gardening in different SEN contexts

This one year (2010-2011) project based in West Yorkshire will look at the impact of gardening in different SEN contexts. Participants in the project will include a Pupil Referral Unit, a Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre (SILC), a Community Special School and mainstream Primary and Secondary schools with SEN provision, in both urban and rural locations.

One aim of the project will be to show how gardening can help all schools to 'consider the needs of pupils with

disabilities and special educational needs'. RHS Project Officer Sarah-Jane Mason will work with a broad cross-section of pupils and teachers to teach them horticultural skills and to develop case studies that will serve as inspiration to other schools wanting to create improved learning and inclusion for pupils through gardening.

Follow the progress of these projects at: [www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

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**"We are all friends working as a team"**

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**Year 6 pupil,  
St. Mary's School**



## Visits to RHS Gardens for pupils with Special Educational Needs

**All four RHS Gardens offer educational visits for school groups. These can be tailor-made by an experienced RHS Education Officer to suit the individual requirements of student groups with Special Educational Needs.**

Typically sessions consist of practical and creative activities to enhance all areas of the curriculum, as well as horticultural skills development. Tours of the gardens can also be included; to discover the sheer beauty and diversity of the plants, something that inspires all the year round.

Three gardens (Wisley in Surrey, Rosemoor in Devon and Harlow Carr in Yorkshire) also offer the option of self-guided visits at busy times. For further information on the location of RHS gardens and details of how to book, visit [www.rhs.org.uk/Children/For-schools/School-visits-to-RHS-gardens](http://www.rhs.org.uk/Children/For-schools/School-visits-to-RHS-gardens)



*Clore Learning Centre at RHS Garden Wisley*

## Continuing Professional Development for Teachers

**The RHS Continuing Professional Development programme of one-day courses is run in collaboration with the DfE's Growing Schools initiative. Courses are available to all adults teaching and inspiring children about plants and gardening.**

The aims of this programme are:

- To enthuse and support teachers in developing and using gardens in school.
- To support progression through the **RHS Campaign for School Gardening benchmarking scheme**.
- To encourage and advise teaching of the curriculum both inside and outside the classroom using plants, gardens, school grounds and environmental areas.

- To improve knowledge and understanding of plants and gardening in school.

There are 129 courses on offer at 45 different venues including field study centres, botanic gardens, colleges, schools and arboreta. A range of courses are on offer including wildlife gardening in school, designing a school garden, food growing in schools, and gardening with SEN pupils.

For more information visit our website: [www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)



## The RHS Campaign for School Gardening



*Experimenting with seed sowing equipment to sow fine seed.*

**Launched in 2007, the RHS Campaign for School Gardening is a national platform to encourage and inspire teachers, schools and communities to get involved in growing at school.**

At the end of 2010, 12,500 had joined the Campaign – a figure equating to nearly one in two schools in the UK.

In addition to the teachers' Continuing Professional Development workshops and school training and support offered regionally, the Campaign website has comprehensive information and resources to help develop their gardening activities.

The Campaign supports schools in creating sustainable gardens by

encouraging them to work through a series of benchmarking levels to improve their gardening skills, use the school garden more widely and to achieve community involvement. Attainment of each level is rewarded through awards and certificates to celebrate achievement.

To find out more or become a part of the Campaign for School Gardening, please go to

[www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

### Campaign for School Gardening Regional Advisors

The RHS Campaign for School Gardening works at regional level to engage with partners and support schools in developing their gardening activities.

Campaign Regional Advisors, currently located in the East of England, London, Yorkshire and The Humber and the North West, work through designated Campaign 'Partner Schools' to deliver practical training for teachers on all aspects of running a school garden. Training sessions are open to teachers from a wide number of associate schools in the vicinity of each Partner School. Parents and volunteers from the community are also welcome to attend the training as they provide a crucial base of support for school gardening across the country.

### Open Futures Programme – a Skills and Enquiry Curriculum Development Programme for Primary Schools

Open Futures provides primary aged children with life enduring and life enhancing skills.

Open Futures offers a fresh way of meeting the needs of primary school children, whose natural spirit of enquiry is fostered and nurtured through the programme's four curriculum strands – askit, growit, cookit and filmit. The RHS is one of four partners providing expert training for the programme and has developed the growit strand since 2005, working closely with Primary schools and Early Years settings in East and West Sussex, Hampshire, Leeds and Wakefield to create productive school kitchen gardens and to give teachers and children the confidence and skills to grow their own food. Having completed a very successful four year pilot Open Futures is now inviting new schools to join the programme. Please visit [www.openfutures.com](http://www.openfutures.com) for further information, or email [hello@openfutures.com](mailto:hello@openfutures.com)









## Support the work of the RHS with a Legacy

**The 2009-10 SEN Schools Project has enabled the RHS to develop its education work to include more children with Special Educational Needs.**

This project was made possible by a generous legacy from the late Mr Peter Rees. So far 95 pupils and 35 teachers have directly benefited from this project, but many more will do so in the future as the schools introduce new pupils to the joy of gardening.

