

# Growing Schools Case Studies



## Learning through Growing

A holistic approach to school gardening at Esh Winning Primary School, Co. Durham

### Aim

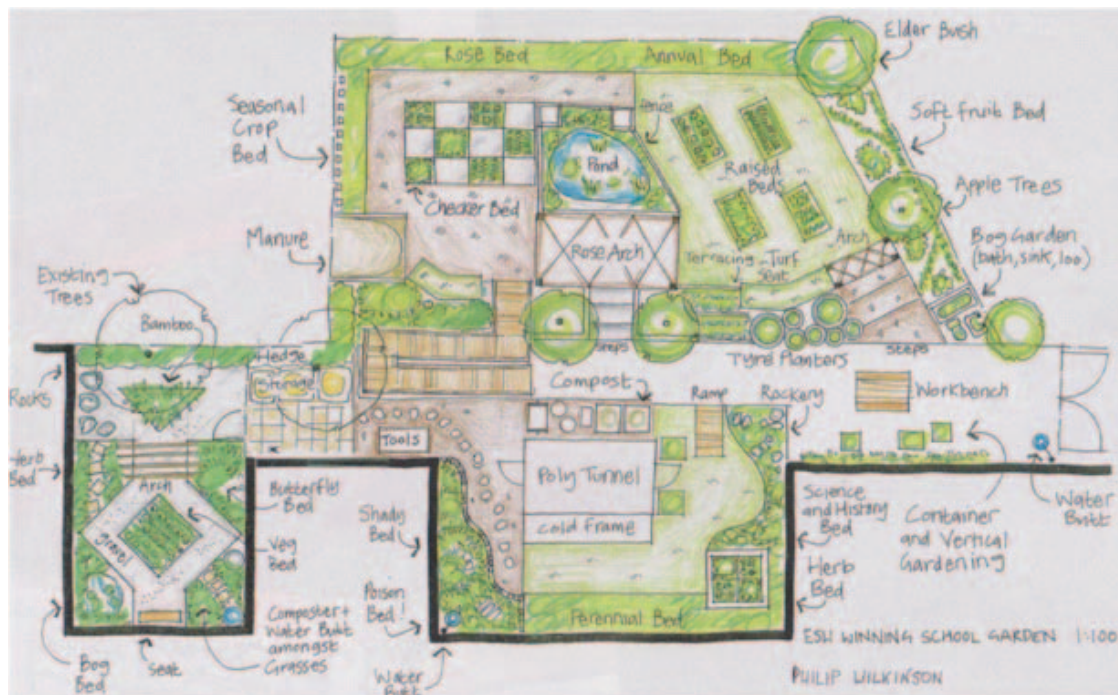
To develop a sustainable garden that would support the National Curriculum and extend the children's experience of the natural world.

### Action

With the help of adults the children designed and built a garden with different areas to provide a wide range of outdoor-learning opportunities.

### Outcome

Disappointing. A much under-used, wonderful outdoor classroom, enjoyed mainly by the School Gardening Club and the Ewe Centre.



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## Details

The school is in a semi-rural situation on the edge of a former mining village. It has 232 children aged between 3 and 11. When the Ewe Centre was established in the school they developed the grounds and planned to have a garden for school use and for their visitors.

