



SEWING GREEN SEEDS AT BLUE BELL HILL

Liz Jones visits an inner city school with green issues at its heart.

Carol Holmes is, by her own admission, the messiest primary school teacher ever - because she never throws anything away. A piece of string, a yoghurt pot or plastic egg box - you never know when they might come in handy. So when her school, Blue Bell Hill primary, located in St Ann's, decided to embark on a green initiative, Carol was the ideal choice to take the lead.

In fact Carol's a bit of a nag - always on at the other teachers to photocopy double sided, recycle and turn off lights. "I'm a bit of a 'saddo' teacher," she says "and I think they're a bit frightened of me!" But all Carol wants to do is impart a bit of her passion to the pupils and other teachers. And it must be working because now the school boasts its own green committee, eco-teams and community rangers club which are putting environmental projects right at the heart of school life and their own community.

Set in the midst of the inner city, the school is building strong links in the area - and their community rangers are

a key part of doing this in a sustainable way. Run by strategic support manager Nic Williams in conjunction with Nottingham City Council's parks ranger Steve Doughty, they go out into the community litter picking, planting in the parks, taking part in gardening projects and visiting local senior citizens to help out.

Last year the community rangers organised the Big Spring Clean which saw the whole school walk from Blue Bell Hill to the Victoria Park along with councillors, council staff, teachers and community members to launch a big clean up. Another community project saw the whole school involved with planting a huge number of hanging baskets to brighten up the area.

"The idea is that the pupils will own and care about their streets and where they live," Steve Doughty explained. "If they have planted flowers in the parks they are more likely to respect them."

At Blue Bell Hill, green issues are not just an add-on as Carol Holmes does not miss an opportunity to bring

them into school life at every level. So, invitations to the school prom were made with flowers and home made paper. End of school individual photos were mounted on home-made paper and framed using twigs and waste wood from the school grounds. A maths project involved making mini wind turbines and measuring how much electricity they generate. There are green assemblies and displays, filmed adverts about saving water, allotments for each class and a permanent outdoor classroom in the wild area.

Pupils on the green committee write action plans, carry out litter and transport surveys, look at what other schools do, check leaking taps and liaise with the head teacher and site manager. They also pass work on to the eco teams, run by teaching assistants Davina Pooler and Lin Gilbert who make posters for local shops and libraries and work on the allotments planting and preparing ground.

As head teacher Jb Bradley explains: "Children have a big impact on their parents - for example making them take bags to the supermarket. They are very interested in finding out ways of cutting paper use in school and recycling at home. If they are passionate about being green at school, it's something they will carry forward into the rest of their lives."

Carol really believes that environmental issues should be a compulsory subject like history or maths. She says: "We have got to educate our children for the future as this is the environment they have got to survive in. If I can get 30 children to recycle, it's better than just me"

A very practical person, Carol also has her philosophical moments. She says: "What we throw away as a society is frightening. It makes people not care about anything. If you look after things then you learn to value everything - especially each other."

Contact Details

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What they do at Blue Bell Hill

- All classrooms have three waste bins for
 - General waste
 - Fruit waste and paper towels for composting
 - Paper for recycling
- Children brought in scraps of material to make patchwork quilt
- Pies are made in school from fruit grown in the school's orchard
- Text messages are sent out instead of letters where appropriate
- Vegetables grown on allotment are sold to parents - money is used to buy more seeds and water butts
- A willow tunnel has been created for children to play in
- Discarded tyres are used in allotment area for planting and composting
- Footballs made from discarded carrier bags
- A time capsule is being buried containing things the pupils hope will no longer be in operation in the future - for example items that cannot be recycled.
- Every class has its own green monitor whose task is to make sure the teachers turn lights off, turn off the interactive board when it's not being used and keep taps turned off.
- The school has an environmental room powered entirely by wind power and solar panels and with toilets flushed by rainwater. This can be hired out by community groups.

