



Eco Schools Case Study

Names of school: Belmont Primary School

Project: Healthy Living

Our Context

We are an infant school, with 242 pupils from P1- P3. As our whole school population changes every three years, it is important to revisit areas regularly. Our Eco Committee is made up of very eager children and a parent/grandparent and we currently have 25 children on the Committee, who bring forward ideas, look at suggestions from our suggestions box, decide what we will do and spread the word! They work hard in school teaching information to the younger year groups and monitoring the work that everyone does. They also have a monthly action afternoon after school with a parent or grandparent to work together on their targets

1. Why did you choose this particular project?

We chose this project because of a whole-school commitment to improving health and well-being for all pupils. Healthy Living also permeates other areas of our curriculum, such as outdoor learning. We have a Promotion of a Healthy Lifestyle policy and feel strongly that all children, even at this young age, can take responsibility for their own wellbeing and can be encouraged to further develop their skills and knowledge. It is also an area the children and their parents are enthusiastic about!

2. Did you integrate it into the curriculum?

Healthy Living is always part of our school development plan, so it is planned and monitored regularly. At each year group level there are distinct topics that promote healthy living:

Primary 1 – Amazing Me and People Who Help Us

Primary 2 – Growing and Celebrations

Primary 3 – Healthy Eating

In addition, we have regular assemblies, led by our Eco Committee with a focus on various aspects of healthy living. We have a 'Stay Healthy, Be Active week' in school, where children are encouraged to try a new fruit or vegetable and exercise outdoors each day.

We also integrated this topic into the curriculum by looking as a staff at the format of our day. Was enough time spent outside? Was screen time only used when it would enhance learning and not as a regular feature? Was there plenty of brain gym, movement breaks etc.? Was the pupil voice given a high priority?

3. Did you encounter any problems and if so, how did you overcome them?

We were fortunate that we had full parental, staff and governor support for this area – this made it easier to enthuse pupils and have their involvement and commitment. A very small number of pupils did not bring a healthy break but we were committed to changing that by encouragement rather than shaming. The Eco Committee taught the other children that there are no 'bad foods', just that some should be eaten in moderation. We organized several healthy break surveys and classes got quite competitive to ensure they improved. Every class made an improvement. This also brought about us winning the Wheelie Big Challenge for Belfast area last June due to the huge increase in fruit and vegetables noted.

4. How did you encourage pupil participation? How did they have ownership of the project?

Our pupils all took ownership of the project, led by the Eco Committee. The children took ownership by:

Suggesting things to do to keep healthy,

Writing to parents to encourage healthy breaks

making posters for display around our school to encourage healthy choices

making sure teachers gave them lots of outdoor activities (and counting them)

being involved in many healthy initiatives

Benefitting from visits and visitors with a healthy living interest

5. How did the pupils/ whole school benefit from this project?

The whole school was able to benefit by demonstrating:

an increase in healthy lifestyle choices made by all children and their families,

an increased knowledge of how to keep healthy for all pupils due to curriculum work, special visits, posters and assemblies

the provision of a coherent curriculum that promotes healthy living

an increase in self-confidence, due to the increased pupil voice and responsibility given

an increase in parental involvement and support for the activities and events undertaken

An increase in our after-school clubs, expanded to include many more sports and activities

In brief, our children, staff and parents love school and the involvement they have in all aspects.

6. Did you receive any support from parents, staff or outside agencies?

Yes – we have had incredible support from all these groups. Parents have come into school to talk about their experiences and this year for the first time ever, we had 2 teams made up of parents and staff in the Belfast Marathon last week. Not only did this raise a huge amount of money through sponsorship (to purchase more items for outdoor learning), it brought a real sense of community to the school and showed pupils that their parents are also healthy! Parents and grandparents also worked in our school grounds and on local litter picking initiatives

Staff organized many visits and visitors – dance/ drama, exercise specialists, mental health specialists (Little Healthy Me) and visits from Belfast City Council. Parents also attended sessions on promoting mental health for children and adults. Staff also looked at the experiences they were providing and adapted these for optimum wellbeing.

7. Is there any advice you could offer other schools embarking on a similar project?

The best advice I could give would be to ensure that all parties are involved and motivated and can see the obvious benefits – governors, staff, parents and pupils. Organising activities that involve each of those groups is vital and regular monitoring and evaluation of targets is key. Planning is essential from the start and brainstorming a range of ideas with pupils, parents and staff is a great way to generate varied activities that lead to other ideas.

8. Has doing this project driven other Eco Schools ideas? What are your plans for the future?

This project has driven many other Eco Schools ideas. Healthy Living started off looking at exercise and healthy eating but has now increased to outdoor learning, mental health promotion, the importance of sleep, limiting screen time and many other areas. Mental health promotion led to work on ways to look after your own mental health but also how your actions can affect how others feel. Promoting walking, cycling and scooting to school led to work on our

carbon footprint and climate change. Healthy food choices brought about work on composting, which is now leading into encouraging biodiversity. Healthy food choices brought about additional work on the necessity of clean water and how we can save water. Healthy living has also touched on litter, which led to work on marine issues and life below water.

In brief, healthy living has been an amazing way to enthuse children, give them responsibility for themselves and their citizenship and give them a strong pupil voice. Our future plans include continued healthy living promotion, even more outdoor learning opportunities next year and biodiversity.