



Hannah Pitt

GROW YOUR SCHOOL

By Dr Hannah Pitt and Dr Esther Muddiman of Cardiff University

Tucked behind the stone walls along Stacey Road in Adamsdown, are some of the tallest broad bean plants Ruth Mumford has ever seen: "I was amazed when I saw them! A fantastic crop and such healthy plants."

The children who grew them are pupils at Stacey Primary in Cardiff and they have cultivated many crops this year, turning their school into a lush oasis. They have been working with a new project based at Cardiff University, carried out in partnership with local charity Grow Cardiff, which aims to support more primary schools to educate through gardening.



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Stacey Primary is one of three pilot schools on the Tyfu Eich Ysgol / Grow Your School initiative.

Ruth Mumford, a schools engagement coordinator for Grow Cardiff, who has been working with Stacey Primary, said: "When we ask children what they like about gardening, I'm struck by the less obvious things they mention. Yes, they like getting outdoors, doing something physical and dirty, or getting to eat the strawberries. But many really appreciate the quiet spots where they can sit and watch the plants or insects, describing how they help them feel calm."

Dr Hannah Pitt, of Cardiff University, said: "Time and time again, teachers tell us how they watch their classes become captivated by looking after seedlings. As well as understanding plant science, they are learning vital life skills.

"But lots of city schools have quite limited outdoor space, and mostly hard surfaces. This is exactly why we wanted to work with Stacey Primary, to show what is possible for any school, no matter the environment."

Gardening and food literacy are now embedded in the school's curriculum, from nursery up to year six, and the site has raised beds and plant pots squeezed into every available space. It hasn't always been easy as Head Teacher, Emma Vokes, explained: "Developing a Food Literacy Curriculum has been a learning



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journey for the staff and children. We believe that it helps children understand where food comes from, how it is produced and encourages respect for food, reducing waste and promoting sustainability." She hopes they will carry these skills into the future "supporting healthy eating, improving learning, building confidence and encouraging responsible, informed food choices."

Teacher Lara Thomas explained: "We try to cover a range of different crops to have the children experience a wide variety of growing. It's a really positive part of our curriculum. We're learning alongside the children and it's really fun and exciting."



SUPPORTING TEACHERS

There is wide-ranging evidence that school gardening benefits pupils, particularly their wellbeing. But despite this, teachers report that they struggle to know how to do so. The university team has been working with Grow Cardiff since 2024 to understand what practical advice teachers need.

Grow Cardiff has been working to inspire people to take up community gardening in the Welsh capital since 2015. The organisation was formed by a small group of local people united by the desire to transform uninspiring urban areas into productive, nature-filled hubs that can boost the health and wellbeing of residents.

For this latest initiative with Cardiff University, the team began by listening to teachers.

"It became clear that confidence is a real issue", said Isla Horton, Grow Cardiff's director. "Teachers who've not gardened before told us they were particularly wary of trying to grow things with pupils. They face considerable pressures, and don't have the luxury of time to investigate what to do, when."

Each pilot school received training from the Grow Cardiff team, helping them develop a plan for growing across the year. Other sessions hosted at schools, including Radyr Primary, enabled teachers to learn from each other.

The university team gathered feedback from teachers. This analysis culminated in the launch of the Grow Your School Toolkit, designed to support all primary



schools in Wales. It includes practical guidance on getting started, sourcing resources, planning your space and advice on what to grow when.

It also provides ideas for running engaging outdoor learning sessions with pupils alongside lesson plans, curriculum links and instructional videos. The toolkit supports learning in Welsh and English, and is free to access.

NEXT STEPS

Since launching this spring, teachers from primary schools around Wales have been in touch to share how they've used the advice. "We're constantly adding to the Toolkit as teachers suggest additional topics to include, such as engaging pupils with additional learning needs," Hannah explained. "We held the first Grow Your School competition this summer, so for autumn term we will be highlighting some amazing school



gardening from around Wales. We want to make sure schools know the Toolkit is there to help them, so we'll be holding more events and webinars".

The project has funding until the end of 2026, with the team exploring ways to make it sustainable longer term.

Grow Cardiff offers a range of support for those who are brand new to gardening right up to experienced growers hoping to take on a new challenge.

Find out more:
www.growcardiff.org



Grow Cardiff director Isla Horton added: "Working with Cardiff University has allowed us to find out what teachers really need to help their learners create and sustain school gardens, so they can be used as a resource that feeds their imaginations as well as their bodies, which care for nature and open doors to a wealth of learning across the Curriculum for Wales."