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Tim Baker and Nicholas Shelley

Charlton Manor's Food Journey

Charlton Manor is a large inner-city primary school which is surrounded by a mix of social housing and some privately-owned housing. The school attracts its pupils from both areas.

The children who attend the school come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have a range of experiences and expectations when they enter school. Some are prepared and ready for learning but a considerable number enter school neither socially or emotionally ready and unsure of what to expect, so find it hard to settle to the expectations of school life.

Within the locality of Charlton Manor there is a high level of deprivation. Many children come from homes where either nobody works, has ever worked or is employed in a low paid job. The effect of which is that all too often expectations for their children are low. Many of the children live with one parent or carer as the relationship between their parents has broken down.

The school has a large number of families entitled to free school meals for their children. In each year group, it ranges between 50% and 58% of the children; however, in the current Year 6 it stands at 74%. This level of deprivation puts the school into the highest percentile on the latest data analysis.

Within close proximity to the school, there are several fast food shops that attract children and their families as they provide easy meals that children like and will eat. Local supermarkets are also frequently used to provide quick breakfasts for older children on their way to school.

Charlton Manor attracts children from a number of ethnicities and there are currently 47 different languages spoken by children attending the school and their families. Nepalese is currently the most prevalent

language spoken after English. This initially has an impact on the school as a considerable number of children begin in the Nursery with little, if any English. However, these children then go on to make accelerated progress once they are secure in speaking and writing English.

As Headteacher, I wanted to introduce the children to the outdoors in an educational way. The area does have parks and communal areas however these were also frequented by gangs. The children had nowhere to develop a growing space that would be safe.

An area in the school had overgrown and was not being used. I was deputy at the time and wanted to start a garden that would support and enhance the children's understanding of healthy eating.

Developing the outdoor area

In 2004, I became the Headteacher and it was now that I started my first project, developing the outdoor area.

I started by giving the children the footprint of the area on A3 paper and asking them to design a garden that they would like in the school. They looked at the area and then went to several gardens to get ideas.

The plans were then collected and given to a landscape architect who produced plans incorporating many of the ideas. These plans are available to view on [our website](#).

The garden was then created and incorporates many educational features including a growing area, weather station, compost area, bees, chickens, wildlife area, pond, hide, workshop, greenhouse, stag beetle area as well as areas to sit for stories or instruction from the teacher or gardener.

The children spend much time out in the garden which is used for literacy and numeracy as well as all the other subjects. I have also

employed a gardener which is key to the success of the garden.

The gardener

The following, written by the gardener Nicholas Shelley, describes his role within the school.

“ As gardener at Charlton Manor Primary School, my role falls into two distinct areas that both overlap and fit together.

I am responsible for the school garden(s), any school produce and the chickens and bees. The second responsibility is in the education of pupils with regards to horticulture.

The school garden encompasses the main garden, nursery garden, forest school and any other raised beds, trees and shrubs and indoor plants around the school. It also includes the school allotment at Woodlands Farm. Along with the bees and chickens these areas all need daily, weekly and monthly upkeep and chores. Depending on the time of year, the focus of time and effort on these areas can frequently change. Not only is the general appearance important, but also the safety within all of these areas is critical. Growing plants for the gardens and produce for the teaching kitchen and main dining restaurant (plus lessons) needs careful planning and care throughout the whole year.

Whilst constantly improving my own experience and knowledge for this role, I also am involved in the education of the pupils in all types of horticulture. This can range from history of growing and food production to actually planting, sowing, growing and harvesting. How to look after the chickens and bees is also important. All this is achieved in small groups such as gardening after school clubs, beekeeping club, Gifted & Talented group or small class groups. Whole class lessons are regular and lunch-time sessions throughout the week. The aim is to include every pupil in the school and to ensure they have access to all gardening experiences during their time at school. ”

As you can see, the role is unique and involves the gardener in all manner of activities.

The importance of the gardener in an effective school garden cannot be underestimated as it supports the development of lessons within the garden and allows access to learning activities all year round. Added to this, it enriches the children's experience as the gardener is able to identify opportunities when teaching through other subjects such as History, Geography etc.

To take this experience even further and gain a real understanding of food growing and eating we have built a kitchen so that children can cook with the produce they have grown.

'Adopt a School'

As part of the 'Adopt a School' initiative, run by the Academy of Culinary Arts, we have had a chef visit several times to work with the children and also with the parents so that they can gain more cooking experience.

The kitchen offers a great environment for children to cook wonderful foods but also to embed understanding of Literacy, Numeracy as well as other subjects in a practical way. In terms of behavior we find that children are very much engaged and besides the enthusiasm there are very few behavior concerns.

The parents are also very keen to use the kitchen and increase their own skills so that they can provide a healthier diet for their children. We have run a parents and children growing and cooking club which was very well attended and led to an increase in school meal uptake. Parents are very interested in the healthy eating side of school and regularly discuss it.

Changed the attitude to food

Charlton Manor has come a long way with food growing and cooking. It has changed the attitude to food within the school and continues to improve the children's understanding of healthy eating and food growing.

The school effectively uses issues within the food industry such as 'Fairtrade', 'Food miles', Organic versus GM, Local produce to support children's literacy skills and cases for arguments as well as instructions for planting, looking after bees/chickens, plant care and report writing such as 'How the chickens are doing?' 'How do bees make honey?' 'What is growing on the allotment?' Added to this a wealth of opportunities for creating settings for stories.

The school is currently working on the new curriculum and linking the learning to food as much as possible in all subjects. Charlton Manor Primary works very closely with Woodlands Farm Trust and has an allotment on which it grows a number of vegetables which are used within the teaching kitchen and the main kitchen.

The children enjoy eating school dinners that contain their produce and also really enjoy using garden produce in the teaching kitchen.

It is essential, at Charlton Manor, that we encourage healthy eating as much as possible and staff join children to eat their lunch in the dinner centre. The year 5 and 6 children are waiters in the kitchen and will ensure that water is served and cutlery is placed at the tables.

Recently the school is working with Olivier Blanc and Charlotte Salt who have developed an app '[Henri le Worm](#)'. The app is designed to support children to understand and learn more about food growing and eating in a fun and engaging way. Also included in the app are 10 recipes from the world-renowned chef,

Raymond Blanc OBE and these are fun and easy to make.

Year 1&2 are currently using the app in Literacy and Numeracy. They are really enjoying this and engaged in their learning.

The future

What next for Charlton Manor? The next step is a community project that brings all the food growing and cooking together and supports the children during the time they aren't at school. The children will have access to food growing and cooking during evenings, weekends and holidays. This will be supported by 'Henri le Worm', the character that children will be able to relate to and be familiar with as they work with the app during school time. Added to this, community groups will work with the children.

Food growing and healthy eating has developed a positive ethos throughout Charlton Manor that not only helps to raise attainment but also provides an inclusive approach that supports the pupils and their families within the school.

Education and Health

The journal, published by SHEU since 1983, is aimed at those involved with education and health who are concerned with the health and wellbeing of young people. Readership is worldwide and in the UK include: primary; secondary and further education teachers; university staff and health-care professionals working in education and health settings. The journal is online and open access, continues the proud tradition of independent publishing and offers an eclectic mix of articles.

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