

St Christopher School

LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

Environment Matters at St Christopher

I thought you might be interested to hear about some of the Environmental and Ecological activities that have been going on at School in the last year.

Our wonderful vermicomposting project that many of you will know about continues to work well. We have 4 large worm bins, in which the worms eat and digest about 25% of our daily plate food waste, as well as shredded newspaper, and produce the excellent fertiliser which we market and sell as a 'Bag of Betsy's'. One of the large bins previously in use has been converted to a storage and processing area for removing worms from the finished product so that they can return to the main bins and continue their excellent work. Our selling operation is low key, mainly happening at the Summer Fair, although if you contact us we will prepare a bag for you to pick up anytime.

The students in the gardening option on Thursday afternoons spend some of their time working on the worms. The option is actually called 'Creating a Gardening Business', and the idea here is that the students grow, harvest and sell mostly vegetables, as well as worm fertiliser, and the money raised is then shared out at the end of the year, according to how many 'shares', (i.e. afternoons worked) they have earned. This is popular with younger year groups and they enjoy receiving their dividend at the end of the year, though often find it difficult to wait, spending much time speculating on the likely value of a 'share'.

We grew spinach, rhubarb, a variety of salads, courgettes, runner beans, potatoes, Jerusalem artichokes and annual marigolds this year. Sales happen mostly in the Junior School in the summer and at the Summer Fair. In the Autumn we harvest the School's apples and make cakes and pies which we sell in the School coffee shop.

The Junior School has an active interest in gardening too- Sally Wall's class made individual gardens in tyres, and grew runner beans, chard, sweet peas, coriander, peppers and absolutely enormous sunflowers! There is another kitchen garden in the area behind the playground, and this year one of the projects between the Senior School gardening option and the Junior School was the creation of a living willow archway and fence at the entrance to this garden. We also used the willow to repair the structure at the front of the Junior School.

We held 2 successful fundraisers this year- the Environment Committee did a morning talk on Water Usage, and raised over £300 for the charity Water Aid, as well as raising awareness of water usage and its shortage. We also raised over £200 for Environmental projects in Kosovo. This was through our annual Fair-trade Fortnight/ Stupid Cupid Valentines Day fundraiser created jointly with the Relief Committee. This year we focussed on cotton sources and in particular the appalling state of cotton production in Uzbekistan. There was another morning talk to raise awareness, the signing of a petition by 210 students

and 28 staff, followed up with a letter to many of the major high street stores and supermarkets asking them to tell us where cotton for their clothes come from. We will report back to the School when we have all the replies.

Each year we select one or two areas from our Environmental Policy to emphasize. Last term we focussed on litter, and the Environment Committee created a Litter Awareness Week. During this we collected, examined and sorted all the rubbish from the bins around the School that are normally removed by NHDC and `dumped` without recycling. We also asked the caretakers not to pick up litter around the School that week, and we went round each morning and did the job for them. For four days, every student in the Senior School took part, and at the end of the week we did a Morning Talk, showing everyone the waste from the week in a big pile in the Theatre, and presenting information about recycling and waste. Most of the recyclable waste we found was food leftovers (a lot of uneaten fruit) and plastic bottles. We are trialling some new bins in the courtyard so that recycling of food and plastic can happen. We also sent out a questionnaire to the students to see how the week affected them- most of them found it a positive experience; and a number are now very clear that waste handling is not a career for them!

As many of you know, a few years ago the School received our prestigious Ecoschools Green Flag award, and this has now expired so we will be reapplying this year. This process involves setting new goals, (as the Environment committee already does each year), expanding the involvement of students, doing an environmental review and deciding on one or two large scale projects we want to pursue. Following our application, a visit is scheduled by an Ecoschools advisor and we then hopefully receive our Green Flag for another 2 years. It gives us a chance to review the many activities we do at the School, and remind everyone of them: for example, our excellent paper and other recycling system that we coordinate with the FR Cawley company. Many of these things we take for granted as they happen seamlessly in the background because of the hard work of the caretaking staff, so it will be good to recognise these efforts.

Ian Warder (Teacher coordinating Environmental Activities)