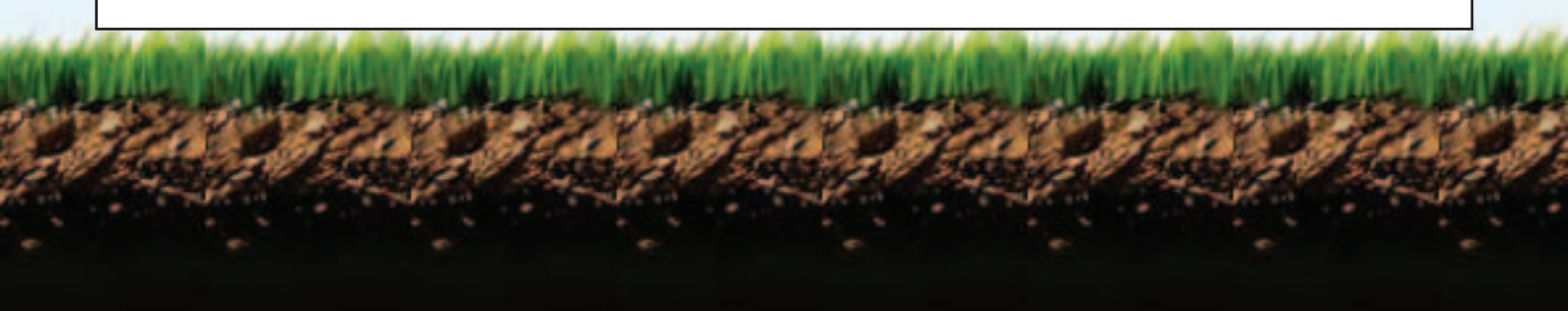
A school Gardening Club was formed with children growing plants from seed in recycled containers in the school yard. The following year a garden was made on the far side of the sports field. but this site proved unsuitable. It was too far from the school and had no water supply. It was ravaged by rabbits and wrecked by vandals. A new garden has now been developed which is gated and rabbit-proofed on a much more enclosed site behind the school buildings. A garden tap was installed, a coal shed adopted as a tool shed and a polytunnel constructed to provide shelter in inclement weather and a growing area for our seedlings in spring and tomatoes and sweet corn etc. in summer. The new garden is much easier to access from classrooms, but still suffers from vandalism.

The garden was designed by the children with the Ewe Centre and the person who would be in charge. It provides a wide variety of informal outdoor-learning opportunities for all ages and in all areas of the National Curriculum - science, numeracy, literacy, art and design and citizenship. There is a variety of wildlife habitats in the garden including a pond, piles of twigs and a dry stone wall made from old colliery bricks and coal (a link with the village's history). Children are learning that nurturing their vegetables involves caring for the whole environment of the garden. Recycled and sustainable materials are used where possible. Volunteers from the local community share their expertise, from building raised beds to dressing leeks for showing.

The after-school gardening club manages the garden and does most of the maintenance and planting. Usually there are children from each class in KS2, so that each class has garden experts, and older children who have experienced two or three gardening years are able to mentor younger ones. They have four raised beds to grow vegetables in rotation. They grow fruit, herbs and flowers, manage the composting and wormeries. They enjoy cooking and eating their produce. Last year three classes grew and harvested enough vegetables to make delicious soups. A pre-school group also grew and ate their own vegetables. This year we hope to have more classes involved and to have inter-class competitions for best produce, tallest sunflower, etc. We may even exhibit at the local leek show.

Two years ago the school gardening club was chosen to contribute to the gold award-winning Growing Schools Garden at Hampton Court Flower Show. The garden has been visited by the Minister for Education and the local Member of Parliament.

A local volunteer runs the school Gardening Club with the aid of a teacher. She is available to advise teachers wanting to use the garden and to help with teaching about cultivation and



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nature. Gardening Club continues to care for the garden through the school holidays. Funding has come from various awards we have won, eg. County Durham Environment Awards, Journal and Evening Gazette awards, RHS, B&Q, Morrisons, from private donations and the Ewe Centre, and from plant sales. Costs have been kept low through the donation of tools and manpower, and by using recycled materials.

The garden is continuously evolving. It needs more growing areas as more children get involved. An elder bush will be developed as a hide to watch the bird feeding station nearby. A quieter, more reflective area is planned. We need to devise a means of collecting water from the roof of the school buildings to use in the garden.

The garden is a much more enjoyable place to learn than the classroom. Examining a plant is much more meaningful and memorable than looking at a diagram. Searching for and watching mini-beasts is much more exciting than looking at pictures. Food chains are easier to understand when you have watched caterpillars devour your cabbages and then seen a blue tit pick them off the leaves and feed them to their young in your nesting box. Grams and kilograms are not just words when you have weighed your own potatoes. Whilst working in the garden children are developing other skills including observation, working as part of a team, problem solving and hand-eye coordination in seed sowing and the safe use of tools.



'I like growing lots of delicious veg and eating them at the end'

