

Inclusion in Further Education

Beechlawn School

What the Judges Said

We felt that this entry showed much more than other sensory gardens that we have seen, so much of it done by the pupils. We were particularly impressed with the engagement from pupils in developing and maintaining their sensory garden.

Context

Beechlawn school is a special school which is recognised as an outstanding school by the educational inspectorate. The school has over 200 pupils and caters for a variety of varying needs and abilities. Beechlawn Sixth form department is currently in its seventh year (2019) and its growing in strength and developing to meet the needs of the pupils from year to year. As the school is situated in a landscaped 7-acre site on the outskirts of the historical village of Hillsborough. Pupils use the school environment to investigate all aspects of the Northern Ireland curriculum including History, Geography and Science.

After discussion involving the pupils in Sixth form, Our Key stage five felt that we should utilise the environment to create a stimulating and safe space which would benefit the whole school and staff. Especially as we as a school want to promote emotional wellbeing and positive self-esteem, whilst developing the full potential of our wonderful pupils.

The sixth formers started to create ideas of what we could use the space for and agreed a sensory garden would benefit the school. Year 15 (19 Year olds) started to make and craft sensory equipment and planting herbs, flowers and shrubbery that create a multi-sensory, kinaesthetic environment for learning and calm time, especially for our pupils in need of sensory input.

The sixth formers really took ownership of their own outdoor learning and created hand crafted games, colourful areas, a sensory curtain, plant tyres and changed a once unused area into a light, bright and calm garden for pupils and staff. The garden was officially opened in June 2019 by members of the Hillsborough castle team.

Our aim at Beechlawn is to develop the individual personal skills by focusing on the strengths of the individual, their needs and abilities. This is done through life skills

and skills for work. We did this by focusing on the pupils, some created sensory items while others planted, others designed areas, and some led the year group in an assembly to disseminate the information to the whole school. This was something the pupils would not have dreamt of participating in before they undertook this project, but due to the pride and effort they felt they wanted to share their space.

This year between September and December 2019 the Year 14 (18 Year olds), have been building on last years framework and concentrated on repurposing pallets. These were sourced to construct furniture in the garden. We have now established a new partnership with the local Southern Regional college and together discussed and arranged for stools, raised beds and tool racks to be made.

The pupils are in the process of painting the furniture, ready for use. There are designated pupils in charge of this as these pupils are currently completing A level art and are designing motifs to be painted on the furniture. This is giving them ownership and responsibility for their area and a sense of positivity. The pupils are all making additional outdoor games and bird feeders to attract wildlife.

Entry

How do you go above and beyond the expectations?

The project involving the sensory Garden went over and beyond expectations as it is being used by the whole school on a timetabled basis (2019), pupils have forged connections with the local regional college to make furniture and our Sixth formers were invited to the Hillsborough castle to tour the Gardens with the Duke of Edinburgh and Duchess of Cornwall (May 2019).

The initiative then expanded, as our current Year 13 (17 Year olds) wanted to raise environmental awareness after spending time in the garden. They sourced (October 2019) wildflower seed bombs that can be scattered in the garden to attract Bees. They researched the decline in the Bee population and created two very meaningful products that could be sold to potential customers raising money for the Sensory Garden.

They are now the only distributors in Northern Ireland for Seed Bombs which are a packet of six clay balls filled with Wildflower seeds. The company name is the Bee Team. All packaging is biodegradable. The research also found that the UK produces 5 million Tonnes of plastic waste yearly, so the pupils have packaged and

created Bees Wraps which are reusable wraps to replace clingfilm. The reasoning behind this is because the Bee population is declining and we need bees to survive

The pupils sell this product in the local area and have entered this year Young Enterprise programme.

This initiative has now exceeded expectations as the pupils have established links with the NI Beekeepers association who are interested in our school products and we are currently in discussion with them about getting a Beehive for the school grounds and in the future producing our own honey.

Through the gardening and business start up work, we established links with the local Nursing home in Belfast. We were invited to attend the Home in November 2019 to meet the residents and discuss our wildflower seeds. We (Sixth form) have now agreed to help the residents start a sensory garden at their home after discussing the benefits of the one based at school.

Our pupils have gone over and beyond any expectations through delivering assemblies to the school on raising awareness about environmental issues. They have created a calm and safe space that benefits the whole school and they have grown in confidence, developing communication skills by selling their products and attending events for Young Enterprise related to promotion, selling and entrepreneurial skills.

How is your work is innovative?

The work of the pupils has been innovative as they have designed items for the sensory garden based on their own needs but also the needs of the school. They created a calming space using natural materials and materials that would otherwise be disposed of including; flower beds made from old tyres, a sensory curtain made from beads and other textured materials and a windchime made from an old fruit bowl and curtain hooks.

The pupils researched ideas themselves taking ownership of the space, they extended their ideas by creating partnerships with the local college, nursing home and creating a sustainable business based on research into the decline of bees and preserving our environment.

The pupils used creative thinking to produce garden games using pebbles and tree

trunk cuttings. They designed and painted each product discussing ideas for each area to include skittles made from old water bottles filled with coloured water beads. All of the items in the garden have a purpose which is to create an outdoor sensory space for the school which it would otherwise have not had.

The pupils have completed the manual work by planting and maintaining their area, they have invited parents to attend and in June 2019 a student invited his youth group to attend the garden and sixth form gave them a tour as they used our sensory garden as a benchmark to create their own.

Beechlawn school came runner up in the SEELB best kept school awards and was commended for the sensory Garden in May 2019.

How is this work sustained over at least two years?

This work will be sustained and developed over the next two years and further, as gardening is now a part of the sixth form timetable. We also now accredit horticulture in Sixth form through life skills units and we place ownership of maintenance and upkeep on the pupils to give them a sense of pride in their work.

The garden is used within the school for staff and pupils and is a calming area, we intend to build on this area over the coming years to develop the space into a natural outdoor learning zone. Beechlawn school sixth formers have established links with the NI beekeeper's association and have agreed that the school will be getting a hive to hopefully start the production of honey. This will be maintained by the beekeeper's association, but they are offering training to staff in this area.

We have also agreed with the local fruit and veg shop in Hillsborough that from Spring 2020 they will be selling our wildflower bee bombs.⁷

We are extending our work to the local community and creating partnerships with the Manor Park nursing home as we have agreed that in Spring 2020 the sixth form pupils will be helping them create a sensory garden for the elderly residents.