

Wildlife gardening at Mandeville Primary School

By Rob Sambrooks (Environmental Study Support Officer, The Learning Trust)

Exciting things are happening outdoors at Mandeville Primary School in Lower Clapton! Last year the London Wildlife Trust (with The Learning Trust) started a weekly study support club on Wednesday lunchtimes. Our challenge was to develop nature areas in the school grounds, for use as a learning resource and as a quiet area for pupils. At the start of the year the schools' green spaces were trampled and bare, so we set about developing a nature garden to provide habitats for local wildlife. Each term, pupils from years 4 and 5 were introduced to their local wildlife through a range of fun activities, and they relished the opportunity to take part in practical projects to improve the schools' green spaces ...



We built a 'dead' hedge using sticks and plant clippings, planted bulbs and bedding plants, grew flowers from seed, and sowed a wildflower meadow (see pictures below). We are hoping to attract birds from nearby Hackney Marshes to nest in the school grounds, and have made bird boxes, a bird table and feeders. A family of robins is currently nesting in one of the boxes! We have also made a mini-beast investigation area with logs and bark chippings, and recently we held a successful workday with several children planting a dogwood or a field maple tree for a new hedge to protect the meadow.



The children have taken great pride in their achievements and were photographed for an article about their work in the Hackney Gazette. School staff have also been supportive – regular photo displays in the school show the children at work, and the groups have given assemblies to educate and inform the rest of the school. (By involving and informing everyone, we are fostering a whole school approach)

Stephanie Oswald, the deputy head says of the club “the garden is helping build pupils' appreciation of wildlife and the eco-system and it is an excellent team exercise”.

After coming out of OfSTED's failing 'special measures' category, the school is now improving, and the success of 'Wildlife Club' is one of the ways which show that Mandeville is on the up. These are exciting times, and many more pupils are keen to sign up to the club, which now takes place after-school. We hope to extend the opportunity by developing activities for the whole school, so that teachers and different classes can contribute to the positive change that is being made and eventually to take ownership of the project.

In the meantime more plants, fruit trees, a seating area and composter are on the way... Watch this space!

