

News from The Schools Group

Normally there are three of us on this Sub-Committee –Lucy Porritt, Sue Lindley, and Nicola Harrison. Nicola has been taking some time out this year so we have enjoyed the support of Fiona Barlow who has taken on the secretarial duties – and of course, Penelope Dawson Brown and Val Hepworth who often come to our meetings. We exist to support, advise and channel funds in one way or another to our 42 member schools.

What we do varies from year to year depending on how much money we have available. We have been well-supported by donations recently for which we are very grateful. The late John Hampshire's donation for instance enabled us to offer sets of good quality children's garden tools. However, whatever the state of the coffers, we still aim to provide a variety of opportunities to the schools. This is because the schools vary significantly – some may be well-equipped, some just starting out on their gardening ventures, some may be surrounded by lots of space to fill with a variety of gardens, others may just have a tiny area to play with squeezed between the netball pitch and the bicycle rack. Therefore, offering a variety of opportunities is a way, we hope, of making sure all our schools benefit.

Firstly, and importantly, we give Grounds Development Awards. Schools apply, demonstrating their commitment to their project, its viability and usefulness, involvement of the children in the planning and use, and provisions for aftercare. Last year, a school near Middlesbrough put a hard path through a wild flower area. The children will be able to get right in amongst the flowers and wildlife to study nature and create artwork. A Sheffield school capitalized on its very successful growing by making a garden kitchen so that the

children – to quote their teacher - ‘can learn and benefit from all their hard work, by eating the produce they have grown from seed’. We are waiting to see what exciting ideas the schools come up with this time!

Secondly, we aim to offer something to all schools. This year, we offered laminated guides to ‘Bugs and Beasties’, and ‘Butterflies’ produced by the Field Studies Council. Those schools to whom that offer appealed applied and received the gift. We budget so that if all schools wanted that item, they would receive it. Also, funds permitting, we offer support for workshops or visits. This spring, using YGT’s own funds, we offered to support a visit to Harlow Carr or the Arboretum at Castle Howard (equally wonderful facilities but quite different). Great Ouseburn chose to visit the Arboretum.

Lastly, we aim to give all schools something. In the Spring term, with the help of The Little Apple Bookshop, we sent a copy of ‘A Child’s Garden: A Story of Hope’ by Michael Foreman to all member schools. Some of you may be familiar with his beautiful illustrations. This story tells of a boy in a war-torn world, caring for a fragile plant – and through that experience he makes contact with another child, a child of the ‘enemy’. Well-reviewed by teachers, this book can be read on a number of levels and we hope will be useful in our schools. One grateful teacher wrote: “We have received ours...what a lovely surprise. Thank you so much.”

The School’s Group would like to thank Council, members of the YGT and those who have made donations, for making such outcomes as this possible.