

The Living Classroom



St. Patricks National School got involved with the project through the local Development Worker with Blanchardstown Partnership, Rosin Devoy. Rosin has been working in the area promoting healthy living and eating. Amongst other things she coordinates the Healthy Food Made Easy course, which has been running in the school for years for parents and grandparents and it is one of the more popular courses.

The school garden was originally designed with the help of the Heritage Council. Our Principal, Mick Shanley, had a great love for all things green and wild and he would often take teachers and their classes out to the garden for lessons and activities. When Mr. Shanley retired in 2011, so too did his green fingers and St. Patrick's garden took a back seat until the project started up in 2013.

Since then the skills, interest and knowledge of the teachers and students have gone from strength to strength and the garden is blooming again! At times, a garden session can incorporate a day's lessons into an action packed hour incorporating elements of Maths, Science, PE, Geography and Social Personal & Health Education. The benefits from the garden are endless for both staff and students. In the summer months, staff has often gone out to pick lettuce or onions to add to their salad - such a pleasure. There is rarely a strawberry to be found in the garden. You often see children scavenging for a ripe one on their way home through the garden or crunching on sweet peas.

Children are learning life-long skills: The garden is making them increasingly aware of climate change, their environment and sustainability; they are learning group skills and there is a real sense of community during sessions; healthy eating and active living is being promoted. We have cooked with much of the garden produce and the children have made and tasted recipes they may never have tried previously, such as pumpkin soup. Often you will find that children who struggle with academics or the structured environment of the classroom excel in the garden.

Some highlights of the garden over the years include:

- The pumpkin growing competition
- The summer garden party
- The planting of the orchard – we are still patiently waiting on our first apple
- Working with the Horticultural students from Institute of Technology Blanchardstown
- Planting, harvesting and learning about the variety of potatoes
- Mini beast hunt
- Working and learning from Roisin Devoy and Roisin Duffy, our garden leader, and getting inspired by their never-ending passion for the garden.



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