

## John Muir Award: biodiversity story

JOHN  
MUIR  
AWARD

wild places:  
DISCOVER  
EXPLORE  
CONSERVE  
SHARE

### Burnfoot Community School looks at the 'small picture' to develop literacy skills

Over the course of a school year, Burnfoot Community School's 'Explorers' have transformed an overgrown, neglected area of their playground into a mini biodiversity haven. The John Muir Award was undertaken to promote a sense of achievement whilst the children were developing their literacy skills. The self-named 'Explorers' are a group of primary 5 and 6 pupils, all with learning needs who come together for an alternative curriculum programme. Actively conserving their wild place, and writing and talking about their activities, has allowed the children to access the curriculum in a different way.

**"The Explorers has given us a whole new way to learn"**  
Mrs. Dumma, Principal Teacher

#### The small picture – looking at biodiversity

The children got to know their playground in detail by looking closely at the plants, leaves and insects they found. Through sketching, making models and using drama, the group learned about the details, life cycles and food webs of many species in the garden. Mrs. Dumma, the Explorer's teacher, explained that over the course of the year the children developed an understanding and appreciation for biodiversity and now have a keen interest in nature and the world around them.

#### Action for biodiversity

The Explorers were involved in a huge variety of activities to improve their wild place that helped increase its biodiversity. Initial steps to remove rubbish moved on to brash clearance in winter to increase light and create habitat piles for mini beasts. Wild flowers were grown from seed through spring and a bog garden was dug in summer. After capturing rain, the bog garden was then planted throughout autumn.

**"I liked making the Bog Garden so that more bugs can come in"** Louise, Pupil

By being actively involved in the wild place throughout the year the children have observed the changes that each season brings. They have also directly experienced the long-term impact of their work, which has given them a sense of satisfaction and increased confidence.

**"The self-esteem of the pupils is visible in the playground"** Mrs. Hair, Classroom Assistant



## A focus on literacy

Sharing their project with others - one of the four Challenges of the John Muir Award - has underpinned all of the Explorers' activities. Within the school community the children worked with groups from the infant classes, planting seeds and bird spotting. They have given support to school staff by creating resources for other classes on how to use the playground to identify plants and insects. This is one of the many ways the project worked towards improving the children's literacy skills. Others have included creative writing about being a seed and composing letters to local councilors and environmental organisations. See a [Literacy and Nature resource](#) to explore how learning about the natural world helps develop literacy skills.



*Bird watching with younger children*

**"I love to write now. I have something to write about because I joined the Explorers"**

Ann, Pupil

The pupils' letter writing raised awareness of their project. They launched a high-profile campaign about dog fouling which resulted in multiple appearances in the press. The children invited many visitors to the school and their vocabulary and confidence developed as they described their work and gave tours of their wild place.

**"The processes of Discovering, Exploring, Conserving and Sharing have given them much to talk and write about. Pupils who previously were reluctant to put pen to paper now confidently write about their work"**

Mrs. Dumma

## A year-long success

The Explorers have successfully designed and created a wild place that is not only a habitat for native mini beasts, plants and flowers, it is also an outdoor classroom that is used and enjoyed by the rest of the school community. Their John Muir Award project has allowed the children to make a difference to their school. It has been a vehicle for learning and development in a creative and inspiring way.



**"Being an Explorer has made me more confident. It makes you look at things outside yourself. It has helped me write better. It means the world to me. We do lots of different things, like sketching to relax our minds. I feel happy and excited being an Explorer"**

Bryce, Pupil