The SEN Schools Project is part of the national RHS Campaign for School Gardening which is helping to inspire and support schools across the UK. Through gardening the RHS hopes to improve and enrich the lives of

thousands of young people, including those with disabilities and Special Educational Needs.

As a charity the RHS depends on other sources of income, including legacies, to help inspire gardeners of all ages and to keep the RHS gardens flourishing.

To find out more about leaving a legacy to the RHS and for a copy of the RHS legacy brochure visit the website: [www.rhs.org.uk/legacies](http://www.rhs.org.uk/legacies)



*Covering seeds with vermiculite.*

## Final Words



**We know that gardening has an extremely positive impact on children's development. As well as helping children lead happier, healthier lives, the RHS Campaign for School Gardening helps children to acquire the skills they need to truly fulfil their potential.**

School gardens provide children with the opportunity to become stronger, more active learners, and to understand the responsibility and resilience that they need to achieve their goals. This project also demonstrates that these benefits are keenly felt in a Special Educational Needs learning environment.

Enabling gardening to take place throughout a school encourages inclusive educational activity. This project is further proof that gardening should be something that every child should have the opportunity to enjoy. Beyond this, the undeniable success that these SEN schools have enjoyed while working with the RHS will enable us to engage with others, and continue with this fantastic work. The RHS is committed to supporting schools and communities, for the good of all children – and this most recent project for children with Special Educational Needs will take us another step closer to that vision.



**Ruth Evans,**  
Head of Community  
and Development,  
Royal Horticultural Society



**The RHS is working to bring the joy of gardening to a significant number of the UK's children and young people.**



# My path to becoming an RHS Schools Project Officer

by Hayley Young



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“I like eating the peas, they were really yummy, really lush”

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**Year 8 Pupil, St. Anthony’s School**

**Hayley Young is one of the RHS SEN Schools Project Officers and part of the Community and Development team.**

During my former professional life as a Town Planner, I was a keen amateur and allotment gardener and studied for my RHS Level 2 qualification at night school. There I was bitten by the gardening bug and realised that a career in horticulture would be far more rewarding than remaining a local government planner. From 2003-2005, I studied for the Wisley Diploma in Practical Horticulture at RHS Garden Wisley and also completed the RHS Advanced and Diploma qualifications (now Level 3).

Since then, I have worked as an Outreach Project Officer for the Strategic Development team. This work involves me in teaching gardening skills to pupils and teachers in urban and rural schools away from the RHS gardens, to test out new ideas and applications for school gardening. This can only be achieved by working closely with school communities – something that makes my job varied and extremely rewarding.

For further information on RHS qualifications, go to [www.rhs.org.uk/courses/qualifications](http://www.rhs.org.uk/courses/qualifications)



## Credits

The Royal Horticultural Society gratefully acknowledges the generous support for the SEN Schools Project from the following individuals and organisations:

### The Peter Rees Legacy



This Department for Education initiative supports teachers and practitioners in using the 'outdoor classroom' as a resource across the curriculum for pupils of all ages. The RHS gratefully acknowledges the support of DfE Growing Schools for the publication of this report and associated teaching resources. [www.growingschools.org.uk](http://www.growingschools.org.uk)



Thrive is a small national charity that uses gardening to change lives. Thrive champions the benefits of gardening, carries out research and offers training and practical solutions so that anyone with a disability can take part in, benefit from and enjoy gardening. The RHS gratefully acknowledges the help and advice that Thrive has provided in reviewing the resources produced. [www.thrive.org.uk](http://www.thrive.org.uk)

**Thompson and Morgan** for seeds.

**Burton and Ball** and **Bulldog Tools** for tools trialled by the pupils.

Thanks to **Andrea Fowler, Jan Lambourn, Sarah Cathcart, Claire Hollis** and **Claire Custance** at RHS Garden Wisley.

Photography: **Fiona Secrett, Ruth Woodrow & Hayley Young**, all images copyright of the RHS.

**Finally, many thanks to the six schools and their pupils who took part in this Project.**

**“It’s better than  
staying indoors,  
we are making a  
better environment”**

**Pupil, St. Mary’s School**



## **RHS Campaign for School Gardening**

Supported by **Waitrose**

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The Royal Horticultural Society  
RHS Garden Wisley  
Woking GU23 6QB**

[www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening](http://www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening)

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